



It makes you think...

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Don't ever become complacent about how and what you feel. Awareness of your symptoms and feelings and responding to them appropriately takes courage.

What is good health? How do we know when we are in or out of good health? Is good health the same as wellbeing?

More than thirty years ago, Paul Solomon (healer, mystic, philosopher), defined perfect health as follows:

“Perfect Health is the natural ability of any soul to experience precisely the symptoms that it most needs at any given moment, to respond to those symptoms and move on to the next experience.”

I interpret this as meaning that health is not an absence of symptoms — some people would say that an absence of symptoms comes only with death. We are constantly experiencing, whether awake or asleep, active or passive.

A rash on an arm, a runny nose, a sore toe, gastric reflux; these are recognisable as symptoms and usually lead to intervention to alleviate the symptoms, or to find the cause and deal with that. But who would readily think of joy, elation or a sense of wellbeing as symptoms? Symptoms of what?

While dictionaries may define a symptom as an indication of some underlying disease, for the purposes of discussing the above quote, I will broaden my use of it to include any experience we have which indicates what is going on at a physical, emotional/mental or spiritual level. I am therefore using ‘symptom’ more loosely to include ‘feeling’.

So, symptoms are a sign of a state of health/ill-health or a sign of our state of being. They tell us whether we are as we should be or not. Pain obviously tells us we are not. Joy tells us we are. But there are grades of pain and grades of joy. Pain may be mild, irritating, excruciating or unbearable; joy may be experienced as happiness, pleasure, delight, bliss or ecstasy.

While we would have no hesitation in recognising pain as a symptom of something, we would probably hesitate in talking of joy as a symptom. Yet we can — it tells us something about what is going on at some inner level of our being.

We assume that if we experience pain, we need to do something about it. Most people would not think that experiencing pleasure needs action. But what if instead of experiencing mere pleasure, we could be experiencing bliss or ecstasy? We assume that ‘normal’ is the absence of ‘negative’ symptoms and for some people it is also the absence of ‘positive’ symptoms — too much joy is hard to handle. We can look askance at people who seem to be always happy.

Just as many people will tolerate a mild pain, even if persistent, most people will ‘tolerate’ mild joy, even if persistent. It is often regarded as normal. And just as the mild pain can be alleviated or the underlying cause dealt with, so can mild joy be turned into pleasure, delight or more.

If we look at Paul Solomon’s definition carefully, he is saying that it is not our symptoms which are important, but what we do in response to those symptoms. The symptoms tell us something and we can heed the message or ignore it. Perfect health is responding in an appropriate way and then moving on to another symptom (or set of symptoms) — “...and move on to the next experience”.

To be in a state of perfect health, we should therefore continually monitor our symptoms, our state of being, and respond appropriately to what we learn about ourselves. It is a dynamic equilibrium, not a static situation. If you experience no ‘symptoms’ for a long time, you should be concerned that you are ignoring something. While this avoiding may allow a state of ‘blissful’ ignorance, it is not perfect health.

When it comes to chronic disease, orthodox medicine is not very good at responding appropriately to symptoms. It most commonly works at masking them, instead of dealing with the underlying cause. Natural medicine on the other hand (when properly practised) deals with cause, even though the alleviation of symptoms may thus take longer. And in preventive medicine, orthodox approaches again concentrate more on symptoms than does natural medicine.

In conclusion, what can we learn from Paul Solomon’s definition of perfect health?

- welcome your symptoms;
- ask what they mean;
- find appropriate ways of responding to them;
- treat levels of joy as symptoms;
- challenge yourself – sustain your awareness and interest.

Don’t ever become complacent about how and what you feel. Awareness of your symptoms and feelings and responding to them appropriately takes courage. I don’t know anyone who has attained perfect health yet.

