

The Tiger Awakes – Physical exercises for Shiatsu practitioners

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Everyone seems to have a great longing to grow and to unfold their potential... their true nature. But the fear of this seems to be just as great as the longing. Human nature holds a lot of possibilities for both encouraging this growth, and also hindering it.

Obstacles and resistances, which we produce on emotional and mental levels with the goal of hindering growth, are always reflected in the body. Body workers know these "blockages" from their clients, clogged and hard regions, helpless regions without power etc. In Shiatsu, we regard this energetically. We differentiate between *kyo* and *jitsu* regions, where *ki* (a Japanese term, which one could translate as energy, breath, and joy of life) does not flow right.

Bodywork and body exercises can help one to become acquainted with the manifestations of our "resistances against the flow of life" on the physical level, and also to deal with these resistances more consciously. Not that we could become completely free from our fear and our resistance in this way... we simply learn to know ourselves better. Many of the blockages release rapidly or with time, and we experience new freedom (such experience feels good!) and can find new ways to deal with these things. Processes like this are not always easy, and often require courage. Bodywork and body exercises are an effective support for this personal growth.

For the same reason, they also represent a path to greater health.

The resistances and blockages just described are the actual causes of illness and being unhappy. If they begin to dissolve, that does not mean that we will be free from suffering. Some problems only become obvious (or visible) when *ki* begins to flow again. The freer flow, however, will gradually lead to more understanding, to more strength, and (in the short or medium term) to more health.

Now, it must be said here, that bodywork can only be a support on this path (even if a strong support). The actual work, each person must (and can) do by himself. That means taking over responsibility for one's own life... for decisions, acts, the state of one's body and one's health. Body exercises can be of great importance here. To understand one's own life and one's own body deeper through such exercises can become a true treasure chest for every human being.

For body-therapists, it is particularly important to go this way. Because, first and foremost, it requires good health to work with other humans in a healing way. It requires strength. Beyond that, you can be more of help for your clients on their path as you consciously go on your own path and gradually gain health. Having worked through some of these developments and issues, experienced joy and well-being, and overcome difficult and painful times as well, you will understand your client's situation much better.

Bodywork does not only mean to

work with the body of a client. It also means that the giver uses his body as tool. In Shiatsu, it *is* the tool absolutely. Frequently the thumb is regarded as the most important instrument in Shiatsu. That is, however, a misunderstanding. The thumbs (and/or the hands) are actually relatively insignificant. What counts, is the whole body of the treating person... not only that the body is used as a work instrument. Even more important, is the fact that touch can only be "empty" (which means "really effective") if the whole body of the practitioner is working with the client. The practitioner doesn't use his body; he is part of the body, which is working here. And sometimes, he only watches.

Furthermore, in bodywork our body is the instrument of *understanding* (not the head or the intelligence, although we do need those, too, to understand). We can only experience what happens in the body of the client and what the client experiences, with, and in, our own body. Energetic reactions in the client during our work (on a physical, mental, as well as emotional level) release resonances in us as practitioners. That is how we understand as body-workers. We can only understand within ourselves, through resonance in our own body. Body exercises let us get to know our body, and help us to understand like this.

Finally, body exercises are a first-class training to understand energy and deal consciously with our own. If we become acquainted with the different areas within us, the different conditions of aliveness, we start to understand what many teachers meant when speaking of "energy," *Ki* or *Qi*. And, we begin to understand how we can use our bare hands to work with this energy.

Masunaga, the founder of "Zen Shiatsu," wrote the book *Zen Imagery Exercises* in the last years of his life (published in English by Japan Publications). This is a book for all people who have interest in their body and in its well-being.

The body exercises presented in this book, promote effective health and well-being if regularly implemented. In addition, they can intervene effectively in the dynamics of different complaints and illnesses, and by doing so, relieve or lessen the suffering. If we wish to apply them in this way successfully, it can be important to select the correct exercises with the support and guidance of an experienced therapist.

Zen Imagery Exercises is therefore offered to all therapists working with Shiatsu, or other methods of bodywork, to use as a source of exercise recommendations for their clients in support of the treatments. Masunaga gives an abundance of notes for the purposeful employment of the described exercises. In order to be able to recommend them, one must first practice these exercises for oneself.

From the perspective of a body-worker, I see the wealth of benefits that are opened for all humans who become familiar with such exercises. It does not play a significant role whether or not they take advantage of bodywork, or even practice it. For "professionals" and "laymen" alike, the *imagery exercises* can become a true "Elixir of Life." These exercises are a source to enrich body experiences and deepen understanding.

The exercises presented in this book form an entrance for everyone to understand meridian energies. These *are* meridian exercises, but beware of drawing hasty conclusions! Meridian

energies are not as easily and cleanly separable, as, for instance, the technical components of an engine. These energies are very concretely perceptible, and yet, at the same time, they are quasi-indistinct and changeable... they tend to blend into one another.

Masunaga's exercises are assigned

to individual meridian energies, but, nevertheless, they always affect the whole being with its different sides and facets. Those who approach these exercises attentively, however, and become acquainted with them over a longer time, find that they become valuable keys to a deeper understanding of the meridians and of themselves.

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