

Learning How to Deal with Change

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The paradox of change

When people come for therapy they usually want to change something. Maybe they want to get rid of pain or deal with emotional issues or cure an illness. They often feel powerless to deal with the issue themselves. Maybe they want the therapist to rescue them from their difficulty and make it go away but, even if they don't expect so much, the therapy is usually seen as a way of changing their condition.

This article explains why *trying to change* frequently doesn't work, particularly in long term, chronic situations. Paradoxically, letting go of the desire to be different can create an environment where real transformation takes place.

One of my specialities is working with severely disabled people. I find that many children with disabilities are traumatised by the orthodox therapy they receive because both the parents and the therapists feel a pressure to try to make the child develop as normally as possible. The fact that they are focusing on how to change the condition results in the child feeling there is something wrong with her core self. The result is that she sees her disability as unacceptable and rejects that part of herself.

In contrast, helping people to face and sense their disability without an agenda of change brings them into their grounded reality and, from that ground, they can start to explore how to develop their unique potential without comparing themselves to 'the norm'.

This viewpoint is also valid for a wider group. People who come for therapy are often viewing their condition as a disability that they want to change. In chronic situations, this gives them a feeling that there is something wrong with themselves as a person. The result is that they split off and reject that part.

So how do we help a client to face themselves as they are without collapsing into a fatalistic acceptance of a situation that they feel powerless to change? How can a person be in a state where they don't reject their present condition but are open to change when it happens naturally?

The individual as a team

I find it useful to see each individual as a group. Sometimes the person is vulnerable and needing help, sometimes they are mature and self-sufficient. In certain situations they may be decisive but in others they are insecure. So in some sense the individual is not one person, but many people who are acting as a team. Confusingly, all the team members have the same name and speak with the same mouth, which gives us the illusion that there is only one guy inside!

This metaphor can also be applied to bodywork. Different members of the person-team are related to different parts of the body. For instance, the soft, vulnerable and emotional parts of a person are often embodied in the internal organs. The decisive, self-motivated adult part may show itself in the spine and the postural muscles. When one part of the person-team is feeling under the weather, that part of the body is de-energised and unused, so the body has to use a substitute.

The part of the person that has left the field and is sitting on the side-lines is the Kyo and the substitute is the Jitsu. So the concept of Kyo and Jitsu is wider than simply focusing on the surface meridians. It is important to realise that the Kyo part is not 'empty' it is just unused. It can still part of the team even if it is sitting on the side-lines. In the football analogy, it should be valued and cared for so that its unique skills can be used by the team in the future.

If, on the other hand, one rejects that Kyo part of oneself and tries to change it, then this breaks the team spirit. Because the rest of the team is not rallying round to support the Kyo, it needs to be rescued by an external source like the therapist, and this is not a sustainable situation. No real healing takes place and although the support for the Kyo may make the person feel better, it is only temporary since that part of the person is being rescued rather than resourced.

More importantly, wanting to change is, in some way, denying who one actually is. So any transformation is based on shaky foundations. If one really faces oneself, then one meets the ground and the foundations are solid. When this self-acceptance takes place, the team starts to work together. Paradoxically, change does then happen - but as an organic process of development and rehabilitation rather than a rejection of the disabled part.

How does this relate to Shiatsu?

1) Valuing the Kyo & Jitsu

If we see the *Kyo* as a valuable part of the team who finds it necessary to be off the field at the moment and view the *Jitsu* as the substitute who has the energy to compensate for the temporary inactivity of the *Kyo*, then the process of treatment is transformed.

Using the analogy of a football team: if the striker is taken off because of injury and someone, whose speciality is defence, is the only one available as a substitute then the replacement will be hard pressed to fill the role of the one taken off, and will feel under pressure and tense. However, if the whole team shares the job of filling the striker's role then everything works smoothly and with good heart.

This metaphor exactly describes what can happen in the body. If a part of the body is vulnerable and needs to be taken off the pitch, then another part will try to take its place and may become stressed in the process.

But if rest of the team can help in the process of compensation so that the Jitsu is not left to do it all by itself then the stress disappears. As for the vulnerable, Kyo part: it may not be ready to come back onto the field, even with support from the therapist. But it needs to feel valued and part of the team and the way we contact it can give it that message.

So the paradigm of supporting the Kyo and dispersing the Jitsu may often be replaced with a process of supporting the Jitsu and patiently valuing the Kyo. This attitude helps a client to compassionately face the areas that they are denying and to slowly integrate them.

2) Learning to Tolerate Oneself

The quiet, vertical pressure of Shiatsu is especially effective at helping people to be **aware** and helping them to **tolerate** those parts of themselves from which they are trying to escape.

Toleration is not often talked about but I think it is the key to maturity. For instance, emotional trauma can cause a person to block off the pain by numbing a part of the body and burying the trauma there. But then that part becomes a no-go area, a chronic Kyo. Anything that reminds one of the trauma causes a defensive reaction and there is a resistance to physically contacting the place where the trauma is buried.

On the other hand, if one can tolerate the uncomfortable feelings then one does not need to contract away from that part and can create a compassionate space in which the Kyo can re-join the team. The deep stillness and depth of Shiatsu touch is non-judgemental and non-manipulative so it makes contact in a way that helps the client to face the issue and listen to what it has to say without triggering the defence reactions.

However, in practice, we frequently collude with the client's desire to escape from pain rather than helping them to face it. In other words we try to rescue them rather than give them resources. If we do this then we are maintaining their split state of being. On the other hand, if we can help a client to be simply aware, something magical happens. Paradoxically, by tolerating and accepting discomfort, a person relaxes into themselves and a profound change takes place. By aiming for cure and change, we subtly collude with the client's impulse to avoid discomfort so the overall pattern of rejecting the Kyo still remains.

I think we do this as therapists because we have not fully integrated ourselves. If something in the client reminds me of a part of myself that I cannot tolerate then I will find it hard to stay solidly in contact with that place in them and will unconsciously try to rescue them from it. However much I use correct technique, this attitude will be transmitted through my touch because my Ki will not want to make full contact with the client. So the key to helping a client to embrace and value their Kyo parts is the personal work that I do to embrace all aspects of myself.

But this does not mean that one has to be totally sorted before one can do Shiatsu. During a session, if I notice parts of my body are contracting away from the client then this is a signal that I am not meeting a part of myself. Facing and tolerating that part of myself allows me to soften and expand towards him. This changes the quality of my touch. He feels the change in my attitude and finds it easier to accept and open up to the Kyo part of himself. So the work that we are doing is working on the total field between therapist and client and this is healing for both parties.

3) Helping the rest of the team to support the Jitsu

Chronic conditions take time to change. There are parts that are deeply buried and need time to feel safe enough to rejoin the team. While this is happening the Jitsu part needs to compensate, so cannot let go of its effort. But it is only stressed because it has to do the work alone. In these situations we need to show the rest of the body how it can support the effort of the Jitsu.

There are several techniques for doing this but they all involve bringing awareness to the way in which the neighbouring parts of the body are communicating with the Jitsu area and helping the neighbours to move with it. This, in turn, highlights how more distant areas can join the team until the whole body is included in supporting the Jitsu.

The result is that the stressed area feels supported and valued, the tension disappears and its energy is available for the team as a whole.

4) Involving the client

All of the above approaches are made easier if the client is consciously aware of what you are doing. Particularly with the techniques for assisting the Jitsu, I explain to the client what I am doing and help them to be aware of the parts of the body that are not collaborating with the Jitsu. They can then explore how to move those parts and be pro-active in supporting it.

The fact that they are active in the therapy means that they no longer feel a victim to their condition. They have a handle on how to deal with it themselves. Instead of trying to get rid of a discomfort they can go into it, take care of it, give it space and hear what it has to say.

This is a great resource for life. Personally, it has helped me to grow up and take responsibility for my own problems rather than project them onto other people. So I find that Shiatsu can also change the way in which we relate to others. Because we have resources for dealing with our own discomfort, there is less tendency to project the blame onto others.

If a person understands and feels involved in the process of the therapy and can be given tools for dealing with discomfort, then dealing with change is not a problem because they are in charge and can have some control over the process.

Conclusion

Change is best facilitated by accepting and being aware of the present and letting go of the desire to change. It is useful to see oneself as a team, so that the vulnerable part can be valued and cared for and the substitutes can be helped in their work. Finally, if clients are involved and proactive in the process of the therapy then they are not intimidated by the changes that take place and can develop at their own rate.