

The Case of Terri: Hypnosis for Mobilizing Resources

By Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.

Terri and Michael have never met before this session takes place at an international meeting on psychotherapy that both were attending. The session is live and spontaneous, conducted before an audience numbering in the hundreds.

Note: This is an abbreviated version of the full session which included interaction during and after the session.

M: Introduce yourself please.

T: Oh. My name is Terri. Okay. I'm from Napa, California.

M: Terri from Napa. Yes. Will you describe a little bit of what you want help with?

T: I have a history of falling, and about seven or eight years ago, I attended a hypnosis seminar and whatever the instructor did with me, I lost my fear and I stopped falling. And I stopped falling for about four years. And I seem to primarily fall when I'm traveling and I love to travel, so that's a problem. So, I've taken to carrying a cane with me whether I've fallen or not, just kind of a comfort.

M: Okay. Now, you said that you'd had a hypnosis session a number of years ago, I think you said eight years ago. Yes? And somehow that was helpful to you. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

T: The day before the seminar started, I fell and I injured my knee very severely. And the instructor... and I was pretty far from home. I was on the East coast. And what he worked with was the fact that I seem to not focus on where my feet are, where my legs are. I seem to be focused mostly on my upper body. And so, whatever he did, I became very aware of where my feet are. And so I could walk over irregular terrain and not fall and feel reasonably comfortable and confident. And then about, as I say, about a year and a half ago, I started falling again. And I tend to fall mostly when I'm traveling. And I think that's because I'm just not aware of where I'm walking. I'm, I'm a tourist and I'm focused on what's out there.

M: Okay. Anything else you want to comment on?

T: Not that I can think of.

M: Okay. Well, then, what I would suggest that you do is arrange yourself in a position that's comfortable and let's orient now to experiencing hypnosis.

M: All right, Terri, you can begin by taking in a few deep relaxing breaths. That's right. Arrange yourself in whatever way you need to in order to make yourself comfortable... And over the course of the next few minutes, I'm just going to talk about some different ideas, some different possibilities... and certainly, you know from your previous experience with hypnosis... that you're quite capable of absorbing new ideas, new ways of approaching things... so that when you're taking the time to just sit quietly, it provides you a very interesting opportunity to explore within yourself... to consider and reconsider... to be with yourself in a way that reminds you of how you can be connected to some of the most important parts of yourself... And certainly you know from previous experience... that there are specific steps to follow whenever you're experiencing hypnosis... The first step, a *comfortable* step, of

simply deciding... that you can close your eyes and focus... And then comes the *next step* of narrowing your attention to really listening... And not only listening, but *hearing*... which leads to the *next comfortable step*...of responding to what's said... which leads to the *next comfortable step* of absorbing what's possible... even from what *isn't* said that is merely implied... And I can talk about all the steps of an induction... the same way that I can talk about all the steps involved in doing *anything*... whether it's getting dressed in the morning... or making a meal... or the steps of planning a trip... It's a curious thing when you start to think of things as involving so many different steps to follow... Because our language isn't really that specific... People can talk about doing a therapy session... but it really doesn't tell you moment-by-moment, step-by-step, what they actually said and did... And sometimes not being specific can really get in the way... I remember once hearing comedian Lilly Tomlin say, "I always wanted to be someone. Now I think I should have been more specific!"... (Terri laughs)... And it's good to be able to poke fun at ourselves... life... therapy... the human condition... But of course, there's a deeper message in there... because what you know from a lifetime of learning... is that anything you want to accomplish is going to have a path to follow... a series of steps to take... And then it's a question of how well defined those steps are... how clear they are... And that one part is being *wonderfully aware* where the next step is... But there's also another part, Terri... It's all about that sense of readiness to take the next step... There's a lot of things I can say, questions I can ask about states of readiness... points that I can make about how you know when you're ready... And if you think about it, it's what you've spent a lifetime learning in different ways... How you knew when you were ready to travel... how you knew when you were ready to see your first client... how you knew when you were ready to take classes at the university... And it's that sense of being connected... connected to something very deep and very profound... *very deep*... that lets you know what's next... And out of all the things there are to be connected to at a given moment in time... the quality of your experience is dictated... by where you focus... where your attention wanders to... what you notice... And this is a curious thing... that there's noticing at a conscious level... where you look at something and you see it... and you know you're seeing it... like walking into a glorious museum and staring at a painting or a sculpture that... just grabs you in terms of your attention... And you *stop* and you *observe*... and you know what you're looking at... And you know why you're looking at it... because there's something about it that's so compelling... And to *stop* when you're looking at something compelling can happen anywhere, anytime... And that's one very conscious, deliberate strategy... But you know, and I know there just isn't enough awareness to go around... can't be aware of *everything*... So that when you listen to me and focus on the things I'm saying... there are other things that drift into the background... that you don't notice... And some of those are external things... sounds in the room... temperature... the feel of the chair... And some of them are internal things... the feel of the rings on your fingers... the bracelet on your wrist... the shoes on your feet... But isn't it curious how something outside of awareness... can so quickly drift into your awareness... like the rings on your fingers... the bracelet on your wrist... the shoes on your feet... So much so that if I were to suggest... that there's no basis for noticing your shoes... you might well agree with me... and yet feel compelled to notice them anyways... simply because I'm talking about them... *Your shoes, your feet, your awareness*... And how old were you when you first stood up... and started to walk... started to run?... And there's the process of learning... which part of your foot you lift first and then next... And it would be easy to think in the most superficial way, Terri... that I'm talking about walking... And on the surface, I am talking about walking and shoes... and feet...and rings and bracelets... but there's something much deeper... *much deeper*... that I would want to draw your attention to... And it has something to do... with what's next in a life that's filled with what's nexts... The *next step* in your personal development... the *next step*... in your professional development... the *next step*...in discovering the *balance* of this part of your life... that part of your life... If I'm going to talk about what's next... and if I'm going to invite you to consider more deeply... that when you're walking... when you're thinking... when you're fully focused... when you're deeply distracted... when you're confident... when you're

fearful... there's still a next step... and a *next step*... And I wonder about how valuable a skill it is... to separate the next step from what mood you're in... to separate the next step from whether you're focused or distracted... the same way you spent a lifetime based on those first experiences... Because there's a transition that took place... of being in the process of learning to walk... and eventually being a walker... learning to do therapy and being a therapist... learning the techniques of meditation and being a meditator... (Terri takes in a deep breath)... That's right. Take in a deep breath... And then the next step is to take in another one... And how many different next steps are there?... And then when you discover there's always a next step... and it doesn't matter which city you're in... it doesn't matter whether you're in the east coast or the west coast... this country or another country... whether it's morning or whether it's night... whether it's been a busy day or a slow day... all of those things become wonderfully separated, Terri... detached... from just having a *strong sense of the next step*... There are people who try and control what's next... who only allow the experiences that they're willing to allow based on their level of comfort... And what you're discovering about yourself is that you're willing to travel... not knowing exactly what you're going to experience... When you left home in Napa... you didn't know that you were going to be sitting here across from me... That's the joy of discovery... and the openness... And if I had asked you yesterday morning, what's next?... You might have *thought* you knew... only to discover the unexpected, the spontaneous... And yet... and here's the part that's really interesting... You're the one who took the uncertain steps of calling me... leaving a message... calling me back... leaving another message... calling me back... having no idea what I was going to say... And isn't it interesting... that you followed these uncertain steps... with a certainty... that you could skillfully negotiate your way through the interaction?... And you did, because here I am... and here *we* are... and not knowing... and getting distracted by the novelty of a new place... and getting distracted by the novelty of a new interaction... and still feeling solid, comfortable, connected... whole... top half and bottom half... front side and back side... feet on the ground... except the one that *isn't* with your next step... and the next step... and the next step... And so, to feel confident... that you don't have to feel confident... *is* the next step in walking... living... growing... and *outgrowing*... And so when you find yourself... *falling up*... with an unusually confident posture... and a steady... even when distracted ... in a museum... recollection... there are many different things that can occur to you... with each step that you take Terri... literal and metaphorical... And you can hold on to that knowledge... and use it... and walk with it and live with it and enjoy it... But the next step now is to... kind of summarize for yourself what's most important... what's most valuable to keep close... to keep that sense of balance about yourself... And you can do that internally, comfortably... Take whatever time you want to, Terri, to process... whatever you need to process... And then, when you feel like you're ready to and want to... you can bring this experience to a comfortable close... That's right... Reorienting yourself gradually... so that when you're ready in a little while... you can let your eyes open and reorient completely.