

We are very thankful to **NICK POLE** to use his article to support the Congress-community with insights, inputs and thoughts about Shiatsu.

Check: [www.nickpole.com](http://www.nickpole.com) for more from Nick.

## 'Very, Very Traumatic' Working with Trauma with Clean Language and Shiatsu

Nick Pole and Peter Cadney

When you're in the middle of a treatment and your client suddenly connects with a trauma, reliving powerful emotions that fill the whole room, what do you do? The Japanese roots of shiatsu offer little guidance on how to bring language into a session, so the language we use in the west is usually borrowed from some kind of psychotherapeutic approach. Pioneers in the psychology of trauma like Peter Levine, Bessel van Der Kolk, Pat Ogden and Babette Rothschild have developed trainings for working with trauma in ways that include the body as well as the mind. These all use some kind of 'facilitative' language that allows clients to feel they can put the brakes on, return to a safe place and feel more or less in control, while at the same time exploring the hints that emerge from body and mind about how to approach the unapproachable.

In this case study, we use extracts from a workshop demonstration to explore what happens when a trauma unexpectedly arises during a session. Nick, the teacher, is demonstrating how to use one form of facilitative language - the questioning process known as Clean Language, developed by the New Zealand psychotherapist David Grove - to help Peter explore a peculiar and rather mystifying problem, as a way towards starting a shiatsu treatment.

The key principle in Clean Language is to ask very simple questions like "What kind of...?", 'Where is...?' or 'Is there anything else about...?' and whenever possible to include the key words which the client has just spoken in the next question. In this way, the client is invited to move from using words simply as labels for symptoms to actually experiencing emotionally and somatically what those words are labels for. In fact, one of the most important ways that facilitative language can help us in shiatsu is not to do with words themselves but the gestures and movements clients make as they speak about their issue. Usually the client is quite unconscious of these movements, but bringing them into awareness often begins to shift the energetic patterns that hold trauma in the body, and prepare the ground for the shiatsu treatment.

In this edited transcript, Nick's questions are in bold type, and both Nick and Peter have added occasional commentary.

**So you were telling me at lunch about this problem working at your computer?**

After 15 years working with computers I reached breaking point and gave it all up to live a quieter life in the country, learning how to be more self-sufficient and doing manual labour jobs outside. After that, when I came back to using computers, I noticed a lot of discomfort that seemed to build up. It seems to take my awareness out of my body. It's almost like my whole body wants to get away as quickly as possible, and it's very uncomfortable. And if I use a computer for a long period of time, I have to do a lot of work grounding myself afterwards, or my mind starts to go into overdrive and some uncomfortable feelings arise in my body.

*As Peter tells us this, his voice and gestures are full of information. As he talks about the discom-*

*fort building up, his hands rise in a fast-flowing spiral towards his chest; when he talks about wanting to get away as quickly as possible, his hands are palm-to-palm a few inches apart, moving jerkily from side to side as if pulled one way and then the other.*

**And when your whole body wants to get away as quickly as possible, and it's very uncomfortable, then what happens?**

Like an anxious feeling.

*Nick mirrors Peter's gesture - his right hand held rigidly in front of his solar plexus.*

*Nick talking to the group: We're not trying to solve a problem here, we're just helping Peter to de-construct the pattern, so we're not asking why he gets anxious, or what would stop him from getting anxious, we're just looking for an open kind of question to help him explore that anxious feeling, for example:*

**And where is anxious?**

Here. *Peter gestures to his upper chest and throat area.*

**And what is it like there?**

*There is a long pause as Peter explores this internally*

Tight, constricting, choking, closed. He coughs.

**And when it's tight, constricting, choking, closed, then what happens?**

Coughing.

**Anything else about coughing?**

Alert, alarming.

**And when it's alert, alarming, then what happens?**

Joking.

**Choking...?**

Joking - with a J.

**What kind of joking?**

*Peter pauses again for a long time, his head down, as if he is feeling some strong emotion. His right shoulder starts moving as if trying to free a tight muscle.*

**And is there anything else about that?** *Nick mirrors Peter's posture and shoulder movement.*

I don't want to do it anymore - that's what comes up with that. I don't want to.

And when you don't want to do it anymore, then what happens?

The name 'James' came out of that, which is meaningful for me.

Meaningful?

James was a friend that died when I was twenty-seven...about ten years ago.

*Nick's sense at this point is that something profound and powerful has happened - almost as if James has somehow entered the room.*

So can I pause for a moment, and honouring James and your memory of him, Peter, just taking your time to be with whatever's happening for you...(long pause)...and when it's ok with you to carry on, then let me know.

Yup. *(Peter is silent for a while longer, then smiles)* This is not going the way I wanted it to go!  
[Laughter from the group]

Is there anything else about James?

Is there anything else about James? Good question. It was a very tumultuous time in my life. And... *(Trying to speak but words not quite coming out - a slight choking sound)* and I used to write music with him at the computer.

Was there anything else about writing music with him at the computer?

I guess this is the logical part of my mind, saying, 'Well, here I am not liking working with computers, and I used to work with James and James died, and I used to write music on a computer'. Peter's right hand makes a circling motion around his heart area.

And is there anything else about that movement? *Nick mirrors the circling gesture.*

It's boring. I've done this a lot.

How do you mean?

I've been over it a lot. Again, and again, and back to it, and here I am again, coming back to it.

So this is the point where it's kind of stuck?

Yeah, right.

*Nick talking to the group: So the Wood energy is not flowing, and Peter's gestures have maybe indicated where it's not flowing, and we could just begin the shiatsu treatment here. But first, let's ask a different kind of Clean Language question:*

When it's like this, and it's been going on again and again, and it's boring, what would you like to have happen?

*(After a long pause)* I'd like to move on.

And can you move on?

Yes. I can move on. But when I say I can move on, there's something in there saying, 'Can you?'

And there, for the first time, I get the sense that your bodymind or your Ki, or whatever you want to call it, is asking me to do some shiatsu; would that be ok?

Yup.

*Nick's comment: At this point, it was like Peter's bodymind was saying, 'Do some work on my right shoulder!' That's often when I start working directly with shiatsu - when I feel there's an invitation from the client's energetic field, and not before. This is when I know they need help through direct touch. Up till that point, it's as though they are doing the shiatsu themselves via the Clean questions.*

*Nick starts working on the Gall Bladder channel on Peter's right shoulder in the sitting position, asking more questions as he works.*

And there's a something saying, 'Can you?' What kind of something?

*(Peter takes a deep breath)* A closure?

And where is a closure?

A closure, I can feel here. Peter's left hand connects with the right side of his chest.

And is there anything else about a closure there?

*Another long and moving silence as Peter experiences something strong.*

*Peter's comment: Here I leaned forward, supporting myself with my hands on the ground. My breathing deepened and the experience became quite intense; a lot of emotional energy was being released, tears and sadness, and it felt like I was going into a breathwork session, something that I had become interested about 18 months previously because I felt like I needed a way to express some deep emotional charge.*

I'm letting my hand just begin to explore. I don't know if I've got the right kind of contact yet but if you just say... is that ok?

Uh-huh. *Peter let's out a deep sighing breath.*

What just happened?

*It's a relief. He breathes out again deeply and repeatedly as Nick works the Large Intestine and Gall Bladder channels on his right shoulder.*

Is that ok?

It feels like it's opening there.

And when it feels like it's opening, what happens next?

*Deep emotional breathing from Peter continues.*

'Let go.' Just those words.

**And is there anything else about 'Let go'?**

*Nick's comment: There was no verbal response from Peter, but the response from his energy was a kind of 'bleeping' from the lower back, so I put my hand there.*

**And what's here?**

There's deepness.

**And is there anything else about deepness?**

*Again, Peter doesn't answer but there is a lot of movement in his body.*

**And what's happening now, with all that movement?**

*Peter starts laughing softly, followed by some more very emotional breathing.*

**Just taking your time and feeling what you feel...mmm. And can I ask a question as you stay with all of that?**

*Peter nods.*

**What is this contact like here in your lower back?**

Supportive and allowing. I feel a childlike sense of going into the body, and into the sensation that's arising. Allowing the sensation to be, and going into it, and it turning into a joke, and then a joyful experience.

*Another very long pause.*

**Would it be ok to gently come back to sitting up, because it's nearly time to finish?**

Uh-huh.

*Peter's comment: I remember feeling as though it would have been better to stay where I was and continue, but because of the workshop setting I sat up.*

**And how is it now?**

Good. It's lifting. It felt like that moment I was describing was like it was coming to fruition, like a joyful opening - in the heart.

**And is that still going on?**

Yeah, it kind of felt like talking was good, but also that the questions were interrupting that feeling.

And how is it here and here? Nick gestures to Peter's right shoulder and right side.

Great. It feels good now, like a peace - like a release.

So I'm just wanting to check back to the original issue. It's too soon to really know if anything's different about working at the computer, but certainly there's something to do with James that seems to have changed. Could you say anything more about that?

Um, peace is all that springs to mind. It felt like, 'Ahh, this is what I was waiting for...' It felt the whole complex was getting attention - getting what was required.

And how about your sense of having been over it again and again?

I had definitely connected the difficulty with the computer to the issue with James, but now it's more clear. The time specifically when I first came to the computer to sit down and write music - it's almost that same feeling every time I sit in front of the computer - uncomfortable, anxiety, don't want to be here. So it could quite easily have shifted after this session. I think now I'll be able to go back and have a different experience in front of the computer.

Remember what they say about trauma - using that word loosely because I don't know how traumatic that was for you...

This session? *(Laughter from the group)*.

No, no, I mean around James...

Very, very traumatic.

*Nick's comment to the group: A very good description of what happens in trauma is that it's a mixture between a vacuum cleaner and a spotlight. The spotlight of intense awareness suddenly shines onto anything that's happening in that traumatic moment, and then there's the vacuum cleaner sucking up into the memory everything that that spotlight reveals - that's how we learn to survive. So in the trauma around James, that spotlight of hyper-awareness included the computer and it got sucked in. Whatever we were doing with the Lungs and Gall Bladder was just helping to dissolve that association and let things move on.*

A few questions from the group:

**Do you ever get to a place where you can't bring someone back from all that emotional opening?**

In the Clean Language approach, the client is always in charge of the process, and you always ask permission to go a step further if you're in any doubt. Remember that Peter allowed himself to go to this place, and if he hadn't felt comfortable with me he probably wouldn't have allowed himself to do that. Peter is obviously very experienced in various mind/body therapies, but if you were working with someone who didn't have that kind of experience, there were various points in that session where you could have put some brakes on and said, 'Would you like to lie down now?' and whatever your level of skill, it would have been safe to do some shiatsu with whatever point they had allowed themselves to get to.

**We're told if you haven't been trained as a counsellor, don't go there.**

It's professional to know your limits, and what you feel safe with, but the more experienced you are, the more you just stay with it. For me, the question is, 'Don't go where? Where is the 'there' that we don't go? You're here with a person and all their meridians and all of their life, where do you not go? It's the client who's leading and all you have to do is follow.

**Final comment from Peter:**

The evening after the workshop, I sat in front of the computer and it felt different but after a short while I had to lie down because it brought up more emotion. That confirmed a sense that I should book a follow-up session with Nick, and after that session I definitely noticed a big improvement in being able to use the computer, though there are still issues there that I am continuing to work on. For me, this experience was a beautiful education in Clean Language and its effectiveness. After the workshop I continued to practice, asking questions internally with myself and allowing the intelligence of the body to express itself. Since the workshop, I have adopted Clean Language as a key component of my own Shiatsu practice. It has given me an authentic method of communication that helps my clients access deeper layers of themselves, as well as giving them control over their own process of self-discovery.

**Nick Pole** has been integrating Clean language with Shiatsu for 15 years and his new book 'Words That Touch - How to Ask Questions Your Body Can Answer' is published by Singing Dragon on 21 February 2017. [www.nickpole.com](http://www.nickpole.com)

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**For information on Clean Language go to:** [cleanlanguage.co.uk](http://cleanlanguage.co.uk). Here you can also find translations of the Clean Language questions.

For more articles by Nick Pole on using Clean Language in Shiatsu, go to [nickpole.com](http://nickpole.com)

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