

The Effect of NLP on Physical Pain and Trauma: Part I of II

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BY CARLA WOODY, M.A.

Our physical bodies are a major miracle. Most of the care and functioning of the body takes place without our conscious awareness. Within our bodies, is a natural healing system everpresent to serve our needs. This system can detect when a part of the system is out of alignment in some way. It seeks to remove damaged aspects of the body and return the body to normalcy. In most cases, the system runs like clockwork. The potential effects of toxins in the environment are diffused. Physical wounds heal. Colds run their course. There are also times when it is useful to enhance our healing system through the technology of Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

During an NLP health applications workshop, trainer Tim Hallbom described a personal experience when he had fallen one day. The fall resulted in considerable swelling and a large hematoma on his thigh, along with a great deal of pain. To speed up his healing process, he had facilitated himself through the NLP *Fast Phobia/Trauma Cure*, and then performed a process described by Serge King in the book *Urban Shaman* as the *Stub Toe Process*. As a result, he was able to greatly reduce his discomfort and swelling. By that evening, the hematoma had diminished to a much lesser size.

Three weeks prior to my involvement with her in this case, Michelle had been cleaning in a bedroom of her home. During the course of cleaning, she tripped and fell landing directly on her elbow. X-rays showed that she had a Radial Head Fracture. Her medical doctor chose to put her arm in a sling rather than a cast. She returned to her physician to have blood excised from the area of the break. During that visit he indicated a concern that the break was not aligning to heal properly and a need to watch it. During the two weeks that ensued she had increasing pain and immobility of her entire arm largely brought on by the fact that she had again fallen, and had landed on the same arm. By the time I saw her not only was she in severe pain, but with her arm bent at a ninety degree angle, she had only an approximately twenty degree range of movement.

Remembering Tim Hallbom's story and the NLP presupposition, *If it's possible in the world, it's possible for me*, we decided to follow the same process for healing.

The Fast Phobia/Trauma Cure

Imagine you are sitting in a movie theater. You are there for a private screening. Be there now. You can see the large movie screen in front of you and seats all around you. In the back of the theater, about two-thirds of the way up the wall, you can see a small window. That's the projection booth. Direct your attention in front of you to the movie screen. Now, see a neutral black and white picture of yourself up on that screen. Make it a still black and white photo.

As you are sitting here, you can imagine that you are able float up and leave this body behind and go all the way up to the projection booth. You can begin to feel a certain sense that allows you to know that you are beginning now to lift up, up, up out of this body. Feel that sense of freedom as you begin to float all the way back and enter the projection booth. Notice your surroundings here and feel the projection booth floor beneath your feet. Peek through the window and see Michelle all the way down there looking at the still photo of herself on the movie screen. I installed and held an anchor at the front of her shoulder to further dissociate her from the injury experience.

In just a minute, a black and white movie will begin to run of the injury experience. The movie will begin before the accident ever happened all the way through to after it is completely over and Michelle knows she is going to be okay. Your job is to watch Michelle watching the movie. Ready? I usually move my arm from left to right in the client's lower visual field while using an auditory anchor, i.e. a "whooshing" sound, to indicate movement, and snap my fingers at the end. I find that these actions on my part help the client to focus, whether their eyes are open or closed, and set up additional anchors for later use in this process.

I tested Michelle's reaction to the black and white movie before proceeding. Right now you can see that Michelle is seeing herself on the screen after the experience when everything is okay. In just a minute, that Michelle on the screen will change from black and white to color. Then, very quickly, the movie will run backwards in color, all the way to the beginning again, before anything ever happened. Your job again is to watch Michelle watching the movie. Ready? This time I moved my arm from right to left at a faster pace that during the black and white segment, while making the "whooshing" sound and snapping my fingers loudly once my arm reached the left side.

After testing once again to ensure a desensitization process had already begun, I proceeded. Now you will be going back down into Michelle's body. It's almost as if you get that same sense as before that lets you know you are beginning now to leave the projection room and to float through the movie theater. You can feel a certain sense of gravity that brings you back into your body now.

The next piece will involve you being in the movie, but, you will be at the end when the incident is over and you know you're okay. It will be in color. From that point at the end, the movie will run backwards, high speed, all the way to the point before the event ever occurred. Step into that time at the end now when everything is okay again. Here we go. Running backwards now all the way to the beginning. Once again, I repeated the arm movements and auditory anchors used previously. After testing to determine that the event was now a neutral occurrence for Michelle, I continued into the next phase of the healing process.

The Stub Toe Process

In just a minute, I'm going to invite you to step into that time when you had been cleaning the room. In other words, be there in the experience, but, instead of injuring yourself have a different ending to it, one that is positive. Since you like to have options, run the experience three times, each with a different positive ending.

Michelle associated into the event easily and experienced three positive endings. Instead of injuring herself she: 1) caught herself before landing, 2) fell on the bed unharmed, and 3) did not trip at all. After having done these two processes, she reported immediately that the pain in her

arm had greatly decreased. Instead of the severe pain, she said she felt a sense of energy moving down her arm that became like a rubberband that if she moved her arm too much became stretched taut. When I saw her again two days later, she had 180 degree movement of her arm with, as she defined it, minimal discomfort and no pain. Some weeks later she saw her physician. He reported that the break had aligned and was healing nicely.

It seems as though the coupling of these two processes provides first, a neutralizing effect of the event for the client that then allows for almost an erasure from experience, or just one of the options of the experience the brain can choose to remember. Specifically, I have used this process with a woman whose symptoms manifested in various ways in her reproductive system. The core communication of these symptoms was a need to stand up for herself, the origin being several sexual molestation situations at younger ages. After she experienced the *Fast Phobia/Trauma Cure* and *Stub Toe Process* with all the earlier situations, when testing, she had difficulty retrieving clear pictures of the different events. In one case, she was not able to see the event at all in her mind's eye.

I have noticed an interesting phenomenon in the language clients choose to use when they are discussing their physical symptoms. Paying attention to language and correspondingly thinking in metaphor has often provided me with insights into the origins of the health challenges that the clients are facing.

Demitri described his pain to me in these words. *At first, there was discomfort. Then, there was numbness and finally, it was a shock to the system.* His pain was fairly continual and seemed to start in the neck, radiated across his shoulders and ran down one arm all the way to his fingertips. He said there had been times that his pain was so intense that he gladly would have allowed amputation of that arm if the pain would stop. Upon seeing a physician, Demitri was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, an inflammatory variety of arthritis. His physician also told him there was nothing to be done about it other than some pain medication. He would just have to live with it. Demitri indicated there was no prior family history of this condition.

I asked him what had been going on about the time the pain had started. He reported that he had had a break-up of a seven-year relationship, and five months prior to that the discomfort had begun. The break-up was not his choice and somewhat of a surprise. His first description of his pain ran parallel not only to the progression of the pain, but also to the experience of the relationship break-up. At the earlier point, the body noticed that something was "off" where the conscious mind had not yet had the realization. Thus, the *discomfort* manifested. A couple of months later, the conscious realization of problems in the relationship began to come and also some denial, and so, the *numbness*. Ultimately, the break-up occurred which *shocked the system*, resulting in intense emotional and physical pain. The discussion between Demitri and I took place nine months after the break-up. He was still experiencing intense pain and emotional upheaval, to the point that he was questioning his very values and direction in life. After I expressed to him my sense of the major origin of the pain, he consented to the *Grief/Loss Process* and the *Forgiveness Process*.

The Grief/Loss Process

Demitri, choose a pleasant experience that you had with Dana. Allow yourself to picture her in that situation in your mind's eye. As you're looking at this picture now, what is the location? Is it in color or black and white? I go on to inquire about the different submodality distinctions.

Now choose someone else that when you think of this person you have pleasant memories. This is someone who is no longer in your life, but, when you think of this person you almost feel as though the person is here with you. This could be a good friend with whom you lost touch, a teacher who was a mentor, a relative, even someone who is deceased. Picture that person in your mind's eye. Is it in color or black and white? Once again, I go down the list of submodality distinctions. The submodalities experienced between the two memories were different, just as I have found them typically to be with other clients.

Would it be okay for you if when you recall a memory of Dana that you could experience it the same way you do the memory of this old friend? After gaining Demitri's permission, I instructed him to map across the submodalities he had been experiencing with Dana to those that he experienced with his old friend.

There are things that you valued in the relationship with Dana, aspects that you want in your life in the future, aren't there? In just a minute, I'm going to ask you to notice what those aspects are. As each one comes to you, you can imagine that you have in front of you a spread of playing cards or little Frisbees, whatever you want, that you place each one of those values on so that you can see each one, symbolically or as the written word.

After Demitri had all his relationship values fully elicited and pictured on the playing cards he had chosen, I futurepaced his rediscovery of these values. See your future extending all the way out in front of you now. In just a minute, you can begin to manifest these aspects in your future. You may choose to literally toss each one out there or gently blow them out there, whichever method seems the thing to do for you. You may choose to place them all out there together at a future time, or place different ones at various points in your future. You are probably also noticing by now that you already have certain ones of these aspects present in other relationships in your life. Whenever you are ready, send those values out into your future so that you have even more of what you want.

After Demitri had completed this process, I tested his thoughts of Dana. He said it was much better, as though she was "just there."

The Forgiveness Process

Demitri, choose one particular incident with Dana that seems to stand out in your mind as one where you still have negative feelings, like anger, hurt, or resentment. When you have that incident, see it over there (some distance in front of us). You're here with me and that situation is over there. I anchor him back to provide dissociation.

As you review that situation, what limitations was Dana operating with to cause her to communicate to Demitri in that manner? As you are looking at her there, it's almost as if you can look behind her and see where she came from, her family of origin, other experiences she had along the way. You know, all of us only know what we know based upon where we've been, our model of the world. Notice what model of the world Dana is operating within. Given these limitations, what is the positive intention behind her behavior? What qualities or internal resources does she need there to turn that situation around? Demitri was readily able to list limitations based on Dana's background and his sense of her positive intention. He also identified internal resources she could use.

Think of a specific time in your own life when you had those resources fully present within you. When you have a time, step into this space on the floor and be in that situation. Notice your experience of having compassion, the ability to openly communicate, and just knowing that you have wider choices in the world. Particularly notice where you sense your experience of these resources in your body. After he described his bodily sensations and the internal messages he was receiving, I tested his response by asking him to step out of the space, breaking his state, and then stepping back into the space. His nonverbal response to the resource state was the same as originally calibrated.

Dana can use these resources, can't she? Would it be okay for you to send them to her now? You can flow them over to her in whatever way seems right to you. Some people take their hands and literally offer them as gifts, others see the resources as energy that flows over, cocooning and settling, integrating. Notice how, as she receives these gifts from you that she changes. Her behaviors change and she may even look differently. As a result, the whole situation changes. Notice Demitri's response to this change. Indeed, Demitri reported that the situation, even though a painful one, had taken on new dimensions adding open dialogue and compassionate understanding.

When he was ready, I facilitated Demitri through associating into being Dana with the new resources, and his younger Self, in turn, to fully explore from all perspectives. When he had finished this phase, I asked him to step out of the resource space. *Think of another time when you forgave someone or something unconditionally. It can be anyone that has been in your life, or even an animal. You were able to see beyond the behavior to the positive intention, or compassionately understanding limitations, and forgave fully. When you have chosen a time, step into this space over here. Experience this state of forgiveness. Notice where you feel it in your body, your mind, and Spirit, and enhancing this state even more.* After testing to ensure that the association between the space and Demitri's sense of forgiveness was strong, we proceeded to the last step.

Turn toward Dana in that situation and allow this forgiveness to flow over to her now. Notice that as you forgive her fully, she may once again look different to you and have certain messages for you. You can also see her getting what she truly needs in her future.

Demitri was able to successfully complete the process of forgiveness, but not without a slight detour. When he first attempted to forgive Dana, I saw strong nonverbal indications of incongruence. I had him step out of the space and asked him what was happening. He indicated he just could not forgive her. I asked him, *What would it mean for you to forgive her fully?* He stated forcefully, *It would mean that she had won!* Incidentally, he had told me before the forgiveness process began that he had already forgiven her. As I have noticed often happens, people THINK they have forgiven when in reality they have not done so.

In response to Demitri's objection to forgiveness, I used a sleight-of-mouth language pattern. *In what ways has she won if you don't forgive her?* This question quickly added additional insights for Demitri. We had some discussion around emotional "hooks", having choices, and moving on in life. He then had no problems proceeding and even realized that Dana would not have been an ideal partner given where he is now, spiritually.

It has now been two months since Demitri's NLP session. He reports that he had immediate significant relief and that the pain has decreased to the point that he experiences only sporadic episodes of lesser intensity and length of time. These episodes occur when he is feeling

stresses at work. After initiating a further communication with the remaining symptom, Demitri realized that the message is about his confusion regarding his purpose in life, and even in that confusion, knowing he is misaligned in his present career. At this writing, he is focusing on uncovering his mission in order to create an alignment. Demitri had not previously in his life had symptoms as described here, even though he had been incongruent about his work for some years. It seems as though the part of him that wants congruence has noticed an opening for change and has chosen the tried and true pathway for gaining Demitri's attention.

Both of the stories related here involve individuals who are open to believing in the possibility of healing through means that are complementary to traditional medicine. Part II of this article will address the issue of beliefs related to chronic pain.

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In [Part I of this article](#), I focused on the use of NLP processes with pain brought about by specific events or situations. What about the use of NLP with chronic pain where no specific precipitating event can be readily identified? Can NLP be as successful in facilitating pain alleviation in these cases? My experience is that NLP can make a measurable difference.

In fact, the pain does have an origin. If identification of the physical origin remains elusive then the pain, in all likelihood, has a mind/body/spirit connection. Mind/body/spirit is a system. When one part of the system is affected in some way, it only naturally follows that other parts of the system will be touched. The basis may be a belief that was built upon a specific event, or over time through reinforcement of various kinds. The pain becomes a physical manifestation or symptom originating from an underlying belief. The belief may be about Self, Other, or about the world at large. Beliefs can be seen as neural pathways that are paved through selected observation of the world, or through selected events that have been experienced. Once the groove has begun to form, it begins to deepen through, again, selected observations that give the particular pathway validity. The belief finally becomes the path of least resistance that the individual follows relentlessly. This idea can be said in other ways. *What you see is what you get; or what you hold in your mind comes true in your experience; or it's a self-fulfilling prophecy.* The process of forming a belief is the same whether it fulfills or limits the individual. The problem with a limiting belief is that it can become a great chasm wherein the person feels swallowed. This is particularly true with continual physical pain of unknown origin and beliefs that support it. The person's attention is so taken up with the pain that it becomes hard to focus on much other than that specific reality.

The fact of the matter is that there are infinite pathways, or realities, in the world. To borrow an idea from quantum physics, a pathway becomes apparent only when it has been observed. By observing other possible pathways, new beliefs are then given the opportunity to form and develop roots to fulfilling outcomes. NLP can facilitate that process. What NLP does so well is to widen the map of the territory. It is as though the person can peek up over the edge of that chasm and notice how much bigger the world really is.

Rae had experienced Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) pain for as long as she could remember, stretching back at least to teenage years. TMJ disorder occurs as a result of the muscles used for chewing and the jaw joints failing to work in alignment. Rae described the pain as being like an earache, and sometimes having sore teeth and dizziness. When she came to her NLP session, she rated the pain at 90% severity, 100% being unbearable. She indicated that this pain was present with her most of the time, becoming particularly in the foreground during stressful situations in her current work environment. Rae was also aware that she ground her teeth during sleep at night. She had previously consulted with medical physicians and dentists, but had experienced little relief.

Since the TMJ disorder had been with Rae for a long time, I asked her what was in her awareness about the time when she first noticed the pain. She replied, *I don't remember when it began exactly. I just know it was there. I don't have many early memories, but, I remember a lot of tension in the family. I have violent images from childhood.*

Let me draw your attention back to Part I of this article when I discussed the connection between language that people use when discussing their symptom, or events surrounding their symptom, and the origin. What is TMJ pain caused by but *tension* brought on by stress, grinding of the teeth, or misalignment of the jaw joints and muscles? Rae went on to say that she always felt like the responsible one in the family who had to mediate between her parents, and between her parents and her older brother. Another interesting aspect is that she said her brother did not have memories of the kinds of tension being present that she did. She still had frequent contact with her family.

At this point, it was as though I was standing at the shore of a placid lake where some unseen person had thrown a stone into the lake. I could see the rippling effects of the stone that was thrown, and even though I could not see exactly where the stone sunk, I had a pretty clear sense of the location.

My tendency in NLP practice is to use a direct approach, if possible. My initial intention with regard to Rae was to facilitate the *Reimprinting* process in order to establish additional resources and formative beliefs. What I discovered was that Rae had a part of her that strongly objected to going back to the origin of the symptom. When I attempted to facilitate a guided search, even under hypnosis, Rae was not able to land in what she could identify as any particular event at all. She indicated that this part of her was afraid. Her only experience was a sense of fuzzy geometric forms in her mind's eye. She even said it was like when a baby was just beginning to see, but not able to clearly focus. Given what she said, I suspected she had found the originating event. However, it became an ecology issue for me. If a part of her was so afraid, I wanted to honor that part. In keeping with the NLP tenet of flexibility, I decided to do something else.

Robert Dilts has developed a process he calls *Creating A Pathway to Health And Well-being*. This process was introduced to me as a diagnostic tool, but I have found it to be so much more than that. Indeed, it specifically identifies limiting beliefs that keep an individual from achieving an outcome so that the practitioner knows where to "tap." At the same time, it provides a very subtle loosening up of the limiting beliefs and empowers the individual with resources previously out of awareness. This is the process I deemed ecologically sound for Rae.

Rae, the purpose of this process is to explore your beliefs related to this particular outcome you want for yourself. We all hold beliefs about possibility, capability, and deserving. This process gauges where you are in relation to these statements. If it's possible in the world, it's possible for me. I have the capabilities to achieve my outcome. I deserve to achieve my outcome. Now, if you could synopsise what it is that you want what would that outcome be?

We took a few moments so that Rae had an opportunity to create a well-formed outcome statement. The outcome she formed was: *To be healthy in all ways that support me.*

As we are standing here, imagine that over there is a line that runs lengthwise in front of you on the floor. This line represents the times of your life: past, present, and future. It starts when you

were born and stretches all the way out to the future. Show me where the present is, and then which directions are for the past and future.

In just a minute, I'm going to ask you to go stand in the present space over there. Then, I'm going to make some statements related to your outcome. I want you to repeat what I say. Okay?

As you are standing in the present now, take a moment to notice what it's like. Notice your bodily sensations, the sounds around you, any internal dialogue and pictures you may be experiencing in your mind's eye. Here in this moment your outcome is to be healthy in all ways that support you, isn't it? I'm going to make some statements and you can repeat them.

It's possible for me to be healthy in all ways that support me. Rae began to say the sentence, but stumbled over a couple of the words.

Okay, Rae. Step off your timeline now and step into this space over here. It seems as though there's some doubt about the possibility of your outcome, or some question. This becomes the space of questioning. Just ask inside now what this doubt or question is.

Rae said that she had been living with the pain so long and she had tried many things and nothing had really worked. She didn't see how it was possible to be healthy in that way.

I am beginning to notice that NLP predisposes practitioners to think and act in a manner similar to shamans. We often lead clients into altered states where they have a different awareness. We use whatever works to change their beliefs about their current reality. We make meaningful connections between events in order for the clients to gain their outcomes.

About two years prior to this session, Rae had come for an NLP session because of nightmares. She had had nightmares several times a week for years, the kind where she would wake up in a cold sweat or literally wake in a start. Needless to say, she had not had healthy sleep patterns because of the nightmares. I used *Six-Step Reframe* with her and she had not had but a couple of nightmares since that time.

Remember when you came to me a few years ago about the nightmares? You didn't think it was possible then to be able to sleep the way you are now, did you? You know now that it's possible, don't you? It can be the same for being healthy in the ways that you want. Just as during that time, you found other ways of doing things, you can do that here, too. We've only just begun. Just imagine that the NLP work has already begun and that the whole question of possibility has been answered. You don't know how. Yet, just that it has been answered. Okay? Now, leave that question about possibility here in this space and step back in the present knowing that that question is answered.

Now again. It is possible for me to be healthy in all ways that support me. Rae was able to say the statement congruently. In the *Pathways* process, this is what the practitioner is calibrating in order to take the next step. When there is the least incongruence in speech, facial expression, or body posture, the practitioner moves the client from the timeline to the space of question.

I have the capabilities to be healthy in all ways that support me. Rae choked up on this one and I moved her to a space of question once more. This was a different space on the floor than the previous one. Again, I asked her to go inside and ask that part of her that objected to the

statement what question it had. The part's objection turned out to be about lack of self-confidence.

So, this part doesn't know if it is able to get to the outcome you want. Think about where you are now in your career. Did you have any idea a couple of years ago that you would doing what you're doing now and be so effective? If you look back over time, there is other evidence that you have the capabilities necessary to get you where you want to go, even though you didn't realize it then. So, just as with that other question that came up, you can imagine that through these processes and otherwise that you already have a full realization of all your capabilities. And that these capabilities will serve you in achieving your outcome of being healthy. So, leave that question that's been answered here and step back into the present. Rae was then able to say the statement congruently.

The next piece then. I deserve to be healthy in all ways that support me. Rae had no problems here.

Here we are in the present. Take a step now into the future. You've already begun stepping toward your goal. Notice what it's like here knowing that you are already going for what you want. What's different here? Rae became aware of some music that had been lightly playing in the background. She was also already starting to stand taller. It is not unusual for people to notice their surroundings as brighter in their visual field, feel movement in their body, or have other awarenesses previously blocked.

Here in the future now having started the process. It's possible for me to be healthy in all ways that support me. I have the capabilities to be healthy in all ways that support me. I deserve to be healthy in all ways that support me. Rae had an objection to the capabilities statement that was a variation of the other objection that she was able to lay to rest and continue.

The practitioner facilitates the client through another step in the future along the process of having the outcome completely, having the client repeat the belief statements and handling any objections. The next step takes the client into the future time of fully having the outcome. The process is the same as the previous steps with some additional pieces added.

Turn now and look back to where you've been and all the things you did to get here and having health in the way you want it. Over there parts of you had questions and doubts, but those were laid to rest. You took all those steps to get here. Walk back through those times now experiencing them once again.

Once she was again in the present space, I spoke to her again. *You have other experiences, other resources in your past that you may not even realize yet that can assist you even more in achieving your outcome. Walk back into the past now and notice those resources. Experience the events or people that helped enhance them once again. Go all the way back.* As Rae experienced these memories, I anchored each one. Robert Dilts calls this phase of the process the *treasure hunt*, which seems truly appropriate.

So, it's as though you've gathered up all these resources and have a full awareness of them. Turn now and begin to walk along your timeline from this spot in the past bringing all these resources with you. You see, they are gifts for your future. Begin to walk from this point now, to the present, and then all the way into the future knowing that these resources are within you.

Immediately after completing the *Pathways* process, Rae reported feeling no pain at all. In a report after two months, she indicated that the TMJ pain was at a 15-20% rating, very different from 90% . She said she often had to realize that there was an absence of any pain at all. In this one session, NLP was able to contribute toward significant pain relief. This case study also shows that there are infinite pathways for NLP practitioners to take. The direct approach may not always be the best one. I term Pathways as having an indirect approach. Yet, in its subtlety, it opens tremendous possibilities for clients while empowering them through their own resources.

This two-part article has focused on NLP processes and pain. In my estimation, the same tenets and processes can be used to address almost any health challenge. Marlo Morgan talks about her experiences with Aboriginal beliefs: *Healing has absolutely nothing to do with time. Both healing and disease take place in an instant.* Just as in one instant a cell can suddenly become abnormal, so in an instant can neurology be altered to allow the healing to begin. NLP provides an opportunity for change.

Note on follow-up: The case studies described here took place in 1995. Today, both Demitri's osteoarthritis pain and Rae's TMJ pain continue to be minimal or non-existent after 5 years.

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