

The Montreal Street Kinesiologist

We'd been walking around Montreal, my wife and I. We found ourselves in Chinatown when we decided to grab something quick to eat to boost our flagging energy. We were standing at one of those tiny takeaway places trying to decide what snack to get. A guy rolled up on a bicycle—a big guy, a grownup with a full beard who made the bike he stepped off look cartoonish—it was a tiny 20" BMX, the kind of bike teenage stunt riders favour. He seemed to focus directly on me and strode purposefully up to me.

“Excuse me sir, are you familiar with the word *kinesiology*?”

Full disclosure: I admit to being a bit of a word nerd so my first thought was, *I know this!* My second thought was, *that's an odd question to ask a stranger on the street.*

“Kinesiology refers to movement,” I said, “specifically the dynamic movements of the body, and a kinesiologist is one who studies the body's ability—or inability—to move.”

“That's correct sir, thank you. I must say that most people do not know the answer to that question so I compliment you on your exceptional knowledge. Are you in the medical field sir?”

I'm not but I have to admit feeling a slight flush of pride that this man could think I might be a doctor or medical professional. Before I could answer however, the bearded fellow asked me another question that struck me as odd: “May I look at your hand sir?”

Naturally I was suspicious of this fellow who had just cycled up, dropped his bicycle on the pavement and marched over to me. Still, I didn't want to look intimidated or panicky so I extended my hand.

“Your left hand, if you would please,” he said.

I offered my left, which he took in both of his hands and began to knead with a firm but gentle touch. Now I was thinking this was *very* peculiar and was about to object when he launched into a very calm and seemingly sensible discussion of how energy flows throughout the body and can get misdirected by impediments caused by injuries, stress, tension and anxiety.

“When the energy flow is blocked by these constraints it fragments and seeks alternate routes. Chronic blockage results in conflicted energy flow: negative energy is not released as it should be and positive energy is depleted instead of feeding back into the body's regenerative

wellspring.”

All the while he kept massaging my fingers and thumb in a sure but calm way and I had to admit that my hand felt good. My whole forearm felt good. The blood was flowing and my muscles felt stimulated but relaxed too.

“Pardon me sir, I don’t mean to be presumptuous but do you often feel pain and discomfort in your left shoulder and neck area?”

It seemed uncanny that he asked me this because I have endured the discomfort of a stiff neck and left shoulder for years! I had simply resigned myself to believing that stiff muscles and aches are an unavoidable aspect of aging. “Yes,” I said, “how could you know that?”

“By feeling the blocked energy flow in your left arm,” he said. “May I touch your neck?”

This was such a strange question yet he asked it so politely and earnestly that I looked at my wife for reassurance. I couldn’t quite read the expression on her face; I think I saw concern, like she might be wondering if I was safe with this large bearded man towering above me. I also thought I saw a trace of amusement in her eyes, almost as if she was tempted to laugh at the absurdity of the predicament I now found myself in.

The man must have taken my delayed response as permission because he suddenly squeezed my left shoulder with a hand that looked extraordinarily large as he kneaded the sore muscle mass between my neck and shoulder. Now his squeezing felt shockingly strong—so strong I realized that he could probably ring my neck like a chicken’s if he felt like it. After all, I’m not a big guy: five-foot-seven, 145 pounds; whereas this bearded stranger was probably six-foot-five and 250 pounds.

He leaned in close and pressed the back of his right arm—the triceps?—into the concavity between my neck and shoulder. At the same time he flopped my left arm over his shoulder and pulled on it with his left arm. Strangely, it didn’t hurt. In fact, it felt very pleasant and after a few tugs he let go and stepped back, smiling at me.

“Feels much better doesn’t it?” He said.

I was too embarrassed to admit that it did but the stupid grin on my face must have given it away.

“Can I ask your permission to do something that may seem quite strange sir?”

I couldn’t imagine what could be stranger than anything he’d already done right there on the street in public while my wife and a gathering crowd of onlookers stood by, watching. Again I glanced at my wife and she gave me a look that seemed to say, *It’s your neck, buddy.*

“I would like to ask you to trust me enough to lay across my back and I will lift you up to realign all the negative energy you have accumulated over the years which is now trapped inside your vertebrae, impeding your flow, blocking you from your full potential and causing you unnecessary grief.”

Now the flags arose: this man might be mad! Still, I had to admit, my fingers and hand and forearm felt great! My stiff shoulder and neck, which had been gnawing away at me for years suddenly felt 95% better!

“If you are uncomfortable with this sir, I will walk away. But if you are willing to relax into the movements and do not resist, I promise you will feel immeasurably better 20 seconds from now.”

I’m not sure what I was thinking. If I thought more about what he’d just said I’m sure I would have said *No thanks!* I’m a careful person by nature, not a big risk-taker. I tend to be cautious. In general I’m sceptical of people, especially total strangers making absurd claims on the street. But there was something about this guy. He seemed so artless and guileless. I didn’t know what his game was but there was something in his touch—his hands were warm and soothing, his movements were strong and sure as if he really was a thoroughly trained and skilled kinesiologist. I didn’t think about it anymore, just said *OK*.

He positioned himself back-to-back with me and explained that he was going to take both my hands in both his and lift me backwards on his back. Then he would stretch my arms out and “with your legs dangling I want you to relax, breathe, and let the energy flow out of your sternum, your chest.”

And so he squatted and lifted me off the ground saying, “I’m going to lift you and bounce you lightly on my back. You may feel and hear a slight popping sound as your vertebrae retroflex. It’s harmless as long as you relax; if you stiffen up we could have a problem. Ready?”

Before I could ask what kind of problem he was already rocking me up and down on his back then tossed me up. There was no time to think, I just had to relax or end up with a serious back injury, maybe even be crippled for life! Could fate actually be this perverse, to be standing in line at a Chinese take-out stand one moment and then lying permanently disabled on the sidewalk because I was foolish enough to submit to the insane request of a demented maniac?

CRACK!

There was a crack indeed, an audible crack and like the guy said, it actually felt good! He rolled me off his back like a *Cirque du Soleil* stuntman, smiled and shook my hand.

“Better, yes?”

Strangely, unbelievably, I did in fact, feel better. Much better!

The bearded kinesiologist went and picked up his little bicycle, came back to me and handed me a business card which said Guy de Serèndipité, Kinesiologist. And that’s all the card said, no phone number, no email address, no website, nothing.

“And if you don’t mind sir,” he added, “if you could afford what you feel is a reasonable contribution for my services, I would be very grateful.”

I felt wonderful but it seemed churlish to offer this man the usual dollar or two one might give a panhandler. But I only had small change in my pockets so I asked my wife how much money she had. She always carries more money than I do so she handed me her billfold and I pulled out a bill for the kinesiologist.

He smiled at me and my wife, mounted his little bicycle and rode away quickly.

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