

Experiential Shiatsu

Interactive Therapy and Teaching

Emergent Diagnosis

Masunaga once said that Treatment and Diagnosis were the same. This article is an attempt to explain that philosophy and make it practical, for it is a fact that many students and practitioners divide their work into a period of diagnosis and then a period of treatment.

I often hear teachers say that, at the end of the first year, a student's touch is really good and that their intuitive Shiatsu feels great but by the end of the third year, the quality of their contact has dwindled. Why does that happen?

I believe it is the result of trying to use several different diagnostic systems such as Zen Hara Diagnosis, Five Element indications maybe even some TCM. Unless these systems are second nature, the student's attention is focused on the diagnostic process and their intellect is working overtime trying to integrate them. The simple, direct contact with the client is easily lost.

Sonia Moriceau used to teach that theory and technique should be like tools in a toolbox, which you take out and use if they are appropriate, but are not essential to the Shiatsu. I like this analogy, and taking it further, you can see where the typical third year student gets into trouble: they are focusing on which tools to use, which meridians to work with. Instead, they should first find out what is needed and then the appropriate meridians become obvious.

The problem is: how do you decide what is needed without first doing diagnosis? The most useful concept I have found is "Emergent Diagnosis". This means that the diagnosis emerges from the treatment instead of being done prior to it.

I think this is consistent with Masunaga's idea: when you feel the energetic interaction of the Kyo and the Jitsu, then this is the action of adjustment as well as being the diagnosis. Emergent Diagnosis goes further and is capable of initiating work on areas where the 'healing process' is stuck and no flow takes place. The common point is that the work is happening BEFORE you know what you are doing.

So how do you start? How do you know what you are going to do? I think that it is unnecessary to intellectually define what you are doing if you have a framework to act within, which starts a process between you and the client. This may be a bodywork routine but, personally, my focus at the start of a session is in building contact with the client and, most importantly, helping the client to make contact with themselves.

For instance, the client may be describing something in their lives that is distressing them and I am noticing which parts of their body they are holding stiff, which parts are collapsing, which parts are filling with emotion. I may suggest that they become aware of the parts that are holding, exaggerating the sensation by increasing the tension. I tell them to pay attention to their sensations and ask their body where they would like to be touched or supported. I encourage them to give feedback, telling me

whether they are getting what they need and to correct me if I am not touching in exactly the right way.

I also do what I intuitively feel is needed, *but I am not trying to understand what we are doing*. The act of trying to understand would take part of my attention off the client. The natural intelligence of our mutual intuition is guiding the process instead of the intelligence of the intellect. This is important: the intellect needs to draw back to work out a future plan of action, the intuition has a different form of intelligence which has been developed by evolution rather than knowledge and which acts more in the present than the future.

Usually, at some point, I realise what we are doing. This is the Emergent Diagnosis. For instance, I may notice that the client is asking me to touch him but that, when I do, he doesn't allow me to really make contact, holding himself away from the touch. So I cannot provide the support for which he is asking. Suddenly I realise that the theme of the day is an issue in the Yang Ming – the combination of the Stomach and Large Intestine meridians.

The Stomach Meridian teaches us to reach out to the outer world and receive support and nourishment. The Large Intestine teaches us to push unwanted energy away, and how to individuate; so as not be swamped by the incoming energy. Often, if people have not learned to say NO with the Large Intestine, they are afraid of saying “YES”, in case they get more input than they are able to cope with.

With our imaginary client, I might use this realisation to suggest creative experiments. I would share my realisation with him but, instead of challenging him to soften, I might suggest that he consciously hardens and keeps me out when I touch. This is using basic principle of Yin-Yang, by encouraging him to go further in the direction he is already moving, he can fulfil the Yang action of the Large Intestine so that it starts to transform into its Yin aspect, which is the ability to let go (of protection in this case). This allows him to start to receive support and to develop his Stomach energy.

Interactivity and Experiential Shiatsu

The key to this style of work is Interactivity. We, the client and I, are exploring together and that activity gives motivation and direction to the work before we consciously know the theme of the session.

I believe that it is also important to facilitate Experiential Understanding instead of Intellectual Description. For instance, we may realise that we are protective and tense without really experiencing how we are doing it with our muscles. If we can help a client to get into their body and experience HOW they are doing something rather than describing WHAT they are doing, then they have a handle on how to experiment and how to move on.

It doesn't matter which style of Shiatsu you practise, but I believe that working interactively and experientially deepens your contact with the client and helps them realise themselves.

Intellect and Intuition

I was very lucky to have worked with several teachers whose focus was experiential rather than descriptive. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in particular helped me to make real inner contact with each muscle, bone and tissue of my body. So I learnt how to do things from the inside, from the body first and only later to add an intellectual description.

The intellect is very powerful and can help you to go somewhere new. Intuition on its own can easily get stuck in the present. But if you start off with the intellect, the process has no ground in present reality – it is governed by thoughts about the past and future. Sensation and Intuition ground us in the present moment and then Emergent Diagnosis can use the fire of the intellect to turn the present into a journey rather than an aimless circle.

In brief, I am suggesting that you do not use the intellect to work out what to do but wait for realisation. In that realisation, the intellect will naturally pull together theory and techniques you have learnt which are appropriate without losing contact with the present process.

Experiential Teaching

I think there is something here to be learnt, not only about how to work with clients, but also how to teach. Students are confused because they first learn about Energy, Organ Functions and other Shiatsu ideas as intellectual concepts. They are not taught how to feel these things from the inside, which makes it difficult for them to work intuitively.

A short article cannot describe in detail how to teach in this way, but we can be aware of the difference between the descriptive and experiential approaches by noticing what we are doing. For instance, are we teaching people about the Stomach energy by telling them what it is and where the meridian runs? Or are we helping the students to feel how they go about getting what they need – which would give them an internal experience of the Stomach in themselves?

Again, in teaching anatomy, if we just describe the location and function of muscles and bones, the intellect has a picture but the body doesn't feel it. If we can teach people to get to know their bodies from the inside then their work with others naturally becomes more intuitive because they are guided by their inner knowledge rather than an outer idea of what to do.

My experience with people who have learned this way is that they do not lose that beautiful, profound touch, which they found in their first year and which, I believe, is the jewel in the crown of Shiatsu.

Bill Palmer is facilitating a course on Teaching Experientially, one Wednesday afternoon a month from November to April in London. It will focus on how to teach people to feel their anatomy and energy from inside. See <http://www.seed.org/teaching> for details, or the advert in this issue of the Newsletter.