

## Understanding Symptoms as Messages

*Adapted with permission from 'Chi Nei Tsang – Healing from Within' by Gilles Marin, Director and Founder of the Chi Nei Tsang Institute, USA*

Most people come for treatments because they are ill, in pain, or experiencing symptoms of discomfort. Any truly wholistic approach to healing involves understanding pain and other symptoms not as problems to be fixed but as messages to pay attention to. Treatment needs to be wholistic, focusing on increasing people's self-awareness, including the parts that are in pain and want to feel good as well as the parts that protect them from feeling pain. Such an approach brings about true healing rather than simply curing the symptoms.

### **Understanding symptoms as messages**

Symptoms are usually an attempt from disregarded parts of ourselves to be heard: alarm signals telling us to pay attention to very personal needs. Sometimes symptoms come rapidly after an offense, and sometimes years pass before the nervous system signals the presence of a hurt and closed-down part. Pain levels vary. For instance, when we hit our little toe against a door, the pain is proportional to the time needed for that toe to heal plus our ability to walk without putting stress on that toe. If the injury is the result of violence, the intensity of the pain may be increased by the emotional charge attached to it, and healing may take longer.

### **The meaning of pain**

Pain does not come from a mechanically damaged physical area, a lesion, or a disturbed part of our anatomy. Pain is an interpretation of our mind. A back pain can be attributed to a herniated spinal disk, but many people with herniated disk don't experience any pain there, and others experience pain where they don't have a hernia. Others may have a combination of both: a chronic pattern of tension involving pain that in the long run weakens the vertebrae and can cause a disk to herniate. So what is the cause of pain?

Pain is a double-edged sword. On one side it is a signal to focus our attention on a particular place in ourselves that needs extra and or emergency care. On the other side it creates a debilitating condition that prevents us from being in touch with that need because the pain makes us want to turn off our awareness in that area.

If attention is given and the body satisfied, the pain might go. If no attention is given, the pain might go, but it will come back when things get worse. If attention is still not given, the pain might even disappear for a long time until the situation gets so bad that chronic pain might then set in and become very debilitating. At that level, pain in itself becomes the main focus instead of the reason behind it. Sometimes a healing process can only proceed with the use of pain-killers. But more often than not the body is stronger than the drugs and nothing except narcotics works to turn off the pain signal.

### **Communicating with pain**

First we need to communicate with it: pain is a feeling, and it needs validation. (Pain is the only condition that gets any kind of relief through diagnose). Knowing we have a mechanical reason to feel pain is reassuring, but each reason also expresses a meaning, which represents an emotional charge often related to internal conflict. An intentional blow is much more painful; it will last longer and might

cause long-term side effects than an accidental blow of the same intensity and location. Pain carries both messages and emotions charges. A wound in the soul is harder to treat than a bruised muscle, especially if a part of us does not want to admit the wound exists.

We have learned to run away from painful feelings, and by doing so we are not in touch with ourselves. When we treat symptoms without addressing the whole person – the reason for the symptoms - we deal with the messenger and ignore the message.

Let's say we have a pain that appears one day, for no obvious reason, and it's bothersome but not unbearable. This pain is a warning signal, a message from deep down that something needs to be attended to. That would be like driving down a highway and noticing the oil light flashing on the dashboard. There is nothing wrong with the dashboard even though the warning light may be irritating. Choosing to pull the light from under the dashboard would be like taking a pain killer for that bothersome little pain. We wouldn't see the light any more – wouldn't feel the pain – but the cause of the symptom is still not addressed. Therefore, the message would have to emerge more loudly or in a different form until we hear it. There is nothing wrong with relieving symptoms, but to experience healing, the message behind the symptoms needs to be heard and attended to.

## **Chronic Pain**

Most chronic health problems result from very old stories that never had a chance to be revealed to the conscious mind, resulting in old emotional charges that never had a chance to be digested. Chronic symptoms are generally a sign that a part of ourselves has been repeatedly shut out, isolated and or mistreated to the point of disassociation, breakdown and revolt. That part of us becomes raw and reactive, sometimes to the point of reacting systematically even to our own detriment, for example, as in allergic reactions that are usually more dangerous than whatever causes them. When messages and the emotions underlying them are not heard by individuals, and their inner selves do not feel validated, the alarm signal has to stay on until the message is heard. This becomes a habitual state until we address the problem on a whole body level.

## **Why don't we hear the messages?**

Why do we shut out parts of ourselves, forcing our bodies to "act up" so we will take notice? Our lack of attention to certain parts of our bodies protects us from feeling what we cannot bear to feel, most often something painful. We usually avoid getting in touch with painful feelings by blocking off awareness of them. We might fear that being aware of these feelings will force us to act on them. We might get in touch with things that frighten us or that we don't want to know, that even make us fear we might have to change so much that we might die. We don't want to get in touch with negative feelings for so many good reasons: we might feel out of control, weak, emotional, irrational, bad. Indeed, for the emotional body there is not much difference between 'feeling bad' and 'being bad'. In the emotional language 'being bad' is tantamount to 'not deserving to live'. From that emotional perspective, it is much easier to let oneself die than to go through the struggle of a painful and meaningless recovery.

However, sometimes we are ready to take some risks and make some changes. And yet, even when we have the maturity a strong enough support system and the energy required to go through a healing process, it is easier to take the pain on the physical level than on the emotional level. Our symptoms are messengers, trying to tell us about that part of ourselves that is now able to feel the charge and wishes to process it in order to feel good again. But if it is necessary to feel that pain in order to resolve it, we will still be confronted with a system of habit geared toward protecting us from feeling bad.

## Chi Nei Tsang – a Truly Wholistic Approach to Healing

If medicine is the answer to curing symptoms, then Chi Nei Tsang is a non-medical approach to treating whole persons rather than just their symptoms, where everyone is approached in all their complexity. This is the true meaning of a wholistic approach. Conventional medical thinking has a tendency to understand a wholistic approach as combining such modalities as acupuncture to address the energy body, osteopathy for cerebro-spinal rhythm, allopathy for diagnosis or emergency procedures, psychotherapy to address the mind, massage to address stress and sore muscles and so on. However, this can be considered merely an extension of an already fragmented and specialized approach to medicine; embracing complementary therapeutic modalities rather than *redefining* how we understand symptoms, illness and health.

True wholism in healthcare means that we address the entire person from the beginning to end. This means that any time we address a symptom or a condition, any manifestation of pain and discomfort will always be in the context of personalities; individuals, with particular perspectives on the world in which they evolve. No two persons manifesting the same symptoms will be treated identically, but the approach will be the same, regardless of differences in conditions. Chi Nei Tsang represents an alternative approach to disease, because diseases and their symptoms are not considered the real issue. However, both allopathic and other healing modalities can be used together in the context of a wholistic approach.

Allopathic medical technology has accomplished miracles in terms of alleviating pain or simply hiding symptoms. Pain can be so dreadful that it can actually prevent a healing process. It is though the attempt to recover dignity that healing begins to take place. But it is still important to go through a healing process after the cure, even if the symptoms disappear for a while, in order to understand what those symptoms were trying to communicate. Otherwise the inner self, if still feeling unheard, will have no alternative but to bring back the same symptoms with a vengeance or come up with another set of symptoms altogether.

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