

SHIATSU

Shiatsu is a Japanese body therapy with its roots deeply embedded in both Traditional Chinese Medicine and Traditional Japanese Massage. Literally Shiatsu means "finger pressure" and it uses this finger pressure (and hands, feet, elbows and knees) as a way of both diagnosing and treating the body through the use of the Meridian pathways and acupressure points. However, Shiatsu has now become a diverse and rich body therapy with many different aspects and philosophies. The predominant one is Zen Shiatsu, popularised by Masunaga in the 1970s, but this tradition has in turn grown in different directions: Movement shiatsu, Quantum shiatsu and Transformational shiatsu to name but a few.

Each of these contrasting approaches have common threads between them however, and awareness of Ki or Chi (as in Tai chi), use of Hara (the energy centre in the belly) and an awareness of Kyo and Jitsu (which will be explained later).

Shiatsu works with the body's own healing wisdom in order to encourage health and wholeness. The word "heal" literally means whole, therefore healing is a process of becoming whole. Shiatsu supports the immense resources the body already has for being healthy and can deepen our awareness of our true capacity as human beings.

Shiatsu is fundamentally a technique for waking up residual or dormant energy in the body and for acknowledging stagnant and tense energy and encouraging movement. Each person's pattern of tension and emptiness is unique and individual and absolutely relevant to their particular life. And Shiatsu addresses how your body is adapting to your life. You could say that your body, in its posture, health and strength or weakness is an expression of your relationship with your life.

When diagnosing, shiatsu is a way of listening to the body and hearing how you are feeling from a body perspective, and then through the treatment, responding to what the body is asking for.

There are two key influences on how diagnosis is made in shiatsu:

- 1) **Kyo and Jitsu.** These two words are both of ancient Japanese origin and were applied to the context of Shiatsu by Masunaga. They refer to the empty and full feeling of the body to the touch of the practitioner and correspond to the energy pattern and balance of the meridians and organs of the body. Where there is an unmet need within the psyche or the body there is an emptiness or hunger, this is the Kyo. Where there is a strategy or method for resolving that need there is tension or action and this is the Jitsu.

The aim of shiatsu regarding kyo and jitsu is to allow a connection between the two and to bring awareness to this dynamic. Often the client is very aware of the jitsu conditions in his or her body or life. These tend to be conspicuous and painful, for example tension in shoulders, painful neck, over eating, poor sleep, extreme and persistent emotional states etc. The jitsu tends to be a pattern or habit which the person has learned to use to address an unmet need, and this need will remain unseen, often remaining in the shadow part of the person's awareness. The kyo is the symptom, the consequences, and there are many therapeutic techniques that attend to this issue only.

The kyo is the need, the hunger, the longing or deep yearning within the person. This deep need will and can be inflected through other needs and wants. In Zen shiatsu the

kyo is the organism's natural need that is required for survival and will be detected as an insufficiency in a particular meridian or diagnostic area. However as human beings our yearning may go beyond our survival requirements and into our spiritual desires or emotional needs. One of the tendencies of the kyo is that it is hidden. There is a vulnerability here and the kyo when left unmet will become a wound, often with a sense of shame and deep protection around it. It hides and intends not to be found. In fact tremendous energy may be exerted to keep yourself and others away from this wound or need, and thus it will remain unmet, hungry and in pain. And the jitsu strategies may take the person further from the actual cause and become part of the mechanism of avoiding this deep pain.

By touching and sensing the body it is possible to begin to feel the need in the body, as an emotional yearning or as a physical hunger, a need for touch, affection, attention or essentially love. The reason why shiatsu is so effective in addressing this issue is that touch is one of the most fundamental ways in which human beings express care and love to each other. It addresses the primal needs that both our infantile and adult selves often have.

Eventually the kyo will make itself known, indirectly through the jitsu symptoms, attempting as a diversionary tactic to get its needs met. The job of the shiatsu practitioner is to help identify that need and bring awareness around it, so the clients can own it and begin to make an emotional connection with that need so the yearning is at least acknowledged. Through this awareness healing comes as the strategies that are not working to fill this need or protect it can drop away, and the need can come from the shadows into full consciousness.

- 2) **The Five Elements** are an amazing archetypal model for exploring the cycles of life and nature, and their part in our life.

The five elements are Water, Wood, Fire, Earth and Metal.

As these elements have their own qualities, strengths and tendencies in nature, so they can be cultivated in us as human beings - to flow like water, flex like wood, ascend like fire, ground like earth and define like metal. These elements and their gifts can be awakened by the right quality of touch on the body.

If we access **the water element** in our life we open to our ancestry, our lineage (as many traditional cultures do) and with this comes a deep sense of support; from this place of support we can take action in the world, we have the will power to be effective and potent. The emotion of the water element is fear, that life-amplifying feeling that can make you feel fully alive (courage is not possible without fear) or paralysed and ineffectual. If we are disconnected from the water element we can become overwhelmed by fear, unsupported and tired. This lack of support can show up in the body as weakness in the back, back ache or pains, weak wrists and ankles. Problems with the bones or nervous system can ensue but most commonly a feeling of stress. Often when stress is present there is a deep survival fear at work and we feel out of our depth or overwhelmed. There is a need to reconnect to the waters of life, and to know we are supported, that there is someone at your back. How would it feel to know there is a long line of ancestors behind you, rooting for you and willing you forward? This is the possibility with the gift of water.

The wood element is beautifully characterised by the season of Spring, that awakening energy that leaps from the earth, with new growth, new possibilities and

new plans. The wood element holds the vision for your life and has the capacity to take the action required to fulfil that mission. When we access the wood element we can be organised, proactive, motivated, decisive, flexible and cooperative. A hugely creative energy is available here. When access to the wood element is difficult, a feeling of being stuck can ensue, a lack of vision and ideas, or the inability to take the action or decisions required, can then manifest physically as tension and inflexibility in the body, headaches or migraines. The energy is not flowing smoothly, conflict can arise and with it frustration, anger and rage. Anger can be a liberating emotion, full of creative potential, but it can also contract into resentment, blame and bitterness which can further block growth and movement. Depression and apathy can creep in. A new vision and strategy is required to break through into new fertile ground.

The fire element, the image of a leaping flame or roaring fire, light and warmth are brought into the world. Fire signifies consciousness and awakening of the spirit. This is the place of relationships, of intimacy and compassion, of the unity of the human community, of the heart, of love. Fire blurs and merges boundaries, brings freedom of expression, laughter and passion. When access to the fire element is difficult, and the flame burns low, there can be anxiety, heartache and difficulty expressing, connecting and relating to others. The heart is closed, the need to protect is more important than the desire to connect. This can arise physically as heart conditions, circulatory issues and psychologically as a difficulty in expressing feelings and creating intimacy or closeness, spontaneity has died, you are the coal removed from the hearth. The fire of life, of longing and of desire needs rekindling, rejoining the community of the spirit, of love.

The Earth, always under us, this blessed place of fruitfulness, abundance and nourishment. It brings the gifts of trust, maturity, generosity and empathy. To be grounded in the earth is to know humility, and to know you are fundamentally good, that you are of the earth, you are the eyes of the earth, the ears of the earth, the thinking of the earth. You are full and whole and can give and receive, you are not flawed and there is no original sin that blemishes you, for you are of the earth and all its goodness. When this is hard to access, where there was fullness, emptiness creeps in, a hunger, a craving, a neediness. Famine strikes and with it scarcity, selfishness and a feeling of unworthiness. Shame lies here, and with it worry and heady dizzy over thinking. This can present itself as any kind of craving or addiction, compulsion or life diminishing habit. Compulsive eating or under nourishing, work, sex, obsessive cleaning, watching television or the addictive use of substances or anything to fill the gap; There is no peace here, trust is far away, mother has abandoned us, we are victims, poor me! Physically this can manifest as digestion or appetite issues, weight and problems with the flesh, fertility and menstruation. We need to reconnect to the comfort of the earth, the abundant nourishment available, and to awaken to the richness of life and our own goodness within it.

The metal element, the element of value, of identity, of character and clarity. This brings the gift of boundaries, definition, of healthy, clear authority and leadership. A healthy self-esteem, knowing who you are and your value in the world. The appreciation of each breath, of each living moment, a keen-ness and certainty, death will come, and I am alive, vividly alive! When the metal is dulled, life can become remote, and we can feel the isolation of our unique selves, existential and alone, the boundaries are too clear, rigid and brittle. This is a place of deep grief, but a grief unwept, withered and crumpled inside, broken and alone. This is our fundamental sense of separateness and loneliness, surrounded by autumn leaves and bare trees. The breath of life is dimmed and with it can come respiratory problems and bowel problems as letting go becomes hard and too painful. Problems with the skin, with our

boundaries show up and with it a loss of sense of self. The keen edge of life needs re-shaping and defining to see our 'specialness' and the paradox of being alone and belonging.

Shiatsu aims to rekindle these elements, different parts of the body hold these primal and potent energies and shiatsu can awaken them with the right touch and intention.

And often I have found that the body is waiting to be held in a certain way in a certain place and that when we are finally met in an appropriate way a deep transformation can take place.

Shiatsu is not something that is DONE to you, but with you, listening to both you and your bodies deep wants and needs and responding to and meeting them in the moment, with your full participation. Shiatsu is a dance, following a rhythm of an unfolding process of awareness, a mystery, a celebration.

Shiatsu is an invitation to that celebration through the simple power of touch, of witnessing and holding.

Our body is the gateway to our humanity and magnificence, and shiatsu is a tool for unlocking that gateway. 'Where I am not whole, broken or wounded, I need to be witnessed and held. And where I am strong and wise I need to be acknowledged and honoured to make it real and to bless the difference I can make in this one, wild precious life.'

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