

The Tiger in the Grove

Kyo & Jitsu in Movement Shiatsu
by Bill Palmer M.Sc. MRSST

Movement Shiatsu evolved out of a long period of work with disabled children and adults. But it has also been a lifelong project to really understand how Shiatsu works. Einstein once said about physics: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough". I feel that Shiatsu is a truly great therapy but the lack of real explanation of how it works results in it being undervalued by the general public, who most often see it as just another technique of massage.

Shiatsu and other Oriental Therapies are based on the concept of Qi, or Ki, which is seen as the body's means of self-regulation. Shizuto Masunaga's system of Zen Shiatsu also incorporates the idea that symptoms are an expression of the body's struggle to compensate for an area that is not integrated into the whole organism. The part that is not energised is called *Kyo* while the part that is stressed in the effort to compensate for the *Kyo* is called *Jitsu*. I think that one of the special features of Shiatsu is that it focuses on parts of the body that are not integrated rather than trying to alleviate the symptoms. In this, it follows a similar paradigm to psychotherapy, which sees neurotic behaviour as a coping mechanism for feelings that are being kept away from consciousness.

The process of psychotherapy helps the client to become aware of their unconscious feelings, facilitating the *Kyo* areas to integrate into the self. The client must do this themselves (with the support of the therapist) because they have a resistance to facing these painful areas. Psychotherapy is not about rescuing the client from their pain but helping them to be aware of it, face it and incorporate it. However, Shiatsu practitioners often say that they *diagnose* the client's *Kyo* and *Jitsu* meridians and *treat* their energetic imbalance. This medical language implies that it is the practitioner, not the client, who has the responsibility of discovering and dealing with the condition. The process is often mysterious to the client, who is relatively passive in the therapy.

In acute conditions, where a part of the body is temporarily isolated and protected while it heals, this medical mode of therapy seems effective. If the isolated area remains disconnected, it causes other parts of the body to be stressed after the need for protection has disappeared. In such situations where the client has no emotional investment in keeping the *Kyo* hidden, Shiatsu can effectively help the *Kyo* area to reconnect and the stressed *Jitsu* to relax even when the client is passive in the therapy.

But in deep seated conditions the *Kyo* area has a different character. For instance, in children with cerebral palsy, there are areas of the body that the brain has not learned to use. I don't find that touch alone is enough to teach the brain how to move these undeveloped areas. Another situation where passive manipulation and touch may not be enough is when the client has an active resistance to contacting the *Kyo*. For instance, in a person who suffered emotional trauma in childhood, part of the body may be held frozen because contacting it would open up the trauma and the client unconsciously resists approaching this pain. In these cases a different approach is needed.

Valuing the Jitsu

I once assisted a musician to run a gamelan workshop with a group of twelve quadriplegic men. Eleven of them were frustrated and angry that they couldn't control the simple movements needed to hit a gong. For them the workshop was an unpleasant and slightly traumatic experience. One of the men, called Peter was more disabled than most, but was radiantly delighted to be taking part and was enjoying the act of making music, whatever the difficulty. I asked him how come he was so happy, and he told his carer to wheel him out of the workshop to show me his studio. In this were displayed some of the most beautiful ceramic sculptures and pots I have seen. Peter had made them just using the first two toes of his right foot.

The point is that, by finding something he *could* do, Peter had found spirit and this gave him the confidence and the courage to try something that he couldn't do without frustration or shame. He was one of the people who showed me that, in working with long-term deep-seated conditions it is often best to work with those parts of the body that are already alive and embodied. The energy in these areas empowers the person and gives them motivation to explore the areas of incompetence.

Kyo and Jitsu in Movement Shiatsu

In the books on Zen Shiatsu, the word Kyo is translated as 'depleted energy' and Jitsu is translated as 'excess-energy'¹. However, the Chinese (or Kanji) characters give a deeper meaning to the words. The character for Kyo is :



The top part represents a tiger while the bottom half : represents a burial mound with two flags on it. Thus the character gives the picture of powerful energy hidden and buried.

The modern character for *Jitsu* in Japanese is 実. However, its original rendering in Chinese² is



This literally means "a house full of money", but in the context of Chinese culture, which saw a family house as a symbol of status, it means: "*The same on the surface as underneath*". In fact *Jitsu* means 'truth' in Japanese.

I find these re-translations helpful because, instead of seeing the *Kyo* as something empty, needing the support of the practitioner, one can see it as hidden energy that the client can bring to the surface. Instead of seeing *Jitsu* as needing dispersion, one can see it as an authentic resource to be used on the journey into the *Kyo*.

The *Jitsu* is often a place of tension because it is 'holding the fort'. But it is also the place where a person's will to live is embodied. In deeper conditions, it may be more effective to start from the *Jitsu* and use bodywork and movement to help the client to become conscious of the *Kyo*. They no longer feel a victim to an inaccessible part of themselves that needs treatment by the expertise of the therapist. Instead, they are using their own resources to journey into the underworld and bring their hidden energy to the surface.

Meridians and Development

If we focus on what is wrong with us and try to change, then we may actually inhibit the process of transformation because we are, in a sense, rejecting our present reality. On the other hand, if we focus on embodying and becoming aware of ourselves, then we can unblock the process of development and change happens naturally. The basic philosophy of Shiatsu seems to me to be perfectly consistent with an emphasis on natural development rather than change and my work with baby development taught me how to facilitate this innate process rather than try to manipulate the energy.

Babies develop both physical and mental abilities through movement. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen has shown³ how the primitive reflexes form the 'alphabet of movement' and has explained how each reflex action underlies a component of mental development. For example, the *rooting reflex*, stimulated by stroking the Stomach Meridian between ST4 and ST3 turns the mouth towards the touch. The evolutionary origin of this reflex is probably to help an infant latch onto the nipple. But the fact that this reflex is stimulated by touch gives the message that nourishment is *here*, not over there. There is no need for effort, the baby just needs to reach his mouth to receive the food.



The **rooting and tonic labyrinthine reflex** appearing together in a two week baby

Another example is the *Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex (TLR)* that tonifies the muscles on the side of the body facing downwards. The effect of this reflex is help the baby to use the ground as a support for pushing movements instead of relying on the effort of the spinal extensor muscles to lift the body. This gives a similar message to the rooting reflex, "*Support is available, you can receive it*".

In 1982, I was working with Kay Coombes⁴, a speech therapist who specialises in working with babies with cerebral palsy (CP). The brain damage associated with CP often means that some reflexes are missing. One day she was working with a three-month boy who was floppy through lack of the TLR. However, her focus that day was to stimulate the rooting reflex to help the baby feed. Surprisingly, I noticed that, as she did this, the Tonic Labyrinthine reflex was activated. Normally reflexes do not stimulate each other but her stimulation of one reflex was waking up a whole chain of movements. The pathway along which they appeared exactly followed the Stomach Meridian.

All the primitive reflexes along the Stomach Meridian, like the rooting reflex, the swallowing reflex and the TLR are related to how we receive external support (or nourishment). This is exactly the traditional description of Stomach Qi. I formed the hypothesis that the meridians were pathways along which babies learned to join up the primitive reflexes to develop capacities that correlate with the Qi-capacities of the meridians. I spent the next ten years exploring this idea and found that the location of all the traditional organ meridians could be explained in this way.

This was exciting to me because it fitted into the accepted neurological theories of development. In the first few years of life, a child is developing models of the body in the cerebral cortex called the sensory and motor homunculi⁵.

	<p>Motor and Sensory Homunculi</p> <p><i>The motor and sensory homunculi are areas of the cerebral cortex in which a map of the body is developed.</i></p> <p><i>Consciousness and control of the body is mediated through these maps. So if the map is numbed or incomplete we are not aware of and cannot consciously move the uncharted part of the body.</i></p> <p><i>In reverse, if a limb is amputated, the person often still feels the limb because their consciousness is of the map rather directly of the body.</i></p> <p><i>In a sense, the homunculi maps are more real to us than the actual tissues they represent.</i></p>
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By 'watching' the reflex movements, the motor homunculus learns which muscles to use in order to perform basic movements. However, it is not understood how these primitive movements are joined up to create whole body actions. My idea was that the meridians showed the pathways along which we learn to move and that they might be initially embodied in the innate wiring of the brain. It is as if we are provided (by evolution) with a wire-frame meridian-model of how to join up primitive movement that needs to be filled in and coloured by experience.

Early trauma may block off areas of these homunculus maps to avoid the pain or brain damage may inhibit the reflex movements that fill in the details of the homunculi. In both cases, the cortical map is incomplete so touch alone cannot create it from scratch. Movement Shiatsu uses guided movement as well as touch to help a client explore blank areas of their internal maps. This makes the work more like education than treatment and the involvement of the client in this exploration process empowers them and helps them to overcome the difficulty of reaching into a chronically Kyo area.

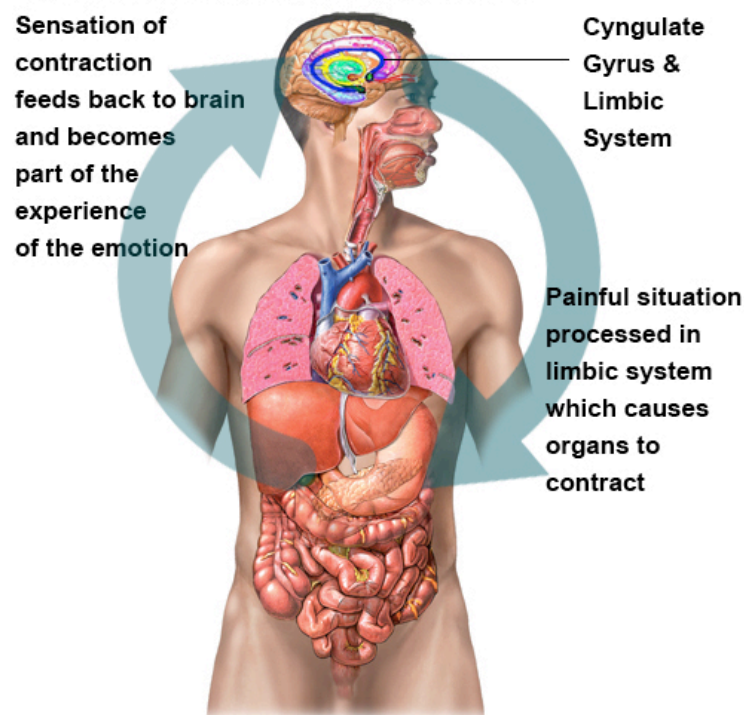
Working with Emotional Trauma

In this explanation of meridians, the Yang meridians map the chain of muscles that produce whole body actions such as rolling or crawling. The movements are building the so-called Motor Homunculus in the cortex of the brain and develop our conscious control of action.

The path of the Yin meridians on the other hand seem to be more related to building a sensory map of the body, the Sensory Homunculus. This sensory map is especially useful in dealing with deep seated emotional trauma.

Recent research into emotional pain⁶ shows that there is a definite physical component to a feeling. Emotions are related to activity in the limbic system and part of the subjective feeling of the emotion is created by organ contraction stimulated by the cingulate gyrus.

The Sensation of Emotion



So an emotion has two parts,

- 1) its story: the situation that triggered the emotion
- 2) its sensation: the physical contraction of muscles and organs underlying the feeling.

Severe emotional pain can be so intense that we cut off from the sensation, numbing the conscious feeling and creating a blank area in the sensory map of the body. But the organic contraction is still happening and feeding back subconscious emotional discomfort to the limbic system. Subjectively, we feel uncomfortable but can't make sense of it. The result is that we project that discomfort onto our current relationships, being hurt or angry or feeling needy for no real reason. In this way we can view the emotional pain as unconsciously 'stored' in the tissues.

The movements associated with the development of the *Yin* meridians are more internal than those of the *Yang* meridians and help a person to become aware of their internal organs and soft tissues. These are exactly the areas of the body where emotional pain is stored and learning to move these internal tissues helps to bring the sensation of the emotion into consciousness. The *sensation* of an emotion is less traumatic than the story that produced it, so the resistance to entering the *Kyo* area is not so strong.

A personal example illustrates this well: I was seven years old when my parents decided to send me away from home to a boarding school. I hated the competitive and hostile environment and felt I would rather die than be separated from my parents. I felt desperate for warmth and loving acceptance, but soon buried that feeling in order to survive. However, that neediness was still in my body and created severe problems in my relationships as an adult.

When I started exploring the sensations of emotions I found that the fascia between my stomach and the diaphragm was too tight and was pulling on my oesophagus. The sensation produced the same feeling as my emotional neediness. Using the developmental movements associated with the Spleen and the Lung meridians, helped me to consciously move the stomach and the connective tissue around it, giving more space to the feeling. Not only did this allow me to face and own the feeling but, over time, the fascia stretched and relaxed and the buried emotion simply disappeared.

I find this work provides a powerful resource for dealing with emotional problems and I hope I share that insight with my clients. The focus on sensation rather than story gives people a practical method of taking charge of themselves and integrating the *Kyo*.

Touch provides the focus for awareness. Movement provides a way of exploring and taking responsibility for oneself. Meridians provide the archetypal pathways for developing movement. This is Movement Shiatsu in a nutshell.

Bill Palmer is leading a postgraduate programme in 2014 whose focus will be to explore how to work in the way described in this article. See www.seed.org/postgrad for more details.

¹ *Zen Shiatsu* - Shizuto Masunaga.

² *Chinese Characters* - Dr L Wieger S.J - Dover Language Books

³ *Sensing, Feeling and Action* - Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen 1994

⁴ *F.O.T.T. (Facial-Oral Tract Therapy)* - Kay Coombes

⁵ *Cortical Homunculi* : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortical_homunculus

⁶ *Why words are as painful as sticks and stones* New Scientist 4/12/12: [Lisa Raffensperger](#)