

Shiatsu as Still Qi Gong – the Inner Technique of Expansion

by Wilfried Rappenecker

In the practice of Shiatsu, the Inner Technique of Expansion represents a refined Still Qi Gong. It is a technique that can be used for selected individual joints and those areas of the practitioner's body where she feels tense or blocked. Of particular value is the practice of expanding the whole body; expansion here also means to be both anchored in the ground and upright at the same time. With this technique, the quality of the touch becomes more refined, and working with energetic spaces is greatly facilitated.

When applying Inner Techniques the practitioner, while performing a certain Shiatsu technique, uses particular ideas or images, which are in contrast with the purely physical execution of the technique. In this way a *contradiction* arises within the practitioner *to which her body knows the solution*: the moment in which such an image is experienced as vivid and powerful, something opens within the body of the treating person – there will be more expansion and openness; the prerequisites for resonance.

Ideas which can be used with Inner Techniques may include the image that there is sufficient space beneath the touching thumb (Technique of the Free Field of Ki), or that the attention of the treating person expands from her own space into that of the client (Technique of Ki Projection). Further information can be found in the article 'Inner Techniques' which can be downloaded from <http://www.schule-fuer-shiatsu.de/shiatsu/veroeffentlichungen/englische-artikel.html> As described in this article, these images may also include the expansion of a particular joint or other areas of the practitioner's body.

Mindful attention within one's own body

Of all the Inner Techniques the Inner Technique of Expansion is, to me, the most important and far-reaching. In its application the Shiatsu practitioner works with mindful attention in her own body space; this distinguishes the technique from most other Inner Techniques where the attention is focussed on the client's body.

I discovered the Technique of Expansion during the early years of my Shiatsu practice when the base joints of my thumbs became painful when performing several Shiatsu treatments in a row. I realised that I tensed up, subtly yet noticeably, not only in these joints but also in the surrounding musculature and fascia, thus becoming narrow. The obvious thought was to counteract this state through the image of expansion in and around the joint. To my surprise this worked straight away: I could feel how the image of the joint space becoming wider relaxed this area; the pain subsided quickly and completely. The technique of expanding a painful joint is certainly very helpful in the professional practice of Shiatsu.

At the same time something else happened: My whole body relaxed, especially in the shoulder area, generating a sense of spaciousness. As with other Inner Techniques the touch became softer; clients felt less pain, even with deep contact. I still use this technique very often in my treatments simply because of these two effects.

The image of expansion, as described above, can refer not only to the thumb base joint but also to the thumb saddle joint and any other joint of hands and arms where tension is felt. The wrist joint deserves particular mention, as this is an area where many Shiatsu practitioners build up severe and persistent tension. Similarly, it can also be used for chronically tight muscles such as the thenar eminence, between the metacarpal bones or also around the elbow.

Effects on the Whole Body

By continuing to experiment with these techniques, one will find that by expanding one of those joints the entire arm will also expand as a reflex. This reaction is desirable and can be easily supported by mindful attention. It helps to imagine that the arm is growing out of the shoulder and that the shoulder extends into the upper arm. As a result the tension in the affected shoulder will decrease, the shoulder drops and is experienced as more open. The opposite side lets go as well, the diaphragm relaxes, and the contact with the floor is experienced as more intense, which is one of the foundations for good contact in Shiatsu. The expanding arm is relaxed and open, while at the same time having a distinct tone; thus the touch has a clear direction.

If the idea of the expanding of the arm has the thumb and the fingers as its starting point, then it is as if the practitioner would subtly gain distance between her and the area that is touched. This makes it easy to rise up straight and extend oneself upwards. Distance is very helpful in our work, because deep contact requires distance so that energetic movements can occur more easily.

It is thus possible, if desired, to build up considerable pressure on the touched point solely by expanding the shoulder, arm and hand. This shows that good deep contact, and also the physical pressure of the contact, is not generated exclusively by the sinking of the practitioner's body weight on to the client as the American Shiatsu teacher W Ohashi showed the generation of older Shiatsu teachers. The better alternative is expanding into the point to be touched as described here; if necessary, this can be assisted by the use of body weight. Expansion and body weight have very different effects; sometimes they complement each other perfectly.

From this perspective one should never attempt to establish contact purely through the use of passive body weight— ideally this should be used in conjunction with the treating person rising up and expanding her body.

'Leaning', as taught in some schools, should, by the same token, be first and foremost an attentive and active expanding. It should certainly not be a rather collapsing leaning in, resembling a tired labourer who needs a rest after a hard working day.

When 'leaning' through expansion the expansion extends beyond the arm and the shoulder; *the whole body reacts* and increases in both width and height. The technique of expanding the whole body evolves. It can be performed in any of the classical treatment positions, be it the low position (sitting on one's heels), the semi-low position (e.g. 'Aikido position' on the balls of the toes) or in the

high position (e.g. 'Samurai').

Sinking, Rising and Expanding

If the whole body expands in this way it is as if the practitioner were sinking into the floor while, paradoxically, at the same time pushing away from it in order to expand upwards. The Inner Technique of Expansion should thus really be called the Technique of Sinking, Rising and Expanding. All of these three movements are of fundamental importance and characterise a good treatment position in Shiatsu.

The three movements can be most clearly perceived in the high position, either by resting on both knees or with one foot placed on the floor. The practitioner sinks into the floor through the knee resting vertically on the ground; at the same time she straightens up, expanding upwards. Her body space rests between these two poles, which are tendentially moving away from each other; these movements cause the space to be the centre of the action, it becomes the connecting element between the two poles. The connection has to be lively and not be disrupted, for example by slumping in the area of the solar plexus or drawing back in the groin. Slumping or drawing back means to remove oneself from the contact with the client. Practising a lively connection is a form of Still Qi Gong.

A relaxed and present solar plexus as well as an active, slightly forward pushing groin secure the practitioner's body space. Contact is created from within this space. It is hard to overestimate the importance of being present in one's body space (more than just the Hara) which is, in my view, more important than a straight, expanding spine only, as promoted by some schools.

A position that is expanding in this way provides stability for the practitioner; a stability that is well grounded in the floor, thus providing the freedom for the shoulders and arms to expand and open up. Inner expansion is the prerequisite for entering into resonance with the energetic spaces of the client's body, for example when working with connections or with Ki projection.

Once the resonance with client's body space can be perceived, this automatically further increases expansion and presence in the treating person; it is as if the vividly perceived resonance allows the presence of the practitioner to truly flourish. Then it will also become intuitively perceptible which treatment position is required in order to touch with expansion. Finally, the quality of the contact when touching will also substantially change: it will become more open, less painful and will reach far deeper or further.

It requires persistent practice to become familiar with the Technique of Expansion. The exercise itself may seem quite easy, almost simplistic; nevertheless with years of practicing ever deeper experiences and insights become possible. Shiatsu treatments themselves represent a continuous opportunity for practice; opportunities that last for years.

Just as in Still Qi Gong the practicing person uses her own focussed and relaxed attention as a tool. Since she does this in a Shiatsu treatment, she immediately experiences the effect this has on the client.