

Qi Heals!

**NEWSLETTER OF THE SIKE HEALTH QI COMMUNITY
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HOW THE BODY ADAPTS (II)

If you get a piece of grit in your eye, your body adapts to the discomfort by turning on tears in order to wash the grit away, and the sooner the better. In the same way, your body adapts to an extreme psychological situation by using tears and vocal sounds as cleansing mechanisms. Whether produced by joy or sorrow, tears and sobs release and remove a powerful emotion from the body where, if it were left pent-up, the emotion would lead to physical discomfort or dysfunction.

On a more light-hearted note, you can work yourself into ill-health in order to clear your desk in time for your vacation. You may leave for your vacation feeling like something the cat dragged in, but on the morning of the first day of that longed-for vacation, you feel like a million dollars, and your body is more than up to the task of sudden exercise and exertion.

It is qi that promotes the effective functioning of the adaptive power; it is, therefore, through the working of qi that physical health and mental alertness are maintained and improved.

There is one more thing to be said about our natural adaptive power. Our adaptive power responds both micro and macroscopically to a continuing barrage of stimuli. This may be called *dealing with the present*. On top of all this, as if just dealing with this barrage were not enough, the body is also *dealing with the past and with the future*.

All of the events in our lives occur within a time continuum, and therefore have a context. Let us return to last month's car lifter, and put that incident in perspective.

Her name is Liz Dunn, and she is a 64-year old widow living alone. Her late husband was in the military, and died in a work-related accident eight years before. Her only child, Charles, is 40 years old, and lives half-way across the country.

Liz has a part-time job with a barely adequate salary, and so has been financially dependent on her late husband's military benefits. One day, about two weeks before lifting the front end of the car, she received two communications: one a letter from the Veterans Administration informing her that her benefits were to be reduced by

12% in accordance with their cost-cutting measures; the second an air ticket from her son, Charles, with a sweet note inviting her to spend Thanksgiving with him and his family.

The note from the V.A. sent her into a tizzy of alarm. She lost her appetite and had trouble falling asleep. At work, she found that rather than concentrating on what she was doing, she was thinking about how to economize to make ends meet. Sometimes her chest felt so tight that she could hardly breathe, and that would induce brief weeping that relieved the strain.

At the same time, she looked forward to seeing Charles and his family, though she hated to fly. It was not fear of flying that bothered her. It was the physical discomfort of packing and unpacking and sitting around at the airport and having her flight delayed or canceled and the cramped airplane seats, and then waiting endlessly for her baggage at the other end.

From the moment the two communications arrived until the moment Liz saw the traffic victim hit by the car, her body was adapting and adjusting to the past stimulus of her bad financial news and to the future stimulus of her impending plane flight, *all the while adapting and adjusting to present stimuli.*

Her body was attempting to ameliorate the physical stress her tense emotional state had produced so that she could continue to function in daily life. At the same time, her body was adjusting itself to the idea of a three-hour plane flight, so that it would be ready and resilient to make a successful trip when the day came...

...when suddenly, an event exploded upon Liz's present that called for an instant adjustment. When the person had been saved and she released the car, Liz's body went immediately back to dealing with her past and future adjustments, even as it adapted to the immediate change of events, i.e. great physical strength was no longer needed and she had to relax.

Even as the body copes and responds to the present, it deals with the legacy of the past and the promise of the future.

Apart from the unexpected such as Liz encountered, we never enter into a situation that our bodies have not already prepared for, nor, until there is a decisive conclusion, do we ever stop adjusting to past events. When Liz boards that plane, her body will not play catch-up, but will be fully prepared for the flight. And unless Charles offers to make up the 12% pension cut, her Thanksgiving appetite will not improve.

UNCLE ARNIE (III)

Uncle Arnie was genuinely liked by the staff of Silver Birches. He was a cheerful man. He smiled sweetly at people he trusted and liked, and went out of his way to accommodate them. He was short and squat from childhood, and had become obese by early middle age. However, he was terrifically strong and had great stamina. If something heavy needed shifting or moving, Uncle Arnie was called on to do the job. He could not read, write or calculate, but he could carry a hundred pound crate from one end of the building to the other and then ask for more to do. People were astonished by his strength, and praised him for it. Angling his head to the right and twisting his torso accordingly, he would shuffle along with his load, delighting in the gasps of surprise and approval of the female staff of the home. They would reward him for his efforts by taking him to the kitchen and fixing him his favorite food, hamburgers.

According to unbiased eyewitness reports, Uncle Arnie could eat six hamburgers with buns at a single sitting, washing them down with a quart of milk. He hated vegetables, and had to be threatened with absolute termination of all hamburger privileges in order to get him to eat a green salad. The kitchen staff was extremely patient with him,

and fed him in the kitchen at whatever hour he chose to eat. His eating schedule was determined by his work schedule and television programming. Uncle Arnie lingered in the kitchen on days when his television was on the blink. The staff, as consolation, would cook him hamburgers until the meat ran out.

Uncle Arnie's best friend, and the person who loved him more than anyone else did save one, was his Silver Birches colleague Arthur Pillars. The two had become fast friends almost from the moment they met. Arthur and Arnie were really very similar. A psychologist who visited Silver Birches from time to time to evaluate the residents for legal purposes once said that Uncle Arnie had the mind of an average eight year old, while Arthur Pillars had the mind of a precocious eight year old. Arthur Pillars was not brain damaged. He was a living refutation of Dr. Johnson's "such stupidity, Sir, is not found in nature".

What saved Arthur from being mistaken for being brain damaged was his manual dexterity, which he possessed to a degree inconceivable in the truly brain damaged. He was, officially, no more than the janitor of Silver Birches. But he was also the unofficial handyman and fix-it man, who supplemented his small income with

tips from the residents for adjusting their hearing aids and stopping their toilets from leaking. With no formal training he was able to fix almost anything simply by staring at it long enough to find a broken link or connection. The staff of Silver Birches had at first advised the residents against letting Arthur touch anything of any value; but after twenty five years of impeccable service, they were now among his most loyal customers.

Arthur was a tall, rangy man with an agreeable face and disposition. He could read and write after a fashion. One of Uncle Arnie's greatest pleasures was to have Arthur read him the captions to comics. Having gotten their gist, Uncle Arnie would pore over them again for hours, trying, but failing, to recapture the exact text. His pleasure was undiminished, however, for Arthur had conveyed to him the secret of the story line. Arthur Pillars was the only person admitted to Uncle Arnie's room. In fact, Uncle Arnie had entrusted Arthur with a spare key, which I had to borrow from Arthur when I went to Pittsburgh on a whim shortly before Uncle Arnie died.

Uncle Arnie had a number of fears, but none more potent than his fear of buses. He was fine in cars, boats and airplanes, but buses terrified him. Arthur Pillars, on the other hand, loved nothing more

than to ride all over town on buses. In return for having comics read to him, Uncle Arnie occasionally agreed to accompany Arthur on his excursions by bus. His love for, and trust in, Arthur Pillars must have been epic, for he would not go near a bus with anyone else. I once took him for a brief bus ride. He seemed to have a convulsion when the bus door opened, threatened to go berserk when I shoved him on board, and could only be pacified by becoming absorbed in an extraordinary sight that made him forget where he was.

They must have made a conspicuous couple as they walked about Pittsburgh, for Uncle Arnie loved to walk and Arthur did not mind walking with him. Uncle Arnie, five feet four inches tall, dark and hairy, with his short, powerful legs pumping energetically and his head and torso angled to the right as if the streets of Pittsburgh were askew; Arthur Pillars, six feet two inches tall, fair, with long legs taking loose, relaxed strides. The two never talked during their walks, but saved up their impressions for excited conversations whenever they halted.

Uncle Arnie had a fantastic memory for minutiae. He could tell if a park bench had been moved a foot, notice that a litter basket was missing, comment on the growth of buds in Spring, and on the

rapidity of color changes in the leaves of Autumn. A change in a window display could make his day. It was as if living and working in the home -spending his hours in a box within a box- whetted his appetite for the activity and color that lay outside, and made him a gourmet of the visual. Arthur, who was oblivious to all but the most general and obvious changes, would listen rapt as Uncle Arnie ticked off the new and the different on his fingers. Arnie was not Arthur's eyes; he was the stimulus that elevated the mechanics of sight to an awareness of seeing. The world grew large and interesting for Arthur on his walks with Arnie.

Uncle Arnie's favorite walk was to the Carnegie Museum. He and Arthur would go there twice a month to see the naked Indian woman on display. Scenes depicting the history of America were (and still are) displayed behind glass. The scene which unfailingly drew Uncle Arnie was that of a Plains Indian family. In the center of the tableau, a young Indian woman made of wax kneels, grinding corn. She is naked to the waist. Arthur Pillars told me the following story from the late 1940s.

Arthur and Uncle Arnie were standing before the wax figure, Arthur feeling uncomfortable at the way Uncle Arnie stood transfixed,

staring with the left side of his face as if scrutinizing the wax nipples with a magnifying glass. Hoping to derail Arnie's concentration, Arthur asked: "How long you been comin' here?"

"Since I was a kid," Uncle Arnie replied, without looking at Arthur. "My brother, Mort, used to leave me here. I seen everything in the museum, but this here's my favorite. They's the best tits I ever saw."

Arthur whispered, "They the first tits you ever saw?"

"Naw, I saw my mother's." Arnie nodded his head to show that he was no novice at tit appreciation.

"You mother's ain't real tits. I mean, someone else's tits."

"They's the first," Arnie admitted, restoring his full attention to the wax woman.

"That's why you think they's the best," Arthur intoned sagely.

"Lotsa people think they's the best," Arnie said defensively, his voice rising.

A young boy standing next to them now spoke up. "They're nice, but you can see a lot bigger and better in girly magazines."

"Girly magazines? What magazines?" Uncle Arnie demanded with such force that the boy turned pale and fled.

"Oh, get me one, Arthur, please get me one," Uncle Arnie begged.

Arthur was appalled by the idea. He feared women and did not find the female form pleasing. An inclination for sex, either first or second hand was not immoral to him; it was troubling. Best to deny, or failing that, avoid it. Finally, he was worried that someone from Silver Birches might find out, and he would lose his job. But Uncle Arnie pleaded so persistently that Arthur finally gave in, went to the city limits to make the purchase, and brought the contraband item to Uncle Arnie's room in a small suitcase so no one would know what he had. He swore to Uncle Arnie that he would never again do such a thing, and Uncle Arnie never again asked him to do it.

The staff of Silver Birches gave a splendid party in the Founder's Room of the home on the occasion of Uncle Arnie's fiftieth birthday. The Director, son of the Founder who had hired Uncle Arnie, was to give the keynote address. Arthur Pillars was also delegated to make a short speech.

The Director's speech was pre-prandial and lengthy, dwelling more on the history of Silver Birches than on the guest of honor. When he did touch on Uncle Arnie, it was to confuse longevity with loyalty, and his singular praise of that virtue led some to think that

Arnie had turned down numerous and enticing offers in favor of standing by the Silver Birches elevator.

Arthur Pillars's speech was post-prandial, just before the cutting of the mammoth birthday cake.

"Ladeez and Gennelman," he said in his halting, unsure way, "when me 'n Arnie was born God didn't give us a normal size piece of cake. He cut our slices real thin. But we done alright anyhow. We're happy where we are with what we're doin'. We're plenty satisfied with God's piece of cake. But tonight, we also got birthday cake, and we won't be satisfied with nothin' 'cept a big piece, so how about cuttin' the boths of us a real big piece? You like that, Arnie?"

The staff cheered as Uncle Arnie applauded enthusiastically. He was given a real big piece of cake, which he consumed in two ferocious bites.

"Good God!" the Director said to the Manager who was charged with the day- to-day running of the home. "Does he always gorge like that? It's disgusting. It's been years, I admit, but the man's ballooned since I last saw him."

The Manager assured the Director that Uncle Arnie's diet had not changed in the ten years since the present Director succeeded the

Founder, and added that he would personally see to it that Arnie's appetite did not jeopardize the financial equilibrium of Silver Birches. Uncle Arnie's weight gain -about sixty pounds in five years- had surprised the entire staff, but they, like his family, assumed that he had become a secret nosher.

Paul used that assumption as proof of Uncle Arnie's financial incompetence.

"He wastes his money on crap that ruins his health and his appearance," Paul wrote to Mort. "If he carries on like this, I will feel perfectly justified in cutting his allowance."

When, in his annual Rosh Hashana card, Mort informed Louis of the steps Paul was prepared to take in order to save Uncle Arnie's figure, Louis responded, "Who cares if he's fat?" and sent Uncle Arnie a smoked turkey by wire.

Uncle Arnie's obesity, high cholesterol intake, and lack of an exercise regimen were the major contributing factors to his sudden death by myocardial infarction. Only Arthur Pillars knew the cause of Uncle Arnie's corpulence, but he was a loyal friend and never revealed the reason, not even when I questioned him on the point.

Uncle Arnie was the most historical personage of Silver Birches, five years senior in longevity to Arthur Pillars, the next most enduring. In 1934, when Arnie was seventeen and living at home, Paul's bride, Ruth, decided that he needed a job. She was a gentile from wealthy Mt. Lebanon, the *ne plus ultra* of my father's adolescent fantasies. No one knows how he won her. My mother speculated that Ruth intuited a character flaw in Paul that would applaud her malice. But win her he did. One of her Mt. Lebanon neighbors was the owner -- afterwards called the Founder-- of Silver Birches. Through the good offices of Ruth's family, Uncle Arnie was given the job of elevator boy at \$10 a week. By the time his parents died in 1955, Uncle Arnie had been living at Silver Birches for eleven years, and was receiving a salary of \$50 a week, \$10 of which went back to the home for room and board.

Louis, the most irreverent, adventurous brother, was the first to leave home. It took him six years to make his circuitous way across the United States, relying on his looks, charm, and occasional hard work to pay his way. He arrived in southern California with numerous promises to fiancées still residing in towns along Route 66, and a little less than \$100 in his pocket. The next day Hitler invaded Poland,

and Louis invaded Hollywood, working as a stuntman's assistant until he had enough savings to buy a toy store. Gaining financial stability and a home of his own, he no longer made promises to women. They liked him just the same.

Mort, though the youngest, was the next to leave. He received a volleyball scholarship to the University of Illinois at Urbana. He chose to go there rather than live at home and attend the University of Pittsburgh because his best friend had decided to go there and become a dentist. In the first place, he reckoned, teeth would be easy to work on as they do not move. Moreover, having had a small fortune spent on his own teeth, Mort reasoned that there was a fortune awaiting him in the field of dentistry. He was correct.

The second oldest brother, Ernest, left home to enlist in the Army Air Corps in early 1939. He and Franklin Roosevelt seem to have been the only Americans of the time to perceive Hitler not only as the raging evil he was, but as a raging evil inimical to America. Ernest hated the anti-Jewish laws of the otherwise lawless Nazi regime, and became obsessed by the idea of personally dropping bombs on the Reichstag while in full session. His first choice was to be a pilot, but failing that, he would be satisfied with co-pilot, navigator or

bombardier; just as long as he was in the plane over Berlin. He never became a flier; his eyes were too bad. He was posted to dingy, remote bases throughout peacetime America, finally being sent to the Air Corps Eye Hospital in Miami Beach to serve as an orderly a year after the United States entered the war.

Ernest left the military with little enthusiasm over Hitler's defeat. He had been deeply disturbed by the anti-Semitism of many of his fellow servicemen, as well as by America's exclusionary policy towards displaced and disenfranchised European Jews. He later turned into a brooding pessimist whose sole pleasure was in making anonymous contributions to Jewish welfare and anti-defamation agencies. He was the least communicative and most inaccessible of all the brothers. He eventually settled in Denver, where he became a realtor.

None of the three brothers returned to Pittsburgh except for the briefest of visits. Paul, who entered Ruth's family's merchandising business, remained in Pittsburgh until 1965, and took tacit control of Grandpa Eddie, Grandma Edna, and Uncle Arnie.

In late 1944, Paul and Ruth decided that Eddie and Edna could live more efficiently and economically in a one-bedroom apartment

than in a three-bedroom house. Without consulting the other brothers, Paul arranged to have Uncle Arnie live at Silver Birches, and then sold the house in Squirrel Hill. This may sound high-handed, but Paul always maintained, with some justice, that since he looked after the parents fifty weeks of the year, he was entitled to make decisions affecting their lives without the unanimous consent of the brothers. Louis, Ernest, and Mort entertained their parents and brother for the two weeks that Paul and Ruth went to Provincetown each summer. Each brother took them in rotation. Mort did not want to take them, but paid for them to go on vacation wherever they liked, twice asking them to take me with them. They refused both times. They came to Miami once. That was in 1953. Uncle Arnie did not accompany them. He had chosen to remain behind and nurse Arthur Pillars who was ill.

Eleven months following this change of domiciles, Louis stopped in Pittsburgh for one night en route to New York on business. Grandma Edna made dinner, and Paul and Ruth drove Uncle Arnie over from Silver Birches. The new apartment was small but comfortable, and Grandpa Eddie and Grandma Edna seemed satisfied. Uncle Arnie was, as usual, quiet and slightly withdrawn.

"Do you like your new home?" Louis asked him.

Uncle Arnie nodded.

"Are you comfortable there?"

Again a nod.

"Is there anything you need to make you more comfortable?"

Louis continued. He had not yet learned how to ask Uncle Arnie a question.

Uncle Arnie shook his head.

Paul assured Louis that Uncle Arnie had everything he needed and was as happy as a flea in a carpet. "Not only that," Paul went on, "he has his independence, and there's no finer feeling in the world than the feeling of standing on your own two feet. Is there, Arnie?"

"Is there what, Paul?"

"Your sentence was too long for him, dear," Ruth reprimanded lightly. "I've told you about that."

"He lives underground now," Grandma Edna complained. "He could've continued living with us. Wasn't no problem."

"Was a problem, wasn't a problem...who knows? Everybody says he's happy," Grandpa Eddie concluded.

But underground? Mama, what do you mean underground?, Louis wanted to know. Now Ruth assured Louis that the room wasn't actually underground in the strictest sense of the word. Actually, it was more like a basement apartment, also called a garden flat, very common in Pittsburgh.

Louis remained skeptical and asked Ruth to be more specific. Paul became indignant at Louis's questioning, and drew his ultimate line in the sand, a Maginot Line of his much-enduring rectitude.

"We were lucky to get him into the home. It took all of Ruth's family's influence. Mama's never seen the room. Do you want me to take him out of the home and have him live with you in Encino, California? Do you want to take care of him? Do you want him helping customers in your store? Anytime you do, we'll be glad to hand over the responsibility. He says he likes his room and that he's comfortable there. What more do you want? The people at the home are doing everything they can for him. Who are you to breeze into town and demand an accounting? I think you owe Ruth an apology."

Louis's charm outweighed his intellect as lead does gold. He was browbeaten by the false premise of Paul's argument and its implied threat, and docilely accepted Uncle Arnie's pleasant life at the home

as an incontrovertible fact. He reported to Mort and Ernest that Paul had seen the room and was satisfied.

It was not until I went to Pittsburgh twenty-nine years later that anyone besides Arthur Pillars and Uncle Arnie saw the room that Paul, Ruth, Ruth's family, and the Founder had arranged for him. Uncle Arnie was away for the weekend, and I had to get Arthur Pillars to let me in.

HELPFUL HEALTH HINT

As the cold of winter gives way to the warmth of spring, the body begins to expand, the pores open, and we need more water. Be sure to increase your water intake for the next month.