

The Three Archetypes of Healing

by Bill Palmer M.Sc. MRSS(T)

I started learning Shiatsu as part of my Aikido training in 1973, where we used it to recover from injury. It was very simple, meridians weren't discussed and diagnosis didn't exist. Then, studying Zen Shiatsu in 1978, I discovered the world of Kyo and Jitsu, Hara Diagnosis and meridians. These styles seemed very different but then I started working with Shinmei Kishi and realised that, at some deep level, the Namikoshi style and the Masunaga style were the same, in that they were both concerned with *curing a condition and re-balancing the energy*.

Kishi, in 1979, was starting to strike out on his own, independently of the Zen Shiatsu tradition. He was starting to develop what he now calls Sei Ki, whose deep principle is to *liberate energy and to allow it to move*, not to cure or to balance.

It is true that if blocked energy is liberated and a process is initiated, then the organism often reaches a state of balance. In fact, the process of Zen Shiatsu, involves liberation of Jitsu and the movement of energy into the Kyo, but the end result (at least in my day) was to find eventual balance. That is not the aim of process oriented work, and in my experience, the effect of practising spontaneous movement is to allow one to feel poised and centered even within chaotic situations, rather than to calm those energies down.

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, a Dzog Chen teacher who has been deeply important to me, talks about the difference between Sutric Buddhism (including Zen Buddhism) and Tantric Buddhism in a way that mirrors these two styles of energy work. He observes that the aim of Sutric Buddhism is to create calm, so that the practitioner can experience the essential non-conceptual nature of reality without being distracted by strong emotions. This is sensible, because the nature of strong emotions is to form divisions in the world. If I'm angry, it is natural to be angry WITH SOMEBODY ELSE, not just to feel the experience of anger.

However, the principle of Tantrism is different. The aim here is to remain undivided even in the presence of strong feelings. So, Tantric practitioners welcome intense situations in which most of us would be overcome with desire or anger, because, for them it is like learning to surf on the wave of energy rather than be drowned by it.

The two archetypes that are emerging here are two different styles of being.

- 1) Calming the Waves
- 2) Learning to Surf

Neither is better or worse than the other but they have different functions which are appropriate in different situations and for different people. In my experience, the first style is useful in acute situations and conditions which are unfamiliar, while the second is

more appropriate when energy is stuck in a chronic pattern. This often occurs when a trauma is too strong to deal with, we lock the feelings up for later. We create a false calm which is not alive, because we are resisting movement. In this case, we need to learn to feel comfortable with movement as well as finding a more real sense of self.

Learning to feel comfortable with movement needs practise and needs regular trips to the inner beach to practise balancing on the surf board before we are confident to take on the real breakers of normal life. This is the purpose of practising Sei Ki or Katsugen Undo.

So, Kishi's work and Zen Shiatsu gave me two ways of working that I practised for about 10 years. However, I noticed that something wasn't working. Most clients felt great about the work, enjoyed the mixture of bodywork and spontaneous movement, felt empowered by the interactive work we were doing and felt better in themselves. Successful treatment, one might say.

But, on a deep level, I felt that they were only moving from one stuck position to another, more subtle, stuckness. They were entranced by the ability to deal with strong, uncomfortable experience by letting the energy liberate itself through some spontaneous movement, but this can and did become self-obsessed. The subtle stuckness was that they did not carry things through. If something became uncomfortable, they had learnt techniques to liberate that discomfort and so the creative function of conflict did not have a chance to work its alchemy.

I also noticed this in myself and my life. I did not stick with things long enough to allow the difficulties to erode my arrogance and develop real awareness of my shape as a person. I was stuck in an over-optimistic illusion about myself and therefore had difficulty maintaining real, profound human relationships.

The development of another style of work, which has become called Movement Shiatsu, has therefore been the fruit of personal struggle. Both the archetypes we have discussed so far do not embody the Liver Yang in their essence. What do I mean by this? That they both are concerned with smooth flow, with resolution and with process and are not concerned with challenge, persistence in the face of difficulty and development of core strength. Thus, in many cases, nothing really changes.

Going back to the metaphor of water. The first archetype helps to calm the water so that it becomes limpid, allowing you to be aware of yourself. The second archetype helps the water to move and helps you to swim and surf in it. However, neither of them helps the water to break out of its entrenched pathways. For this you need a style of work that incorporates something akin to sports training and this is necessary for chronic personality disorders such I discovered in myself.

Movement Shiatsu has been developing in this way. We work with positions and movements derived from Yoga and from the primitive reflex movements of infant development. These exercises challenge us and help us to become aware of the

unexplored terrain that our water (energy) does not flow into. You could say this is the self-discovery of our deep Kyo.

We then use Shiatsu to help the water to reach those places, to generate a direct experience of what it is like. This does not last because the terrain has not changed but it wakes up a process of development.

We then provide a system of personalised exercises and experiments, which we practise. This strengthens the parts of the body which are too weak to maintain our integrity and slowly develops the physical support for a real change in terrain. Paradoxically, real change only happens when you accept yourself as you really are and, in humility, commit to a long period of practice during which development slowly transforms you.

Bill Palmer was one of the founder members of the Shiatsu Society and has also studied Psychotherapy and Developmental Movement Therapy. He was the originator of Movement Shiatsu, which this article describes. In 1986 he formed the School for Experiential Education, which now only runs postgraduate training courses. His work has become most popular in Spain and Holland, where he teaches regularly. It has also become part of some Gestalt Psychotherapy trainings in the UK.