

## **The Body Whispers Before It Screams**

### **Learning to listen before life forces us to**

Most people do not wake up one morning with burnout.

Or chronic tension.

Or persistent physical complaints.

Or a deep sense of disconnection from themselves.

These experiences usually develop gradually.

Quietly.

Subtly.

Long before they become impossible to ignore.

The body almost always begins by whispering.

The question is whether we are listening.

### **The first signals are easy to dismiss**

A little tension in the shoulders.

Difficulty relaxing.

A restless night.

A shortened breath.

Recurring headaches.

An uneasy feeling in the stomach.

Nothing dramatic.

Nothing that immediately prevents us from functioning.

And that is precisely why these signals are often overlooked.

We are busy.

We have responsibilities.

Deadlines.

Families.

Expectations.

There is always something that seems more important.

So we continue.

And continue.

And continue.

While the body quietly keeps trying to get our attention.

### **The body is always communicating**

The body continuously responds to how we live.

To pressure.

To conflict.

To loss.

To loneliness.

To uncertainty.

To connection.

To safety.

To threat.

Every experience leaves traces.

Some are barely noticeable.

Others become impossible to ignore.

The body is constantly in conversation with our lives.

The question is not whether the body is communicating.

The question is whether we understand what it is saying.

### **Listening is not the same as understanding**

The body continuously provides information.

But information still needs interpretation.

And interpretation is not always straightforward.

A tight chest may signal a medical condition.

It may also reflect anxiety, grief, pressure or emotional distress.

Abdominal discomfort may result from a physical disorder.

It may also emerge during periods of stress, uncertainty or inner conflict.

The body speaks through sensations.

But sensations do not come with subtitles.

This is why listening requires both curiosity and humility.

Sometimes symptoms point towards a medical problem that requires medical attention.

Sometimes they point towards something deeply personal that requires reflection rather than treatment.

And sometimes both are true.

The challenge is not only noticing the signal.

The challenge is learning how to understand what it may be trying to tell us.

The body does not lie.

But it does not always speak in a language that is immediately easy to understand.

### **The meaning we give to symptoms matters**

The same symptom can lead to very different responses.

When we view a symptom purely as a defect in the body, we naturally look for someone else to fix it.

A doctor.

A therapist.

A treatment.

A solution from outside ourselves.

Sometimes this is exactly what is needed.

But sometimes symptoms carry a different message.

Sometimes they reflect the way we live, the pressures we carry, the emotions we avoid or the boundaries we ignore.

When this possibility is considered, the question changes.

Not:

“What is wrong with my body?”

But:

“What is my body trying to tell me?”

This shift is profound.

Not because it places blame on the individual.

But because it invites participation.

The symptom is no longer simply something that happens to us.

It becomes something we can become curious about.

Something we can learn from.

Something that may invite change.

Listening to the body is not only about hearing its signals.

It is also about exploring their meaning.

### **From symptoms to the person**

This perspective lies at the heart of person-centered approaches such as haptotherapy.

A symptom-centered approach asks:

“How do we get rid of the complaint?”

A person-centered approach asks:

“What might this experience be telling us about the person who is living with it?”

These are very different questions.

The first primarily seeks a solution.

The second seeks understanding.

This does not mean that symptoms are unimportant.

Nor does it mean that people are responsible for causing their own difficulties.

It means that symptoms may be connected to the way a person relates to life, to others and to themselves.

And that possibility deserves attention.

### **Responsibility is not the same as blame**

For many people, this shift can be challenging.

When a symptom is viewed as a medical problem, it is natural to expect someone else to solve it.

An expert.

A treatment.

A prescription.

A procedure.

There is comfort in believing that the solution lies outside ourselves.

Yet when symptoms are understood as part of a larger personal story, something changes.

We are invited to become participants rather than passive recipients of care.

Not because we are to blame.

But because we are involved.

Responsibility does not mean guilt.

It means recognising that we have a role to play in understanding our experience and responding to it.

The question is no longer:

“Who will fix this for me?”

But:

“What is this experience asking of me?”

### **When whispers are ignored**

The problem is not that the body fails to communicate.

The problem is that we often fail to listen.

Or that we misunderstand what we hear.

When subtle signals are repeatedly ignored, the body may gradually increase the volume.

The whisper becomes discomfort.

Discomfort becomes tension.

Tension becomes pain.

Pain becomes exhaustion.

The message remains the same.

Only the intensity changes.

Not because the body is working against us.

But because it is still trying to reach us.

### **We cannot push life away forever**

Human beings are remarkably capable of suppressing awareness.

We can ignore fatigue.

We can push through stress.

We can disconnect from sadness.

We can deny fear.

We can override our limits for surprisingly long periods of time.

But this comes at a cost.

What is ignored does not disappear.

What is pushed away does not cease to exist.

Like a ball held under water, it requires energy to keep it there.

And sooner or later, that energy runs out.

The body often carries what the mind is unwilling to acknowledge.

### **Symptoms are rarely the beginning of the story**

People often assume that physical complaints begin when symptoms appear.

In reality, symptoms are frequently the final chapter of a much longer story.

The tension was there before the neck pain.

The exhaustion was there before the burnout.

The loneliness was there before the depression.

The grief was there before the tears.

What appears suddenly is often the result of something that has been developing for months, years or even decades.

The symptom is not always the problem.

Sometimes it is the invitation to look deeper.

### **The Art of Listening**

The body is not our enemy.

It is not an obstacle to overcome.

It is not a machine that occasionally breaks down.

It is part of who we are.

It continuously reflects our relationship with ourselves, with others and with the world around us.

Its signals are not always pleasant.

But they are often meaningful.

The body does not lie.

It tells the truth long before we are ready to hear it.

Perhaps health is not only about eliminating symptoms.

Perhaps it is also about learning to listen.

To notice.

To feel.

To become aware.

To respond before life forces us to.

Because if we do not listen to the whispers of the body, we will eventually be confronted by its screams.

And sometimes the greatest act of self-care is not doing more.

It is listening sooner.

Roel Klaassen, Juni 2026