

Hypnosis for Chronic Neck and Shoulder Pain Stemming from an Auto Accident

(This transcript is from a hypnosis session conducted by Dr. Michael Yapko. It is also included in the fifth edition of Trancework: An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis.)

The client is a woman in her late 30s who suffers chronic pain in her neck and shoulders, a consequence of a car accident in which she was rear-ended while stopped at a red light. She had several neurological evaluations prior to consulting me and was told that the pain would most likely eventually diminish, though not in the near future. The client is a professional woman who, as a result of her injuries and residual pain, is currently unable to work. She is married, and in all other respects is a high functioning, competent woman. She did not evidence depression or anxiety beyond what would be considered normal for her circumstances. Thus, other than instructing her in the use of dissociative techniques of hypnotic pain management over the course of a few sessions, further therapy was deemed unnecessary. The following transcript was from the fourth of five sessions.

Okay, Mary ... Are you comfortable? ... (Nods) ... Good ... you can begin by taking in a few deep, relaxing breaths ... and then whenever you're ready ... you can just allow your eyes to close ... so that you can begin now ... to go inside ... to be able to explore within yourself ... find those most comfortable ... thoughts ... and feelings ... that can allow you that very, very relaxed state ... of mind and body ... and you might remember ... that you've experienced hypnosis comfortably with me before ... and so I know from at least those experiences ... as well as other hypnotic experiences you've had ... both on your own and with others ... that you know from your own direct experience ... what it's like to *breathe comfortably* ... and to *sit comfortably* ... what it's like to get so absorbed in your own thoughts ... that for a little while you forget ... that the rest of the world is going about ... its usual business ... and one of the most soothing, relaxing recognitions ... is that you really don't have to pay attention ... to anything other than what pleases you for the moment ... and the nature of conscious awareness is such ... that it will naturally drift ... from here to there ... and to nowhere in particular ... and wherever your consciousness drifts to at any moment ... is just fine ... whether you notice the routine sounds of the environment ... or your own thoughts ... or your own reactions to the different things that I say ... or *the pleasing changes that take place in your body* ... as your mind drifts ... to the different awarenesses ... and it can be very comforting to know ... that that is the nature of the conscious mind ... it can drift in ... and out ... it can notice and not notice ... it can think and enjoy not having to think ... or having to analyze critically ... and so it can accept easily ... the different

possibilities ... and while your conscious mind is certainly capable of processing ... whatever it happens to notice ... the part of you that is infinitely ... more interesting and powerful is your unconscious ... the part of you that can listen ... and respond ... even when your conscious mind drifts elsewhere ... and your own unconscious ... has abilities that your conscious mind sometimes forgets about ... and when you're conscious of your unconscious mind's abilities ... and can consciously analyze and access ... the unconscious awareness ... of what your conscious mind knows and doesn't know ... and what's easier to understand consciously than unconsciously ... that's when you can appreciate the comfort of recognizing ... how the mind and the body ... can work so closely together sometimes ... when that's important ... and how other times ... the conscious mind and the unconscious mind ... can drift off elsewhere ... and the mind's greatest ability is the freedom ... to go wherever imagination wills it ... and some people like the freedom of having their minds float through space and through time ... others like to drift back in time to the comfort ... of a very special soothing place ... that's prominent in their memory ... and is vivid in their senses ... and the fact *that your mind can drift off ... way over there ... while your body rests so peacefully ... over here ...* is certainly an interesting experience ... and sometimes people forget ... how when their mind is drifting there ... and their body is resting here ... that their body can continue ... to take care of itself ... the automatic, unconscious ... self-preserving ... nature of your body over here ... can give your mind the comfort over there ... that allows a comfortable distance ... that gives you the freedom to simply know how differently ... you can feel ... and when your mind drifts ... that's when it's easy to not notice things that change ... and I don't know whether you know yet that your breathing has changed ... that your pulse rate has changed ... and what it feels like to have ... your body somewhere ... close enough ... to use if you want it or need it ... but without impinging on the freedom ... to float freely and comfortably ... that light ... airy feeling ... and as you experience that interesting sensation ... it can be very interesting to discover ... how easy it is to forget ... to notice where your left foot is relative to your right ... until I draw your attention to it ... what it feels like to wear a wristwatch on your left wrist ... it's easy to forget ... what it feels like ... to have earrings in your ears ... or to have the chair supporting your body comfortably ... and you know and I know ... that the mind and body ... are closely related ... and so are thoughts and feelings ... and so is past and present ... but you're also very aware that things change ... and that awareness offers ... a buffer ... a comfort zone ... that leaves just enough room between the present and the past ... to make the present of comfort a gift that you can enjoy for months to come ... and the comfort zone ... that rests comfortably neck and neck ... between the present and the future ... where the present can be just

comfortable enough ... to allow a future of feeling better ... a day at a time ... and you know that sometimes ... people don't understand the relationship between past and present ... anymore than they understand the relationship ... between thoughts and feelings ... but you have a feeling that your thoughts matter ... and your thoughts about your feelings can allow your feelings some distance ... a safe, comfortable distance ... between what you experience now and what you felt then ... and between your head and your body is a space of deep comfort ... and what you're going to think tomorrow ... but you'll have to wait until tomorrow ... for your conscious mind to know ... what your unconscious has already discovered ... that it takes far more effort than it's worth ... to move your hand ... when it's so much easier ... *you can be so much more comfortable sitting beside yourself so much more comfortably* ... when your mind is here ... and your body is here ... and it's just enough distance to be *so much more comfortable than you thought you could be* ... and you can be very aware ... of that interesting sensation ... of being separate from your body ... and having all of yourself ... in the experience of deep absorption ... and you know and I know that as distant as your body feels on one level ... it also feels close enough on another level ... to be aware of its need to continue to breathe ... in ... and slowly out ... so effortlessly ... and so comfortably ... and as your mind continues to float there ... and your body continues to rest comfortably over here ... your conscious mind can certainly be curious ... about the *comfortable sensations of feeling the separation existing* ... and you don't really have to analyze too carefully which part of you is the most comfortable at the moment ... you can simply allow yourself instead ... to enjoy the comfort that goes along ... without really being sure ... exactly ... where your fingers are ... or where your hair is ... it can be very soothing to know that you can drift back ... into an awareness of your body when you choose to ... and that for the moment ... you can simply enjoy the choice ... of letting your mind be there ... while your body rests comfortably over here ... and I know that doesn't make much sense to your conscious mind ... but fortunately ... even though your conscious mind is very smart ... your unconscious is a lot smarter than you are ... and all the learnings of your lifetime ... allow you the *comfortable position now* of being able to drift freely ... far enough away ... yet close enough to your body ... to be so comfortable ... in ways your conscious mind is only beginning to discover ... and each time that you listen to this session or each time that you sit quietly with your eyes closed ... your unconscious can add a new and interesting dimension to the experience ... your overall awareness ... of your ability to be as close to or as far away from ... your body as you'd like to be ... and when you recognize ... powerfully within yourself ... how much more control you have than you ever thought possible ... then *you can enjoy the feeling of comfort* ... that you really can rest comfortably

... and that you really can heal surprisingly quickly ... now that more parts of you have begun some work on the job ... and so, Mary ... I'd like you to take your time ... and reorient yourself to whatever degree that you wish to ... in order to bring ... yourself out of hypnosis to whatever degree you wish ... and by that, I mean that if you choose to keep your body absorbed while you bring your mind out of hypnosis ... I can certainly understand that choice ... or if you choose to bring your body out of hypnosis ... but leave the comfort intact to enjoy the rest of the day ... I can certainly understand that choice ... and whatever choice you make ... you'll certainly be aware ... that when you allow your eyes to open ... you'll be ready to get on with the rest of today in a much more comfortable state of mind and body ... and that will certainly be an eye-opening experience ...

The suggestion of being able to keep her body comfortably in hypnosis while in a "waking" state was one that Mary found especially useful in helping her carry out routine activities. The many suggestions throughout for disorientation and dissociation (mind and body, conscious and unconscious, past and present, and body parts) facilitated a very deep experience of hypnosis that permitted substantial relief from pain throughout her lengthy recovery.