

One client taught me a great deal about dealing with conflict. Ann came to me, very tense and frustrated. She had been living an affluent but unsatisfactory life with a husband, children, house and friends in another country and then fell in love with a man, Bob, from England, left everything and determined to start anew with him. However, as soon as they started living together in England, Bob started to doubt the whole thing and became physically impotent. She was furious with him and felt powerless to change his fears about intimacy. They were locked into a position of conflict where he felt guilty, trapped and weak while she felt strong, angry and resentful.

I could well understand her anger but it wasn't helping to resolve the conflict. The more she shouted at Bob the more distant he became. So I wondered where to start. I noticed that her energy was powerful but concentrated in her muscles (the exterior) and the top of her body; she was tense, fiery and red-faced. So, seeing the strong Yang I tried to help her get in touch with the Yin by stimulating the sensation of her internal organs and bringing Qi into the Stomach and Spleen meridians. She started to get in touch with her more vulnerable feelings and one session, when we had been working with her own feelings about relationship, she discovered a deep terror of intimacy in herself of which she had not been aware. In fact Bob had been helping her keep these feelings unconscious by doing the job of "keeping the distance". Not only did she understand and feel compassion for him after this session, but the same night he lost his impotency and they started a good sexual relationship. She did not have to explain her insight to him, he could feel that she empathised with him and was freed from the guilt which was locking him away from her.

In the foreground of this conflict was her anger, which she felt was justified since she had "left everything to commit herself to him". In the background was her own fear of closeness which her boyfriend was saving her from feeling by doing the withdrawing for both of them. When she could feel her own shadow feelings, he was no longer trapped in the conflict, no longer felt himself to be the one at fault and could feel close to her. By finding their underlying unity (the fear of being together!), they could, paradoxically, come together. They got married that summer, I hope they lived happily ever after!

The key to this process is what Buddha called compassion. This is more than just mutual understanding or sympathy; it is fully realising that both forces are part of the same unified field and thus necessarily co-exist. The relationship is stuck in conflict because the field is polarised.

### **How can Shiatsu help a person to resolve conflict?**

Ann and Bob exhibited a typical polarised field. Basically, this is a locked charge in a relationship coming from a mutual effort to keep certain feelings unconscious. Both of them were resentful, both of them feared intimacy. The fear of intimacy probably had a deep cause in the childhood of each. For instance abuse can obviously result in fear of closeness and, since the abuser is often desperately important to a child, the natural anger against the abuser is often repressed and experienced as guilt or resentment.

With this couple, the field was polarised by the feelings of anger and fear being deflected away from their original cause and projected onto each other. Ann hid the fear and expressed all the anger in the field but directed it at Bob rather than at her abuser. She felt energised but stuck. Bob expressed fear but hid his anger by turning it back onto himself in the feeling of guilt. He felt weak and un-energised. This feels very like the energy polarisation of the meridian system into a Jitsu and a Kyo pair but since I was working with the Jitsu partner, I could not "support the Kyo" in the relationship.

However, as the field is created by the energy polarisation of each partner, one can work with the relationship through just one of the couple. If one of them moves out of the stuck polarisation of the relationship then the field is liberated and the couple has a great opportunity for real contact.

### **The role of bodywork in therapy**

Just working with the body or mind in therapy will not get to the root of deep issues. I believe that deep patterns in the personality only change slowly through the challenge to one's conditioned expectations provided by new forms of life experience and bodily sensations.

For instance, lack of confidence, such as Bob exhibited, is generally a result of childhood experience and the problem is that, once this pattern is in place it tends to feed itself. A person who doesn't value themselves shows this in their posture and movement and this is picked up by the people around them who unconsciously act in a way, such as domination, which only confirms the view. It is as though our past

experience is frozen into our posture which continually feeds back a sensation of ourselves which keeps us trapped in the habitual belief about ourselves.

Bodywork can change our posture and ways of sensing ourselves and thus can break this vicious circle. If our body starts to *feel* solid and upright when our emotional view of self is insubstantial and collapsed then we have two contradictory views of self. If the emotional view is not reconfirmed by present experience then slowly the past-conditioned view can be replaced by one that is consistent with our present postural sensations. Counselling is helpful in this transformation process since it keeps us in touch with reality while the nervous system tries to integrate our bodily sensations with our mental experience. The approach to body-work needed in working with one partner of a conflictual couple is different depending whether you are helping the Jitsu or the Kyo partner.

## **Working with the Jitsu partner**

If you are working with the person who is Jitsu in the relationship their energy is often Yang and Exterior, so bringing energy and sensation to the Interior aspects of the body is usually helpful.

Specifically, the Heart Protector, Spleen and Conception Vessel help the energy to move towards the central core. Guiding the breathing into the centre helps a person to become aware of their internal sensations. This requires a particular form of touch which I call Spleen Touch and, in particular, points such as HP8, HP6, SP6, CV4, CV 14, CV17, CV22, LIV13, SP10, and SP21 support this process.

One can also help the client to ground their energy and let go of muscular control of feelings through working with the **Yang Ming** division, which facilitates Downward energy through the Stomach and Large Intestine meridians. Tonifying points such as LI4, ST31, ST36, SP3 support this process.

Freeing the joints also helps her to let go of muscular control. Moving both sides of the joint rather than just rotating the distal part helps the postural bracing to release and creates free movement. Points on the space between the bones are helpful in giving a sensation of a central pivot around which both the distal and proximal bones can move. Examples are GB2 (TMJ and Atlanto-Occipital Joints), LIV13 (Top and Bottom of Body), GB29 (Around which the pelvis rotate in Sagittal plane), LIV8 (Knee) and SI10 (Shoulder).

Finally, working with the **Shao Yin** division joining the Kidney and the Heart allows the central, core energy to come into consciousness and be expressed, particularly by stimulating spontaneous movement through techniques I call Kidney Touch, and by releasing the musculature of the jaw and hyoid bone to allow the Heart Meridian to open into the mouth. Points such as ST8, ST7, ST6, CV17, KID27, HT7, KID1 help this process. I usually help the client to embody this division by using their voice to make long, open deep sounds after having done the body-work.

In my experience, these styles of work help a person in the Jitsu part of a relationship to access the feelings in the Yin, vulnerable aspect of the field and thus, like Ann to find a common ground on which to meet the Kyo partner.

## **Working with the Kyo partner**

Helping the Kyo partner is a different story. Bob did not need to access their common fear of intimacy, he was displaying it explicitly, but needed to access his share of their common anger which, in the field, was retroflected into guilt. Retroflection is the process of turning a feeling against yourself to avoid expressing it to the person at whom it is really aimed. Energetically it is a contractive process, undermines the upright energy of the person and makes them liable to collapse.

In his case we need to encourage the Yang, upward and outward directions of energy. If he could access his anger it would give him the inner force to move towards Ann, even if at first it is in an angry way. When the energy of the field is polarised in an attempt to avoid contact you often find that if the Kyo partner can move towards the Jitsu one then the relationship flips. In our example, if Bob could come forward, Ann would start feeling her fear and back off! Within a therapeutic setting, the Kyo partner can be helped to see that now A is doing exactly what he *was* doing and this opens the gate for compassionate understanding to enter the relationship, which *does* resolve the conflict. So how can Shiatsu support the Kyo partner to make this switch.

Subjectively Bob felt weak, collapsed and contracted by guilt. Shiatsu and bodywork can help someone in this position to develop an upright and liberated feeling in their body which contradicts this emotional sense of self, stimulating a process of change.

## **Dealing with Collapse**

Energetically, collapsed posture means low energy in the **Tai Yin** division. The Spleen and the Lung, which together form this division both have the function of expanding and supporting the posture. The Spleen Qi gives tone to the central organs and the Lung Qi spreads this tone into the peripheral tissues and gives a sense of expansion and space.

I generally work with the **Tai Yin** through breathing techniques and Spleen Touch, helping the Qi to inhabit the body by encouraging the breath to enter the centre and expand into the body by tactile feedback. Opening and tonifying the Spleen and Lung meridians helps people in this process specially at points such as SP21 and LU1.

Just as important as the bodywork however, is encouraging the client to live a lifestyle where he is not under pressure, feels nourished and has space. This change of lifestyle supports the buoyant and expansive energy of the Tai Yin. Traditionally the Lung is called the *courageous Organ* and helping the person get space in their life supports the Lung in this function.

## **Dealing with Guilt**

This is a complex syndrome but the basic issue is an internal conflict between our gut feelings and the views of ourselves that we have imported from other people, especially parents & teachers. These imported views are called *introjects* and the subjective experience is that we feel something like: "I want to do this but I shouldn't". Introjects are little gremlins that say "Should" and "Shouldn't" and inhibit our drive. As such they are un-assimilated energy from the outside that has not integrated with our sense of Self.

The energetic problem associated with guilt shows itself in the **Tai Yang** division, linking the Bladder and Small Intestine meridians. The **Small Intestine** function discriminates between outer energy that we can assimilate and that which we can't. If it is not functioning then we are vulnerable to introjects and this is especially true in childhood when the Small Intestine function is immature (what you should be open to or reject is largely decided by adults so they take over the S.I. function). The **Bladder meridian** links the legs and spine in such a way that the Will can mobilise the body into action in a straightforward way. Both meridians together collaborate to give a sensation of clear decisive action, not inhibited by introjection.

By aligning the legs and body and strengthening the spine by energising the Bladder meridian one can help the body to feel its potential for powerful action. By liberating the S.I. meridian, the cowering posture typical of people plagued by introjects can be released allowing the body to be capable of clearly reaching out to another person. This cowering posture is generated by a few muscles which are linked to the state of the S.I. meridian. These are the Latissimus Dorsi, Rhomboids, Trapezius and Levator Scapulae. Techniques such as Sotai are useful in liberating these muscles and tonifying certain points related to the Small Intestine help maintain the muscular freedom. For instance, SI9 and BL27 (Small Intestine Shu Point) are at either end of Latissimus Dorsi whilst SI11 & SI13 help liberate Trapezius and Levator Scapulae.

## **Rejecting the Introjects**

Two more organs are important in dealing with guilt. The **Large Intestine** helps us to expel unwanted energy such as introjects and to turn the retroflective direction of guilt outwards towards the person who has created the condition.

In addition, the **Liver** and the **Gall Bladder** meridians can support the sides of the body, giving a sense of uprightness and confidence to the posture. The sap flowing up this tree-like posture is the anger, previously repressed, but which now provides the power needed to stand up for ourselves and can push through inhibitions to create a free passage for the Will.

In practise I find that by working with the body in this way and then encouraging the client to make gestures and sounds of pushing away (Large Intestine meridian) they spontaneously get in touch with their resentment. By encouraging them to keep the energy flowing up and out, the resentment transforms into

upright, clear anger which does not eat them away inside but can be used to stand up for themselves. This provides the inner strength needed to move towards the other partner in the field and to make real contact.

**Conclusion**

This article has explored one particular form of conflict but many of the ideas presented will be helpful in working with other forms as well. In our training courses we are teaching Shiatsu in the context of working with life issues and it gives an exciting and immediate relevance to the work.

However, this approach links the way in which bodily and emotional experience are linked, so we need to emphasise in our Shiatsu training the counselling skills necessary to deal with these issues. In addition, in my experience as a trainer of Gestalt Psychotherapists I have found that these body-energy insights are also helpful in that field. Hopefully, we are working towards a closer collaboration between the two disciplines.

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