

DIAGNOSIS: SAID AND LEFT UNSAID

By Peter den Dekker

TO BE FORCED AND TO FEAR

If we feel forced in a certain situation, it might be difficult to be ourselves. There is an hidden or known message to behave in a such a way, which is not a natural one for us. This message can come from the outside world in the form of an actual social or political restriction. Or it can be the internalized echo of pasttime voices: a teacher or any other person, who told us what to do and what not to do. Once such a seed of restriction is planted, it might take many years before we are able to recognize it. Sometimes it is there in the form of guilt, deeply rooted in our european culture. Another time it has a very personal face, like the expectation of a parent, that we still try to fullfill. In all cases these pressures hold us back from being ourselves and being creative.

Fear has a similair effect on behaviour. It freezes the smooth flow of life activities. To touch fear and to melt and move frozen movement is certainly one of the core issues of shiatsu, In clinic there are hardly any cases, were stagnation and fear are not present in one form or the other, be it strong or less strong. In the Chinese medical tradition fear is associated with the water element, so it can be considered as at the very root of emotional life. Therefore it is worthwhile to study it deeply. Sometimes the fear can easy be traced back to its origin: an accident, a broken bone, a whiplash or a fysical attack. Even after many years the body remembers the shock and holds itself ready for the next one. I think that in clinic we all saw many examples of strong holding patterns, based on fysical trauma. Shiatsu is the art of localising and releasing these holding patterns.

INTERACTION

There are many other fears, that are more difficult to touch because they are hidden. "*Fears have a shape, but anxiety is more formless*" as Richard Reoch writes in his book "To Die Well"¹). Such an anxiety is like a gost without a face, always present, but yet unknown. It can be deeply rooted in our system, so that it becomes a state of being. Last springtime I led a shiatsu workshop in Austria on the theme of fear and panic. In the course of the days we composed a whole list of hidden fears, which we had recognised in ourselves and in others in the past. One of the participants told about the fear not to be welcome amongst others. Another one about the fear not to be adequate and to be left behind. We recognised the fear to speak the truth; to make full use of power and talents; to keep being playfull when becoming adult; to make mistakes; and the fear to be ourselves and simply forget what other people think of us. These anxieties can remain sleeping and often do not alarm our conscious attention. But if they remain in the dark, they can have a determining influence on our daily life. Finally, we came against some special shiatsu fears: the final examination of the shiatsu training; to be observed and diagnosed in clinic; and to be told what is good and healthy by a so called specialist. An even more common shiatsu fear, is the one to be touched, either by hands or by attention. After all, it became apparant, that it is very wel possible to trigger, and even create, fears and pressures within a shiatsu session.

In my shiatsu work I always try to have a visual clue of the area, in which the interaction with a client takes place. I visualise this meeting area somewhere halfway in between us. Now I know, that in therapeutic relationship the best for both is to go halfway, only 50%. It is just like reaching out to give somebody a hand. You can try to do that, while going far over the 50%. You will probably find yourself standing on tiptoe, with overstretched arm and fingers, struggling to keep your balance. That will not be very relaxing and on the long term quiet exhausting. Trying to give a hand while holding your arm against your body, actually not willing to reach out at all, looking down with your eyes and holding in the breath, is not efficient either. But luckily there is a middle way, which we normally perform without even being aware of it. Two hands meet in the middle, and both owners keep standing relaxed on their own feet.

Physical posture can be taken as the key to learn about energetic and emotional interaction. When the 50% rule is respected, it helps preventing situations like emotional invasion, advising-and-helping-syndrome, fights with too high expectations and authority-victim conflicts.

UNDER PRESSURE

If we get clear about interaction and mutual influencing, and if we have access to the right skills for this aspect of our work, there is less danger of forcing, pushing and triggering new fears. Shiatsu is to create safety and space to experience. This seems in contradiction with the very nature of the shiatsu touch, stable pressure. Touching and not moving, directs the attention, gently but decisive, and is in itself an act of strength. Scattered attention is brought back to one focus. Stable touching prevents escaping into fantasy. It brings the attention back to the present moment and in this very body. Yet we have to understand, that coming back in the here and now is not always nice and comfortable. To stand still and not go any further for a moment can be very confronting at times. Whatever emotion, memory or pain is dormant under the surface, it is allowed to show up. The hand which touches and does not move, can be compared with the calm attention in meditation. Both the hand and the attention do not discriminate between the one or the other feeling, thought or bodily sensation. The stability of the touch is the expression, that we as practitioners represent the stable factor in the treatment setting.

A good friend of mine, Kees Pronk, is one of the pioneers of shiatsu in Holland. In the shiatsu pre-histories he often got the question, what he actually was doing as a shiatsu practitioner. In that period most people did not have any association with it. After having tried out many possible explanations, he finally said, that as a shiatsu practitioner, he was putting people under pressure. Everybody could relate to that to some extent (though the idea that he could earn a living with that activity!). Whenever I meet him, he still seems to be happy with that self-given characteristic of shiatsu. We both agree on, that a stable and firm touch does not imprison and is neither forceful. On the contrary, it makes it possible to experience what is there, be it pain or joy. The secret of the still touch is, that it offers an optimal space to experience. It is reaching out till 50%, without any forcing. In the context of “putting people under pressure” I refer to Bill Palmer’s excellent article “The Sadist on Honeymoon”²⁾.

KYO AND JITSU

In the traditional Japanese shiatsu there is the concept of kyo and jitsu. It tells about energetic interaction in all respects. The concept can easily be understood, when applied to behaviour in everyday situations. If we are together with a friend and we get aware of a certain vulnerability in him, the way we address it is crucial. Pointing to it directly, the other one will surely come into defense. His armor will surround the vulnerable area of his being. Our attitude may be based on a willingness to help, but if we don't use the right skill, collision and more distance will be created. "*Kyo does not reveal itself to those who judge and criticise...*"³⁾ If on the other hand we ignore the issue completely, the contact will lack depth and aliveness. The inner weakness will continue to attract attention indirectly. The deeply stored seek for support will be like a hidden agenda and will limit free development and creativity.

Within each person the interplay between kyo and jitsu, vulnerability and character armor, can be observed. The internal dynamics are triggered by outer relationships. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh created the new expression "interbeing" and I believe it can be used in this perspective.⁵⁾ Inner and outer communication inter-are. In my shiatsu study I never really could grasp the kyo-jitsu. I was always looking for their objective characteristics. Whenever a teacher or advanced practitioner stated that this meridian was kyo and the other one jitsu, I was very impressed by their skill and somewhat frustrated by my own inability to feel the same under my fingers. Now I understand, that the concept is about the way of touching and the response upon that touch. It is about the person I treat and it is about me and therefore an utmost subjective matter. I believe, that what has been said about the kyo-jitsu in behaviour and relationship, can be projected on the local treatment of pain and movement limitation. The same mechanisms of defending and withdrawing can be seen in local tissues and body parts.

THE PROCES

In Chinese herbal medicine and in western allopathy a diagnosis has to be made *before* the actual treatment can take place. Without having clear insight, a diagnosis and a treatment plan, it is not safe to give any kind of medicament. Therefore, it must be understood, that in these medical disciplines diagnostics precede the action. Beside that, a certain kind of objectivity and labeling is necessary. This all is in sharp contrast with shiatsu and acupuncture. Here, insight and a diagnosis develops during the treatment. Or better to say, *might* develop during the treatment, because even without a clear diagnosis we are well able to treat. When I consider my shiatsu and acupuncture work, in many cases I don't have so much understanding of the situation. But I can start to touch, than there is the body's response on that, than a correction of the initial touch, than again a response on that and so forth. A true back and forth communication. The touch follows the needs of the body and that is what the kyo-jitsu concept is about. Shiatsu diagnosis is the process of getting to know and is not the posing of statements and labeling before the actual treatment has started.

Chinese herbal medicine is founded on sophisticated theoretical concepts like the Eight Principles and the ZangFu Syndroms. They are highly developed intellectual means to come to a precise interpretation of symptoms and a diagnosis. The Chinese pharmacopea envelops many poisonous ingredients and therefore no experiments in prescribing them can be afforded. A sharp

diagnosis beforehand is necessary. This is equally true for western allopathy (and homeopathy). In the last few decades shiatsu and acupuncture have been strongly influenced by the Chinese herbal and western allopathic diagnostic approaches. In China acupuncture was standardised at the half of this century and herbal concepts like the Eight Principles were forced on it. In Japan, specially in the period after the last world war, shiatsu had to adapt itself, for reasons of recognition, to western medical standards. Slowly the subject of diagnosis became prominent, meaning the kind of diagnosis, which is used in disciplines where medicaments are prescribed.⁴⁾

An Austrian shiatsu colleague works with children, who all have a history of abuse. She mentioned once, that the crucial part of her work is to gain trust towards the children. The effort is to find new ways to relate to each other, despite all their sad history. She said, that she experienced the conventional before-the-treatment-diagnosis and fill-in-diagnosis-forms completely counterproductive. Through her practical experience, she truly found back the dynamic option of diagnosis: entering the labyrinth yourself and finding the right way to meet the other one. To stay in those situations in the conventional therapist role is certainly not very helpful. It takes courage to leave the questions, “what do you think about my life?” and “what is your diagnosis?” unanswered. In fact, nowadays I can feel it as a relieve, to say that I don’t understand, but that we can explore together. This dynamic diagnostic option doesn’t need a specialist, but the courage of a beginner.

LEARNING

I can see two fundamental ways of diagnosis, a static and a dynamic one. In my own training in shiatsu and specially that in acupuncture the static option was put very much on the foreground. There was a strive to attain a certain objective standard in diagnosis. In the curriculum as well as in the final examination there was little space for background and personality of the student and for the creative process of making all the material our own. However, the heart of a true learning process is to digest the lessons through your own being and so assimilating what is true and discarding what is merely someone else's truth. Bill Palmer clarifies this point in his article about the Six Divisions, when he explains the Greater Yang division: “...an unassimilated bit of our conditioning. In psychological language it is called an introject, something we have swallowed whole without digestion.”⁵⁾

I have a deep respect for the traditional values of Chinese medicine. The fruit of experience of generations of practitioners better be highly esteemed. However, an uncreative learning process during a training course will always lead to uncreative clinic work. No need to say, that in training many diagnostic skills and protocols have to be learned. But here I want to emphasise the typical characteristic and the role of diagnosis in shiatsu. Why to use in shiatsu a way of diagnosing, which is not of the same nature as the shiatsu touch itself? I started this article to say, that if we feel forced in a certain situation it might be difficult to be ourselves. That is basically true for the conventional way of learning and examining in our society. This deeply rooted educational structure projects itself easy on the way we relate to clients. To undergo observation, to be diagnosed and to be told what is good and healthy are not very empowering at all. Fear and force are involved and the conventional therapist-patient roles will get even stronger fixed.

EMPTINESS

The way we perceive the world and the way we are as a person, are inter-dependent. In many traditions and disciplines this fact is acknowledged. In the far east there is the Heart Sutra.⁶⁾ It is a text, which is

frequently recited by buddhist monks and nuns, as well as by lay persons. The Heart Sutra tells about the inter-relation of all things and the non-existence of a separate identity. Every object, every thought and every concept is empty of a self. It means that the existence of one thing is only made possible by the existence of all other things. In buddhist terms: *“this is because that is, that is because this is”*. In quantum physics similar statements can be heard in relation to the world of elementary particles: no particle can be defined without referring to all other particles. That seems a modern version of the insight of the Heart Sutra: the absence of a separate self. The notion of emptiness is not at all a denial of the world in which we live, but the deep understanding of inter-dependence.

The truth where the Heart Sutra reflects on, is simple and yet more complex, than we are ever able to understand. The insights it offers us, the result of deep reflection on life, are full of contradiction. It shows us the world of the relative. Seen through the glasses of the Heart Sutra the most trivial becomes the most important; less becomes more; and sickness seems to be health itself. The early master of relativity, Lao Tze, wrote in his Tao Teh Jing: *“the one who is sick of sickness is not sick”*. Not the symptoms themselves are the sickness, but the identification with them. In my work I occasionally could be with seriously ill people, who had not lost their dignity and ability to keep a certain distance from their illness. Despite their pain or their disability they had not *become* their symptoms. Although they were ill, they had not become sick. On these occasions I felt myself their student. How could I call myself healthy, with my constant worrying and complaining about minor things? Seen from this perspective, health can be defined by the ability to relativate and by humor, and not by the lack of symptoms.

TO BE PRACTICAL

Ordinary daily life seems to follow completely other lines. Here, we have to earn our living, take care for our family, defend our rights and be simply practical. In clinic we have to take on the role of the therapist and be down to earth. We are asked to lessen some of the pain and make complaints bearable. We might have to give advise about food and exercise and able to come straight forward with our judgements when the situation asks for that. In the role of the therapist we have to make full use of our knowledge and the skills we have learned. There are all the diagnostic tools, the clinical protocols, the empirical first aid points and so forth. Addressing to acute and severe conditions, most of the time there is simply no time to reflect and see the situation in a larger perspective. We have to come into action, into efficient action, and the aim is for direct results.

Working like a therapist asks for the static diagnostic option. We have to translate our observations into a clear judgement of the condition. Furthermore, we have to decide right away what to do and what not to do. To treat one person with great conviction or to refuse to treat

another person and to refer him to a medical specialist, are both examples of decisive strength. The new age wave has made symptomatic treatment suspicious. As a reaction on tendencies in our conventional medicine it is seen as inferior practice to merely address symptoms. But it is forgotten, that relieving the acute symptoms can open the door towards a more fundamental approach. By lessening some of the pain and by an instant result our clients will have faith in their capacity to heal. Symptomatic results are necessary to find the courage and the commitment to go through more structural changes. As Bill Pamer writes in the "The Sadist on Honeymoon": *".....this nourishing period builds up a supply of satisfaction which supports the future commitment."* The static and the dynamic approaches in diagnostics bring forth two fundamental roles we can take in practice and refer to two views of the world, a practical and a relative one.

TO FEEL HUMAN

When I work in Vienna, I sometimes walk into a catholic church, to escape city life and to enjoy the silence for a minute. I haven't had a strong christian education, and certainly not a catholic one, but entering one of those churches, it is clear where the attention is directed to. Directly to the front is the altar and the cross. The only thing I can do, is to look up. There is no any intimacy, there is distance and I feel small and full of awe. The higher the ceiling, the stronger this feeling is to me. Standing there, it is obvious that the christian god is male. I see a severe father or teacher, who says that for now it is alright but a next time I have to do it better. His energy is one of teaching, judging and comparison. *"Western culture, its religions originating in desert regions and its society growing in harsh northern climates, sees nature as something to be conquered and manipulated."*⁷⁾ The atmosphere to the front is very helpful to make another step in a learning process or in life in general, but not very inviting to do things in my own pace and be myself.

In the same church the female counterpart of the front altar can be found. At the left or at the right of the entrance, there is a small chapel with a statue of Maria. People go in there, burn a candle and stay for a while. The atmosphere in the small chapel is so different compared to that in the big space of the church.

I feel human, maybe with a lot of stupid mistakes, but I feel human. It is easy to think and feel whatever is there in myself. I guess that whenever people tell or ask something to her, it is already acknowledged before they do that. Looking up to her I see the earth, the same patience, the same embrace. I understand that in our religion the statue of this woman got a place somewhere at the side. Or must I say, because she resides at the side, our culture became what it is now.

COMPASSION

Being in China for study, I visited often buddhist monasteries and temples. There Maria can be found at almost the same place as in our catholic churches, a bit of the side. But also here the people are able to find her and burn incense and say their prayer. She is called Kwan Yin, the goddess of mercy. Compared to the often enormous statues of Buddha she is but a tiny figure, but her presence is not less radiant. In the buddhist tradition there is the idea of a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is someone, who is able to truly be there for somebody else. In his or her heart there lives a very deeply rooted compassion. They live according to their strong wish to help, wherever

there is pain. In other people the compassion is still shallower and comes only for a moment on the surface. That can be seen in many of us, who wants to do something when we see injustice or suffering, but sometimes lose the contact to our heart again.

A well known bodhisattva is Avalokita, the personification of the skill of deep listening. It is remarkable that the male Avalokita transformed into a woman during the travel buddhism made from India to China. In China he became a she and is called Kwan Yin. Obviously, the characteristics of this bodhisattva could be better embodied and personified in a female figure. I don't think it is useful to see Avalokita or Kwan Yin as a historical or mythical figure. We better see her as the symbol of the listening capacity in ourself. I remember the deep listening of my own grandfather and to have had such a person in my live has been a truly wonderful gift. His kind of listening was without interfering and advising and gave space to the story I wanted to tell. In the past many articles in this journal expressed this attitude in an inspiring way: "Healing the Earth" by Maddie Parisio⁸⁾ and "Teaching Energy Awareness in Shiatsu" by Nicholas Pole⁹⁾ are only two examples of that.

LISTENING DEEPLY

Evoking the Bodhisattva's names

We evoke your name, Avalokitesvara. We aspire to learn your way of listening in order to help relieve the suffering in the world. You know how to listen in order to understand. We evoke your name in order to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We shall sit and listen without judging or reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what has been left unsaid. We know that by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person.

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The two different ways of being with somebody is so clearly expressed in the sentence: "... be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what has been left unsaid." Listening and the story being told are inter-dependend. Are we able to listen so deeply that not only the spoken words are heard, but also the hidden ones? The story which probably is not being told for a long time waits for the listener who is able to forget himself for a moment and who can be truly present. Reading the last sentence influenced my shiatsu practice and my teaching deeply. "We know that by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person." Here is expressed that the listening itself, either with ears or with hands, is the core of

