

Ep. #338 - Mirrors of Transition — Symptoms as Messengers of Change



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hately

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatelly. You'll hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain, and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatelly.

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Susi (00:24.60)

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here because today, we're getting into one of the core features of what it is to move from pain to possibility. I wanna explore something that I see over and over again for clients of mine who really succeed in the process of moving from pain to possibility, of getting outta pain, staying outta pain, and really evolving into a new version of themselves. And the pattern, the thread, that is very present when I look at all my clients who were able to do that is **they were able to be with their symptoms as invitations**, and that's what this episode really is about.

When life is shifting, perhaps it's kids moving into new stages; for women, it's menopause approaching. Maybe it's roles at work evolving or grief arriving. We often feel these things in our bodies. It can feel as gross and heavy, foggy, achy, unmotivated, even anxious, spinny, out of sorts, or disconnected.

And it all makes sense. Like, of course, our system is responding, perhaps even reacting to the shifting that's occurring. But here's where the story usually goes sideways.

Susi (01:43.53)

People will often label these experiences as aging, or they assume that it means decline. Or like, it's just the way it is now. And with this episode, I wanna bring some words to - *what if this isn't that truth at all? What if the symptoms aren't proof of decline, but proof that your body and mind are asking for you to reorganize? What if they're not problems to eliminate, but messenger is guiding you into the identity shift that life is calling for?*

This is the invitation to inquire into symptoms instead of dismissing them as inevitable. To listen to them as the language of transition, of shifting identity. Through this episode, I'm going to share sort of a meta version of this, but also weave in stories from myself so that what I'm sharing here can land in a way that you can take curiosity with and perhaps even action.

Susi (02:49.19)

So let's begin with this. Think about the last time you felt off. Maybe tired for no reason, or achy in a way that didn't make sense, or like you were moving through some sort of fog. Did you immediately try to push through? Did you judge yourself saying that you should be doing better? Did you write it off as, *"Well, I'm just getting older. This is just what happens."* That's a really

common reflex. But what if those moments are less about decline, and more about your body asking you to pause. To notice. To consider what's shifting underneath. What if the very sensations you are resisting or avoiding or trying to push through are the ones pointing you towards the change you actually need to make?

Susi (03:43.83)

So as we move through this episode, hold that idea close. **Symptoms as invitations.** They're not the end of a story. They're the beginning of a conversation. And to highlight this, let me bring in a roomy poem called *The Guesthouse*. Here it goes:

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning, a new arrival.

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if there are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house,
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
They may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and
invite them in.*

Be grateful for whoever comes.

Because each has been sent

as a guide from beyond.

So let's step back. Go high level here. When symptoms show up, they rarely feel like a possibility. They feel like discomfort. Fatigue feels heavy. Brain fog feels frustrating. Pain feels limiting. Low motivation feels defeating.

These aren't pleasant experiences. They're not things most of us would choose to experience. And in those moments, it's so easy to think that something is wrong with me or just to chalk it up to aging, to assume it's inevitable decline. But here's the shift.

Susi (05:33.18)

Symptoms are not random. They're not just about aging. They are the body's way of saying, *Hey, pay attention. Something is reorganizing here.* In that way of thinking, they are messengers of transition. They're pointing towards an identity shift that wants to happen.

My experience is that the body does not speak in neat sentences. We are certainly not a Tiffany box with a perfectly tied bow. But rather, the body speaks through patterns, through sensations, aches, fluctuations in energy, and even mood. What feels like symptom is often the body's dialect for saying an old role is loosening and the new one hasn't quite landed.

It's why I think symptoms can feel so confronting. They're not just about muscles or hormones or joints, although that physiology, that anatomy, that bowel mechanics, it's absolutely there. What's even more prevalent is that they're carrying attention of identity, of who we've been, and of who we're becoming.

Susi (06:55.19)

For example, when someone describes themselves feeling constantly tired, they might assume that it's because they're getting older. But often, that exhaustion is a body mind saying, *Hey, the way you've been living, the role you've been playing, it's no longer sustainable.*

It's not just about needing more sleep, though. It may be about needing a different relationship with responsibility, with energy, with identity. Or when the headaches appear at the end of every week, the temptation is to medicate and move on. But if we inquire those headaches, they might be pointing to the way tension builds in your body as you push through tasks without listening. Or the way that you brace yourself emotionally in environments that might not feel entirely safe.

Again, the symptom isn't random, it's the messenger. It's also why I think that there is an ebb and a flow. Like oftentimes when I am working with clientele and their pain begins to drop after a

session or two, and the symptoms ease for a time, but then return. They soften and then they flare.

It's easy to make an assumption that that wave is a failure, but it's actually not because when we are moving into a new pattern, that pattern is new. It's learning to get its legs. It doesn't have stamina yet, so it makes sense that we default back to old ways of being as we get our feet, proverbially speaking, underneath ourselves again. So as we continue to practice, and as we continue to notice, as we continue to be aware, we see that that ebb and flow is actually part of the reorganization, as the identity shifts and takes root.

Susi (09:10.23)

So the invitation then is to not see the symptoms as enemies, not to push them down or explain them away as aging. The invitation is to turn toward them with curiosity and to ask, *what's this showing me? What's being asked of me? What identity is waiting underneath this discomfort?* Because when we relate to symptoms in this way, they actually stop interruptions and start to become guides, and that shift really can change everything instead of feeling like we're stuck in cycles of frustration. We begin to see the cycles as waves carrying us somewhere. And instead of bracing or disconnecting or avoiding the discomfort, we can work with it, letting it reveal to us what is next.

This is the deeper work. To let symptoms be the language of transition, to hear them as messengers of identity change. To allow them to move us toward the next chapter rather than holding us back into the story of decline. When you see it this way, even the really gross feelings, the fog, the aches, the heaviness, the avoiding, they stop being signs of deterioration and they become the signals, the glimmers, of what is possible.

Susi (10:58.08)

I remember when I fell down my stairs, it was the day after Christmas, 2010. It was one of those falls where I slipped with my socked feet. I had a box of files in my hands and I landed squarely on my cossacks. Now I didn't pass out, but I certainly had a moment of like, whoa, what's going on here? And when I kind of came back and came to, I realized just how bad it was.

And then as I struggled to bring myself up to standing, I said to myself, I'm gonna become my own best student. Now thankfully, the hallway was narrow so I could hold onto the wall because I could not really walk. My pelvic floor was in spasm. And when I did try to go to the bathroom, it was very, very difficult.

I couldn't get onto the toilet. I had to stay in a very mini squat to even do the thing. And I remember a few weeks later, as I was moving through my recovery process, sitting in front of the computer, much of the strain had settled out. I noticed a whole bunch of complaints that were moving through my head.

And very real, validating, complaints. Because in addition to my fall down the stairs, this injury that had really upended my ski season, my yoga practice, my ability to run and lift weights, I was

also going through a divorce. My mom had been diagnosed with cancer. You know, life was really in the shits. So all the thoughts in my head were very, very valid, and in some case, true.

Susi (12:43.52)

But I noticed something, and it was my pelvic floor moving into a massive spasm, and it dawned on me that if my thoughts were really true, would my body be responding in this way? And I decided to try something out because the reality was is I would prefer to get back to skiing and get back to my yoga mat.

And with that thought, my pelvic floor settled. I'm like, *huh, okay pelvic floor, so are you suggesting that if I start to shift the way that I'm thinking, that perhaps these thoughts that I'm having, even though they feel very true and I feel very right about them all, that maybe - just maybe - if I shift the way that I'm thinking and consider that there is a different way of thinking, that something will change?* The pelvic floor released more.

Then I added, *okay, so if I focus my attention now, not to disassociate from those complaints, 'cause those are real, but if I focus my attention towards my ability to get back to skiing and to my yoga practice, then what?* And then the spasm completely let go. And that was, even though I already knew a lot of this, that was my embodied realization that **my body was a barometer for my mind**. So that when I was noticing my pelvic floor getting all spasmy, instead of just going to the direct, *oh, this is because of my injury*, and by the way, people don't recover from cox injuries - I'm glad, actually, I didn't know that at the time - instead of just going into an anatomical bomb mechanical reason for this, I paused and I looked into my mind and I noticed what was going on in my head, and there's some work to do with some of what was going on in my head. It was indicating some things to pay attention to, and I saw that that was more of the indicator.

Susi (14:45.74)

It was asking for an identity shift. So then as I continued on, I paid close attention. Clearly, the complaints were asking me to set some limits, some boundaries, to speak up, to share things that I may have been scared to share. And I followed my pelvic floor as a barometer for what I was saying and how it was really landing through my body.

My pelvic floor was my truth. It was my truth bomb. From that experience, and since then I have followed into my body as being a real barometer for what's going on in my world. I can tell now when what I'm thinking is actually not entirely true. What I'm actually lying to myself and I don't even realize it, because what I do know for sure is that the body does not lie.

It absolutely responds. So if we take that idea, then, if symptoms are in fact messengers, then the real question could be - how do we work with them? And here are some principles that consistently emerge (like I did with my pelvic floor): **Acknowledge the symptom as purposeful**. Symptoms aren't random glitches. They reflect how your system is trying to stay coherent in the middle of a transition. When we acknowledge this, we stop making war with

them. We shift from why is this happening to me, to *what is this showing me? What do you want me to pay attention to?*

Expect the ebb and flow is the second principle. **Healing and identity shifts are never linear.** Symptoms soften, then return, and then they shift again. The rhythm isn't failure. It's gaining and improving and refining the roots of the shift. Bowel mechanical re-patterning takes some time, and it's not that we wait and wait, we have to practice the new pattern.

Susi (17:07.13)

I had to practice noticing what was going on in my head. I had to practice paying attention to my pelvic floor because initially, going into the complaints, which were very valid and seductive for me to pay attention to, clearly were not true in my body. But I had to practice paying attention to them and not get mad at myself when I was falling into that pattern of thinking.

And I wanna be clear, just because I was thinking that pattern of thinking and it wasn't really true in my body, it didn't mean that it wasn't still valid. There were still truths inside of it that I had to pay attention to, which became where I got to set boundaries and speak up in ways that landed.

Susi (18:00.32)

But the idea here is we're enabling and welcoming this ebb and flow as a way of monitoring our milestones of shift, which goes along with number three, which is **catching the yellow lights or those little whispers**. Symptoms usually whisper before they shout. You know, a small ache, a dip in energy, the flicker of heaviness. You know, those things that we don't really pay attention to, 'cause they're not really in the way of getting things done.

Until you fall down the stairs and you land square on your cossacks and you really can't do much, that gets your attention, right? But the reality is, listening early means you don't have to wait for the red light crash to learn the lesson. And when you start to learn and then respond, the whisper stage, your body doesn't need to escalate.

But sometimes if you're like me, you need something big to get the lesson, and sometimes we have to do that. That's why I'm in business. This is how I help people. This is where I train my trainees to help people. Because it's so easy to blow by these whispers, these yellow lights, and it's necessary at times for our body and mind to escalate in order to get our attention.

Susi (19:20.72)

Whether you pay attention at the whisper level or at the much louder level. Ultimately, the fourth principle is, **seeing the identity beneath the discomfort**. Symptoms are rarely just physical. They carry the weight of identity change. An old role loosening, a new one not yet rooted. The discomfort is not just in the muscles or hormones - although those are true, the anatomical and physiological reality is true - but really underneath it all, it's *who am I now?* And being willing to ask that question allows a symptom to reveal more than its surface.

I remember in my early forties having a conversation with my naturopath about the whole menopausal transition. And she was saying to me, you know what's so amazing about the menopausal transition, as hard as it is for some women, is that you used to have this creative force that was there to facilitate the creation of children. And whether you had children or not, the reality is, is that creative force now gets to be channeled elsewhere. And she had seen many, many women moving through menopause who just rocketed off and applied that creative energy in a way that was so incredibly purposeful and powerful.

So then this leads to number five, about **staying curious and not combative**. The way we meet symptoms can really change them, and whether that is menopausal symptoms, whether that is the grief that can feel so, so heavy. And really, any other symptom that might be being experienced. Fighting usually reinforces them.

As one line that I often hear is, *what you resist persists*. Curiosity though, opens them. Asking, *hmm, what are you pointing me toward? What are you asking of me?* That can turn a wall into a doorway. This doesn't mean we necessarily like the discomfort, but it does mean we can stop making it the enemy.

Susi (21:43:16)

Which leads to number six, **shift in increments and not at all at once**. Trying to unwind everything overnight overwhelms a system, and it's basically impossible. Small releases build trust. Shifting by a fraction allows for the body mind to reorganize without panic. I find that the line of *"the turtle always wins"* is really, really true in this moment. If we try to rush the process, there's resistance all around it.

But when we go bit by bit, piece by piece, they're so much easier from a motor control and motor coordination perspective to integrate the change, which actually makes the process happen faster. And this leads to number seven, **trusting the body's coherence even when it feels messy**.

Every symptom in your system is an attempt at communication. Trusting that allows us to work with our bodies instead of against them and create space for a new coherence and coordination to emerge. What looks like chaos, and what can certainly feel like chaos, is often the first step of repatterning.

Susi (23:12:30)

These principles aren't about fixing or erasing symptoms. They're really about listening to them as the language of transition. There are ways to stay with the process of reorganization without collapsing into frustration or fear. When we work with symptoms, this way, they don't have to shout. They can begin to guide.

So let's bring this together.

We began with this idea that symptoms aren't random problems or signs of decline, but rather they're messengers. They are our body's language for saying, *Hey, the identity needs to shift. Something is reorganizing. Pay attention.* When we work with the principles - acknowledgement, ebb and flow, paying attention to the yellow lights or whispers, seeing the identity piece, staying curious, shifting incrementally and trusting the coherence and coordination - we really do stop fighting ourselves and we start to make relationship. And from there, change doesn't have to be forced, but rather it unfolds.

Symptoms soften, energy returns, pain becomes information instead of interruption. The body reorganizes, not because we demanded it, but because we listened.

Susi (24:52.38)

So as you step away from this episode, notice. Where are symptoms showing up for you now? Which ones feel the most uncomfortable? The most confrontational? Which ones feel less so uncomfortable, but are still present or maybe less confrontational?

And depending on your personality, choose the one that you wanna work with first, and ask yourself. Rather than, how do I get rid of this? Ask yourself, *what's this telling me? What's this pointing me towards? What action do I need to take?*

And as you answer those questions, notice if your answer is like a very reflexive response that's almost quick and comes high in your mind and brain. Versus how it feels in your body. Because when you're coming to a response that has a resonance in your body, the response tends to be a bit different. Lands a bit different.

Overall here, the message I want to impart most of all - **symptoms aren't here to prove decline.** They're here to guide you into the next chapter of resilience, coordination, coherence, freedom, strength, and ease.

Susi (27:03.89)

If this is interesting to you, if you're a yoga teacher or a health professional who loves yoga and you wanna be able to do this kind of work, utilizing the body as the entryway through biomechanics and kinesiology and really tapping into and connecting to the messages of the symptoms, I'd love for you to join me at the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive.

It runs October the 25th to the 30th online via Zoom. And if you wanna take this even deeper and build a business around it, whether part-time or a retirement business, the yoga therapy certification programs may just be the ticket. And I have two of them, one's a 13-month, and the other one is a full 18-month IOYT accredited program.

You can learn more over at **functionalsynergy.com/intensive**, and if you wanna go deeper into certification, it's **functionalsynergy.com/certification**. It's amazing work. It's remarkable how fulfilling, how embodying, and how powerful it really is. I'd love to see you there. Until then, we'll see you next week.

Happy exploring.

Susi (28:33.09)

If you are a yoga teacher, who knows that you've learned a lot and taken a lot of trainings, but you still feel like there's something missing when you're working with a client who has pain and there's that moment of uncertainty and you sense there's more to see, there's more that you want to understand, know that you're not alone.

The I Love Kinesiology program is where we enter into an experience of really blending the worlds of anatomy and biomechanics and neuromechanics to make sense of how to really support people, and helping them move better, reduce and eliminate physical pain. You can read more over at functionalsynergy.com/ILK.

See you there.