

The Six Forms of Touch

Part 1: The Creative Function & Kidney Touch

The *Six Forms of Touch* are basic attitudes which support the fundamental forms of energy described in Chinese Medicine by the Yin Organs: the Kidney, Spleen, Liver, Lung, Heart and Heart Protector. These attitudes are communicated by the way that we touch somebody and also the way that we relate to them. In the case of the Kidney, that basic attitude is saying 'YES' to the client's primal energy. This attitude is an essential part of the ancient oriental tradition but has become lost in modern times.

For instance, I was talking to an experienced acupuncturist the other day about the meaning of the word 'holistic'. "Holistically", she said, "a person's illness is not only the symptoms, but also the entire life and lifestyle of the patient, whose imbalance manifests as disease."

I thought to myself how common this notion had become in the world of the healing arts: that the whole of a person is diseased; that the whole of their lifestyle has to change. We have exchanged one problem-based viewpoint for another. We have swapped a disease-sized problem for lifestyle-sized problems like a bad diet or a wretched childhood!

In the West the concept of original sin is deeply ingrained in the cultural psyche. This says: "**if you leave things alone, they will get worse!**" Thus a disease becomes a problem because we think we have to *actively do* something to *cure* it. Since the communist revolution, China has also embraced this negative philosophy and it has become incorporated into the modern practice of TCM.

Disease as a healing process

The ancient oriental philosophy, on which Chinese Medicine was founded, believed that if you leave things alone, they will get better by themselves. Maybe a little support is needed to help the process, but, essentially, healing is a natural development of life. Masunaga used to say that the energy of healing is the same as the Jitsu part of an imbalance. I think he meant that the symptoms are signs of a healing process, not part of a disease. As with walking, we have to move out of balance in order to move forward.

Ryokyu Endo, author of *Tao Shiatsu*, also confirms this approach in his book. For instance: "*What the healer should sympathise with is not the patient's symptoms but the patient's life force existing beyond the symptoms, because the life force, not the symptoms, respond to therapy.*"

Many of us may pay lip service to this idea, but how many of us carry it into our Shiatsu practice? In many years of watching people do Shiatsu it seems that most people centre their treatments around relieving the patient's discomfort. This may seem obvious, but if you are doing Shiatsu with the intention of *getting rid of* the symptom then you are saying 'NO' to it. And if the symptom is part of a person's natural self-adjustment, then you are also saying 'NO' to the healing process! If you really base your treatment on the positive philosophy then your attitude is positive towards the disease. Your aim is to support its progress, to help it onwards towards speedy resolution or to help stuck process to start moving again.

Noguchi, the modern Japanese master of Seitai, used to praise flu, saying it was a great healer. He regularly used to get flu which developed fully into sneezing, mucus and fever and which disappeared in a few minutes, leaving him refreshed. He used to say that it's only because we reject the symptoms and try to escape from the illness that it takes so long to resolve itself.

This rejection of the process of disease is part of a whole culture of saying 'No' to spontaneous life energy, and it is this same source of creativity which is the essence of Kidney function. Culturally, in Northern Europe we have a feeling that we need to stay in control of our energy; as though our impulses are intrinsically dangerous. Working with Kidney energy is learning how to turn this attitude round and fundamentally say 'YES' to spontaneity.

Energy is intrinsically positive.

I do not believe in 'Negative Energy', only that we cannot always find a way to harmoniously manifest our impulses and this unresolved energy feels uncomfortable and can result in distorted behaviour. I feel that this is a fundamental difference. If you believe in negative energy, then your aim is to get rid of it and replace it with positive energy; so your initial action is to say 'no' to the energy that is there. If you really agree with me, then you can say 'yes' to the energy however painful its way of manifesting.

I see these two attitudes very clearly in the way people treat children. Young children are perfect manifestations of pure Kidney energy and are naturally exuberant, aggressive and loving by turns. I notice, in England, that many people spend a lot of time saying 'NO' to children to teach them how to behave. It may be necessary to channel energy, but if you try to control it and suppress some impulses completely then you start to kill our basic source of vitality and the result is the stiff, lifeless adult forms which we often see around us, living but not living, bored with life because they have lost their zest.

I feel that the basic exuberance of children is good energy however it manifests. This attitude of basic approval is

immediately apparent even if you are saying that you don't like a child's behaviour. For instance, a two year old is often very aggressive and flies into enormous tempers when he doesn't get what he wants. This is obviously difficult for the parents, but the underlying aggressive energy is not bad, or even violent. It is the same energy that we use to reach our goals in life, to persist in the face of difficulty and to explore new experiences. He is developing his will.

If the parents disapprove of his aggressiveness and coldly give him the message that this energy is not acceptable, then they are trying to kill a major part of his life force. But if, on the other hand, they confront him and intimately engage in the contest of wills then they are teaching him how to use this energy within relationship and society; to channel it without killing or suppressing it.

Spontaneous movement resolves imbalances automatically

The Primal Energy which is the source of our spontaneity is the core of the Kidney Function and in TCM is called *Yuan Qi*, which means Original Energy. I see it as the Inner Child. When working with adults, it is usually hidden under layers of self-control but if you can reach it, it is an infinite source of healing. Many systems of healing from all over the world are based on the idea that spontaneous movement resolves unbalanced energy automatically. In Japan, this is the basis of *Seitai* and is called *Katsugen Undo*. In Tibet it is called *Rushen*. In Europe the *Process Oriented Psychotherapy* of Arnold Mindell is based on the same idea. In this view, the inner child is not our vulnerable victim but our source of vitality.

Kidney Touch is saying 'YES' to energy.

All these different systems have their own ways of initiating spontaneous movement and the techniques within Kidney Touch owe a lot to them all and also to art forms such as Contact Improvisation and Grotowski's theatre work. But essentially they are ways of helping a person to sense inner impulse and to say 'yes' to it through movement.

Working with babies and very young children is an entirely different story since they are continuously in touch with their spontaneity. Crying, kicking, dancing, shouting, squealing, playing, laughing and shaking are all automatic ways that children use to resolve and express their energy. With them it is more a matter of teaching them to channel their power and choose how to manifest it in action. This is working with Liver Qi, which is archetypally like an Inner Father.

Another important aspect of working with children is in helping them to trust themselves, to trust that they can re-find themselves after getting into a state. To feel self-reliant by stages. This is helping them to develop healthy Spleen Qi, an Inner Mother. Slowly, the child can then transfer their dependance on the outer parents to the inner parents and grow up without losing touch with the source of their vitality.

Spontaneity and Fear

Uncontrolled and chaotic movement can be terrifying (*which is why Kidney' is associated with Fear*). We are often afraid of our spontaneity. Personally, in my rediscovery of primal impulse, I found it necessary to work with a teacher who was not afraid of it and who loved life.

One of the most common difficulties that my students have when exploring Kidney Touch is that they find it difficult to cope with their client's primal release because they are afraid of it in themselves. Also, people learn Katsugen or Central Channel Release techniques and try to apply them to clients without practicing spontaneous movement. It is only by exploring it in ourselves that we can trust that it is not destructive.

Paradoxically, spontaneity needs lots of practice and you cannot help a client to freely release their Original Qi without meeting it in yourself. Then it becomes a magical source of continuous healing, allowing us to resolve imbalance as it happens. It inspires us to dance through life with zest rather than trudging through it in a state of zombie-like boredom or self-control.