

## **Pressure and rhythm - strengthening the psychophysical core (Dr. Eduard Tripp)**

A substantial characteristic of shiatsu is the continuous perpendicular pressure. If there are complaints and diseases,<sup>1</sup> it is important to bring the client into a state of resting and relaxation. The basis for this is to get the nervous system used to ongoing and stable stimulation. The reaction to the stimulation becomes less through continuous pressure and can even disappear. Rapidly increasing and decreasing pressure activate the organism. Consistent pressure promotes calming down and relaxation, a deeper, slower breathing pattern and a decrease of blood pressure and heart frequency.

Especially in the case of severe diseases, patients should find rest and relaxation, so that healing can happen. In these cases it is not enough, as Fujisaki & Fujisaki emphasize, to only treat tsubos; rather, the state of being relaxed should be the target of the treatment. On the other hand, to restrict oneself to the treatment-principle of continuous pressure would, as will be discussed, just bring unnecessary limitations.

### **Touch**

We touch people not only in their complete form of body, soul and mind, but also in the wholeness of their experiences. The first experience of being human happens through the skin. Of all the senses of an embryo, the sense of touch awakens first; already in the eighth month of pregnancy we start getting an image of who we are. We rub our skin on the inside of the uterus, play with the umbilical cord and touch our body.

We have our first experiences of being touched by fellow human beings as infants and small children. Especially in the first year of our life, when our ability to move is still very limited and we can't express ourselves through language, the physical touch, the tactile contact, is the most important reference point from which we experience the world and our fellow human beings.

Touch promotes our self-image and the sensation of ourselves. The construction of the image we have of ourselves has a lot to do with our basic experience of relationship as a young child. What has the biggest imprint is the quality of this relationship, which expresses and unfolds

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<sup>1</sup> The article quoted here by Nobuyuki Fujisaki and Masami Fujisaki (The Three Principles of Shiatsu Therapy and its Effects, [www.shiatsu-austria.at](http://www.shiatsu-austria.at)) refers to Japan, where Shiatsu is integrated into the health sector, as opposed to the law in other countries.

mainly through touch. If you were carried well as a child, it will be easier to have a strong relationship with yourself throughout life.



Through the shiatsu treatment people can re-connect with these early and very basic experiences. This always has something to do with the early mother-child relationship.<sup>2</sup> The main characteristics of this relationship include skin and body contact, vibration, rhythm, tension and relaxation, body posture, temperature and tone of voice. We dive into this early perception and

communication world, which Rene Spitz called the coenaesthetic world.

### **Biological rhythms**

Chrono-biology explains the idea that the human body functions rhythmically and is controlled by time. This has gradually been incorporated into western medicine. In a healthy organism these different rhythms behave like the musicians in an orchestra, listening and paying attention to each other. The more often the vital rhythms of the body adapt to harmonious circumstances, the healthier a person is. Whatever goes against this natural composition of rhythms has the potential to create disease, e.g. travelling by airplane through several time zones or working at night.

### **Rhythm in the early mother-child relationship**

During the early, non-verbal dialogue between mother and child, rhythm is a decisive element. When still in the womb, the baby is a part of many rhythmical life-procedures of the mother, which have an imprint on its prenatal life. In the beginning of its life, the newborn is without a

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<sup>2</sup> The fundament that is laid in the early mother child relationship will always have an effect in us, as every deep experience does. But at the same time it will be strengthened, modified and/or changed through the experiences during the course of our life.



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stable rhythm of its own. Even its heartbeat, which is aligned with the circulation of the mother before birth, is unstable after birth and must find its own regularity. If the mother lays the newborn on her chest after the birth, the heartbeat stabilizes much faster. The known rhythm, which is revived externally in this way, helps to regulate the heartbeat of the infant.

Empathetic and sensitive rhythm gives security and has a calming effect. Children can be calmed down through rocking. Singing and speaking rhythmically calms them down as well - an experience, which is utilized in hypnosis, and trance as well. Rhythmic touch and pressure have soothing potential in them in the same way. The vital functions of the organism are supported, strengthened and stabilized. A good point of reference for such a rhythm could be the calm and relaxed breath of the client.

Rhythm gives us something to hold on to. This becomes clear when we look at the bizarre way compulsive people rely on rhythmic procedures. They structure their days and their whole lives using repetitive and, therefore, reliable actions based on specific times they see as appropriate. The bigger the distress, the more threatening the chaos and the loss of control over their own life becomes. The compulsive and ritualized actions grow stronger and more important for the sake of survival.

### **Strengthening the psychophysical core with Shiatsu**

Deep-psychological theory presumes, in its understanding of our development, that we have an early-child core, in which the body and the psychological/mental aspect are not yet separated. In the beginning of its life the infant experiences the world mainly physically. Physical stimulations and experiences form the basis for further development, including psychological and mental progress. This early field of experience can be compared to the foundation of a house. It is what is primarily responsible for how the floors that lay on top of it can be built and furnished. A strong and stable foundation provides a good platform for dealing with the challenges of life, which is full of conflict. A weak foundation leads to instability and might break down if it is stressed.

There are three qualities, which can strengthen this early-child core: warmth, rhythm and continuity.<sup>3</sup> According to Freud's depth psychology tradition, these form the basis for further development, which includes oral, anal and Oedipal processes. If we leave behind the specific language in the framework of depth psychology, we can see these three qualities as a base for the ability for

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<sup>3</sup> This, as well as the following comment about the depth psychology view-point on the early mother-child relationship, is mainly based on the therapeutic approach of G. Bartl (1984, 1989). He commented on the meaning of warmth, rhythm and continuity as a necessary basis for later psychological development.

- Dedication and trust
- Control and achievement
- Stable and reliable relationships



Warmth, rhythm and continuity are used in psychotherapeutic treatments to strengthen the ability to solve problems and to deal with conflicts in a mature way. Also, the attentive touch and encounter, which are central aspects of shiatsu, give warmth, rhythm and continuity in a very direct and impressive way. For this it is a prerequisite that the

practitioner has a basic understanding of these qualities in him/herself and has dealt with them through intensive and professional experience.

### **Conveying trust and warmth through rhythm**

It is the experience of psychotherapy, that warmth (meaning: caring, valuing, respecting and trusting oneself and the world) can only be experienced directly to a small degree. The basic “rule” is that the more a person has developed trust in the world, the more this person is capable of accepting care and love. If someone mostly experiences insecurity and being hurt, instead of safety and security, they will develop an attitude of distrust. They will easily perceive possible betrayal behind friendliness and bad intentions behind care. They will be more concerned with creating positive experiences for themselves than believing that someone might, in contradiction to their past, actually meet them with friendliness and good intentions, without any ulterior motives. If they can overcome their initial reserve, it is possible for the offender-victim relationship to turn around and play out in a different way. They may take advantage of the goodness, naivety, stupidity or weakness of the other.

In the case of such a life-attitude, valuing and respecting others can only be strengthened by implementing rhythm and trust improving procedures. The fox in Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s book “The Little Prince” explains these connections very nicely:

*"If you want a friend, then tame me. (...) You must be very patient. First you sit down in the grass a little ways from me. I will notice you and look at you from the corner of my eye and you will say nothing. Language is the source of misunderstanding. But every day you will be able to sit a little closer. (...) It would have been better if you had come back at the same hour. If, for example, you come at four o'clock in the afternoon, I can start being happy at three o'clock. At four I will already get upset and nervous; I will experience how expensive happiness is. But if you come at any time, I can never know when my heart shall be ready to greet you. (...) One must observe the proper rites. (...) That is what makes one day different from the other, one hour from the other."*

This is how the fox explained to the prince why he should tame him:

*"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat. (...)"*

*One only understands the things that one tames. Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things already made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me!"*

A bit later the little prince met the roses.

*"You are not at all like my rose," he said. "As yet you are nothing. No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are like my fox when I first knew him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world."*

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