

Diagnosis means understanding

The process of diagnosis in Shiatsu

Diagnosis in Shiatsu means something else than it does in western medicine. While in western medicine the nature and if possible also the cause of an illness is understood from the viewpoint of natural sciences, diagnosis in Shiatsu in first place allows us to get an impression of the person's biography and individual situation, in which the symptoms have appeared, and which lead her or him to ask for treatment.

In standard medicine, diagnosis is directly followed by therapy. From this point of view understanding the cause of an illness already gives clear directions to what is to be done for a cure. In Shiatsu however, what diagnosis says is of limited importance to the further procedure, which in fact very often will show itself step by step during the treatment. In the first line diagnosis gives the practitioner an individual approach to how to touch the person. This approach might be effective only at that specific moment. Furthermore, diagnosis in Shiatsu offers a focus, a subject of treatment, which - while at the same time always perceiving the whole of the person - allows to concentrate the attention and techniques on one area in the body and this person's life.

In hospital medicine, even the smallest relevant aspect of a person's physical reality is being brought to experience as far as possible by the means of microscopes, computer-tomographs and endoscopic methods of higher and higher resolution. Here the more the more detailed information it is based on the more reliable diagnosis becomes. The more exact, the better.

In Shiatsu the details of the "hard facts" also have a meaning and they are thoroughly being investigated during the diagnostic interview. The over all situation of a human however is an energetic phenomenon in first place. Energetic fields by nature cannot be understood by investigating details. Instead this is a phenomenon of resonance, which requires wideness and openness in the perceiving person as a first precondition. This is why in Shiatsu, as in all holistic methods and in opposition to hospital medicine, it is essential to have enough distance to the other person in order to perceive her or him as a whole (which is the ideal). In doing this, an "unfocused" glance can be useful - while being totally clear at the same time.

The clear image of another person is not achieved by carefully collecting technical details. Above all it is the expression of an inner connection to this person, along with technical and theoretical expertise, and experience. Most needed for this are openness, life experience and compassion.

All sources of perception are being used for this - listening and also listening to what cannot be said, looking and seeing what happens inside of this human, touching and also feeling what the body wants to say, tuning into the client and her or his individual situation and an intuition of what is really important at that moment. From all these impressions an image forms in the practitioner that lets her know - maybe we should say "feel" or "sense" here as more adequately describing it - what is to be done in this very unique situation of this very person. (Making use of all possible sources is what the terms of traditional Japanese medicine Bo Shin, Bun Shin, Mon Shin and Setsu Shin describe).

The diagnostic process is in no way restricted to the anamnestic interview and Hara diagnosis alone. It is much more a continuous process of understanding better and better, which includes the treatment itself - and is not finished after the treatment either. While touching in a treatment the therapist gets further important impressions, which complete the image. The diagnostic process finally lasts as long as the client returns for treatments.

In standard medicine diagnosis comes before the treatment. In Shiatsu they go hand in hand, they interact and fertilise each other and are in parts identical.

Due to all these fundamental differences it has often been proposed not to use the term 'diagnosis' anymore in Shiatsu but to replace it by another term, like 'energetic assessment' e.g. As the term 'diagnosis' means from its original etymological meaning 'to look through' in the sense of experience and to get *insight*, this term fits much better with Shiatsu than it does with modern medicine based on natural sciences.

Seven steps in the process of diagnosis

In order to make the diagnostic process easier to be understood I have cut it down into single steps. This list of steps is quite artificial, as in fact the impressions do not reach the treating person in the described order. It can however be quite useful not only for Shiatsu students to work with this list systematically in order to get familiar with the single aspects.

The seven steps in the process of diagnosis are:

- The interview, the art of listening, “the song of 10 questions”
- Feeling into the body (so called whole body scan)
- Body diagnosis (e.g. Hara- or back diagnosis)
- The three questions:
 - Where and in which way does this issue show in the person’s body?
 - What does this issue mean on the background of the person’s actual life situation?
 - What is the strength and beauty of this person and what is her or his potential?
- Deciding for one issue and one area of focus accordingly, following the understanding that has emerged during the four steps before
- Treatment according to the information gained during the diagnostic process and a rough idea of how to work
- How can this person be supported beyond the treatment?

In the following I will describe these steps in more detail.

Step 1: The conversation - The art of listening - The “song of ten questions”

The anamnestic interview

By interview in first place the anamnestic interview is meant that a Shiatsu practitioner shares with her client before the first treatment. In this conversation, she tries to learn about all the important life facts of a person. These are in part “hard facts”, which have to be asked for only once as they do not or at least not quickly change (e.g. age, profession, important illnesses in the past etc.). She will however also ask for things one could call ‘soft information’, e.g. why somebody comes to Shiatsu or also what that person enjoys most in life.

During such an interview, two things happen at the same time: first, the practitioner gets to know important facts that she might want to note on a clients’ sheet if it seems right in that situation. To the other, she senses the client while she is talking to him. She feels the atmosphere in the room that she is sharing with this person, registers language, posture of the client’s body (which mirrors the inner attitudes), his reactions to spoken words, maybe a certain emotional state that is predominant at that moment and listens “between” the client’s words to hear what he does “not” say, but what can still be felt.

She perceives him as a complete human being. That means that she acknowledges that she does not need to learn and “know” everything about this person. This is not possible anyway, as the personality of a human being is always infinite. At this point of the diagnostic process there is also no need for a theoretical system, which allows to put the received information into an order that seems to make sense. What is important now is to perceive, to take in, to sense consciously.

This counts for the whole diagnostic process: it helpful to just collect information for a long time without having any idea about how to put this information into the treatment, which will follow. We are collecting impressions of this person just as the grapes are being laid into the back-basket during vintage, without giving thoughts to what is going to happen with them after. Not to fix oneself in doing so has the great advantage that the practitioner stays open for all impressions, that this openness is being restricted by concepts as little as possible. Only right before the treatment starts the practitioner will in the ideal case decide on how she wants to use the received information during the treatment, how she wants to work on them by the means of Shiatsu.

The art of listening

Respect and sympathy

The sense of the interview with the client is to encourage him to speak about himself, to express himself, the goal is to offer him the space to show himself. The source of the information shall gush like a fountain, so that the practitioner can enter into resonance, sense the other and share the space with him. The practitioner can support this with her own attitude and posture and her own behaviour.

The first essential point here is to give all attention to the client. The practitioner shows her interest (her posture tells a lot here), tries to understand. She looks at the other and takes his issues seriously. She tries to be as authentic, open and honest herself as possible and she avoids showing the client merely a façade of her person. She gives herself all naturally, just as she is.

The practitioner offers all the space and does not restrict it by her own ideas or even by offering early advice and solutions. Her own thoughts about what the client tells are to be kept in the background for the most. At this point the practitioner also resists the temptation to discuss arising questions with the client.

She rather keeps distance to this person and how she experiences him. This distance is a compassionate therapeutic distance in which she acknowledges what is being said, without identifying with it or with her own thoughts about it. Above all she resists the temptation to judge, whether something she hears is right or wrong. What the client is telling is and remains part of his life, and it is o.k.

‘Compassionate distance’ also means that the treating person recognises the beauty and strength of the person and his ability to find inner and external solutions for his questions and problems. Departing from the idea that in the core we humans create almost all our problems ourselves, she knows that this person is in the same way able to find the solutions for his problems and will in fact find them (possibly through the support of Shiatsu). Such a resource oriented encounter lets emerge an open and powerful space in which the client’s ability and strength can unfold and be felt again.

If we are meeting the other person in Shiatsu with compassion, then pity is in the wrong place here. In the therapeutic space that we share with him, the confidence and the power of the other has a positive and supporting effect. Pity however sees the other as a rather weak creature. It does not acknowledge the strength of the client and minders his ability of finding solutions himself.

On the other side, the practitioner’s compassion allows the client to feel supported and to find himself in a secure room with all his problems and pains, which may cause fear in him.

All of this does not mean in any way that the practitioner is just sitting there and bears everything passively. The art is much more in participating in an active and interested conversation and to stay open and keep a compassionate distance at the same time.

The active side shows as e.g. questions of understanding (“Do I understand you well, that...?”) or brief summaries in order to gain more clarity. As the right questions give the client space and can encourage him, it is important that the practitioner develops a feeling for which questions do encourage to express his issues with the feeling that he is the only one who can competently talk about himself. Suggestive questions however that already propose a specific answer narrow the space and are a hindrance to the fruitful conversation.

The song of ten questions

This is a poetic way of describing the art of gaining a maximum of information and impressions of a person with as little questions as possible. In doing this, all questions should be asked that are of interest and do not hurt the other person, respectively do not hinder the conversation in any other way.

I have the impression that many Shiatsu practitioners have a certain fear or shyness to ask personal questions or medical questions concerning actual or past illnesses. This may come from an insecurity of being rejected when asking too intimate questions or not being able to understand and/or professionally deal with certain medical problems.

My experience is that our clients give us great trust when we ask all the questions that seem relevant and also ask the more “tricky” questions with empathy. To lead a conversation needs courage; also the courage to show myself just as I am.

The more, it is important to be clear about the fact that Shiatsu is not about treating medical problems. A medical diagnosis is of interest for the treatment only insofar as it gives the practitioner an impression about what the ailments and possibly the complications can mean in this person's life. For this case it pays to have a certain basic knowledge about medical terms, respectively a medical dictionary in the back room.

Beyond this, however, it is advisable to put the medical term aside soon and to totally look with the eyes of Shiatsu what is really going on in the client's body (e.g. patterns of Kyo and Jitsu that clearly spring to one's attention). The question concerning actual or past sicknesses does not serve the goal of telling the practitioner what he has to work with. Rather it shall complete the impression of this person's life situation and allow us thus to get a clearer image.

This is an exemplary list of general information that may be inquired:

- “What can I do for you?” - Why is the client coming for Shiatsu?
- The complete name, phone number, address - this information is important in order to communicate well (e.g. in the case an appointment has to be cancelled or to send the bills).
- Does the client live in a (sexual) relationship, does she or he have children (for several reasons children change our lives from the bottom), what profession does he have (the answer to this question often also gives important information about the Wood-side of a person)?
- Were there any important illnesses, accidents, operations or times spent in a hospital? (The body areas and / or organs involved give hints to the client's energetic situation at that time, e.g. according to the five transformations. This energetic situation can still be present or may have strong effects in the present). Is the client under medical treatment at this time, does she receive any other kind of therapy? Does he take any medication? If yes, for what reasons (see comment above)?
- We should not forget to ask women about their menstrual cycle, i.e. at least about the length of the cycle, periodicity, pain (dysmenorrhea), and also about a possible premenstrual syndrome (PMS - quickly changing moods and physical or mental feelings of tension in the days and possibly weeks before the menstruation). This may give hints about the Wood element).
- I also like to ask what people enjoy most in life. Here, clients often show very interesting reactions, ranging from a grumpy “What's that question for?” to a smiling “Well, I really don't know where to start there...”. It is here that I find plenty of information, especially “in-between the lines”, and often I learn more from the reaction to this question than from ten others.

Furthermore it is helpful in Shiatsu to ask specific questions concerning the situation of the the person's Five Transformations during the song of ten questions.

Such questions are harmoniously embedded in the whole of the conversation. It is highly advisable to find out with time about how to do with as few questions as possible. I for myself do rarely ask more than one (and only for special reasons two or more) questions to an element. Valuable hints to the states of the transformations and energetic organs in the body and life of a human are also to be found in the answers to other questions, as well as in the physical posture that accompanies these answers. In doing this the practitioner is aware of the area of the body, in which a reaction is sensed most clearly. Special attention goes to the trunk (chest and Hara) where the elements and energetic organs are at home.

At this point I want to put three or four possible questions to every element, as every situation is different and it requires some experience and empathy to find the right question and the right way to put it, so that the answer allows us a good insight.

The questions beneath are only examples. With good understanding of the theory of the Five Transformations the questioner gains the freedom to play with them. In a specific situation possibly quite different questions may come to her mind, which arise out of the moment and are in resonance with the individuality of the client and his actual situation. It may also be that essential aspects in the situation (respectively the biography) or also “just” a feeling within the questioner point at a certain element. The practitioner will then ask further questions that go in this direction in order to learn and understand more.

Wood element

- What is your job? (this question has been asked with the general questions already).
- How important is regular physical activity or sport for you? (People with a strong and active liver energy also have a tendency to stagnating liver Ki. For that reason regular physical activity, which moves liver Ki is often quite important to them, e.g. moving outdoors or doing sports).
- How do you react to stress resp. can you relax well?
- Are there any menstruation problems and / or PMS (This we have asked before already).

Examples for what does not need to be asked for, as it is perceptible: the expression of the eyes, a kind of “radiation“ or the impression of pressure along the course of the Gall Bladder meridian on the head and on the side of the body, physical tension, the feeling that a person is creating pressure or tension in and around herself and for others, irritation etc. All of this can be “seen“ or “sensed“.

Fire element

- Do you sleep well? (a healthy, balanced Fire element enables us to fall asleep easily, to sleep through and to wake up refreshed)
- Are you easily cold or rather too warm? Do you easily get cold or hot hands? (The answers can also give hints to the Wood, the Earth or the Water)
- How is the relationship with your partner? To your children? (These relationships are heart issues - the spontaneous reactions to these questions are often more informative than the answers themselves. The answers can also give important impressions of somebody's Earth-side).

Shen, as well as paleness or a red face can be “seen“, as well as the expression of the Upper Warmer as the home of Heart and Pericardium. The clarity of language is audible, the expression of fire in the chest or in the forearms and hands is also easily perceptible.

Earth element

- How is your appetite?
- Have you ever had stomach or digestive problems? (which can also be expression of the Wood energy)
- How is your bowel movement? (When Spleen-Pancreas is weak, the client can have soft or loose stool or diarrhoea. This can also be a question about Large Intestine, respectively about Wood energy - too great tension in the Wood affects the digestive functions).
- Do you easily get tired? (this may also point to an imbalance in any of the other Transformations): Do you easily sweat? (This may point at a weakness of Spleen-Pancreas, or also at special conditions in Lung, Heart or Kidney).

(The state of the left Middle Burner, a yellowish or pale colour of skin, being over- or underweight, the impression of heaviness can be seen or sensed)

Metal element

- Do you often catch a cold? (Lung reigns the Wei Qi, the defensive Qi)
- How are your bowel movements? (has been asked above with Earth Element already)
- Do you smoke - how much and in what situations? (even a very low consumption of cigarettes can be a serious strain for Metal element)
- Do you have skin problems or anything special with your skin? (this can also be a question concerning Wood)

- How important, are social contacts for you, resp. are they easy for you?

(The expression of the Lung area in the Upper Burning Space, respectively the area of the Large Intestine in the Lower Burner, many specific phenomena concerning the skin, as well as rigidity in body and attitudes can be seen or sensed)

Water element

- Do you feel fully recovered or tired or even exhausted, or overloaded from too much stress? (the answers to these questions are also perceptible without having to hear the client give them in words - asking the question however often initiates a fruitful conversation because the client may feel understood).
- Do you sometimes suffer from back pain? (This question also covers the situation of the organs of the Upper and Middle Warmer, as the Upper Warmer shows especially in the upper back, the Middle Warmer in the middle of the back).
- Do you suffer from hot or cold feet?
- Do you know ear problems (respectively problems with your teeth)?

(The expression of the Lower Warmer and the lower back are perceptible, the signs for a powerful, respectively stressed Water can be seen at many different spots of the body)

Second step: Body diagnosis (e.g. Hara- or back diagnosis)

Using of a focused touch to ask the body about the situation a person is in at the moment is an essential and very helpful part of the diagnostic process.

Every area of the body seems to store the complete information about the past and present of a human being. However, certain information is more easily accessible in certain areas of the body. As the Hara mirrors a human's true, actual situation in the understanding of several traditional cultures, it is of no wonder that this area is very well suited to get a profound and encompassing impression of the overall situation of a client.

On the other hand, the practitioner brings herself by her knowledge and experience into an inner state that makes it easy to gain relevant impressions. Which of these out of the potentially infinite multitude impressions she gets depends very much on what she is asking for. The system that she is using for this, her interest, the whole of her life experience, the inner stillness and wideness she is finding in herself to accept whatever she finds, all this and yet much more flows consciously and unconsciously into the questioning and the perception. This is the reason why a Hara diagnosis on the same person can give different answers to different practitioners.

I do not want to go into the different possible techniques to do a Hara diagnosis, nor into the different systems that are being practiced traditionally. This would give far too much emphasis to this partial aspects of diagnosis in the frame of such an article. They are anyway studied best in a seminar with an experienced teacher. Certain is, that much experience is required to gain the important information in a reliable way that is needed for a good treatment. It is said that twenty years of practice are needed to master the pulse diagnosis of TCM. For Hara- or back diagnosis, the same is certainly valid, too.

As practitioner I want to sense what the Hara of a person who is coming to me wants to tell. I want to know what additional information it has for me, additional to the impressions I have already gained and that are not rarely being complemented by the information, which is revealed by the Hara - or sometimes even contradicted. This is why I rarely leave out this part of the diagnostic process - I am much too curious to renounce it.

I am especially interested in two aspects there (out of the infinite multitude of possible information): To the one I learn important information on the actual situation of the individual energetic organs, sense, which sides of the person are especially asking for treatment or open to touch or are in special resonance to each other. In this respect Hara or back diagnosis are of invaluable help when it comes to finding a clear focus for a treatment.

On the other hand the terms Kyo and Jitsu, which are most often used as diagnostic criteria, cannot describe my impressions well enough here. My sensations in the touch go much further than these eight letters. What I am more interested in is the feeling for that person in that area, in every individual zone, the feeling for her life situation, his joy, love and longing, for his fear, stress or exhaustion and so on. To listen so attentively and exactly here, to be open for emerging resonance without knowing, what comes up, to let myself be surprised belongs to the most enriching moments of a Shiatsu treatment.

In opposition to the widely spread dogma I do not use the Hara- or back diagnosis to tell me what I have to do in the treatment. What they do is to give me additional, valuable information that complements the image that is already forming. It helps me to see and to feel more clearly. They are a support for my work - in no way are they dictators, to whose orders I have to obey. I can follow the additional information when it seems right. However, I also have the freedom to follow a different impression that seems more relevant to me in the encounter with a person at that moment.

Hara- and back diagnoses are a chance, not a burden. They are a living part of the diagnostic process.

Third step: Feeling into the whole body (so-called Whole-body-scan)

Behind this far too technical term hides a very interesting and exciting part of diagnosis in Shiatsu. To practice this, the practitioner makes use of the fact that on one hand our physical body is solid and delimited by clear boundaries that are difficult to penetrate - on the energetic level of our reality, however, our body is pure energetic space. We can easily step into this space with our attention.

The attention of a person is an energetic field that is being focused and directed consciously or unconsciously in manifold ways in every-day life. So for example do I have the possibility to go into my own body with my attention, maybe because I feel pain in some area and want to know, what gives me the pain, how it feels “from inside”.

As I have described in another article (Inner Techniques – Ki-Projection) one may feel or see nothing, when doing this for the first time. If one stays within that part of the body and waits patiently then sooner or later differences in the field will become recognizable. There will always a pattern to be discovered since energetic fields are always organised, they never stay amorphous or diffuse. It is possible to work directly with the perceived patterns – they do react to physical touch as well as to touch with nothing but pure attention. A practitioner can feel / see the changes that occur in reaction to both kinds of touch.

In the body that is being visited like this occurs a reaction that can be felt. In the example of “walking” in my own body it may be that I can localise the place of pain more or less exactly, that the spot may get warm or a certain relaxation takes place etc.

It is therefore possible to touch the inside of the body with the attention and this touch induces a reaction that can be felt, usually for the one who touches and for the one who is being touched as well. In class it sometimes happens that participants who are being touched inside by the attention of another student can tell, where the watching person focuses her attention at that moment.

The technique described here has nothing to do at all with a kind of romantic fusion of the practitioner with the client. It is of essential importance that the energetic fields of the participants stay clearly separated, i.e. they do not mix. Only then it is possible for the practitioner to stay clear.

The relaxed and focused attention is in my experience one of the most important instruments in Shiatsu and the basis for an effective physical touch.

Touch with the attention can however also be used for diagnosis in order to get information from the energetic space of the client. If I systematically go with my attention through the client's body, at every place I visit a reaction is induced. This reaction is being perceived in the body of the observer via resonance. The sum of these reactions produces an image of the energetic space of this person.

In some ways such an image corresponds to the results of a computer-tomographic examination. In the case of the latter, the physical space of the patient is being scanned three-dimensionally with the aid of computers and the results are fused to an image of the body's interior. With the technique I describe here it is the same, just that it is an energetic “scan”. As a result, we do not perceive physical structures like bones, joints, muscles or inner organs, but ‘energetic patterns’.

Apart from the different technical devices that are needed for the two scanning methods, there is one more essential difference between a computer-tomographic examination and a whole-body-scan: the computer-tomograph exactly records all details it can “perceive” in the body. They will be looked at and interpreted later on. In the whole-body-scan it is the tender, soft and in a certain aspect unfocused attention of the observer that is wandering through the body. It does not collect details but is drawn to important “hot spots”, quasi stumbles over them. It is those hot spots that the practitioner is waiting for, all the rest is nothing but an interesting background for those.

Like with any other energetic perception this is a highly subjective phenomenon. The whole of the perceiving person with all his history, his wishes, fears, skills and weaknesses flows into the perception. In no way does this fact minder the value of this technique. By the time and with growing experience it is possible to more and more easily get away from the “surface” of subjective perception where own concepts, illusions and wishes interfere with what is being perceived to the depth of “real” perception, to what is “really” being felt or sensed there.

At this “depth” you can find quite reliable information about the other person. Here subjective perception gets closer and closer to the reality of the other. It will however never be identical with it: a more or less big difference or blurring will always remain and therewith also a certain uncertainty in the observer, whether she actually only perceives herself or the reality of the other. Paradoxically it is exactly in this subjective insecurity that lies the possibility for great clarity in “seeing” the whole of the other person.

Only few people in modern society know about this amazing side of human perception, even though it is a totally normal skill that everybody seems to have and that we constantly make use of in every-day life. The fewest however do consciously make use of it (with one exception, which is the emotional experience, which is less unreliable, though), probably because this possibility is not being made a subject in our culture and therefore not used. Accordingly, there are no words in European languages to describe this perception. It is often being described as “seeing”, one could however as well say “feeling” or “sensing”.

If one wants to make use of this technique for the first time consciously and in a focused way, then the impression may be rather disappointing. The result most likely will be an unclear, undefined “image” that seems to be of no meaning. Only after a while of constant practice the “images” become clearer, so clear that one can work with them precisely in Shiatsu. They however never reach the clarity of photographs that are depicting physical structures. This may be due to the fact that in the energetic world there are no real limits between the individual areas; everything seems connected with everything. The perception does hence not perceive clear and separated structures, but rather areas of different quality or intensity.

The practitioner may thus have the impression of a body space with areas of different brightness or she gets a feeling of different strength or weakness in different spots. The space may seem structured by fullness and emptiness, sensed temperature, deep or superficial fields or different intensity. In order to get a vivid impression it is important to concentrate on the own, immediate perception; processing and interpretation follows afterwards, if this should be necessary.

Such qualities appear in the subjective sensation of the observer; they are probably not to be proved objectively. For the professional communication and for easier orientation, these sensations are often being standardised in Shiatsu and termed as Kyo or Jitsu. I feel it important to emphasise that Kyo and Jitsu are not in any way qualities of sensations - no one feels anything as kyo or jitsu. These two terms represent nothing but intellectual *interpretations* of what is being felt.

With growing experience the perceptible differences become more and more clear and the basis of a focused work with the client’s body.

In her daily practice the practitioner systematically guides her attention through the client’s body. She could well make a drawing of the perceived pattern (what is being done in class), this is however not so important or necessary. More important is, to which spot she feels attracted, respectively where her interest goes to by itself. There is no such thing as an objective image of the inner state of a person. What develops is a kind of three-dimensional map of preferences from the practitioner’s side, places to which she feels attracted. I have made the experience that it can be really important to follow these preferences within the frame of the whole image that I got of someone.

In order to “look” through a person’s body it is important to take a simple, relaxed and yet clear position, which gives the practitioner the feeling to sink into the ground. In the beginning it may be the easiest way to “go” into the body starting from the client’s Hara. Sei-za (sitting on one’s heels) is ideal here - hip to hip and parallel to the longitudinal axis of the client. The technique can however be applied at any spot of the body’s surface. It can also be used without there being physical touch, e.g. during the conversation. Here it is interesting to compare the impression of the energetic pattern we “see” with what the client is telling us, e.g. about his headache. It is even possible to do a whole-body-scan with a person who is not physically present in the room - under the condition that we can create a vivid and clear connection to this person.

Feeling into the client’s body has become a very important instrument in my Shiatsu. Here I find an essential way of orientation to learn where there are areas I should work with primarily. This is true for a local Shiatsu as well as for the treatment of the whole body. At the same time I perceive the changes occurring as a result to my treatment, which tell me whether my work is effective.

Fourth step: The three questions

The separate impressions gained from conversation, Hara- or back diagnosis and whole-body-scan are relatively meaningless if they are not being understood altogether. Each of these sources of information can give important hints to which energetic organ, what issue, what place in the body could be of special importance for the treatment. Only viewing them together lets us recognise what may really be of importance.

On one hand the intellectual understanding is very important in this process. What however is essential for assessing the meaning of a specific piece of information is a quasi-emotional understanding for the life situation of a client (as far as I can understand on the basis of the information I have gained so far). What is needed is a sense for the whole, in which areas that seem of importance attract the attention like lighthouses on the coastline at night. In this work a good theoretical basis is needed because it impedes that the practitioner stays caught in her own world but sees connections she would “normally” not have thought about.

I have made the experience that it is easier to get to such an understanding when we look for answers to concrete questions. After having decided for a treatment subject after the first three steps, the following three questions have proven especially helpful:

How does this issue

1. show in the person's body?

2. show in the person's life (on the background of what I have got to know so far)?

And what is

3. the strength and beauty of this person and what is his potential?

- ***How does this issue show in the person's body?***

If a possible issue is about the state of an (energetic) organ (as it will most often be the case in Zen-Shiatsu), then this question helps to become conscious of where and in what way the organ manifests in the body. “Stomach kyo” by itself means absolutely nothing. The important question is, where can I perceive this Stomach-kyo most clearly in the body and what does this area feel like. Such a place I can make the focus of my treatment and touch it with my attention and with my hands.

For example a Heart-jitsu may show clearly as a tension between the shoulder blades, a Lung-kyo in an emptiness below the clavicles or between the upper shoulder blades, a Liver-kyo spring to attention in the form of an eye-catching area of the right rib-cage, a Kidney-jitsu in a tension of the lumbar area or the back of the upper thighs. In general one can say that the energetic organs (there are some exceptions) will show most clearly in the Burning Space where they are at home (I do more thoroughly explain this in my book “Five Elements and Twelve Meridians” in what areas the organ-energies typically show themselves).

When I think about making a certain aspect of my client's psychological situation the issue of my treatment (e.g. a life crisis, a difficult emotional experiencing or other) then it is important to see, where this experiencing manifests in the client's body. Already during the conversation I may have perceived a tension in the chest or in the throat, a density in the Middle Warmer or something different (these are just examples) which seems to relate in a special intense way to what the client has described during the interview. Maybe I have even asked the client where she feels what she describes most clearly in her own body. Such a spot can then become the focus of my treatment and I can touch it with my attention and my hands.

Often a client comes for Shiatsu because of some local pain or other problem in her body. Then it is very likely that I will make this local problem area the focus of my treatment. I will take the local area into my hands, “look or feel inside” and find the spot that seems to be in special relationship with the ailment. I do the same with other possible local issues. In the article “Tracing Ki – meridianfree Shiatsu” I have described of a local Shiatsu in more detail.

- ***How does this issue show in the life of the person (on the background of what I have got to know so far)?***

This second question reflects the relationship between the possible treatment subjects, respectively actual ailments to someone's life history and momentary life situation.

A Spleen-kyo e.g. may have been existing for a long time and perhaps already shown in a difficult relationship with the mother during childhood - it may also show up when a mother keeps breastfeeding her baby for a long time.

Maybe a Gall-Bladder-jitsu is the expression of an actual situation of overload with a tendency to create too much pressure and narrowness in the own life, possibly accompanied by a high tension in the neck and shoulders. It may also be the sign for a long time stagnating Liver-Ki.

If the client has pointed at knee problems e.g. and these are the treatment focus, then they may be the consequence of a skiing accident with injury of the meniscus, but may also be expression of a general uncertainty in life.

All of these are only examples out of the infinite number of possibilities. To sense a situation like these as an important factor in bringing forward the complaints and to understand them is only possible on the subjective level of resonance to other people. The basis for this is a feeling, a felt experience in first place - rational reflections add to it only later. (The importance of rational reflections consists in being able to put order into what is being experienced. This usually will make it easier for the practitioner to perceive a sensed issue consciously and to reflect it.)

All of these subjective impressions and sensations in my opinion are important for a good Shiatsu treatment as salt is for a soup. When I understand a person's life and physical situation quasi emotionally, everything that happens during a treatment will gain a deeper meaning. In the therapeutic space that I share with my client, she will also feel this greater and deeper meaning, accept the touch more easily and let it reach deeper.

It has to be mentioned here that even when a feeling seems to be obvious and clearly pointing at an important point in my client's life, I will only rarely speak to her about my impressions. They are not more than working hypotheses. Too often have I experienced that my words have been misunderstood or that I had realised only later that I had not had interpreted my sensations in the right way. And also the ego likes to play tricks with us – it likes to blow itself up and feel more importance through reports of “important deep insights”.

The subjective realm is the true richness of a holistic therapeutic work. It is however always incomplete and no matter how meaningful and powerful it may appear, it is never all true. Most often it is advisable that the practitioner leaves such insights in a somewhat vague space. Only rarely it seems important and necessary to me to express my impressions to the client, and if I choose that option I most often do it in an indirect way. Usually it makes more sense to ask for what the client has experienced and understood herself.

- *What is the strength and beauty of this person and what her potential?*

This third question is especially close to me. It allows the practitioner to see the whole person and to work in a resource oriented way.

It happens often that a client is so filled with her suffering that she cannot see the beauty of her life anymore. If we look at it closely, though, the suffering, the pain of someone is always and without exception a lot smaller than the beauty of life and the possibilities of this person to resolve the suffering.

If we as practitioners want to go into client's subjective perspective on things, which at the moment is narrowed and filled with suffering, then we will hardly be of any help. As a general rule are problems, fear and pain always narrow whereas solutions are always wide. In taking over the narrowness of the client's fear and suffering, we diminish this person's resources in the therapeutic space to solve her actual difficulties.

In doing so we also make our own work much harder, as we will most likely be working hard on solving this client's problem after having adopted her narrow view. The strength of Shiatsu however lies not in resolving states that are being experienced as negative by the client. Much more our work offers freedom that can be used to find a solution. For this it is necessary that the practitioner keeps the overview and sees the strength and beauty, the resources of the client.

In order to do justice to a person in the treatment it is necessary to see her strong and radiant sides. Then it becomes clear that the problems are in fact part of the radiance, of the strength.

The answers to the third question should reflect the whole person and not only concentrate on the treatment subject. By the way, I prefer 'strength' and 'beauty' as terms rather than 'resources', as they are less technical, more open and above all correspond more to how I perceive other people.

The potential of a person describes his skills and abilities that are already clearly sensed but not yet fully developed. It especially relates to those skills with which a person can support other people in the social context. To sense his potential deepens the impression of the beauty of a human and his possibilities.

Fifth step: Deciding for an issue and for an area of focus according to the understanding that has evolved during the former steps

Ideally up to this point the practitioner has only been collecting impressions of the diagnostic process without thinking of how she could work with them or of what to make the focus of this treatment. It is only now that she starts reflect about how the different information could flow into the treatment in a meaningful way. It is much recommended to leave the perceiving mind open and wide as long as possible and not to let it narrow down too soon by premature decisions concerning the practical use.

Now however it is the time to decide for a concrete issue for the treatment. This usually results out of the impressions gained from the interview, whole body scan, body diagnosis and the answers to the three questions. Subject of a treatment can be everything that attracts our attention to and which is related to the client's reason for coming to Shiatsu.

In many cases Hara- or back diagnosis will give us a topic that perfectly makes sense. Probably this will revolve around an energetic organ. The topic of the treatment can however also result from problems or wishes of the client, e.g. when he comes because of specific physical troubles like back pain or joint problems. In such a case the specific complaints can become the centre of the treatment themselves.

The decision for a subject makes it easier to keep a clear mind during the treatment. It enables us to stay focused and keep the overview, not letting ourselves be distracted by all those other things that are so very interesting, however are not of importance for the issue the client is coming for. This could weaken the treatment's effects and let it become meaningless. Above all, having a clear topic allows the practitioner's attention and energy field to focus on a specific aspect in this person's body and life. This is crucial for the effect of Shiatsu.

The area of focus in a Shiatsu treatment

By choosing a subject for the treatment we point out the place where it shows most clearly in the body as the area of focus or reference of the treatment.

The meaning of choosing a physical focus area is to be able to stick to the subject during the treatment without great effort. On one hand the practitioner will work locally with this field and perceive the occurring changes in it. On the other hand she will be able to easily and clearly relate the other areas in the body where she will be working to this area of reference and support connections and resonance in between them if needed.

The aim of a Shiatsu treatment is in the first line to raise the client's degree of freedom in the focus area - and with this increase the possibility for changes of the local energetic pattern. This will however also increase the person's overall freedom and his possibility of going other ways in his life. The practitioner will therefore make her treatment revolve around the needs of this one area. For the whole time of the treatment she stays in an open contact with this place, respectively always gets back into contact with it, be it immediately physically or with her attention. In doing this she perceives the changes that are happening there or the changing needs, and she adjusts her further treatment according to them. The focus area becomes the pivotal point of the treatment.

To decide for a focus area does not mean at all only to work with this area. At the contrary, all other areas that are relevant for the subject should also be addressed. Touching these parts of the body however is not for just touching them, but has aims at offering the reference area more possibilities to change. Relevant within the treatment are those other areas, which go into resonance with the focus area easiest and influence it the most.

The energetic kyo-jitsu pattern of the focus area stands is vividly interrelated to the pattern in other parts of the body - yes it can only exist *because* other parts support it by their own kyo-jitsu configuration. A Change in the focus area is only possible when these other areas also experience a change. The practitioner allows communication and balance between the different interrelated areas by keeping connected to the focus area (even while she is working on other parts of the body). This is one of the reasons why in most cases Shiatsu treatments are whole-body treatments.

It is of importance to deal with the focus area consequently yet at the same time playfully. The game has to stay light and easy. Slave-like sticking to the area will narrow the treatment's freedom too much and weaken possible positive effects.

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The practitioner has the choice of whether she first works with the focus area locally and then establishes the connection to the whole body or whether she prepares the local work by giving Shiatsu to other fields first. She decides this according to the treatment's situation and needs. To start with the local work has the great advantage (and not to be underestimated) that the issue becomes the treatment's centre by nature and does not easily get forgotten. It can however also be crucial to prepare the work with this issue by working on other parts of the body first, e.g. in the case that the focus area does not feel ready to be touched yet.

The clarity of a treatment totally depends on a clear topic and a clear focus area - this has a clear influence on the effect.

Two ways

There are basically two ways to get to a clear subject and a clear focus area and hence to a satisfying treatment:

- a) by the area where a complaint (physical complaint or other) is located in one part of the body for which a client comes to our praxis
- b) following a body diagnosis like the Hara- or back diagnosis.

To a) - starting from a local issue

When a client comes with specific problems that show strongest in one part of the body (e.g. back or joint pains) then this place offers itself as a natural focus area to become the pivotal point of the treatment. From the change in this part of the body we can read whether a treatment goes "in the right direction", whether it is effective and enables movement. It can however also be another area that seems to be closely related to, sometimes even the cause of the described troubles, as the shoulder-neck area may be in the case of headaches.

Also psychological complaints often can be localised in one part of the body as the area where the client senses strongest a physical or emotional feeling (like a burning sensation or an emotional pain). It therefore makes sense to ask the client, where in the body he can feel most clearly the state he describes. Other possible uncomfortable feelings may be a pressure behind the sternum or a feeling of narrowness in the throat.

Let us take acute or chronic problems in a single joint as an example. If this is the reason for the client coming to us, then it will most often make sense to make the aching joint and its surrounding the subject and the focus of the treatment. This means that the practitioner examines this area carefully and touches it, further asks questions to the quality and the history of the problems and then gives that area local Shiatsu. Already at this early point she will be able to perceive if and how the joint reacts to the touch with attention and hands.

After the local work has been finished the practitioner will integrate this part into the whole person by means of a whole-body treatment. Through this the complete body of the client is offered as a space of resonance to the place that has been worked on. This often drastically deepens the effect. Also in this phase of the treatment the practitioner again and again will go back into contact with the focus area (be it with her hands, be it with her attention) to learn how it reacts to the expansion of the treatment field. Sometimes it may also make sense to first work in other parts of the body and thus let unfold a resonance space before turning to the reference area itself. In both ways is the aim of Shiatsu to offer the place of complaint a better integration into the whole body.

The full presence of the practitioner's attention at the place where she touches is the basis for such a work (and of any good Shiatsu). This allows the perception of different energetic qualities and patterns (kyo and jitsu) in the body and the direct work with these (I have written more about this in my article "Working with Kyo and Jitsu"). More than that the practitioner's attention is an effective instrument in Shiatsu itself, I would even describe it as *the* most important instrument of Shiatsu.

To b) - Starting from Hara- or back diagnosis

If we follow Hara- or back diagnosis we will decide for one organ to work with in the first line (see below). The situation of the chosen energetic organ almost always clearly manifests in the expression of the physical body. The organs show clearest in the trunk, in the area of the three body caves where they are "at home". These manifestations of the energetic organ's situations can be perceived, "seen", or felt. The place in the body where an energetic organ shows most clearly offers itself as a focus area for the treatment. The practitioner will work with it in the same way as with a local place of ailment that has become focus area.

Opposed to the widespread practice of Zen-Shiatsu to work with two corresponding meridians resp. two corresponding energetic organs in a Shiatsu treatment I propose to choose only one of the two corresponding kyo-jitsu organs to represent the subject of the treatment and to primarily work with this one. It thus becomes easy to decide for one clear focus area by taking the place where the first organ manifests most prominently.

Even though we work primarily with one focus area during the treatment also the second organ, its manifestations in the body and its meridian course can be treated in order to address the treatment subject from an energetic counter-pole and to support the communication of kyo and jitsu. It can however also totally be left aside when it does not seem to be necessary to work with it.

Quite often it is difficult for students to decide for one organ and make it the core subject of the treatment. This is probably mainly because in the beginning of the Shiatsu way one naturally does not have the experience yet as to trust one's own subjective feeling. In fact it seems quite insecure and unreliable to the inexperienced. Later one understands, though, that contrary to this beginner's belief it is precisely the subjective perception and feeling, which says most reliably what is the right decision and how to proceed. With increasing practical experience, it is the best warrant for doing the right thing in Shiatsu.

For experienced students and practitioners it also may be right to work with two corresponding energetic organs and their meridians as Masunaga has suggested doing with a kyo and a jitsu organ. However, this only is one possible procedure, and it is not always the best.

Shiatsu with a non-physical focus area

The focus area of a treatment can also be immaterial, like for example an emotion as sadness, fear or anger that the practitioner senses in the therapeutic space, may be also in a part of the client's body. It can be impressions of how a person deals with the specific sides of life, what strengths and possibilities, but also what limitations seem to exist. Examples for this could be the way of dealing with stress, a general mental and physical tension or similar. The practitioner can also connect with the situation of an energetic organ by asking the question, how the client deals with a central aspect of the organ's functions, respectively what strengths and limitations she feels here.

Prerequisite for working with an immaterial focus area is to perceive "clearly", to feel and also to be able to perceive changes during treatment. Advanced meridian Shiatsu quite often automatically turns into such a work with an immaterial focus by perceiving the client's strong and the weak sides in respect to a central function of the underlying organ.

During a Shiatsu education, respectively in the first years of professional practice, it is suggested to find the focus area clearly in a defined area of the client's body. This will as well remain a very good orientation for experienced Shiatsu practitioners, especially when a client comes to Shiatsu with local physical ailments.

The difference between topic of a treatment and focus area

Sometimes students have difficulties to understand the difference between the subject of a treatment and the focus area. In fact in many situations the two will be almost identical, especially if a client reports of a complaint that is clearly located in one part of the body. If a client comes with lower back pain (pain in the left knee) for example, it makes sense to choose the lower back (left knee) as the subject as well as the focus area of the following treatment.

In another case however the client may come to Shiatsu with more general complaints like sleeping disorders or just because he "wants to feel better". Here the practitioner may follow Hara or back diagnosis to gain a clear focus. In that case she will decide for one of the energetic organs to work with as the subject of the treatment. The place in one of the three burning spaces where this organ shows most clearly will be chosen as the focus area. The energetic organ to be worked with, however, includes many more aspects reflecting the client's situation than just the place that has been chosen as focus area: physical, emotional, mental or spiritual sides of this person's life and present situation.

The topic of a treatment is the more comprehensive term. The focus area simply is the place in the body where the topic shows clearly. Here it is possible to work with the local energetic pattern and also the effect of the treatment can be easily witnessed here.

Treatment outline

The treatment, which follows the decision for a topic consequently works with topic and focus area. This is the pivotal point of the work. Especially at the beginning of a professional Shiatsu career it may be suggested to take a moment for one-self before starting the actual physical treatment and to think about how the treatment could be structured. Even if the treatment should take an all-different course, we thus have prepared the field with our thoughts and ideas. It is then easier to keep an overview, to get a feeling for where about in the treatment flow we are at the moment. It is a lot easier to estimate which of those many possibilities that are offering themselves to us are essential when working with this topic, and which ones we should better leave aside.

One thing to think about may be in which position the treatment should start, depending on e.g. in which position we can best reach the part of the body we want to start with, but also what position most supports the openness and trust on the client's side. Also we have to answer the question whether we want to work with the focus area directly at the beginning of the treatment or if we should rather go and work on more distant places first in order to prepare for the direct work on the subject.

In my experience a treatment consists of four phases: the welcome at the beginning, the actual work with the subject and the integration of this work into the whole (this enlarges the resonance space of the focus area) and finally the finish, the last contact. The greatest space thereby takes working with the subject and integration. Often the two play together like two dogs and cannot clearly be separated from one another. The welcoming phase and the last contact are shorter, however very important phases, too.

With increasing experience one will sense more and more already at the beginning of a treatment, how these four phases could look like. In no way does this however mean to subscribe to a defined treatment flow. In contrary, all possibilities have to stay open at any time so that we can flexibly meet the evolving needs in a treatment.

Shiatsu is also a game.

Sixth step: Treatment following diagnosis and treatment sketch

The following treatment is also part of the diagnostic process. To the one the assessment and the understanding evolved from the diagnostic process are transformed into touch. The perception of the person when touching her and her reactions to it again contain valuable information and extend and enlarge the practitioner's image of the client that has emerged in the steps before.

For example the impression of the energetic perception during the "scan" and the impression while physically touching rarely are identical. Rather they describe the same object from a different perspective. From my experience, in physical touch we most often perceive information about the surface quality, whereas in energetic perception the information about the surface is quite under-represented and we become more aware of the deep energetic spaces of the body. In this way the two impressions complement each other and widen our understanding.

What is more, it often shows in treatments, which areas are of special relevance at the moment of touch. Before we started the actual treatment we may already have had an idea of what could become of importance during the treatment. In my experience there always remains insecurity, though. It is only at the moment of touch that it becomes real.

Most of all, however, spaces open during the treatment process that were not or hardly to be perceived before the treatment. With trust increasing in the flow of the session especially a person's covered kyo-aspects may show and open themselves to touch. These may be individual, localised kyo-spots in the body, in the course of a meridian, or vulnerable sides of the whole personality. When such areas open it is usually of great value to touch them and to encounter the person in there. In the deep contact in these opening areas important changes are possible.

Hence, totally new and unforeseeable possibilities often show up and the treatment may take an all-different path than our original outline. Here a very satisfying aspect of Shiatsu shows - the practitioner is always facing new surprises. It requires a lot of experience and presence to feel the surprising turns in a treatment and to integrate them into the flow in a meaningful way. This is one of the reasons why in fact Shiatsu is an art. Experience is one of its most valuable treasures.

Finally during a treatment the practitioner's energy field goes into greater resonance with the client's field in the Therapeutic Space. This is how we may explain why images and impressions often arise in the practitioner where he for example experiences longings, fears or emotional states of his client, sometimes even "sees" complete images of an overall life situation. Receiving information of that kind is an all-natural phenomenon and does not indicate the development of supernatural faculties.

Such impressions can already arise during the first contact and the conversation. The development of the relationship between therapist and client during treatment, the growing trust and opening of the client however create all new rooms and spaces where the practitioner meets with information that he experiences as images and feelings in himself.

All of this adds to the practitioner's deepening understanding. At the end of the treatment, the impression of the client has grown and often become quite different the impression he had in the beginning. The image hence deepens, is being corrected and completes with every treatment. *Diagnosis in Shiatsu is a never-ending process of insight and understanding.* There is the chance that the treatment gets closer and closer to the client's reality in compassion and understanding. Both worlds however will always stay separate and the image of the therapist will always remain incomplete and mistaken.

Still such a procedure offers the only possibility to go into a deep contact with another human. Paradoxically it is in this all-subjective encounter that we meet the strength, beauty and the therapeutic potential of Shiatsu.

Seventh step: How can this person be supported beyond the treatment?

After the treatment some clients feel a strong need to share their experience. It is often wise to meet this need. The practitioner however has to be aware that anything he says at that time weighs for the client. She will therefore choose her words with special attention and care.

It can also be wise to keep short on answers to questions, especially if these are like "What have you learned about myself?" or "What's wrong with me?". Such questions can mirror a client's sincere interest to learn to know her-self better. They can however also be the expression of a superficial curiosity, respectively a superficial, defensive way of dealing with own, deep fear. Most often fast answers given by the therapists will hardly be of any support for the client.

It will usually be a lot more helpful to fathom the deeper issue of the client and her deeper needs in the frame of a treatment series by repeated conversation. The therapist will let his impressions, which he gained in the treatments, flow into these talks with great care and attention.

In doing this he is well conscious of the difficulties in giving words to these impressions. This he does on one hand because language is too raw a tool to adequately name and express the subtle experience. To the other, words mean different things to different people. The same word that has a certain meaning in the practitioner's world may have an all-different meaning in client's. As a rule, the client will understand it the way it fits into his world.

There are moments, though, when the meaning of words meet, moments of resonance in which the practitioner and the receiver meet each other in the Therapeutic Space and when both may experience correspondence, maybe even a kind of harmony also on other levels. These are the moments, which have the greatest impact, in conversation as well as in physical touch, and when it is more likely that sharing one's impressions will in fact support the client. With the perception of resonance the practitioner may also become clear, which of the different possible suggestions or advice that come to his mind with respect to the client's issue are most adequate. From a rational perspective, some suggestion may seem the right advice for some specific situation. However, many times one will experience that still it appears to have no meaning for the client and that he will not put it into action.

One possibility of finding out whether a suggestion is the right one for a client is to be aware of whether she goes into a positive resonance with it. If she does, then the suggestion feels to be the right one and the moment has strength. This phenomenon is clearly to be experienced. One can do the same silently in thoughts, too, and feel whether the other goes into resonance with it.

Such advice can be of great importance for the evolution of a client's situation. They can serve as a kind of bracket between the treatments that connect them into a continuous flow. This enables the client to stay in contact also in the time in between with what she experienced in the treatments and hence to keep evolving.

Advice can however also restrict the possibilities of a client to find a solution for his issue by himself. They should therefore only be given when they support the other on that way, when they really seem right and important and when it can be felt that the client is in resonance with the suggestions. They should only be given if the practitioner is quite familiar himself with what he suggests. Further more it is important to convey them in a way that is well understandable and taken serious. Before the beginning of the following treatment and also later, it is helpful to ask how they could be put into action, respectively what they mean to the receiver of the advice.

For physical exercise and similar the practitioner takes the time to demonstrate them. It may be suggested to repeat individual exercises over and over again together with the client before the treatments. Shared in this way, they will most often be practiced.

Here closes the cycle

of the diagnostic process by having returned to its starting point, the interview. As we have pointed out at the beginning already, the information will usually not reach the practitioner in the order of the cycle as it has been described here. For example, all conversations that have taken place before, during and after the treatments of a series, taken together, can be understood as the source of information, which we call *interview*. All impressions received by means of body diagnoses and the answers to the three questions, received via the subjects of the individual treatments and the treated focus areas, no matter at what point of the process they reach the practitioner, condense into an always clearer understanding of this person, her actual issues and possible solutions.

It will however be of help to practice the cycle for a while in the order in which it has been put here (or in similar order). In this way an understanding for the different facets of diagnosis in Shiatsu develops and also the perception is being trained.

Finally, in this article I have listed the aspects of diagnosis that seem especially important to me in my own practice. Other practitioners maybe will look at the one or other point as less relevant and may wish to exchange them with other methods that are important in their practice.

There are as many ways of Shiatsu as there are people who practice it.

Wilfried Rappenecker 2006