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## **When Shiatsu Isn't Fun Anymore. About Difficulties In The Shiatsu Profession (Wilfried Rappenecker)**

Next to the doubtless positive effects, which Shiatsu has on the therapist himself, the possible negative effects for the practitioner have often not been taken seriously enough. The Shiatsu practice, though stimulating developing processes that bring positive changes, can also bring difficulties. That is why the same thing goes for Shiatsu as for any other intensive and holistic work with human beings (for example teaching, psychotherapy, or other kinds of bodywork): unwished for reactions on the therapist are possible and it is important to deal with that fact.

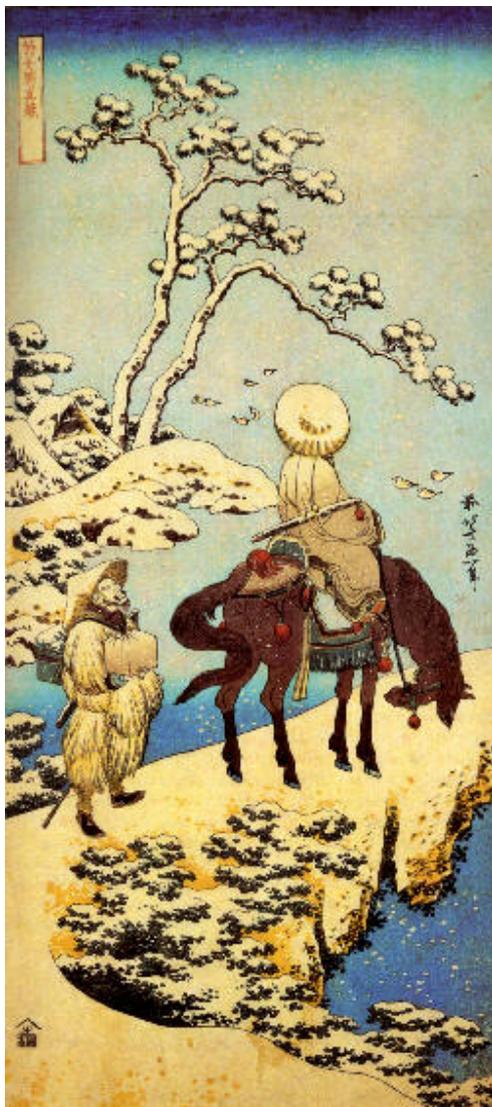
One of the reasons why Shiatsu didn't just stay an esoteric boom of the 70's, but has become a broad movement in Europe within the last 25 years, is that it has the capacity to trigger amazing changes in the practitioner. The experience of calmness, discovering of one's center, and trusting in one's own body and perception all disclose personal developments that often are of great meaning to the person they are happening to. I think that an important factor in this effect is that the releasing of energetic blockages in the client can, like a resonance, have the effect of releasing blockages in the practitioner. This "being released" after giving Shiatsu is experienced as being pleasant and liberating.

However, many Shiatsu therapists also experience problems. Oftentimes, these problems come after ending the Shiatsu training, when the practitioner starts giving many treatments in the course of a single day. After the positive, sometimes euphoric experiences in the first contacts with Shiatsu, for many this may be inexplicable. They might look for the mistake within themselves, because Shiatsu, up until then, had seemed to be a guarantee for a positive development of health and personality. The same might happen to therapists who after years of practice notice, that "it can not go on like this." The fact that such experiences are discussed so little in public, gives me the impression that these difficulties are looked at as something that actually shouldn't be happening.

Certainly such troubles always also root in the personal life situation and development of the person concerned. Still, a substantial part is triggered through the work with Shiatsu; the signs are too obvious. Why, after all, should it be different for Shiatsu therapists than, for example, psychotherapists, teachers, or the practitioners of other kinds of body therapy? In those professions, negative effects are well known, and talked about in professional journals.

I do not want to, by any means, say that Shiatsu is dangerous for the practitioner (at least no more dangerous than other professions or life itself). It seems much more that not everybody

can deal optimally with the processes that are triggered through Shiatsu. Nobody is being helped by avoiding this topic. Only the open conversation about what it is that is happening with the Shiatsu therapist enables us to learn. It should be our goal to already talk about possible difficulties during a shiatsu training, and to show ways in which these difficulties can be avoided or kept as small as possible. In such a conscious space, the positive effects of Shiatsu could develop more surely and safely.



### Signs

The first signs that the Shiatsu practice can have negative effects on the practitioner could be unexplainable, unpleasant states in the hours after a Shiatsu treatment. A defined tiredness, restlessness, euphoria, feeling confused, even concrete physical symptoms (sometimes the same as the client whom one has treated), and other symptoms can be examples of this. Mostly they lessen within one hour (maximum within a few), but they are concrete signs that our system has difficulties in dealing with the effects of Shiatsu, or of our being practitioners of it.

A strong, lasting tiredness or an unknown exhaustion can seem threatening to the people effected. In other fields one talks about a “burn out syndrome.” The fast tiring can be accompanied by dizziness, buzzing in the ears, heat, feelings of pressure in the head, stomach problems, sleeping disorders, or psychological signs like irritability, hyperactivity (living only for working), the feeling of being completely overloaded and never having enough time, hidden depressions combined with fears, or the loss of motivation to even keep giving Shiatsu etc. Such a state can force one to reduce one’s work, or to completely stop temporarily with giving treatments and/ or teaching.

Defined life crises and physical illnesses of different kinds are the heaviest (and rarest) effects. They show that the things happening are not just to be interpreted as a result of “negative energies” penetrating from the outside, but are expressions of pre-



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existing personal development issues and life crises that can be triggered and amplified also through Shiatsu.

### **What is Happening Here?**

For sure, it is not one clearly definable happening which calls for all of these completely different complaints. Far from understanding the whole thing, I would still like to describe different mechanisms, which I think can be involved in triggering such problems. I know that this list is based on personal experience in big parts, and yet, at the same time, out of a lack of experience, must be incomplete.

First, I would like to go back to the changes in the practitioner after a Shiatsu treatment, that were mentioned above. They are, to a large degree, results of the changes that happen in the client. In Shiatsu, we touch concrete energetic patterns, which, as a result of our touch, have a tendency to change more or less. This is where the actual effect of Shiatsu is based. With every touch and every change, specific vibrational patterns are sent out that (similar to sound or light waves) spread out in the room and can be perceived as energetic phenomena by a schooled observer. This is one of the bases of energetic perception.

With their spreading out, the vibrational patterns released in the client also penetrate the person giving the treatment, and trigger reactions there. What kind of reactions these are depends on the kind of patterns that are sent off and "flood" the practitioner. On the other hand, the reactions to this are dependent on the energetic patterns and blockages already existing in the practitioner. From my point of view, there are no "negative or harmful energies." Nevertheless, there are vibrational patterns with which I, given my nature, may have difficulties in dealing with.

The strength of the reaction also depends on the way I practice Shiatsu. The more precisely I know what I am doing in Shiatsu, and the more focused and clear I am, the less I allow the patterns of the client to influence me. Through the way I approach the client, I can minimize their influence on me.

So it might be that a therapist, after, or already during, the treatment of a client with stomach pains, gets the same pain because he is taking in the according vibration patterns but can not let them flow through him, or can not keep them outside of himself in a relaxed manner. He holds on to them because he himself has blockages in the area of the stomach energy (in the broadest sense) which, under other circumstances, might have shown up completely differently, but not as stomach pain.

To say it in other words, the "stomach pattern" of the client in this example triggers resonance in the area of the stomach energy of the practitioner. The effects of this do not have to be



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experienced negatively at all. Frequently, they are quite liberating. Whether there is a feeling of unpleasantness or freedom, it is the same mechanism that is at the root. As mentioned above, complaints disappear (as also with feelings of positive change) after treatments within a relatively short amount of time. However, if a blockage pattern in a practitioner is provoked over and over again without coming to a workable solution (in whatever way), it can lead to more permanent problems.

Because the different energetic qualities exist everywhere in the human, and are in vivid communication with each other, such a "stomach pattern" does not have to show as a stomach problem in the practitioner at all. It can have consequences in completely different areas or elements according to the individual thematic and energetic dynamics of the person concerned. A therapist may always have complaints in the same body-part after a treatment, even if he works in completely different areas with his clients.

### **Letting Go - Not Only Advantages**

Many (mostly temporary) physical or spiritual complaints or symptoms after Shiatsu treatments can be explained through such a mechanism as we've been discussing. However, another mechanism seems of even greater importance to me.

As explained above already, the basic effectiveness of Shiatsu is the releasing of energetic blockages through touch. The state of "being released" is often experienced as pleasant or even euphoric. We have to be clear that with increasing number of treatments and increasing solutions, unnoticed deep changes happen in the practitioner. This is often one of the reasons for practicing Shiatsu.

No human is completely released and without blockages. Even if such blockages (as long as they are conscious) are often experienced as negative, painful, or unwanted, they are of great importance for our own balance. In one way, one can say that in the same amount as they restrict our development, they also give us strength and stability. Our (unconscious) control over endangering, frightening aspects of our existence can be softened unnoticed as a consequence of the "Shiatsu process". Through loosing protection blockages, seemingly solid energetic (that means physical and emotional) patterns get into movement. Old, long ticked off problems can show up again and give us a hard time.

### **Rising Liver Yang**

What is also important: the control of energetic emotional movement in the human happens through the liver energy. The longer and stronger control must happen, the more liver energy is

bound, which creates an energetic over-accumulation or pressure. With the wanted or unwanted loss of control - for example, through the described releasing of blockages in the Shiatsu practice - this wood energy becomes free.



Through the long time of holding on to it, the energy has practically become compressed and hot (yang). That is why it has a defined tendency to move upwards and affect the upper part of the body. Typical liver/ gall-bladder symptoms like, for example, restlessness, irritability, impatience, stomach/ digestive disorders, heat, feeling of pressure in the upper body parts, or sleeping disorders can be expressions of the upward rushing ki generated through such a release process. In extreme cases this can even lead to a loss of jing (vital essence) with all the symptoms of a yin deficiency and a so-called "false heat" of the kidneys and other energetic organs.

The control of emotional energetic movement through wood is a phenomenon that almost all the people in our societies have in different degrees. In principle, clients that have a strong pressure in the wood element, and receive a Shiatsu treatment that is strongly directed towards a fast release, can have negative effects in this manner. Shiatsu practitioners are, depending on the extent of their practice, always confronted with these forces, and are influenced by them. That is why they should be aware of this process, and learn to deal with it in a harmonious and practical way.

Letting old patterns go is good. Obviously, Shiatsu can be, on the path described, a trigger for welcomed personal development processes. Through my own experience I understood that it is not enough to just let go of old patterns out of the desire for developing perception and sensibility. There is a critical phase in which our energetic system has not developed an alternative for the old structures. In this situation, difficulties can arise.

That is why a growing stability in the energetic center must counteract within the weakening centrifugal movement of released liver ki. This is even more important, because the normal person in western society has a rather weak center. Within such an energetic system, the tendency is predominating to give away energy and strength to the environment instead of accumulating it in his center and



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acting from there. This is also valid for Shiatsu therapists! Only a determined energetic training and rising awareness can counteract this.

### **Inner Beliefs**

Being clear and aware are two important mental qualities that enable us to deal with the risks of the Shiatsu profession in a wake manner and without fear. To know what is happening in a Shiatsu treatment on an energetic level and how this can effect me as a practitioner, will help avoid many possible problems. Relaxed perception and the ability to work with energetic structures, are normally rooted in a clear and relaxed hara. Such a state makes it easier for us to act with awareness out of the center of our existence and to not hold on to foreign patterns. This is why this state is the best protection.

The following influences are able to create states of unclarity and to draw energy from our systems. We create them ourselves through our imaginations and our convictions. These include inner attitudes of the therapist towards his work, like, for example, the (often unconscious) imagination of having to help the client, or the conviction of never being good enough. The former has been made a topic in the eighties in the health care systems under the name "helping syndrome." It pays to give some regard to literature which deals with this. The conviction of not being good enough (and because of this having to try especially hard) can, in a good Shiatsu training, be detected as nonsense. Crucial to this, is the factor of security, which can only be achieved by lots and lots of experience.

It also makes us tired if we allow our clients to use us for their needs. We especially let them do this when we ourselves (mostly unconsciously) have needs towards them, which, at the same time, are often a big part of the reason why we decided to learn Shiatsu in the first place. That is why it is of importance for every Shiatsu therapist to recognize what his motivation is for giving Shiatsu, and to see if (and how) the way he feels is dependent on the reactions of his clients.

Such dependences let the balance of given and taken energy to become negative. In this state, we are willing to give away ki, and are willing to help through weakening ourselves. In a way, we have turned off our inner magnet, which, as compensation, attracts energy and stores it in the center.

Another misunderstanding, which weakens us, seems to occur when we make mental and spiritual development our only goal, and, over this, neglect our physical body. Our body with all its physical and energetic structures is an important counterbalance and foundation to mental/ spiritual processes. That is why we should value the body highly, and keep it strong and elastic through training (see below).



### What One Can Do

There is a whole series of possibilities and practices with the help of which we can experience the positive effects of the Shiatsu practice on our life, safely and without too big problems (But not completely safe, because life is not safe, and not without any problems because we need them to grow). All the influences we are exposed to through Shiatsu, and all the other experiences in our daily life, can always create situations that require our whole clarity and alertness (and maybe also the support of friends) to be able to deal with them.

The following recommendations are mostly rooted in my own practice, and that is why they are not necessarily directly usable. Every interested person is asked to find the right ways for themselves. On the other hand, these recommendations are not only valid for Shiatsu therapists, but also for other therapeutic professions and even ordinary people.

### Clear Decision

If I recognize negative reactions in myself after a treatment (for example, complaints like headache, extreme emotional moods, and similar things), the following procedure has proven itself helpful for me:

For one, I become clear with myself that something is evolving within me that hasn't been there before. This first step of becoming conscious is very important.

Then, I decide that this whatever is evolving in me does not belong to me, and that I will open the way for it to leave me. This can happen, for example, through my making myself

wide and transparent, so that whatever is held in me can find the way out. This second step of the decision is also quite important.

If the state stays for longer (which happens sometimes), I look at it as also being connected to my own thematic problems, and then deal with it as such.



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Because these type of exercises that make us more transparent (and, through this, minimize the “holding on to” of energetic patterns that flood us) work so well, and are so simple, they have become important for me. Also important, are exercises that make our energetic center (our ki magnet) conscious and strengthened (see below).

It is helpful to make a clear and light “cut” before and after every treatment. Before the treatment, this indicates that I am determined to not let my own needs and problems flow into the treatment. The cut afterwards means that this treatment is over now, and my client will manage his situation by himself now. One can intensify such cuts through symbols like mantras and short meditations before and after the treatment. Sometimes it is suggested to shake out ones hands, or to wash them with cold water and sea salt (don't dry them off) after the treatment.

Another valuable support for our energetic system can be mental, or meditative exercises which I can use to protect myself. For instance, I can imagine that a balloon of light surrounding me (or another special state of the energetic body) hinders unwanted forces from coming in. I believe, though, that it is important not to get into a permanent defensive state towards so-called negative energies. That would be unhealthy.

For some practitioners, homeopathic remedies or Bach flower remedies are important. As important as such remedies, however, is the clear and light decision of the practitioner to not let himself be influenced in a negative way. And in this way, clear distance towards the patient is not a weakness, but a strength in a compassionate therapist.

For people that feel influenced strongly (more or less), or even moved deeply, after a treatment, it is important to have enough time, quietness, and space for themselves at that time. A longer walk (especially when one feels very restless and unclear) or time for a calm cup of tea (if one feels wiped out, or like just laying down) can be very helpful.

Meditation at the beginning or the end of the day can become the most important protection, because meditation offers the possibility to let everything become lighter again and more easy to oversee. Many times, it is exactly the in-clarities and confusions that make us vulnerable. A good meditation teacher will additionally be a valuable guide and support in the crises which many Shiatsu therapists go through due to their accelerated development.

#### Interest in Our Own Body and Ourselves

Many Shiatsu practitioners neglect their body badly in their interest in esoteric phenomena. However, a weak body makes us more vulnerable to the influences described above. In my opinion, every practitioner of Shiatsu should do at least one form of training that enables them to



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get to know their energetic center and to cultivate it and structure it. This increases the energetic bond of their system.

It is helpful to have a regular time every day when one (even if it is only for 20 minutes) does such a training. With the traditional eastern disciplines like, for example, martial arts, Yoga, and Qi Gong, there is a whole range of possibilities.

In the same way, keeping a strong, healthy, and upright physical body should be on the top of the priority list of the activities of a Shiatsu therapist. Martial arts, active sports, dancing (contact improvisation etc.), and other body exercises are all good. I recommend some clients to also do some moderate muscle training to regain the memory of how good an active body feels. Pilates is a training that serves very well in this sense and is now available in many cities. For sure there are many other possibilities, and every Shiatsu practitioner needs to find the optimal thing for himself. Jogging can be very helpful; but by itself, it is mostly too one-sided. For a balanced and complete Hatha Yoga training, an experienced teacher, who can also advise in difficult situations, seems important to me.

Important support can also come from techniques that channel the ki, which has started to move, and avoid that it blocks up again (thus causing problems). To this I count every method (also therapies) in which the practitioner can express his current situation in a physical, creative, and intuitive way. (For example, dancing, intuitive movement like in contact improvisation or dance therapy, singing, psychodrama, Katsugen according to Kishi, and others)

### **Recognizing One's Own Borders**

In order to find the right ways for oneself, it is important to take a large amount of self-responsibility. We won't become stronger unless we are very interested in it. No one can protect us from the influences described except ourselves. This goes with developing an interest in discovering ourselves and our real needs... to accept these needs, and (oftentimes against the general opinion) live according to them.

We have to understand, that as Shiatsu practitioners, we often have become more vulnerable and sensitive than so-called "normal people." It might be hard to give up life habits that are dear but weakening to us; however, exactly that may be necessary when we learn to see what we really need, and what takes away our liveliness in respect to what makes us alive today.

It is especially important (and difficult) for many to accept their own borders. Serious problems often evolve in those therapists who have ignored their tiredness over years, and find themselves, next to the intense Shiatsu practice, in a strength-robbing life situation. It can be quite difficult to find the right measure of work and strain, especially if one has idols or ideals

that one consciously or unconsciously follows. It is helpful to recognize which circumstances in my Shiatsu practice are tiring and straining and to change these circumstances consequently.

In my opinion people starting with the Shiatsu profession should keep the number of treatments they give down to a number where they still feel comfortable. For different practitioners this number may vary immense. It would be ideal if it was not material pressure, but increasing experience and security that would be the reason for giving more treatments. The simple question of whether one should work independently, or become employed in a practice, or at a hospital might become important in time.



I feel that the process of learning how we can use our own energetic system in an economical way in a treatment situation, is an essential basic for having more strength and an improving Shiatsu practice.

### **Accepting Support**

As in life in general, also in the practice of Shiatsu crises cannot be avoided. What matters is dealing with them openly and creatively. Pessimism, self-pity, and/or sacrificing oneself for others are misplaced. Crises (physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual ones), and are expressions of growth.



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Developmental steps that are due, almost as a rule, happen in a crisis manner. Every crisis has a climax, but also strikes with all its force towards a solution. That is why everyone that gives Shiatsu should be ready to invest time and money in treatments for themselves. That will help practitioners to grow with the crises, instead of stagnating in them. This can be Shiatsu, but also other forms of bodywork can be valuable.<sup>1</sup>

Many Shiatsu practitioners also acquire (especially in the first years of their practice) a confusing wealth of energetic experiences, which go in many different directions. Regular Shiatsu treatments by an experienced therapist offer the perspective to understand this better. This helps us to recognize our own life theme behind the symptoms that might cause us trouble. It takes away the fear, and makes it easier to make the right decisions.

For some processes, which are triggered through Shiatsu, might be optimally dealt with in psychotherapy. Such a therapy does not support self-pity. Rather, it is a possibility to get over obstacles, thus leading to more understanding and responsibility for oneself.

Supervision through an experienced Shiatsu therapist or teacher are a good possibility to deeper understand the situations in the clinic, with "difficult," strength-robbing clients, and to find ways for change. In supervisions, we can, for example, learn where we give the client power over us, because we have unconscious wishes towards them. Different Shiatsu schools offer supervisions (single or in groups). Shiatsu therapists should not be hesitant to make use of such offers.

Accepting help and support from experienced people is not a sign of weakness and incapability. It means that the person concerned understands their own development in Shiatsu as a process with ups and downs. We might lose the overview over our situation in this process. Then people on the outside can see more clearly where we stand, and what is to be done. Through giving them insight into our situation, we give ourselves the possibility to get through it with less loss, more health, and with improved Shiatsu too.

All problems a person will meet in the course of his Shiatsu activity are temporary manifestations. They are healing crises (as with most sickness), that have a beginning, a climax, and a solution. What one should avoid is to get stuck. The state after a crisis is going to be different in essential points from the state before the crisis. This will mean more freedom, more life, more understanding, and more joy.

Translation: Z.B & J.S.



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