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## ***Ericksonian Hypnosis and the Enneagram***

NLP is partially derived from the study of Ericksonian Hypnosis, named for Milton Erickson (1901-1980), considered to have been the world's foremost authority and practitioner of medical hypnosis and brief therapy.

Erickson worked for 50 years to establish hypnosis as a legitimate therapeutic modality and divorce the subject from its popular, sinister associations with Mesmer, Rasputin and Svengali. Erickson demonstrated a consistent ability to achieve therapeutic results; the depth and the sweep of his skill were truly impressive.

Ericksonian hypnosis is different from classic approaches of hypnosis in that its power is in its gentleness. The hypnotist is a co-hypnotist rather than someone who has power over the client. Instead of commands, an Ericksonian hypnotist offers open-ended, respectful, positive messages. She doesn't tell you what to do but focuses on rearranging your resources, evoking your full intelligence and applying it to the solution of your problem. Ericksonian hypnotists typically use lots of metaphor and indirect suggestion to help clients have a smooth, calm and empowering experience of trance.

Like NLP, Ericksonian Hypnosis is a solution-oriented approach to change, more focused on "how" the client can change rather than understanding why they can't. Erickson's work with clients was also goal oriented. Rather than exploring the client's inner life the main point of therapy was to help him get over his problem. Erickson recognized how people were caught in patterns but he also prized individuality and stressed that each person was unique.

Although mainly known for his work with hypnosis, a large portion of Erickson's therapeutic work made little or no use of formal trance states. He also invented a variety of innovative, non-hypnotic approaches to working with families and individuals. Many of these overlap with techniques from Brief Therapy.

Erickson understood ego psychology but he would often take a client's problem at face value and work with it as a pattern, analyzing the problem's structure without delving into its cause. Partly this was due to his clientele; many were unsophisticated

people with little interest in how they got their problem or its psychological meaning. They just wanted relief from their symptoms.

For instance, one of Erickson's clients, a probable phobic Six, was terrified of going past the city limits of Phoenix, Arizona. Erickson gave the man an assignment: drive out to the edge of town on a solitary desert road. Park on the road's wide shoulder near a sign that marked the city limits of Phoenix.

The man then had to walk ten steps beyond the sign that said, "Leaving the city limits of Phoenix, Arizona." After step number ten, he was to lie down in the ditch on the side of the road, have a panic attack and tremble with anxiety until the feeling passed. Then he was to get up, walk another ten steps and lay down in the ditch again and ride out another episode of anxiety. He had to do this in ten-step increments until he was over his fear of leaving Phoenix.

This is what's known as a "benign ordeal" and Erickson was famous for them. He would often secure from clients an ironclad commitment to do anything he asked of them. He would then devise a task or a ritual that intensified the client's problem in a way the client could endure and learn from. In essence, Erickson was using hypnosis to help clients waken from the trance of their problem.

The three best applications of Erickson's work to the Enneagram are:

1) Adapting the principles and distinctions of hypnosis to see how each Enneagram style is literally an open-eyed hypnotic trance.

2) Using Erickson's non-hypnotic approaches to create behavioral tasks, homeworks assignments and benign ordeals that resolve personality dilemmas.

3) Modifying hypnosis techniques to evoke and work with the unconscious imagery that drives Enneagram defenses.

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