

# learning solutions in hypnosis

5 minutes at a time

with Rob McNeilly



Foreword by Stephen Gilligan Ph

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Simplicity is the highest intellectual achievement. When I was in graduate school in the Stanford Psychology Department, we had a Friday afternoon department-wide seminar where some luminary would present recent ground-breaking research. Amidst all the heady talk, it was just a matter of time before Gordon Bower, the department head (and my mentor), would clear his throat, and say kindly but loudly: *I grew up in the (poor) Appalachian mountains, and my grandmother only had a third grade education. I figure that if psychology has anything interesting to say, they should be able to say it in a way that my grandmother understands. So how would you tell my grandmother what you're saying?*

I saw many brilliant minds utterly flummoxed by this question, but I'm sure Dr. Rob McNeilly wouldn't be. As this book illuminates, Rob would be delighted to receive this question. This book would be his answer. Rob is able to take the profoundly radical work of Dr. Milton Erickson and convey it in a way that makes sense to anybody. He emphasizes how each of us has the capacity to skillfully engage with whatever life gives us—including illness, suffering, and heartbreak—with resilience and creativity.

When I studied with Dr. Erickson, he was an enfeebled old man, and I was a very young university student, committed to intensive exercise regimes. I would stay in the small bedroom in the office complex adjoining his main house, and one evening around dinner I walked through the backyard and knocked on the screen door of the kitchen, looking to give Mrs. Erickson something. I heard Erickson's voice inviting me in, and I walked into the kitchen to see him in a purple athletic workout suit, completely focused on cutting vegetables for the kitchen dinner. He looked at me with sparkling eyes, saying, *I'm getting my workout!* To a young student committed to martial arts, what he was doing did not fit *any* definition I had of a "workout"! He smiled and added, *Most people focus on what they can't do. I focus on what I CAN do and take great pleasure from that!*

This value can make lasting differences in a person's life, and Rob McNeilly describes lucidly how that can practically guide a clinician's work. Dr. McNeilly is a true master. My Irish immigrant grandmother, also with very limited formal education, would be deeply understanding and grateful for his sage advice.

Stephen Gilligan, Ph.D.  
March 26, 2021  
Encinitas, CA

## preamble

This eBook is a collection of daily videos I offered as a way of introducing a respectful, everyday approach to hypnosis.

It emerged from my appreciation of the benefits of hypnosis and to honour the heritage of Milton Erickson, dispelling the unhelpful myths too often surrounding hypnosis.

My colleague, Crispin Jones, generously transcribed the videos with minimal editing which can add to the relevance of the principles I wanted to express.

I have been sharing my version of what I learnt from Milton Erickson towards the end of his life throughout Australia and many different countries over the last 40 years with the aim of contributing to the effectiveness of therapy in relieving suffering, wherever it may occur.

I have been privileged to have learnt from many giants - therapists, visionaries, and of course my family near and far - and respect the advice to not be weighed down by them stating on my shoulders.

My invitation is to watch, listen, read what is in the small eBook, not to agree with or copy, but rather to play with, explore, adapt anything useful, ignore anything unhelpful, and correct any limitations.

Erickson advised to not try to copy him - "You couldn't anyhow!" - so please allow your own voice to emerge, and if this eBook can contribute to that, I'm satisfied.

Thanks for your willingness to explore.

Rob McNeilly

January, 2021

# introduction



Hello, my name is Rob McNeilly. I have a medical background and I was in a family medicine practice in suburban Melbourne, Australia for 10 years. I became interested in hypnosis and had the great fortune and privilege of meeting and then learning from the late Milton H. Erickson. I started to incorporate what I learned from him into my clinical practice. I left general practice and started a hypnosis practice, teaching the material locally, nationally, and then internationally. And what I've come to see over the three and a half, four decades that I've been using and teaching what I learned from Erickson was an increasing dissatisfaction in people wanting to learn about Erickson's therapy, about the training, they've had up till that time. I keep hearing that people have learned in academic degrees and in workshops that they've been to, and by reading textbooks, a whole series of techniques and theories, which is the focus of, in my view, too much of -- too many of -- the ways that therapy is taught.

When therapists who are experienced are working with clients, they are not remembering theories, they're not remembering techniques. When an elite athlete is running, throwing a javelin, doing a high jump, whatever this athlete might be doing, they're not applying a technique. They're not re-

membering some theory. They have actually embodied through practical experience their own version of what is going to work for them. And so, in learning to be effective in our therapy, it's going to be more important to learn how to interact with clients so that we can be more available. We must learn to listen more effectively, so we can be more helpful in connecting them with the resources that they are looking for so that they can get on with their life and resolve their suffering and their problems.

I found it helpful in my work and in sharing this with others to follow Erickson's invitation to observe, to observe, and to observe. Then, out of our observations, we can learn how to respond and then observe what happens with the client and respond to that. So, in an ongoing process of observing and responding, it's more like a dance. It's more like some kind of conversation where, as the client changes, we change with them and as we change, they change with us. So, this is a way of learning that is not based on memorizing techniques or theories which are then applied, but rather learning how to be in the experience, how to be in the relationship, how to be effective in our work, as it evolves with each individual client.

Therefore, with that concern in the background and me hearing that recurrently and increasingly, from people interested in learning therapy in Australia and in several other very disparate countries that I've taught in - South America to Asia to the UK to Scandinavia and so on – I've come to this point. This concern about learning how to be effective, rather than learning how to apply theory and a series of techniques has led me to offer a free four-week program connecting with resources in hypnosis, as an opportunity to look at one method, sit through a series of exercises, one approach that can help us to connect with the client to help the client connect more effectively with their own resourcefulness and their own individual resources, to come to a place where the whole process can move on respectfully, easily and in a time-effective way.

I don't offer the course as a cure-all. It's not that I'm claiming that if you do this, you'll be able to cure everybody with all situations. I would not be that arrogant, that blind. But it's offered as an opportunity to explore, to see how this approach can be a foundation; it can add to whatever else you might be doing. And not as a substitute, but as an underlying, overlying addition to what you're doing. So, if this is of interest to you, please read on. It would be a pleasure to have you and your company in this four-week exploration where we can learn the doings of it, learn the beings of this approach so that we can be more effective without having to be limited by some artificial process, some mechanistic collection of techniques to be remembered and applied. Thanks for reading.

## the common everyday trance

Let's begin exploring the essence of my program, Connecting Solutions in Hypnosis. As I mentioned, things changed for me when I had the privilege of meeting and then spending time with the late Milton H. Erickson in Phoenix, Arizona towards the end of his life. And what I learned from him

really changed my whole attitude to therapy, to hypnosis in particular, and to other areas of my life as well.

In the program I've offered, which I detail here, each chapter introduces a different topic. In my program offerings, following the topic, I say some things about it, and then invite people to follow up on an exercise which might be an observation or a suggestion for trying something out. And all in all, I'm wanting to make this easy for you as a way of exploring a particular way of approaching hypnosis that I've developed out of my response out of my experience learning with Milton Erickson, and then over the last 35 or so years in my clinical practice.

So, today, in the first lesson, I want to mention that hypnosis has had a very strange group of associations. It's been associated with magic where a magician, a traditionally charismatic male comes in and does some dramatic action to a passive subject. And this approach to hypnosis still persists to this day in some traditional hypnotic approaches, where people are given orders, given directions, given suggestions by a very wise, charismatic person. And that's how it's supposed to happen. Hypnosis has also been associated with sorcery and with sorcery it's a different process. You can go into any new age bookshop and buy a book of spells. And the power is not with the speaker and the magician, or the therapist; the power is in the words. So, anyone uttering these words can have an influence over again, a passive recipient. And that passive recipient then is supposed to respond to the words and the power of the words.

This process continues on in contemporary hypnosis in the form of hypnotic scripts, where someone comes for hypnosis, the therapist or the hypnotherapist says, "What's the problem?" and then looks up a book of scripts and reads a script appropriate to that diagnosis of that problem. Now, that's all very well to have a standard script if you can find a standard person. I haven't met one yet. Now, I've only been doing this work for 40 years, so maybe I will! So, there are some limitations when we just use a standard script.

The other very strong association that hypnosis has had, was in relation to general anesthetics. In the early 20th century, hypnosis became popular as a way of dealing with shellshock after the first World War. And around the same time, general anesthetics became available. So, some of the jargon from general anesthetics lives on in contemporary hypnosis about putting someone out, putting them under, them going to sleep and then the worries about will it work? Will I wake up in the middle? Will I wake up? And the idea with hypnosis in this way is that we use a hypnotic approach or a series of techniques to put someone under like giving them an anesthetic so then we can do the psychological operation, the therapy. We can cut out the problem, we can put in the solution, and that's how it runs. Now, while these approaches are somewhat effective, they miss the point with a lot of people who don't like being told, who don't want to be given a standard approach or don't want to be put out or put under. And this is where Erickson's influence has brought to bear.

Erickson spoke about what he called the common everyday trance, in which anyone can be reading a book, watching a movie, looking out the window, daydreaming, going for a walk, listening to music, some everyday experience, where we get into the experience, he called the common everyday trance. And as such, we can think of hypnosis as simply an extension of this trance. And as a result of that, it distances hypnosis from all of that weirdness, that really magical use of words and power and brings it down to ground so that it becomes more available for clients and more accessible for anyone wanting to learn hypnosis.

Thus, the exercise for Step 1 is for you to notice when you or other people that you're with or that you just happen to be in the presence of are showing evidence of this common everyday trance. When someone's watching television, notice what you can notice about their body, their reactions, their response. Notice when someone's reading a book or listening to music or walking along the street or waiting in a car for traffic lights. That's the invitation. Have a look and notice in yourself or anyone else, anytime where you see that focus-absorbed experience happening as a part of everyday life. And if you could, please comment about what you notice, whether this was unusual or frequent or surprising or interesting or whatever response you have. If you'd like, leave a response on my website. Or if you prefer, send me an email directly. Thank you for joining me on this first step.



## what is hypnosis?



Continuing with ideas from my program, *Connecting Solutions in Hypnosis*, I want to ask you - what is hypnosis? If you look in textbooks, you'll find a whole lot of different definitions; it's a state, it's this, it's that. Some people say everything is hypnosis and some people say nothing is hypnosis, it doesn't exist. Rather than getting involved in some kind of academic debate about what hypnosis is or isn't, I'm suggesting we start from the position of a description rather than a definition. And the description I'm offering and inviting us to start with as a practical, easy way to begin, is to think of hypnosis as something that, when we observe someone having an experience where there's focus, where there is absorption, we can mutually agree this can be called hypnosis.

In this way, there's no such thing as hypnosis, just like there's no such thing as comfort. We can say that's a chair. But whether it's comfortable or not, is a matter of agreement. So, I'm inviting that description. And so, if we can start with that description of hypnosis as being something we recognize as hypnosis, when there's an experience, where there's focus, where there's absorption, and where there's an agreement to call it hypnosis, then we can also say, as a description of meditation, that meditation is an experience where there's focus and absorption that we call meditation.

We can say that mindfulness is an experience where there's focus and absorption and thus we call it mindfulness.

Now, of course, with hypnosis, with meditation, with mindfulness, there might be a different point of focus, a different area to focus on. With meditation, it may be a mantra, it may be focus on breathing, it may be focusing on some image of a guru with mindfulness that you focus on. It is that sense of getting absorbed in some sensory experience, the feeling of your breathing, the awareness of sounds around that are just there that you focus and get absorbed in without making any judgment. So, if we can think of hypnosis in that way, then we don't have to get involved with complicated arguments about, is hypnosis the same as meditation? What's the difference between mindfulness and hypnosis? Is EMDR another form of hypnosis? And so on. We can put all that aside.

So, I hope that that's an agreeable place for us to build our learning experience over the next while and I'd love for you to share some comments about what you think about that, whether you think that's adequate, whether you think it's ridiculous, or just what it is that you think about it. That description is really not adequate. It doesn't completely do justice to the experience of hypnosis. But it is a place that we can begin, so that's my invitation.

Now the exercise that I invite you to do is when you're with a client, and you're just having a conversation with them about whatever they're talking about, whatever is happening and whatever way that that's happening in a conversation in therapy, keep your eyes open and see if you can pick up times when you notice that they become very focused, and you notice they become absorbed in something. And we're not going to call this hypnosis. But the invitation is for you to look. If someone says, "I had a really good day," if you notice when they say, "Oh, it was just wonderful", often there is something happening there. They're not just words. It's as if sometimes they look off into the distance. "I had such a wonderful holiday recently." And it's as if somehow their focus and their attention is not so much in the room, as it is on the holiday. This is my invitation - start to notice when in the middle of conversations with clients, you can become aware of an experience where they're focusing and where they're becoming absorbed. And if you notice that, please leave a message, please leave a note, comment, or send me an email directly.

## Connecting, not fixing



Here we are at number three of my lessons from my program, Connecting with Resources in Hypnosis. I want to make some comments about the difference between the traditional medical model to therapy and hypnosis and the solution approach to therapy and hypnosis. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have a medical background. And if someone came to see me when I was in general practice as a doctor, I would ask them information so that I could find out what was going on, make a diagnosis, and then treat the condition. Now, most therapy approaches, and many psychological approaches, are based on the medical model. In the medical model, we ask what's wrong here, we gather information, we classify the information to make a diagnosis, and then we have a protocol for treating this. The whole approach is based on a response to the question, "What's wrong?" And the process is one of fixing something that's defective.

Now, by contrast, the solution-generating approach is more interested in finding out information about what is happening for this client, what's missing for them, so that if they had access to that missing thing, they would be okay. It's based on the assumption that people are able, they have capacities, they have facilities, but they've forgotten them, they've lost contact with them, they've

overlooked them, and so the process in the solution approach to therapy is not one of fixing but is rather one of reconnecting or connecting for the first time or it is a process of learning. It's a very different mode in the problem-solving and the solution-creating approach. And they're complementary, it's not that one is better than the other. It's just that in these theories I'm presenting, I'm going to address how we are working and assuming that we're going to build on the solution approach rather than the problem-solving approach.

The question that is going to be in the background the whole time is: what's missing for this person that if they had it, they'd be okay. Erickson told me in a personal conversation that a woman rang him saying that she'd been washing her hands obsessively for 12 years. And he told me that he was very interested to find out what she used to do with her hands 13 years previously. He wasn't going to emphasize what was the trauma, what was the event that precipitated the problem because that would have been a reason to diagnose something and then to treat it. He wanted to help her to reconnect with that ability to wash her hands normally, that she'd had all of her life, and somehow got out of touch with and hence the problem. So, I give that as an example of the contrast between the two approaches.

Here's the exercise: When you're with a client, they will come in with a problem and they'll want to tell us what's wrong. That's the human way of approaching. But my invitation is to start to keep the above thought in the background and see if there's an opportunity for you to drop the question in, "What's missing here that if you had it you'd be okay?" I'm inviting you to play with that. I'm not requiring that you do it. Sometimes it might not feel the right thing to say, you might not be comfortable. I'm not recommending it, just inviting the opportunity for you to play.

## asking about likes



Now, let's talk about something that's usually omitted and not given much focus in therapy, and that is to explore what someone likes to do. It turns out that when any of us are engaged in some activity, or having some experience that we like, the fact that we like it means that we have the resources right at our fingertips to deal with any little hiccups, any little interruptions that happen along the way. If someone likes riding their bicycle, they like cycling, then if they like it they will know how to deal with punctures, the chain coming off the sprocket, falling off, getting wet, getting hot, getting hungry, and thirsty, and so on. And if they fall off their bike, they don't have therapy, they don't throw the bike away, they don't give up cycling, they just get back on - they're okay.

It turns out that for any human being, if we do something that we like, we are resourced up. We've got all the resources there. When we do something that we like, our experience is resource-rich. Here's an exercise. When you're with a client - I actually like to begin a conversation with this question, but you don't have to begin. At some stage during the counseling session, therapy session, ask the client, "what do you like to do?" And when you ask them what they like to do, see what you can observe about them, their mood, their body, what happens?

Now, there's nothing to do with that yet. We're not going to start to make use of it. My invitation is to simply ask the question. If it seems a weird question to ask, "What do you like to do?" because people come with problems, there's a way of kind of easing into that by saying, "Just so that I can get to know you a little bit more, could you tell me something about what you've been doing lately that you find enjoyable or fun or relaxing or whatever it might be?" Use some kind of variation on the question but always the overall form of what do you like doing? There's the exercise, there's my invitation, see what happens when you ask the question.

## asking about what they like about their likes



We previously looked at the question, “What do you like to do?” And I hope that you're able to notice that when someone responds to that question, it's a pretty nice experience. Often, their eyes light up, they feel lighter in themselves.

And if we leave it at that, if we just ask what someone likes to do, then it's very likely that our understanding about what they like to do will be more a function of our response to that answer rather than the particular client. It can be really helpful and clarifying to do this because to build on yesterday's example, if someone likes to ride a bicycle, if we just leave it at that, we might, for example, say “I like riding a bicycle.” I might like to ride the bicycle to get fit. And I might think, oh, this person likes to ride a bicycle because they get fit. But if I asked the question, “What is it about riding the bicycle that you like in particular?” then I'll have an opportunity to find out what it is about cycling that they like, and the response will not be the same from each person. Some people like riding a bicycle to get out into the fresh air. Some people like to ride on the bike to get away from work or the family or something. And some people like to ride a bicycle because they like to join

with other people. They might be lonely, and they ride a bicycle with a bunch of friends, so they have company. For these people, they like riding a bike because of the company.

There's something about asking, "What do you like about the activity that you like?" that helps to clarify things for us. And very often when we ask a client and they respond to that, it's a question they haven't thought of. And it sometimes becomes clearer to them as what it is about their experience that they like, what it is about that. And I like to think of asking, "What do you like about that?" as a window into someone's soul. When we find out what someone likes about whatever it is they like to do, it gives us a sense of who they are as a person. It's a beautiful question, a beautiful way of generating a connection, trust and mutual respect.

So, a simple exercise, when you're with a client, whenever it seems an appropriate time at the beginning of a session as is my preference, or anytime during, whenever you ask it, ask your client, "What do you like to do?" And then follow up with these other questions: "What is it about that that you like?" And please be attentive to what the client says. There'll be some gems there, and how they are in saying that.



## asking about a problem



Moving on to point six of *Creating Connections in Hypnosis*, we've established that people come to see therapists, come to see us, because they've got a problem. We need to talk about the problem. And if we just say, "What's the problem?" sometimes people will tell us. There's an apocryphal story about Groucho Marx, who was an hour and a half late for a dinner talking engagement. When he eventually arrived, the host said to him, "How come you're so late for this talk? You were supposed to be here an hour and a half ago." And Groucho Marx is supposed to have said, "Well, on my way here, I met someone, and they asked me how my family was and so I told them." So, sometimes if we just say, "What is the problem?" we can be there for hours, days, weeks, months, even decades. We have to find out what's brought the client to see us. If we can ask what the problem is in a way that's going to be helpful to the process, it's worth exploring.

Here are some variations on asking what the problem is. We can say, "What would you like to talk about here that would be useful for you?" Or, "What could we talk about that would make a difference to you?" How about, "If we could do something today, if we could achieve something in this conversation that would make a difference to you, what would that be?" "What is it that you were

hoping to get out of this session today? If we get to the end of the session, and you say, that's what I came for, what would that be?" Do you see that all of these questions are variations on asking what the problem is, but they are a reworking of that question in such a way that when the client responds to the question already, they are starting to move towards a solution, starting to move towards something useful, rather than just a talking about what the situation is.

Here's a very simple exercise. The next time a client comes to see you, instead of saying, "What's the problem?" or "What brought you here?" ask the question with that presuppositional element that has a bias toward usefulness, a bias towards a solution. And play with the variations and see what you can come up with. Find some variation of what you could do, what could you talk about. Ask, "Today, that would be useful, what would be helpful, that would be beneficial and that you might get some benefit from?" Have a play with that, ask the question in that way, and see what difference that makes to the response, to the situation, to the counselling session, to the outcome.

## clarifying the problem



Hello. Rob McNeilly here again and welcome to Day 7 in this free four-week program, Creating Connections in Hypnosis.

Yesterday, we explored finding a way of asking what the problem is in a way that was helpful to give some direction to the therapy session. And three days ago, we looked at 'what do you like' and 'what do you like about that?' And that question 'what do you like about what you like?' adds a beautiful refinement to our understanding and the client's understanding of their experience.

And in a similar way, when someone says, "I have a problem with blah, blah, blah, blah I want to do something about," if we can ask, "And what is it about this problem that is particularly troublesome for you?" 'What's the problem about the problem' is a shorthand way of saying it. We wouldn't mention that to a client. We wouldn't speak about it that way.

But when the client says, "You know, I can't sleep."

"What's the problem?"

"I want to learn how to sleep. "

If we don't ask, "How come that's a problem to you?" we will make an assumption about what that problem would be like for this client based on how it would be for us if we had that problem. If someone has trouble sleep and we ask, "How come that's a problem to you in particular," and listen, then we will hear, "I get bored. I can't do my job properly the next day. I get up and eat too much. I get irritable the next day."

So, when we find out what it is about the problem that is particularly problematic that's going to really help to refine our direction and the client's direction that we're going to move in towards a solution.

If someone comes in because there's been some traumatic event in the past, recent or of a distant past, and have a problem with trauma. Now, if you just leave it at that, then we are left with just dealing with PTSD. And if you want to treat PTSD, well, you've got to get a textbook. You've got to find a way of fixing PTSD. And if we say, "That trauma happened. What is it that is continuing to trouble you? What is it about the trauma that is particularly bugging you to this day?" If you listen to the client's response to that, we will hear, "I get flashbacks. I can't sleep. I get depressed. I get frightened. I can't work. It's interfering with my relationship."

So, when we ask specifically about what is it about the problem that is still problematic, that is going to provide a beautiful additional fine tuning, an additional clarity for us, for the client and for the therapeutic process.

So, here's the exercise for the day. Next time you're with a client, ask the client, after you've clarified with them what it is they want to work on, what the problem is for the session, ask in a respectful way, "What is it in particular that has that problem still be a problem to you? What aspect of that problem is causing your suffering." And when you ask that question, be interested to hear what the client says and be willing to be surprised.

And please, leave a comment below or send me an email privately. Thanks for being in the program and I'll see you in tomorrow's video.

Thank you.

## what's missing?



So far we've explored what hypnosis is, we've talked about focus absorption that we're going to call hypnosis. We've explored the wonderful benefits that happen when we ask someone what they like to do, and further refine that to what it is about that that they like. And we've played with asking, "what is it that you want to work on here today? What's the problem that you want to do something about? And what is it about the problem that is particularly troubling you still?"

Now let's explore a spectacular question, one of the most wonderful questions I've ever come across. I mentioned earlier that, in a medical approach, in a problem-solving approach, we ask, "What's wrong – what can we fix?" We've touched upon finding out what's missing for each individual client, that if they had it, they'd be okay. Let's delve further. Sometimes when we ask a client, what the problem is about their problem, say someone who's had a trauma and they're getting flashbacks, some people will say, "I wish I could just get it out of my head. I wish I could just forget it." And so, from there, it might be apparent that what's missing is forgetting. Some people have a trauma, and they get a kind of a fuzzy vagueness about it, and what's missing is remembering.

Some people have a trauma and what's missing is going to sleep. So - what's missing is going to sleep.

When we find out with each individual client what is missing for them, then of course, if we know what's missing, if we know what we're looking for, well, that's going to make it ever so much more likely that we're going to be able to find it. In the therapy session, we can find it and most importantly, the client can find it. So, sometimes having the question, "what's missing?" in the background, that question is answered without us needing to ask it. People may answer, "I just want to feel happy. I just want to feel cheerful." Some may say, "I just want to feel better about myself." They may say, "I just want to be able to go to sleep", and so on. Sometimes it's not clear and it can be helpful to ask the question this way: "What is missing that if you could connect with it you'd be okay?" And usually when we ask this question, clients don't have a ready answer because they're so busy thinking about what's wrong that needs fixing.

So, just the question. What's missing presupposes that there is something missing that is potentially able to be found and already, this helps to move things towards a solution. And sometimes when we say, "So what is missing that if you had it, you'd be okay?" the client might say, "oh, if only I could...", whatever. Oh, that's what's missing, then we know what we're going to look for. Sometimes it's not apparent, sometimes it's not clear to a client what's missing. So, there may be another way of phrasing the question so that they can have access to a useful answer. And I found that sometimes if I say, "No, if you would go to a supermarket and there was just everything there and you could just say, 'oh, if I can have that', if you could just have that, if you could have anything, and if you could have it, you'd be okay; what would that be?" Some people are able to respond in a more concrete way when we say that.

Another way of finding and getting some clarity about what's missing is to ask the miracle question: "If a miracle happened and while you're asleep tonight, the problem disappeared, and you wake up in the morning, and because it happened in your sleep, you wouldn't know how it went, but it's gone. You wake up and the problem's gone, got no problem. There's a solution, what's happening? And whatever is present after the miracle will be what's missing." Before we can say, "When you no longer need to come and see me, when you've resolved this, when this is in the past; what's going to be different for you in the future when this has happened?", if we listen to what is present in the future, when this has been resolved, that'll give us a clue about what's missing in the present, which is the real problem.

So, have a play with the question. This is the exercise for today. When you're working with a client have the question, "What's missing?" in the background of your awareness and see if something emerges spontaneously. Or if it doesn't, find a way of exploring with the client what is missing for them that if they had it, they'd be okay.

invite to focus on likes, become absorbed and comment



Most people are very happy to experience and re-experience talking about something that they like. We can ask someone to recall whatever that is - they like reading a book, they like riding a bike, they like going for a walk in nature. We might say, "Let's go for a bike ride, let's read a book, let's go for a walk-in nature, would that be okay?"

We're inviting an experience; we can then invite someone to focus on some part of that experience. It might be some sense of the air on the skin or the sound of the birds in the forest or the pleasure of noticing their character, you know, in a book or in a film. So, we're inviting focus. And always inviting the focus in whatever way is happening for the client. Not that there's a particular way or a particular degree of focus, but we're inviting the individual to focus any way that they are. Then the next step is to invite someone to become absorbed. When someone's focused on something that they enjoy, it's very easy for them to become more absorbed in the experience. So, we can invite an absorption simply by saying that. As you're focusing on bike riding or reading a book, as you're focusing on walking through the bush, in nature, can you allow yourself to become more

absorbed, increasingly absorbed? Can you allow that absorption to increase in a natural way that it can when we're doing something that we enjoy?

So, now we've got the ingredients for what we're describing as hypnosis; experience, focus and absorption. And if you notice when you or when anyone is in an experience of focus and absorption, there are certain physiological changes that happen. Therefore, we invite someone into an experience they like, we invite them to focus, we invite them to become absorbed, then we can comment on the physiological changes that we can observe. For example, we can say, "Without you making any effort, I can notice that your breathing is suddenly slower and deeper. I can notice that your eyelids are blinking differently." And of course, some people will close their eyes and we can say, "And you've closed your eyes". They don't have to close their eyes, but we can comment on any change in the blinking that is apparent.

Very often an adult in a focus-absorbed experience will become rather still. So, we can say, "I can notice that there's very little movement in your body." This doesn't apply with kids. When kids are watching television and reading, they move all around the planet. So, don't tell kids that they're sitting still because that wouldn't be. But if an adult is still, there's not much movement. We can say, "There's relatively little movement in your body." We only want to comment on something that we want to encourage. If someone is sitting and they're very clearly becoming focused and their breathing has changed but they're fidgeting with their fingers, we don't want to talk about that. We can say, "I noticed that your feet are very still." Just ignore commenting on the fingers. Ignore anything that we don't want to enhance, and only speak about things that we do want to enhance.

Another change that often happens is a change in the facial configuration. So, instead of the face being like this, it becomes more like that. It's as if somehow, the face smooths out and we can comment, "I notice that your face is smoothing out." So, when we talk about, when we vocalize, when we articulate these changes that we can observe it helps to let the client know that something different is happening. It helps to encourage those changes and it also reassures them that what's happening is okay. As well as commenting on these changes, we can also make some generic encouraging noises like, "Oh, that's good. Uh-huh. Mm-hmm. That's right. Very nice." Just generic comments like that.

Now, here's the exercise. When you're with a client, you find out what they like, what they like about it; invite them to recall, to re-experience, to imagine being in the experience that they like to do. Invite focus, invite absorption, and comment on the changes that you can observe. Something to play with. Be willing to be surprised just how easy and natural this process can be. Because we're not imposing anything from within, from ourselves, just using how wisdom and our experience and our expertise. We are actually inviting, we're evoking, we're helping someone to reconnect with their own experience. And because it's theirs it'll be easy, it'll be natural, and it'll fit them.



## invite to look for what's missing



Building on the previous discussion of inviting someone to get into the experience of doing something they like, where we then invite focus and absorption and comment on the changes, now we can start to get to the nitty-gritty of this approach and ask specifically for them to look for exactly what it is that's missing in the problem area. For example, let's just say that what's missing for someone is confidence. Just acknowledge that they want confidence, that's what's missing. And let's just say they like riding their bicycle. Okay. So, here we go, go on your bike, get into focus, get absorbed, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Now, as you're riding your bicycle, notice how it is for you to feel confident. And we can be absolutely, totally assured that they'll be able to find it. If someone likes riding a bicycle and what's missing in their problem is confidence, we can be absolutely certain that they will be confident riding the bike otherwise, they wouldn't like it.

If someone likes gardening and what's missing is confidence, then we can say, "we now get in the garden and notice how it is for you in the garden, to feel confident of being able to tell the difference between a plant and a weed. You can be very confident." So, whatever it is that's missing for someone, if someone says, "I want to feel peaceful," and they like watching movies, say, "Let's

watch a movie and get into it; focus, absorb.” Then you can say, “Now, as you're watching the movie, notice how it is for you to feel peaceful.: I'm inviting you to explore the validity of this, that you will always, always find what's missing in the experience of the likes, always. We invited someone into an experience of something they like, got the focus, got the absorption, we've commented on the change.

Here's the exercise for today. Have a look around in the experience that you're in and notice how it is for you to have the experience of connecting with what's missing in the problem. Whatever it is that's missing, have a look and find it. Whatever it is, and be willing to be surprised as the therapist how easy it is for the client to find that, to really connect with that. Tomorrow, we're going look at how to start to connect that with the problem. But all we're doing now is helping someone. We've identified what's missing, we've identified where to look and now, we're just giving the client, each individual client, their own opportunity to find exactly what it is they're looking for.

## learn it



To recap thus far, we can ask someone what they like to do to get into the experience of whatever this is that they like; reading a book or walking in nature or swimming, whatever it is, get focused, get some absorption, and we're going to comment on that. We then have a focus-absorbed experience that fits our description of hypnosis. Because it's something that they like, they're going to have all the resources they need. And we already know because we've explored with the client, what it is that's missing. So, we know what to look for, what's missing, and we know where to look, and their likes, great combination. We explored how we can invite someone to look and find specifically what is missing, what they're looking for, and look forward and find it in the experience that they like.

Now: once someone has found the experience that they like, be it peace, be it a feeling of safety, a feeling of confidence, a feeling of courage, a sense of liking themselves, or whatever it is that they're looking for, they've found what they're looking for, founded their lives. But to just say, "Oh, okay, this is how I'm feeling confident," that's not enough. Well, sometimes it can be, but often it's not. So, I want to give it some time for this experience to sink in so it can be so helpful once we're

in this experience to give the client some time and ask them, invite them to just allow themselves to soak it up, to absorb it, to learn it, to get to know it even more than they already do. And to give them some time, even if we're just silent for a minute or a couple of minutes can make such a huge difference. Let your clients sit in it, let them learn it.

## connect to problem [1]



Since we've previously explored with each client just what it is that's missing for them that if they had it, they would be able to resolve the issue, and have a solution. So, we know what we're looking for. We saw how if we get someone into the experience of what they like, and ask them to look for what's missing, they can find it. And then we ask them to sit in it, to learn it, to get acquainted with it, to get more familiar with it.

Then the next step is to find a way of bringing the experience that's present in their lives to the problem area where this experience is missing, which is what's the problem. And I'm going to offer three different ways of assisting this process of connecting. The first one we're going to explore is for us to simply say this is the same as that. To simply say that the experience that they like doing is the same as the problem. That might sound a little strange; I'll give an example in a minute. And then next, we'll have a look at another way of doing, inviting this connection, which is to ask the client, "How is what you are experiencing in your lives relevant to resolving your issue?" And the third way that we'll explore in the following step is to bring in the idea, the experience of learning.

You learn to do what you did so that you can like what you like, so you can use that same ideas in your overall life.

Let's explore this rather strange and at first sight, perhaps even seemingly psychotic, idea of saying the experience that you like doing is the same as the problem. Let me give you an example. There was a man who said that he liked riding horses. And what he liked about riding a horse was that he felt that somehow at one with the horse. He was connected with the horse, and he and the horse were a unit, and it was just wonderful. He thought that connection was great. And the problem that he had was that he was very anxious about flying in an plane. And the reason that this was a problem to him was that he had some important traveling to do with his work, and this was limiting his enjoyment. He'd get there exhausted from the flight and not be so available to do the work. Okay.

What was missing for this man was finding a way of being in a plane in a way that he could trust. He felt that the plane was untrustworthy. He didn't trust the whole process. So, for him, what was missing was a feeling of trust. In the hypnotic experience, the invitation was, "Let's go for a horse ride." Of course, that was really agreeable to him. So, in the hypnotic experience, he's on his horse, he's riding his horse, he's connected with the horse, and it was just a matter of asking him to notice what it was like riding his horse, to have the experience of trusting the horse. That was very immediate to him, it was very easy for him to make that connection. And then by asking him to just stay in the experience of trusting the horse and notice how it is for him to have the experience of trusting, in this case, the horse. And then I was able to say that riding a horse is like riding in an airplane. And after a moment of very apparent confusion, he seemed to settle into that and looked quite pleased. And to just give a final summary of the outcome of that, he had a very nice time riding in a plane, finding he could type the trusting that he had with the horse into the experience of flying. I'm just giving that as an example.

So, here's the next exercise: when you find what the missing resources for a client, you get them into the experience, the hypnotic experience of being in the doing or the being of their likes, get them to find what's missing, get them to learn, to get familiar with it and then simply say, "The experience that you're having, that you like having, is the same as the area of the problem." So, just make that statement, make that connection, and see what happens. Some people will feel a sense of relief, a huge relief sometimes, and some people will say, "huh, what?" So, now I'm not saying this is a guaranteed way of making a connection. But this is the first of the three that we're going to play with. So, have a try, see what happens when you make that statement, make that connection for the client, and see what their reaction is.

## connect to problem [2]



Previously, we explored how we can help someone to make a connection between what's missing in their problem and what is present in their lives simply by saying this is like that. And sometimes, as I mentioned, for us to make that connection overtly like that is enough for a client to see it, feel it, know it, and then they're up and running. And sometimes, it's not. Sometimes it doesn't click, doesn't make sense. Some people are not willing to or don't know how to make such a logically weird connection.

So, if it doesn't make sense, if someone can't connect that way, then we can invite the client to explore themselves, asking in what way is the experience of doing what you like useful or similar to the area that's been a problem to you? Now, I mentioned the case of that man who liked riding a horse and had a problem flying in a plane. And when that connection was made, he could get it, he had it, he was all right, he was fine. No problem. But just as a theoretical example, if that didn't make sense to him, we could have offered the question to him, "What is it about riding horses that you could find useful in being able to fly more comfortably, more the way you want to be able to fly?" And leaving him with that question would have given him an opportunity to look within his own

experience to say, "Oh, I don't know. I'm sitting on the horse, so I can sit in the plane. I can enjoy the horse, maybe I can enjoy the plane." I really can't predict what that would be because I've noticed that when I ask a client how they can make the connection, some of the connections that they make seem very weird to me. But that really is inconsequential. It's when it makes sense to the client, that's what we're after.

The next exercise then: If someone in hypnosis is in the experience of what they like to do, we've invited focus, we've invited absorption, we've commented on the physiological changes, we know what's missing, we know what we're looking for so we get into the likes and ask them specifically to look for the resource that has been missing in their problem and expect to find it in the experience of their lives, so once they've found it, we can invite them to sit with it, to get acquainted with it, to learn it, become more familiar with it. And then see what happens if you ask the client, "What is it about the experience of doing what you like to do, being in this experience that is going to be useful for you, relevant for you, helpful for you in dealing with that situation that was a problem to you?" The short version is just to ask the client, "How is this life to be led?" and leave them with that question. Be curious and willing to be surprised at the connections that they will make. See what happens when you do that.



## connect to problem [3]



The third way of connecting to the problem that we're going to explore is to introduce this wonderful notion of learning. If we say this is like that, and they get it, great, then we're done. If we say how is this like that, and they make up a connection that's useful for them, great. We're done. If neither of those work, we can offer this notion of learning. Coming back to the horse riding, the plane flying man, as an example, we could say, "when you first learned to ride a horse, there may have been some difficulty for you to trust the horse. It's such a large creature. It's so different from riding a bicycle. That may have been difficult for you to learn. But you learned somehow to ride a horse, you learned how to trust the horse. And now you've learned to trust the horse so thoroughly, so completely, that that's not even an issue. In fact, it's not only something that you can manage, but you can actually enjoy it. In the same way that you learned how to trust the horse, you can learn how to trust the experience of flying in a plane."

And by making that link, it bridges what for some people might seem a huge chasm between when they're doing what they like and bringing that to the area that's problematic. It translates it from a leap of faith into a process. And with any learning process, sometimes we come across something

and we get it, we learn, and we've got it for life. Also, it can be that we come across something new, and we get a hint of it and it takes a little while for us to get comfortable with it, to settle into it. Sometimes we get it then we lose it. Then we come back, and we get it and we lose it again; it comes and goes. It's like an organic process. And so that translates the pressure on a client to get over their problem and takes the pressure off us as therapists to help a client to get over their problem by translating the process into just that, a process. Which can have an organic coming and going, taking its own time, being a natural ebbing and flowing until the learning has happened.

See what happens if you-- when someone's in their experience - remind them, "When you first learned to (whatever it is they like to do), you had this same difficulty and you learned that. So, in the same way, in this situation that you want to resolve, you can learn how to bring this solution, to bring this resource, experience and bring it as a learning." So, that's the exercise. See what happens when you introduce this process, this experience of learning.

## completing the trance



So far, we're putting together a process, a structure, a scaffolding that you can begin to play with where we ask someone what they like, what do they like about it? What's the problem? What's the problem about it? What's missing? So here, we come to hypnosis. Let's get into the experience that you like. We invite focus, we invite absorption, we comment about what's going on. And then we invite the client to look within their likes for the experience that's missing. We found out what that is, we know it's going to be there in the likes, it always is.

And once I found it, I got to know it, to learn it, to soak it up, to absorb it. Once they've got it, then we can start this wonderful process of connecting sort of this resource, this experience that's present in their likes, connecting it to their problem area. And we can do that either by saying this is the same as that, or we can ask how is this like that? We can invite them to notice that when they first learned to do what they like, they had some trouble, but learning happened, and now they like it. The same organic learning process can happen with the resolution of the problem.

Once we've done that, we've got really a completion of the process, of the connecting with solutions in the hypnotic experience. So then, when someone's coming-- they're done, they're finished, where there's nothing more to do, it can be nice to ask, "Is there anything more that you want?" Or sometimes there may be something we've overlooked or something else that they're wanting as well. So, it's nice to ask, "Is there anything more that you might want before we finish?" And if they say no, then all we need to do is invite them to come out of hypnosis. And it's not a process of going through some formal ritual of counting or walking up steps or saying, you know, every time you do this, you're going to be more and more alert and wide awake and blah, blah, blah. It doesn't have to be anything like that.

If we come back to the idea of hypnosis as being an extension of the common everyday trance, the person can be reading a book, they can get to the end of the chapter, the end of the book, they close the book and what happens? They put the book down and some of the book stays around in their awareness for a while and then they can go, "Oh, I better get up and put out the rubbish or cook dinner" or whatever, get on with their life. In the same way with hypnosis, when we've come to the end of it, all that we need to do is to invite someone to complete it in any way they want. We can say something like, "Just as soon as you're ready, just as soon as you know that you've got what you came for, then you can find yourself becoming more attentive to your external surroundings and come back into the room." For example, with the horse riding, flying man, "When you're ready, you can get off the horse and come back and sit on this chair." No big deal. It's just a matter of inviting someone to take their time, find their own way. And just for us to sit patiently and expect that they'll come out of hypnosis pretty readily.

Let's see what happens. Here's the exercise. When you get to the end of a session-- hypnotic session with a client, they've made the connections, make some kind of everyday, ordinary kind of invitation to complete what they're doing. And when they've done that, they'll know what to do. They've had their eyes closed, we can say, "When you're ready, you can let your eyes open, take your time about that." So, it's just an invitation to allow the client to do what they need to do to complete it, and then we're done.

## ask “what’s different?”



Let’s say we’ve finished the hypnotic session. Someone’s out of hypnosis, it’s so beautiful to ask a client, “what’s different?” When we ask a client what’s different now compared with before we started, sometimes the client takes a moment, and they have to reflect on what’s different. And they say, “Oh, I feel more of this or I feel that or whatever.” So, then as the client says that, it not only helps to keep us on track with them, but sometimes when they actually articulate what’s different, it becomes clearer for them.

Now some people say, “I feel fantastic, I feel wonderful.” So, then all we need to do is say is, “congratulations, that’s great, let the good times roll.’ And some people say, ‘well, you know, I feel a little bit better and a little bit something but not quite there yet.” That gives us a clue about where to go for the next session, which may be straightaway or the next day or next week or whenever they follow-up. And of course, some people, when you ask what’s different, they’ll say, “Nothing. Nothing’s different”. And it’s so beautiful to find out as soon as possible that nothing is different, because that lets us know that we need to do something different. We can then explore with such a person what is still missing, what we missed, what was going on and even, I found it really helpful

to start, not necessarily then, but I might say, “Well, when you come back next time, we'll see what we need to do differently.” And then we start at the beginning, so what is it that you like, what is it about that? What's the problem? What's missing?

And I had a number of times when someone who said, “Oh, there's no difference”, and I've asked. “What was it? What is it? What do you like? What's missing?” I hear that they are saying exactly the same as they said the previous time. But I've gone off on my own tangent often, oh, yes, I know that's possible. And I've had the presumption, the arrogance to transpose my thoughts about what will be good and my experience if it were happening to me, that would be useful for them and imposing that on them. And it's great to find out how ineffective that is.

So, here's today's exercise. At the end of a session ask your client what's different now from when we started. And listen carefully, you'll learn a lot. Then when anything is useful, encourage, congratulate, anything that's not useful, we can explore and follow-up in a future session. Have a try, see what you make of it.

# thank you



This message involves a very short exercise, using a very small word that can have a huge, in fact, massive, influence on the outcome. And that is to say, “thank you.” When we get to the end of the session, when someone's about to leave, we can say thank you. And we can say thank you for trusting us with such an important problem. Thank you for allowing us to be part of the resolution of this fear. Thank you for including us in the pleasure of helping you to make that transition.

The phrase ‘thank you’, those two things, it's like a full stop, it's like, that's an end, that's the finish of it, that's the completion. And it's also an expression of gratitude. And very often, if we say thank you to someone, they will then say, “Oh, thank you.” Now, when someone thanks us, they don't thank us if we step on their toes. Someone's thanks us if we have contributed something. So, if we say thank you, well, that is a validation of the client's experience. And if they say thank you back to us, they are letting themselves know that the experience that they've just had is of value to them, a benefit to them. Otherwise, they wouldn't say thank you. So, here's the exercise. Right at the end of the session thank the client and see what you notice, see what their result of that is.

## exploring post session actions



Let's explore what will happen right at the very end of a session. Let's say if someone's coming back, or if we want to know how we can help the client to take the experience, that's been beneficial and take it into their life. If someone comes to see us with a problem, and they find at the end of the session, which you can start to expect will be the case that they've got at least some resolution, maybe total resolution of the problem, that it's one thing for a client to feel okay in the session, in our presence, in the hypnotic experience, but they live in their life. So, we want to find a way of bridging, a way connecting the beneficial experience with their everyday life happenings.

It can be helpful to have a conversation with a client, it doesn't have to be prolonged, it can be quite brief. But a conversation about how they can take this learning into their life. So, we can ask, "How are you going to remember this? How are you going to make use of this? How are you going to use this experience in your life? Who's going to notice? How will you be aware of it? Just how soon do you think that will happen?" And I also like to throw a bit of a spanner in the works by saying, "Even if you're feeling terrific now, I promise you it's not going to last." Because when some-



one's feeling good, there's a tendency to think, "Well, I hope I can hang on to this." And we know what happens if we try and hang on to something. It's a way of losing it. So, I always like to emphasize that it's not so much a matter of hanging on to something that you want, but being able to find your way back to it, if you lose it.

So, we can ask, "How are you going to take this into your life? What's going to be useful for you to remember this, to make use of it?" And also ask the question, "When you forget this, how can you remind yourself? What can you do that can be helpful for you to get back on the track and where you want to be and not just get lost and feel that it's been all for nothing?" I think if we don't know whether someone's coming back, we can just ask that question about how they can link their experience into their ongoing life. If they're wanting to come back for another session, as a follow-up or just as insurance or whatever, we can specifically say, "Between now and the next time we meet, I'd like you to pay attention to when things are going well, when you're feeling the way you want to feel." And then you tell them they're not to pay attention to how you get back to it, and I'll be glad to talk with you next time we meet.

So, that's the exercise. Right at the end of the session, just before someone leaves, ask some questions about how they are going to take their experience into their living, into their everyday life, into their ongoing experience of being with themselves in the world, not with us. Pretty simple. Have some fun with it.

## getting unstuck



What we've been exploring up till now is a refinement of what I learned from Erickson, and what has evolved in my work, in my teaching over the last four decades. And what I have found and what other people who have played with this process have found is that it's very, very frequently an outcome that goes very smoothly, very quickly, very easily, very respectfully. But of course, I would not be so arrogant, so out of touch with reality, to claim that if you do this, you will cure every person with every problem at all times. Of course, that would be absurd.

So, there are some people that, when they do their best, say they've been following through the process that we've been exploring here, they don't get any result. Some people are just stuck in it. And sometimes we can get stuck. And I'm going to make some comments about some ways that have emerged to help with that "stuck" so that we can get unstuck and start to move again. The first I've already mentioned is that if there's been no change, it's very often useful to go back to the beginning and listen a little bit more intently, a little bit more closely, a little bit clearer to just what is it that this client wants exactly, what is it that's missing for them so that we can be more in touch

with them and their experience and what they really want. I think that's probably the most useful first step in getting unstuck.

The other comment I'd like to make is that some people have had a lot of suffering over a long time and maybe even been to a number of people without any success. And so, for some people, there is a natural reluctance to trust some new process, some new experience, some new person and expect a miracle cure, an immediate outcome. If someone has had a problem for 20 years and they have one or two or three or four sessions with us, and they're okay, it can be easy for them to think my goodness, I've got over it so quickly, is there something wrong with me that I had it so long? Was I pretending, was it really not as bad as I thought, and so on. So, I think that with those kinds of concerns in the background, it can be so helpful for us to, as soon as possible, do some validation of the person's suffering, of their pain, of their disappointment, of their previous frustrations of not being able to get some help to really validate that. You have had a terrible time; this has been a real problem for you. You've been to so many people, none of them have really been able to help you the way you want.

Erickson made a spectacular comment to a person in this situation. He said to this man, "You've seen a lot of people in the past and none of them have been able to help you. You must already be losing faith in my ability to help you." He was actually pacing; he was actually validating that man's experience. And so immediately, Erickson became more trustworthy. So, in the same way that if we acknowledge the degree of suffering, the degree of anguish that someone has been through, that can be such a respectful communication. And it can be, even though it's kind of against our better judgment to do that. When we're doing the work that we're doing, we don't like to see people suffering. And it can be tempting sometimes, particularly for someone beginning this work, to help someone to get to a solution so that the therapist feels better. If we are in the presence of someone who's suffering, it's an awful experience. But to sort of force them or hurry them or push them to a resolution so we feel better is hardly respectful. So, a bit of validation can be just absolutely marvelous.

My friend Bill O'Hanlon says that when he was seeing clients and teaching workshops, he'd come back to his clinical practice and think, I wish my clients had been to the workshop so they'd know how to respond to my questions. Then, of course, clients behave like themselves. So, these are the first two steps that I'd recommend: Go back to the beginning, go over it again, in a very, very detailed way to find out whether we've missed something. And if that's not getting anywhere, validate. And when someone is sufficiently validated, then they might be ready to move on. And for some people, they will only be willing and ready to move on when there has been sufficient validation. And sometimes the amount of validation is more than we would anticipate. Sometimes when we're done with validating, they're just getting ready to soak it up. It's like how much water does it take to grow things in the desert? It's a bit like that.

So, here's an exercise. If you are feeling stuck with a client, if they're feeling stuck, go back to the beginning, find out exactly what's missing, what they're up for, what they want, and see if you've missed something; give it a second chance. If that doesn't work, then the next step that I'm inviting you to play with is to validate someone. Really let them know that from your perspective their suffering is legitimate, it makes perfect sense. See what happens when you do that. Thanks for staying with the process.

## completion



This is the last in the series of the four-week program, Connecting with Resources in Hypnosis, that I offer. We've been exploring this approach which is based on what I learned in my time with Milton Erickson and have developed over the last three or four decades in my clinical work and in my teaching in different parts of the world. They are offered as a guide, something for you to play with, something to vary from, certainly not some rigid protocol that you should stick to. In fact, the sooner you throw the structure away and start to play with your own variation, the better.

But what we've looked at over this time together is the way instead of when hypnosis is being thought of some weird magical incantation, or like a general anesthetic, we can look at it as an experience, as an extension of the common everyday trends where we can get involved such as watching a movie, walking in nature and so on. And then if we think of hypnosis not as what it actually is, but just giving a working description as being an experience where there's focus and absorption that we can mutually agree as being hypnosis, that gives us a very respectful, easy approach to hypnosis. And we don't have to worry about what hypnosis really is. We don't have to worry about whether someone is hypnotizable. We just build on the experience that every individ-

ual has. And every individual has an ability to focus and get absorbed in something. We can start with that and then we're up and running.

And we saw that by inviting someone into an experience that they like, this is going to provide a very acceptable, very accessible experience for someone to focus and get absorbed in. As well as that, when we're doing something that we like, we particularly explore what we like about that, and there are so many resources there. In fact, we can say that when we're doing something we like we've got all the resources we could ever need. Otherwise, we would not work. So, clarifying what someone likes and what they like about it, and then clarifying what is it that brought them to the therapy, what's the problem, and what is it about that, that is problematic to them, that is troublesome to them, is causing suffering for them, it will lead on to this wonderful question of what's missing.

Once we've found out what's missing, we know what to look for. And if we invite someone into an experience that they like, invite focus and absorption, and then comment on the changes, we have the ingredients for what we are now able to describe as a hypnotic experience and it's an experience where they're going to have all the resources they could want. So, we know what we're looking for, we know where to look for it, we've got that great combination. So, having invited someone into this experience, we can then specifically invite them to look around and find what it is that's missing in the problem area and expect that they will find it. Once they found it, all we need to do is to give them an opportunity to sit with it, to soak it up, to learn it, to get familiar with it. It's not just an idea, it can kind of have a chance to get into their bones, into their marrow so it becomes a part of them.

And then comes the fun part of helping them to connect that experience in their life with the area that's been problematic. And we explored the three ways that we can do that. We can say that what you're doing in your likes is the same as in the problem area. This is like that. I bet we'll make the connection. Some people won't. And then we can say, "So what is it about doing what you like and having the experience here that could be useful for dealing with the problematic situation there? How is this like that?" The client can come up with their own connection. Or we can bring in the notion of learning. When you first learn to do whatever it is that you like doing; to read, to ride a bicycle, to walk, or whatever, you had this difficulty and you learned it. And now you not only have learned it, but you actually enjoy it. So, in the same way that you've learned that you can learn this. We have then a process which can have an organic feel to it without the pressure on us or the client to suddenly be okay. This translates the change from a jump to a process. Great. Such a relatable round.

And then when we've done this, we can invite someone to complete the hypnosis. We don't need to have some special ritual. Just as we don't have to have a ritual for someone to go into hypnosis, there's no special ritual to come out of hypnosis. They can just do what they need to do and then they can have a conversation. And it's so nice then to ask what's different, to clarify with someone

what is different now than when we started? Once that's clear, we can then play with that, emphasize anything useful, explore anything that was not so useful, and then that helps for the future. And then to say thank you, thank you for trusting us with your problem. Thank you for letting us be part of your solution. Thank you.

And then finally, as part of the session to explore what we might invite someone to do after the session finishes when they get back into their life and how they can take the experience that's been beneficial and apply it in their life. Take it with them. Learning is portable, of course. So, it may be enough to just remind them of that. But to have a conversation so that it's not like oh, you're okay here. So, you know, out you go, good luck. But rather, okay, this is how you're feeling, things are improved, things are great or a little bit better, whatever. Say, "what can we do to have that continued wonderful conversation?"

We've looked at ways of dealing with getting unstuck and I recommended that if you're feeling stuck or the client's stuck, go back to the beginning, listen again, "What do you like? What do you like about it? What's the problem? How come that's a problem? What's missing?" And then off we go and see what happens the second time through. If that still doesn't do it, then we can validate the legitimacy of someone being reluctant to let go of it, reluctant to move, reluctant to learn, reluctant to let go of the problem and move towards a solution. Not as a way of condoning their reluctance, but simply a way of acknowledging the legitimacy of it. So, that's something of what we've been doing during the course of this time together.

I'm hoping that the way we've explored this and the way that you've been able to play with it is starting to fit in to your practice. Incorporate it in your practice so that it can contribute to the effectiveness of what you're doing and to the satisfaction of seeing the way clients, given the opportunity, can make their own connections with just a little bit of guidance so that then they're ready to get on with their life. This small e-book is a written summary of some of the steps that we've been playing that you can use as a reference. I want to thank you for being willing to be with me along this journey. It's been a pleasure for me to put this series together, been a pleasure for me to be able to share with you some of these very simple, very practical, very easy ideas so that you can translate them into your own work, make your own variations, and see what you can do with it.

I'd love it if you could leave some comments about what's different now for you than when we started, and to have the question, "What's still missing?" There's always something missing. Like what's next for you? What will be helpful for you to remind yourself about this? Maybe referring to the e-book, maybe reading some other books. Just reflect on what might be useful for you. And I'd love to hear from you about what's different and what would be useful for you in the future. And either leave a comment on my website or send me an email. And I want to thank you for being willing to be in this process. It's been a real joy for me, to be in this with you, and to have the possibility of contributing to your learning, the effectiveness in your work, and to your personal and professional process.

## a summary



I'm just offering a summary of what this whole process is about in case you want the short version.

Anyway, the main principles that I wanted us to explore afterward my time with Milton Erickson, the main principles are, that if we think of people as individuals rather than cases, if we realize that everyone's different and has more capacities than they realize, that Erickson reminded us about that problems are not due to some defect in us but because of some kind of disconnection that we've learned somehow to limit ourselves, that we've forgotten how to use something that was useful in the past. So, then if we're going to help people, it's a matter of not so much fixing them with some problem that they have, but of helping them to reconnect with some resource that they have got out of touch with or that they have yet to learn.

And in relation to hypnosis, Erickson spoke about the common everyday trance where we look at a movie, where we get involved with something, we get focused, we get absorbed. And if we think of hypnosis then as an extension of this, then any experience that involves focus and absorption can be a beginning, can be a source of a hypnotic experience without having to get in all of the weird-



ness and mystery of the whole hypnotic conversation; that when we do something that we like, we find that we have all the resources that we need right at our fingertips. It can be just so wonderful to ask a client, "What do you like to do? What do you like about that?" And just that conversation helped to create a mood of resourcefulness, a mood of competence. And then if we ask someone, having identified something that they like to do, if they could remember that, recall that, re-experience that, invite focus, and invite absorption, then we've got a beautiful, respectful, transparent way of inviting someone into a hypnotic experience that's going to fit them and be a resource for them.

And if we have the question, what's missing for this person as distinct from what's wrong with them that needs fixing, then we know what we're looking for. And if we know what we're looking for, what particular resources - is it comfort, is it quietness, is it pace, is it being able to sleep, whatever it is, whatever is missing for them - we know what we're looking for. And if we know where to look, and that's in the likes, we've got a pretty good combination. So, we can ask someone to get into their likes, get focused, get absorbed, comment on the changes to validate that we've got a hypnotic experience happening here, and then go looking for the resource that's missing that makes the problem be problematic, and find that what's missing so that we can then bring it to the situation and then allow a resolution, a reconnection, and healing to happen.

And sometimes just asking someone, what's missing, what are you looking for, will be enough to help someone to reconnect and be okay. And sometimes when we ask someone, "What do you like to do, and what do you like about that?", that actually initiates a connection. And they say, "oh, I haven't been doing that in the problem." So, I'll start to delve into that. And more often, we need to provide a bridge to help someone to make that connection. And we can actually say doing what you like to do is the same as what it's going to be like to have the solution. The man who likes riding horses, who had a problem with flying, when he was told, flying in a plane is just like riding a horse, that was enough to make the connection for him, and he was able to enjoy the flight. Sometimes that doesn't click, so we can then ask, "When you look at what you like, how is that relevant to dealing with the problem?" and help the client makes the connection. If that doesn't help the connection, we can say, "When you first learned to do something, whatever it is that you like to do, it was a problem, it was difficult, you thought you couldn't do it, you thought you'd never be able to..." And then we say, "You learned and you're able to do it and now you're fine with that, and you like it. So, in the same way that you learn that, then you can learn to have those skills in this situation so that you've got the result that you want, not the situation called the problem."

Also, if nothing seems to happen in the session, we can set up an expectancy that it doesn't need to happen here. It might happen later tonight, next week, while you're watching news, while you're asleep, and so on. So, we're setting up an expectancy, and all these aspects of this approach, help to generate a therapeutic relationship, which is respectful, which is empathic, which is unique to each individual person, and is full of expectancy. The one other bit that can be helpful for us to be reminded about is that anytime we get stuck, we're always keen to help someone move on towards

their solution. Anytime there's a "stuck-ness", it can be helpful to stop trying to be helpful, and just validate the suffering, validate the intensity of the problem, validate just how bad it's been for them so that once that's acknowledged, once that's validated, then they feel that they can be where they are, and then start to move on.

That's a short summary of what all of these chapters were about. And I hope that you can find some of this, any of this, all of this relevant to your work, relevant to your learning, relevant to your experience. So, thank you for being part of this, thank you for reading, and let me know if there's anything that I can do to clarify or anything that I can do to extend this. A big thank you.

## followup sessions



Following my free four-week program that I offered, I had a number of people express some interest in learning more about follow-up sessions, and how what we've been exploring regarding asking clients what they enjoy doing, what they like about it, what's the problem, what's the problem about it, what's missing, and looking for that resource that's missing in the likes, has helped someone to get some resolution of their dilemma.

First of all, just make some general comments. I always assume that when I see someone, that might be the only chance I have to see them. I like to get a little bit of information, the kinds of information we've been talking about and exploring together. Then I do something helpful, something to help them reconnect with that resource so that then they can get out into their life and get on with it. And I've noticed that sometimes the one session is sufficient if someone gets that connection, then they're up and running and then things fall into place. And of course, sometimes they don't. So, even though I haven't been seeing clients now for 10 years, when I was in regular clinical practice, the most common number of times I saw someone was once. And I find that I was surprised at that, but it was often the case. If we can be very precise, very clear together with the

client in a respectful, caring way, and help them to connect with what's missing for them, well of course. Once anyone has found what they're looking for, then that's it. And at the same time, although one was the most common number of times I saw someone, I saw a number of clients for five years, 10 years, 20 years; the longest was 30 years.

And the question then, and it's a recurring question, is what do we do when someone comes back for a second or subsequent visit? Now, I've noticed that people come back, say for a second visit, and they come back with one of three results: they're cured, there's no change, or they're worse. So, if someone is cured, if someone says, I'm great, I'm fine, that's it, I'm done, see you later, it can be helpful to help consolidate that experience by asking them what they might find useful to keep as a permanent change. And again, when we find out what someone likes to do, that's a rich area to see how someone has learned what they needed to learn in that area, so they didn't need to keep practicing or having a problem with it.

If someone says, "I feel worse than I did last time," then we can explore what was different as a result of their first visit. And if we can find out what situations, what actions, what activities made them worse, well, we know what not to do and maybe to do the opposite. If someone says, "I've been thinking about it more," oh, okay, so maybe it would be helpful to think about it less. If someone says, "I'm feeling worse, but I haven't been paying attention to it", then what's missing then might be, oh, well, perhaps it would be useful to pay attention to it. If there's no change at all, and this is really - this is the dreaded response, often, we get paralyzed then. And I found it's usually very helpful to go back to square one. Now, tell me again, what is it that you like? What do you like about it? Now, what's the problem that you're having, that you want to do something about? How come that's a problem? And what's missing for you that if you had it, you'd be okay?

So, many times, it's embarrassing to remember this, but we're all human. When I've asked that a second time, the second visit where there's been no progression, I remember, oh, that's what they said the first time. But I'd gone off in my tangent because of oh, yes, I know, I'm wise, I'm experienced, and I went off in my direction. No wonder it didn't make any difference. So, getting back to square one and listening again with more attention, more care and more focus sometimes gives us a clue as to what we missed in the first - what was missing for us in the first session, so then we can attend to that. But even if someone says, "I'm feeling better. There's been some improvement, but I'm not there yet. You know, I'm making some progress, things are not so bad or they're a little bit better" We can still ask a variation of the same question, what's still missing for you? And when we asked that question, if there's been some improvement, what is still missing?

Usually, if we listen, that gives us an opportunity what to focus on in this second or subsequent session. And again, if we find out what's still missing, there's still something missing. There's always something missing. If we find out what's still missing, then we can go and look into that within the experience of something that someone likes to do. And even if we see someone for five or 10 or 15 or 20 years, and we keep that focus on what is still missing for you, then that will keep us on

track. And, you know, people are different. Sometimes people come, they have one session, and they're up and running. Some people actually don't even get to the first session, they ring up for the appointment and just the expectancy of seeing someone for some help gets things moving. And some people take a long time.

But this one, same principle I found applies for every session, for every person I've ever seen. We're always exploring what is missing for you at this moment that if you had it that you'd okay? And that may be the same experience that we just need to spend more time consolidating, developing, exploring, extending, or it may be that someone says, "Oh, I'm having trouble sleeping, and what was missing was being quiet at night in my thinking so I could go to sleep." Okay. So, we have a session and they come back and say, "I'm sleeping a bit better. But actually, I'm not feeling rested in the morning."

Okay, so, that's what's missing, feeling rested; so we can explore that. Or someone says, "I want to lose weight." And they come back and say, "Oh, I'm losing weight, but I'm feeling irritable." So, what's missing? Maybe accepting there may be something else that's missing. Sometimes it's the same experience that's missing. We just need to chip away at and learn and support them to learn at their own pace. And sometimes move from here to the fact that what's missing changes over time. So, my invitation is to just keep that question, what's missing, and in subsequent sessions, what's still missing, and to use that as a guide to help to clarify our focus and the focus of our work with our clients. So, I hope that gave some clarity, some ideas, some possibilities for you to play with. And if there's anything else, please let me know.

Now, we can't cover all that there is to know about this. I've been doing this work for 40 years, and I'm still learning. But I teach longer programs lasting a year or two years, and we can condense all of that into just a few minutes. And at the same time, I think if you take the principles that we're exploring here, and you play with them, and you explore them in your own way, that may well be sufficient for you to do what you need to do. Thanks for reading.

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