

Dr Ernest L. Rossi is internationally acknowledged to be among the leading hypnotherapists of our times. For many he inherited the professional legacy, even status of his late colleague, Milton Erickson. A regular visitor to this side of the Atlantic, Dr Rossi spent part of the Autumn in Europe lecturing and conducting workshops across the continent.

The EJCH caught up with him when he while he was briefly in Britain for a weekend workshop/seminar – “The Psychobiology of Mind-Body Healing” – organised by the Academy of Curative Hypnotherapists at the Postgraduate Medical Centre, Tameside Hospital, Ashton-under-Lyne.

One "Wonderful" weekend with the Gentle Giant of hypnotherapy

By Nadia Waters

Rossi's reputation of course preceded him – some 90 people attended this Workshop and appreciated the indubitable wisdom and experience of the man who has taken on the mantle of the great Milton Erickson.

Introduced as “the gentle giant of hypnotherapy”, by his friend Norman Vaughton, Rossi came across as a mild, self-effacing speaker, not averse to a little humour, and charming in his naturalness and lack of pretension.

The basis for a forthcoming science of hypnosis was stressed by Rossi. By analogous reasoning, he pointed out that information transfer is now at the root of several scientific disciplines, including physics (where the boson is viewed as a messenger unit) and biology (through DNA coding).

Contrary to the negative outlook of classical science that the universe is ‘running down’ by a process of negative entropy, Rossi illustrated the positive exponential evolution of increasingly complex information within the system. Rossi believes that hypnosis provides a glimpse of information transfer through Mind/Brain/Cell/Gene.

Hypnotherapy is to do with accessing an inner source of healing that we all possess.

“Hypnosis has always been concerned with the uncovering of information – now for the first time, we have a true science of information transduction. It should be possible to trace a flow of information not only between people but mind to brain, down to cellular and genetic level. That will be the Nobel prize.”

Current ideas on competitive evolution were also challenged. Rossi referred to the establishment of the ‘hyper-cycle’, where molecules co-operated to their mutual advantage, so enabling the evolutionary process to get underway. This basic fact, he



asserted, provides a totally different outlook on evolution and runs counter to the Darwinian based socio-biological notions that ‘Might is right’ and the ‘Selfish gene’.

Rossi also indicated, by analogy, that the stress response has always been present in all species. When an amoeba is stressed by adverse environmental conditions a chemical (cyclic AMP) is secreted as an emergency signal, encouraging other amoebae to group together for survival. He later came across the research of Glaser who discovered that students sitting exams produced more cyclic AMP in their white blood cells. Here, to Rossi, is a clear link between chemistry and behaviour in widely different creatures.

Rossi described various techniques for facilitating the communication process between mind and body when the

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therapeutic session is 'stuck' - in that matters are not resolved and yet there is high energy and motivation.

In these techniques, neither the client nor the therapist needs to know how the process operates and the locus of control remains always with the client - each step is authorised.

All of the methods work on:

- (a) **The problem.**
- (b) **Its history.**
- (c) **The solution.**

Subtle techniques may be employed to home-in on the problem. For instance, simply by mentioning something that is 'private' or 'secret' to the client, steers the unconscious to the appropriate area. The aim is to re-associate and re-synthesise the client's inner realities.

Essentially the method is to set up a problem – stated or unstated – to be resolved, and then allow the inward spontaneous therapeutic healing process to work by itself. The client is observed meticulously for physical signs accompanying psychological processes and all the while, positive verbal feedback (“That’s right”, “Ah-ha”, “Wow!”, “Stay focused”, etc.) is provided by the therapist, using 'artful vagueness'.

The client's comments are restated, and attention is gently drawn to any metaphors that are uttered. “I’m sure that’s not a metaphor about your problem”, of course, will raise the thought in the client that perhaps it is just such a statement!

The client is encouraged to stay with a particular physical experience and try to increase its intensity. The subjective experience of physical pain, for example, can be rated on a 1 – 10 scale.

A 35 year old female with rheumatoid arthritis was the volunteer subject in a spectacular demonstration of the ‘That’s right’ technique.

Rossi first established the nature of the problem with this subject, and the degree of associated pain and stiffness. On a scale of 1 – 10 the subject rated the current pain as “6”.

At this point Rossi induced hypnosis by a very simple technique of looking directly at the subject and breathing exaggeratedly a few times. “Is it beginning to happen to you

now ?” he asked. Her eyes closed. After checking with her that it was acceptable to continue, Rossi paid close attention to her.

The subject's right hand started to twitch. “Yes indeed” was Rossi's feedback response. “Let it out. My goodness”. A heaviness of the chest was mentioned by the subject. “Wonderful”.

Various other physical manifestations – including slight grimacing, eye-twitches, hand and leg movements - occurred, each immediately recognised and encouraged. The subject was instructed actually to try to increase any pain – “Stay with the pain. Let it get stronger” – so that the unconscious links could be explored. Mention of a pain in the stomach drew the comment “Let’s see what your stomach has to say”. Other general comments were “Experience that simple truth. Really experience it right now – difficult as it may be. Let it continue as long as it needs to – with all the healing that can come from



Dr Rossi signing his book, “*The 20 minute break: the ultradian healing response.*” for Cheshire hypnotherapist Lesley Jackson

it. Keep it private within yourself. Just learn the truth now."

"I have very scary feelings" said the subject at one point.

"Let's explore those scary scenes. How old are you when feeling scary? Are you alone? Do you know where you are?"

To precipitate further responses, Rossi suggested, *"Something else wants to happen."*

The subject reported experiencing a blockage *"Like a wall"*. *"Let's see how you deal with this wall. Have the courage and strength to continue."*

At one point the pain went to the legs. *"Don't let it escape yet!"* implied that it could depart and would in a short while!

The therapy session lasted one and three-quarter hours – a typical duration according to Rossi, corresponding to an ultradian cycle. The period was reckoned to have been *"about half an hour"* by the subject. It finished naturally, with the subject's physical pain having changed location several times – eventually reducing in intensity. The ego had learned to relate to the pain – the opposite to being 'stuck'.

Wonderful Uncertainty

The final part of the exercise consisted of convincing the subject that regular daily practice of the procedure was necessary for long-term benefit.

Another demonstration concerned a woman with a hormone imbalance. She had suffered from Hepatitis B and C. A hysterectomy had given no relief to the hormonal problem. She rated a pain in the neck region to be "2-3".

"Are you willing to try new things?" Rossi sought to isolate the part of her that needed help.

She termed it *"The Worldly part"*. The other part was *"Security"*. The subject ascribed each aspect to an upturned palm. The right hand, the *"Worldly"* part, started to shake.

"Tune in and let's see what happens next ... Say whatever you want – only what I need to hear to help the process further".

One hand started to feel hot. *"Allow that healing to continue all by itself"*. Rossi enhanced the process thus:

"You're in that special trance time when every minute can be like days, weeks or months of mind/body healing".

Rossi drew attention to what he saw – a rapid neck-pulse in the subject: *"Can you feel your heart beat? Latch on to it. Go with it."*

One member of the audience commented that as a result of a previous class-practice, he had developed a headache. *"Wonderful"* replied Rossi, validating the experience. The man



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found himself participating as a demonstration subject. Rated as being 2 on the pain scale, Rossi again used the technique of getting the subject to increase the pain *"for a moment or two"*.

A tightness in the chest was reported, followed by a sense of heat in the right side of the body. *"Let's see if it continues to spread and what it leads to"*.

"Now I can't tell if it's hot or cold" the man reported.

"That's a wonderful uncertainty" Rossi clarified. *"Is that a metaphor for something in your life?"* All the time, Rossi was closely mirroring the subject's posture.

At one moment the subject smiled. He had just made a connection with the hot and cold metaphor. *"Keep it private to yourself"*.

Rossi, like Erickson, urged therapists to *"watch the patient"* rather than be overly influenced by *"book-learning"*. *"To tell someone to relax is a perversion"* we were also told, *"It comes as a reward following arousal or work well done"*.

Two dissociation techniques were practised by the audience. One was a 'magnetic' hand method whereby the hands are held about 6-8 inches apart and suggestions given that the hands will come together if the unconscious is ready to explore a problem. When the source is investigated one hand will slowly drop, and when the solution is considered the other hand will also fall. The second method, involving hand polarity, consisted of getting the subject to imagine a problem in the palm of one hand and a positive problem-solving part in the other.

Rossi observed that for a person to admit that one hand is one's mother and the other one's father, is to enter into a therapeutic situation where work on the unconscious can be undertaken.



Even Rossi didn't get to know Erickson's secret

Elegant Minimalism

In similar vein, if the subject is talking of feeling “strange” or “weird”, these are indicators that definite unconscious, therapeutic processes are operating. “*Perhaps a rearrangement is occurring of the messenger molecules that were present in the original trauma.*” Sometimes exactly what is happening psychologically is not clear. “*One should nod wisely*”, was Rossi’s sensible advise.

Another area close to Rossi’s heart, of course, is that of regular periods of activity and rest occurring in the day corresponding to the 90 minute ultradian rhythm. The cycle is apparent in sleep, when dreams appear in just that regular cycle. Rossi covered related topics, such as the cyclical nature of addiction, whether it be to our own adrenaline, caffeine, barbiturates, nicotine, alcohol, and so on. The 90 minute cycle is reflected in such things as right and left brain hemisphere dominance, nostril breathing, mood swings, insulin flow, lactation, and sexual arousal. Apparently, some cancer drugs are administered in synchrony with the patient’s ultradian rhythm, when maximum cell division is taking place. According to Rossi there are, similarly, peak times in the day when healing is likely to occur - but also times that are not so good. He cited an old Indian saying that “If you want to change a friend into an enemy arrange a meeting between 3-4 p.m.” (Rossi’s ‘breaking point’). Rossi urges a 20 minute break every 90 minutes in order to re-charge the batteries.

Rossi is certainly a perspectivist – a rare breed in this age of super-specialisation in science. Constantly, he seeks a broader knowledge of science in order to comprehend a greater view of the whole – “*People don't link ideas together*”. He admitted to

“A feeling of awe at the reality we are faced with.”

His background is multi-faceted – at one time he followed Freudian ideology until “*I turned my interpretation into a question*”. When Erickson died, Rossi, who had been working with him for 8 years, told us he thought “*Shucks, I didn't get to know the secret*”. For a while Rossi played the stock market until he was inexorably drawn back to Erickson’s manuscripts.

He particularly emphasised that therapists should not project their pet theories onto therapy situations. Such “therapeutic treachery” can lead to blind alleys and not help the client. The current vogue for seeking “childhood sexual abuse” as a “cause” for some behaviour has been a retrograde step. Fortunately, the emergence of the ‘false memory syndrome’ has countered that particular erroneous pathway, to some extent.

In his speech thanking Rossi, Norman Vaughton referred, very accurately, to Rossi’s “*elegant minimalism*”. It was a privilege to observe the consummate skill of one greatly experienced in subtle, effective therapy. One can imagine Rossi almost instinctively responding “*That's wonderful!*” – even to a sock on the jaw. No doubt he would conceptualise such an event as a therapeutic behaviour on the part of the assailant! Rossi’s approach was refreshing and, frankly, inspiring.

Recommended books:

Rossi, E.L. (1991) *The 20 minute break: the ultradian healing response*. Jeremy Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles.

Rossi, E.L. (1986) *The psychobiology of mind-body healing: new concepts of therapeutic hypnosis*. W.W. Norton, New York. (Paperback edition)