

What is Energetic Perception, how can it be learnt and how can it be taught?

By Wilfried Rappenecker

Energetic perception is essentially subjective. This is a very interesting phenomenon; although everybody knows that perception is always subjective, we still believe that with our senses we can experience objective reality.

In the world of energetic perception this illusion cannot be maintained. There are too many differences when two observers describe how they perceive the same object. For example, if two Shiatsu practitioners describe the internal energetic patterns of a painful knee their descriptions can be so different that an observer not familiar with the method of energetic perception might assume that they are describing two different knees.

There are good reasons for these differences. The most important of these is that there is a long way from the immediate perception to putting what has been perceived into words. The intuitive perception of two persons is probably also different owing to differences in their sensory organs (see below).

In addition, during the steps from the immediate to the conscious perception what has been perceived is further interpreted due to differences in personality and life history. Concepts about reality shaped by cultural identity also play an important role as do desires, fears and avoidances. Such factors 'dress' immediate perceptions into 'different clothes'.

If experiences made are eventually put into words, one will find that language is so much coarser than energetic perception. Often there are no words available for what has been 'seen' or 'felt' so that the description will have to succumb to serious compromise.

Despite the subjective imprint, any energetic perception is an important source of information when working with other human beings and, as such, is invaluable and indispensable.

Intuitive Perception

By what I have written above it will be clear that I would like to differentiate between the experience of a sensory organ during the moment of perception and that which enters the 'day to day'

awareness of the observer. Accordingly, I would like to call the quasi 'pre-awareness' perception 'Intuitive Perception'.

It is as if the place, where the initial Intuitive Perception takes place, is deep within a person, as if it were at the very basis of anything that is perceived. The more the perception reaches the surface of the personality, the more it will be interpreted and censored by the laws dominant there. In order to utilise the perception during therapeutic work it is important to know that through appropriate exercises it is possible to come into closer contact with one's intuitive perception. This results in the distorting censors to become weaker without, of course, being able to incapacitate them completely.

I mentioned above that energetic perception is always subjective. In my experience, the closer one gets into contact with one's Intuitive Perception, the more information one will receive about the observed person. By the same token, the perceptions will be less distorted and falsified by one's own personality. However, one's own perception will never be able to completely detach itself from distorting personality traits; it will never be 'objective'.

Energetic body spaces

But what is this Intuitive Perception deep within a person? Well, I have always found the following model very helpful in order to understand what is happening. I assume that energetic perception is based on how energetic spaces resonate with each other. Energetic structures are always (at least three-dimensional) spatial entities, which, like all such structures, are lively and in a constant state of vibration. These vibrations can, in turn, be received by other energetic spaces by virtue of resonating with the first space. The vibration of these other spaces could be described as 'infecting' further spaces. The other spaces thus 'experience' the vibration of the first space.

Human beings, like all beings, present such energetic spaces. *Accordingly, the actual sensory organ for energetic perception is the whole human body: its whole space.* It resonates with the 'body spaces' of other human beings or with parts thereof. Our sensory organ for energetic perception is therefore not our eyes, ears, olfactory or tactile sense – even though these senses, without doubt,

contribute important aspects and their importance in the therapeutic process is evident.

During the process of energetic perception I am able to focus my conscious awareness, that is my whole 'body space', like a sensory organ and direct it towards specifically chosen energetic spaces, for example the body space of another person. This means that I can directly resonate with another person, while there will be less resonance with other people standing close by. By the same token I can focus my attention on particular parts of a client's body, for example on a painful shoulder or other joint.

An Example

As an example I would like to describe the perception of a painful knee joint. The therapist is seated in a position that allows them *to rest in a relaxed way within themselves*. Since Shiatsu is mainly carried out on a mat or futon on the floor, sitting on one's heels generally allows such a relaxed posture. Often it is helpful to support the client's knees on a cushion; this makes it easier for the giver to hold the affected knee while kneeling and to rest with the knee with relaxed awareness. This position also allows the therapist to sit nearly upright which also makes it easier to be open to clear attention.

The giver now holds the knee in both hands and stays with it with their full attention. This 'being with it' is not like a slow 'entering' but the result of the decision *to be present* in the knee. It is a state similar to meditation; in fact, a regular meditation routine – besides physical exercise – is a very effective support when learning energetic perception.

Perhaps the attention resting in the joint will at first not notice anything special. But after a short while some blurry patterns will emerge; obviously the various areas of the space within the knee will feel or look different. The perceived pattern can now be used in the treatment, allowing a differentiated touch with focussed attention and also work with physical contact 'from outside' (further practical information about this work can be found in my article 'Traces of Ki – Introduction to Shiatsu without Meridians' by using the following link: http://www.schule-fuer-shiatsu.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=32&Itemid=60)

While the giver is holding the knee and rests within it with relaxed attention, they will often get an impression not only about the patterns within the 'knee space' itself but also about the client's emotional and mental state. For example, there might be the worry that the knee will never be healthy again, and perhaps also resignation and despair. Or the emotional and biographical background surrounding the trauma to the knee becomes palpable and should be considered in the context of the treatment.

However, such impressions should not be actively sought; rather they should arise by themselves. They present information that is simple 'there'. They allow the therapist to evaluate better the context of the knee problem, which might provide a different meaning and direction to the therapeutic process than the one it would take without this information.

A moment such as this, when impressions and information flow towards the giver, is always unique, is always a surprise; since Intuitive Perception is always experienced as unique, is always experienced as a surprise.

Learning Energetic Perception

Persons who are learning a therapeutic method such as Shiatsu initially often struggle with energetic perception. The reason for this is that while this type of perception can be learnt as a technique (as described above), the physical and mental state of the student play an important role.

Ideally the 'perceiving person' is relaxed, both physically and mentally, is aware of themselves in their 'body space' and *feels well within it*, even if this is not happening consciously. In such a state one's attention is resting within oneself and therefore expands all the way to the perceived space, which might be located in another person. The body space is relaxed and can therefore resonate with the space of the object, just like a sensory organ.

All factors which impair the ability of the body space to resonate also impair the ability for energetic perception. In this context important obstacles are: to be occupied in one's mind with something else; to be worried or afraid (for example students being concerned that they won't be able to perceive anything); great desires or longings; inflated ambition to be therapeutically successful; great

physical or mental tension etc. Even if a student wants to be technically perfect but is not able to relax body and mind, is not able *to be with themselves* in calmness, the energetic perception will be only weak or not possible at all.

When teaching energetic perception these disturbing factors play an important role. After all, students often feel insecure when learning new techniques, they are worried that they 'will never learn this' or that they are not good enough. At the same time they are so preoccupied with performing the technique correctly that it becomes entirely impossible *simply to be there*. And finally there can be too much ambition to be successful in learning the new material and to be good at it. But the main obstacle is doubt – doubts regarding one's own abilities and also doubts about the 'correctness' of one's own perception. During classes these fears, inflated ambitions, and doubts will therefore have to be addressed time and again so that they will become less significant (it is impossible to eradicate them completely).

In this context it is important to create a space which promotes a serene and relaxed state in all involved but which also makes it clear that the process about to be learnt also presents a challenge, affecting the whole person. To feel relaxed and comfortable in one's body despite all the adverse factors which life, after all, confronts us with – this is an important prerequisite for success. Regular physical exercise and meditation are fundamental supporting elements. Also guided meditation and body journeys can create and support a sense of wellbeing, of *Being with Oneself*. During classes the participants should be reminded over and over again to reach out to themselves, to feel themselves within their bodies.

When learning these techniques personal processes can sometimes cause participants to feel tense; they tighten up internally and take things too seriously or grant them too much importance. Especially when working intensively on one's presence, students often overshoot the target and become internally rigid. In such cases it can be helpful to make jokes or light-hearted comments, or the teacher may also pull his own leg, in order to guide the students out of their rigidity. Games, music, and dancing present valuable breaks during lessons, they dissolve the inflated seriousness and efforts and help to create the required lightness.

Doubt Detectors

A little trick which on the one hand helps to demonstrate how important it is to trust oneself and one's perceptions and which on the other hand also, by way of a prank, helps to relax an atmosphere that has become too tense, is the image of the 'doubt detector'. The teaching person informs the course participants that, with the help of the janitors, 'doubt detectors' have been installed in the ceiling. These GPS-based tools would inform the teacher when and if any students in the room were doubtful, whether they were able to sense their perceptions or were sceptical whether these were correct. This image generally leads to great laughter and a sense of relief since the atmosphere suddenly becomes more relaxed. Afterwards the students seem to cope much better with their work. They seem to observe themselves, how their doubts block their perceptions. They are then generally able to shove their doubts aside and not let them be an obstacle. They also report how they achieve this. By the way, I have tried the same trick with 'confidence detectors', also with positive results, but I have the impression that for whatever reasons 'doubt detectors' seem to work better.

Of course it is of significance what kind of exercises and techniques are used to introduce the participants to energetic perceptions. Simple exercises are, for example, to perceive the emotional state of another person when teaching the Five Phases. I also like the following exercise: the students look at the hands of their partner and pay attention to all the impulses they receive by doing this which could provide information about their current life situation or possibly about their personality. The experience that, by doing this exercise, it is indeed possible to gain information and to be able to actually describe this information, often provides the confidence needed for more difficult techniques.

It is also very interesting to explore the depth of a tsubo (contact point) by working in groups of three. The observing person perceives whether the treating person has established a contact that is of sufficient depth, whether the angle is correct and also whether the right area is being touched. The witness will then give the treating person precise instructions how the contact can be optimised. The witness may even guide the hand or the thumb of the treating person. The experience that it is possible to see whether the treating person is 'on

the meridian', in which direction the contact may be shifted and whether the touch is carried out at the right angle, can give much courage and self-confidence. Provided they receive sensitive support, even very insecure students often make surprising and encouraging experiences with this exercise.

Inner Techniques

In this context so called Inner Techniques are very important to me. These mindfulness techniques use particular images that can lead to radical changes in the quality of the contact. These changes are the result of the changes taking place in the inner space of the treating person. For example, if I imagine that there is still sufficient space beneath my thumb, despite a clear physical contact at the right depth, this will allow the Ki field of the receiving person to vibrate freely (technique of the Free Field of Ki). However, the lively feeling of the free field of Ki will only arise when the giver becomes wide within themselves, when their thumb, wrist, and shoulders are able to let go. What is astonishing is that the widening and broadening will occur quasi automatically if one is able to visualise the free space between the thumb and the body with a sufficiently vivid imagination – the treating person therefore doesn't have to 'think' that they have to become wide; but they should be willing to let this change take place within themselves. Their body knows how to resolve the apparent contradiction between a deep contact and providing space.

A further inner technique works with the connections between various areas within the body space. Such connections become possible only if the treating person is able to rest calmly within themselves. Only then will the tension in the hands, wrists, and shoulders subside and the various areas connect within the body of the giver to form a whole. The ensuing resonance allows the two areas of the client's body touched by the giver's hands and presence to connect (so that the two areas might no longer feel like two different places).

The moment when it becomes possible to experience this connection the giver is able to 'see' the energetic space more clearly, for example, where the connection between two touched areas is impaired and where touch should take place. The inner state which allows the connection to take place is the same state which lies at the base of energetic perceiving.

There are a multitude of inner techniques – a detailed script can be downloaded by using the link quoted above.

Whole-body Dreaming

One of the more sophisticated methods of energetic perceiving is, in my experience, the Whole Body Scan. Personally I prefer to use the term Whole Body Dreaming since it comes closer to the process that is taking place. When learning this technique there is a combination of factors which make it more difficult for the student to let go of any doubts and to be confident in herself or himself. In addition to the student's lack of confidence in their abilities and their lack of trust that what they perceive is actually of significance, there is the, as yet, incomplete knowledge of what the perceptions mean.

For this reason I introduce this technique in my classes step by step. The first step is that a person lying down tries to perceive the arm and body space of the person who is resting their hand on the lying person's Hara. For the lying person who has a hand resting on their Hara, 'being relaxed in one's own body' seems to happen naturally – an ideal prerequisite for energetic perceiving.

In the next step a sitting student places their hand on the Hara of a lying person and then uses the same technique as in the first step, except this time from a sitting position. A drawing will be made from that which has been perceived. This is often of great help to allow perceptions that are still vague and blurry to become more concrete.

For the next step I ask for a whole body scan to be carried out on a person who is not in the room but with whom the student has worked only a short while ago. For many students the biggest challenge is the technique to 'wander' in relaxed mindfulness through a client's body space during a dialogue. This allows finding correspondences to what the client is talking about.

Summarising comment

Energetic perception is an ability which everybody has. However, in our culture it is accepted as only a form of emotional perception and considered as relatively unreliable. In the past this ability has also been abused; it was used for personal profit and also to gain power over other people (for example

the church during the Middle Ages). For these reasons energetic perception is not cultivated in our society and is therefore seen by many as mumbo-jumbo or something supernatural.

It is about time that we become aware again of these natural abilities. Our society will become more human when we learn to trust in our energetic perceptions, respect their boundaries and their risks, and, regarding the information we have gained, deal wisely with it and for the benefit of others.

Wilfried Rappenecker

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