

# Symptom as Messenger

“Through acupuncture, I’ve come to realize that the stress created by my life-style was finding its way to my lower back—and my body was crying out ‘Stop! or you’ll find your way to an early heart attack!’ ”

by Jack Tymann, B.S.E.E.



I came to acupuncture three years ago with a fifteen-year history of chronic lower back pain—and a fifteen-year history of trips to doctors, orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors, and hospitals, various forms of therapy, muscle relaxants, Valium, and an occasional recommendation of disc surgery. The diagnosis varied from partial slipped disc, to herniated disc, to pinched sciatic nerve, to (when all else failed) “psychosomatic.” I was often in pain, constantly frustrated, and spent days flat on my back missing work and/or tennis matches. Eventually, I was strapped to a board and carried to a hospital, unable to move even an inch. Two weeks and \$4,000 later, after CAT scans, myelograms, lots of codeine, Valium, and deep heat therapy, the diagnosis was lower disc problem and elective surgery. Fortunately, I elected acupuncture instead.

Today, for the first time in eighteen years, I have no back pain, and I feel wonderful. I attribute not only this—but also other profound changes in my life—to acupuncture. I now realize that my back pain was symptomatic of other ailments (some deep-rooted) and of the life-style I was leading. I was caught up in my career, material gains, and mid-life crisis. I was proud to be labeled an “overachiever,” or a “fast burner,” or an “A-type.” I worked long hours and traveled a lot, taking little or no time out to play, or smell the flowers, or reach out to others. I was a junk food addict, and “Big Mac attacks” were an almost daily occurrence. My exercise was erratic and my reading was restricted to technical and management journals.

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I’ve grown a great deal through acupuncture. Gone are not only the back pains, but other symptoms as well—headaches, lower intestinal pain, postnasal drip, skin blemishes, and fingernails that wouldn’t grow. Through acupuncture, I’ve learned to experience the simple truth of the Law of the Five Elements, and I’m more in touch with nature and my Maker. Through seminars and literature available at the Traditional Acupuncture Foundation, I’ve grown in my understanding of life, and I’m doing some writing myself (even poetry!). I’m exercising regularly,

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eating sensibly, and I’m twenty pounds lighter. I’m enjoying playing tennis and jogging free from pain. I’m more relaxed—more at peace.

I’m not trying to say I have it all together, but I am on my way. The symptoms, the signs, and the way to healing all make sense to me—and I can boil down the lessons of the past three years to four basic truths:

- it’s easier and more productive to tackle life’s problems as a whole, rather than “putting Band-Aids” on symptoms one at a time;
- healing is a process, not an event, and “quick fixes” may only bury deeper the root cause of a problem;
- the power to heal comes from within, and the practitioner and the needles can help unleash this inner healing power; and
- on the journey toward healing, we must each take responsibility for the wellness of bodymindspirit, seeking not fame nor fortune, but taking charge to become all we are meant to be—in harmony with others and with nature.

These truths apply not only to each of us as individuals, but also to organizations and to society as a whole. More and more, these truths are understood and accepted in all areas of human endeavor—individual (wellness programs), governmental (peace talks, human rights and environmental concerns), and public (“Live Aid”). Increasingly, symptoms are recognized as messengers of imbalance and are addressed in a wholistic (global) fashion. These trends, I believe, give us cause for optimism about the future, both of individuals and of society.