

The Tiger in the Grove

Kyo & Jitsu in Movement Shiatsu
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Movement Shiatsu evolved out of a long period of work with disabled children and adults. But it has also been a lifelong project to really understand how Shiatsu works. Einstein once said about physics: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough". I feel that Shiatsu is a truly great therapy but the lack of real explanation of how it works results in it being undervalued by the general public, who most often see it as just another technique of massage.

As I started my adult life as a theoretical physicist, I have not been fully satisfied by the attempts of various scientists to find a basis for energy therapies in terms of the body's electromagnetic field and quantum theory¹. I set up a blog called Science and Energy Medicine² to detail why I felt these theories did not really explain Shiatsu. Essentially, the core of my discomfort is that they only replace one mystery (in the language of Oriental Medicine) with another mystery (in the language of physics). The research may show how the body communicates through energy fields as well as through physical channels, but it does not show how the contact between one person and another helps to heal. This article is an effort to provide an explanation of that question.

Shiatsu and other Oriental Therapies are based on the concept of Ki, or Qi, which is seen as the body's means of self-regulation. Shizuto Masunaga developed his system of Zen Shiatsu by including the idea that symptoms are an expression of the body's struggle to compensate for an area that is not integrated into the whole organism. The part that is not active and energised is called *Kyo* while the part that is stressed in the effort to compensate for the Kyo is called *Jitsu*. I think that this is one of the special features of Shiatsu, that it focuses on parts of the body that are not integrated rather than trying to alleviate the symptoms. It is similar to the viewpoint of psychotherapy, which sees neurotic behaviour as a coping mechanism for feelings that are being kept away from consciousness.

The paradigm of psychotherapy is to help the client to become aware of their unconscious feelings, facilitating these kyo areas to integrate into the self. The client must do this themselves (with the support of the therapist) because they have a resistance to facing these painful areas. Psychotherapy is not about rescuing the client from their pain but helping them to be aware of it, face it and incorporate it. However, Shiatsu practitioners often say that they *diagnose* the client's Kyo and Jitsu meridians and *treat* their energetic imbalance. This medical language implies that it is the practitioner, not the client, who has the responsibility of discovering and dealing with the condition. The process is mysterious to the client, who is relatively passive in the therapy.

In acute conditions, where a part of the body is temporarily isolated and protected while it heals, this mode of therapy does seem to work. The isolated area can remain disconnected after the trauma has healed, causing other parts of the body to be stressed after the need for protection has disappeared. In these cases and in other situations where the client has no emotional investment in keeping the kyo hidden, passive-client Shiatsu can effectively help the Kyo area to reconnect and the stressed Jitsu to relax.

But in deep seated, long term conditions the Kyo area has a different character. For instance, in children with cerebral palsy, there are areas of the body that the brain has not learned to use. I don't find that touch alone is enough to teach the brain how to move these undeveloped areas. In a person who suffered emotional trauma in childhood, part of the body may be held frozen because contacting it would open up the pain. In this case the person has an active resistance to contacting the Kyo. Manipulation and touch is not usually enough to enliven these buried areas.

In situations like these, the person's dysfunctional state has become their sense of self. So trying to change that state may just increase the feeling that there is something wrong at the core and can even increase the resistance to change.

Valuing the Jitsu

In 1981 I started working with Lizzie, a five year old girl with cerebral palsy, who taught me an important lesson about working in this way. At the time I was assisting a physiotherapist who was helping her to walk using caliper splints. Lizzie hated it. Putting her feet down on the ground was hard enough, moving them in the right way to walk seemed impossible.

Every time she moved, her body turned in a spiral that caught my interest, so I playfully suggested that she stop trying to walk, took off the calipers, and from a sitting position try to turn round in a circle. Suddenly, she started spinning round the room like a top, squealing with joy. The movement was chaotic but full of energy. Sometimes, the momentum of the movement brought her up onto her legs. After a few minutes she came to rest with a big smile and, when the physiotherapist suggested she continue with the walking lesson, she re-started the difficult task with enthusiasm and determination.


This is no miracle story, she still found it hard, but she had found spirit. Lizzie taught me to look first for where a person's energy is already embodied before working with areas that are un-energized. Embodied energy feels good and empowers you with a feeling of life. Starting there gives the message that you CAN do something well and that good feelings are possible. From there it is easier to gather the courage to enter areas of difficulty.



Lizzie helped me to see that the Kyo area can seem to the client to be a place of incompetence and of shame. The client has a natural resistance to inhabiting that area. Instead, if you start working with a place that is already alive and embodied, then this empowers them and they have the confidence to go with you into the problematic parts.

Kyo and Jitsu in Movement Shiatsu

In the books on Zen Shiatsu, the word Kyo is translated as 'depleted energy' and Jitsu is translated as 'excess-energy'³. However, the Chinese (or Kanji) characters give a deeper meaning to the words. The character for Kyo is :



The top part represents a tiger while the bottom half :  represents a burial mound with two flags on it. Thus the character gives the picture of powerful energy hidden and buried.

The modern character for *Jitsu* in Japanese is . However, its original rendering in Chinese⁴ is .

This literally means "a house full of money", but in the context of Chinese culture, which saw a family house as a symbol of status, it means: "*The same on the surface as underneath*". In fact *Jitsu* means 'truth' in Japanese.

I find these re-translations helpful because, instead of seeing the *Kyo* as something empty needing the support of the practitioner, one can see it as hidden energy that the client needs to bring to the surface. Instead of seeing *Jitsu* as 'excess energy' to be dispersed, one can see it as the client's authentic strength, which may be under stress because it's doing all the work, but is an accessible resource to be used on the journey into the *Kyo*.

Lizzie's spinning movements were an expression of her *Jitsu*, and embodying it woke up her spirit whose strength she could use in the more difficult task of walking.

The principle that I learned from her was that, in deeper conditions, it may be more effective to start from the *Jitsu* and use bodywork and movement to help the client to become conscious of the *Kyo*. They no longer feel a victim to an inaccessible part of themselves that needs treatment by the expertise of the therapist. Instead, they are using their own resources to journey into the underworld and bring their hidden energy to the surface.

Meridians and Development

If I focus on what is wrong with me, then I actually inhibit the natural process of development because I am trying to control and correct who I am. Ideally, Shiatsu does not focus on changing what is wrong but concentrates on helping people to fully embody how they actually are. This wakes up the innate movement of development, which naturally reveals their potential. Working with babies and children made me curious about the process of development and led to a satisfying explanation of meridians.

Babies develop both physical and mental abilities through movement. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen has shown⁵ how the primitive reflexes form the 'alphabet of movement' and has explained how each reflex action underlies a component of mental development. For example, the *rooting reflex*, stimulated by stroking the Stomach Meridian between ST4 and ST3 turns the mouth towards the touch. The evolutionary origin of this reflex is probably to help an infant latch onto the nipple. But the fact that this reflex is stimulated by touch gives the message that nourishment is *here*, not over there. There is no need for effort, the baby just needs to turn his head and receive the food.



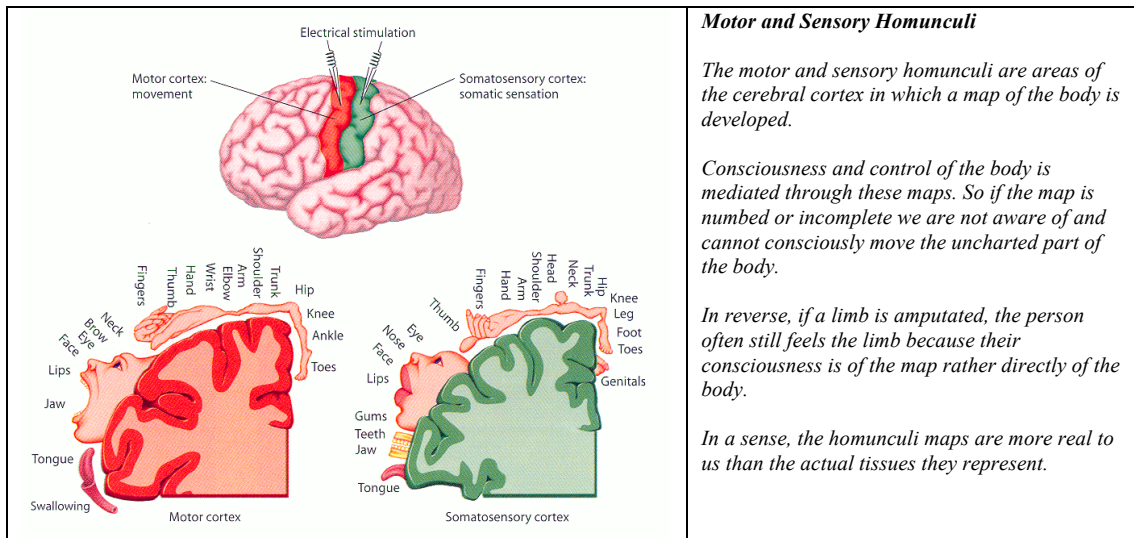
The rooting and tonic labyrinthine reflex appearing together in a two week baby

Another example is the *Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex (TLR)* that tonifies the muscles on the side of the body facing downwards. The effect of this reflex is help the baby to use the ground as a support for pushing movements instead of relying on the effort of the spinal extensor muscles to lift the body. This gives a similar message as the rooting reflex, "*Support is available, you don't need to do everything on your own*".

In 1982, I was working with Kay Coombes⁶, a Bobarth trained speech therapist who specialises in working with babies with cerebral palsy (CP). The brain damage associated with CP often means that some reflexes are missing. One day she was working with a three-month boy who was floppy through lack of the TLR. However, her focus was to stimulate the rooting reflex to help the baby feed. I noticed that, as she did this, the sucking and swallowing movements were also stimulated. Surprisingly, the Tonic Labyrinthine reflex also appeared progressively down the body. Normally reflexes do not stimulate each other but her stimulation of one reflex was waking up a whole chain of movements. I noticed that the pathway along which they appeared exactly followed the Stomach Meridian.

All the primitive movements along the Stomach Meridian, like the rooting reflex, the swallowing reflex and the TLR are related to how we receive external support (or nourishment). This is exactly the traditional description of Stomach Qi. I formed the hypothesis that the meridians were pathways along which babies learned to join up the primitive reflexes to develop capacities that correlate with the Chinese descriptions of Qi. I spent the next ten years exploring this idea and found that the location of all the traditional organ meridians could be explained in this way.

This was exciting to me as a scientist because it fitted into the well accepted neurological model of development. In the first few years of life, a child is developing models of the body in the cerebral cortex called the sensory and motor homunculi⁷. Homunculus means 'little man' and the cortical maps of the body can be pictured as models of the body mapped onto areas of the brain.



Motor and Sensory Homunculi

The motor and sensory homunculi are areas of the cerebral cortex in which a map of the body is developed.

Consciousness and control of the body is mediated through these maps. So if the map is numbed or incomplete we are not aware of and cannot consciously move the uncharted part of the body.

In reverse, if a limb is amputated, the person often still feels the limb because their consciousness is of the map rather directly of the body.

In a sense, the homunculi maps are more real to us than the actual tissues they represent.

By 'watching' the reflex movements, the cortex learns which muscles to use in order to perform basic movements. No-one understands how these primitive movements are joined up to create whole body actions but some innate plan of how to do so is likely to exist because babies learn to do it faster than would be possible by random experimentation. My idea was that the meridians showed the pathways along which we learn to move and that they might be initially embodied in the inbuilt wiring of the brain. It is as if we are provided (by evolution) with a wire-frame model of how to move the body that needs to be filled in and coloured by experience.

Early trauma may block off areas of this map. Brain damage may inhibit the reflex movements that fill in the details of the homunculi. In both cases, the map is incomplete so touch alone cannot draw it from scratch. On the other hand, in acute conditions, the map is complete but an area may be temporarily inhibited to protect an injury. In this case, touch and manipulation *can* reactivate the missing area.

Movement Shiatsu uses guided movement as well as touch to help a client explore blank areas of their internal maps. This makes the work more like education than treatment and the involvement of the client in this exploration process empowers them and helps them to overcome the difficulty of reaching into a chronically Kyo area.

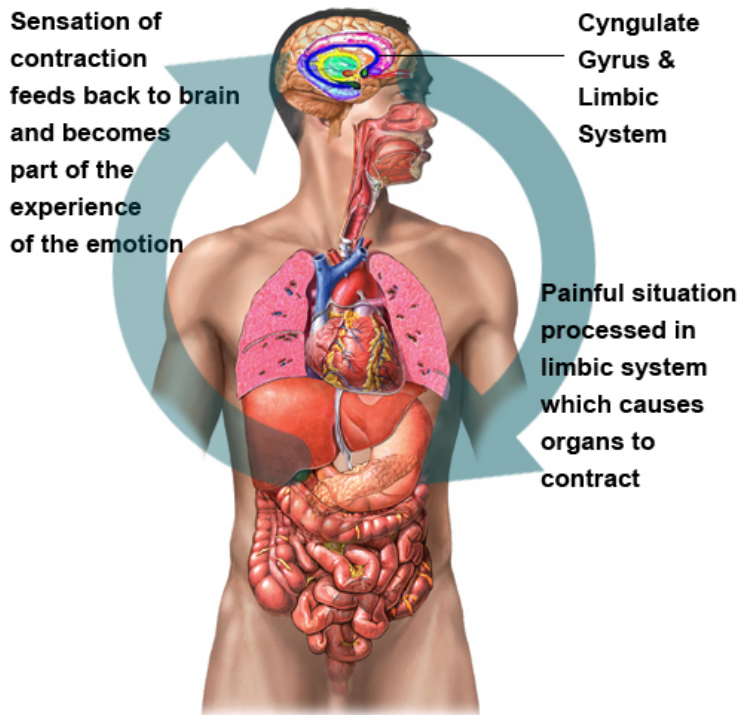
Working with Emotional Trauma

In this explanation of meridians, the Yang meridians map the chain of muscles that produce whole body actions such as rolling or crawling. The movements are building the so-called Motor Homunculus in the cortex of the brain and develop our conscious control of action.

The path of the Yin meridians on the other hand seem to be more related to building a sensory map of the body, the Sensory Homunculus. This sensory map is especially useful in dealing with deep seated emotional trauma.

Recent research into emotional pain⁸ shows that there is a definite physical component to a feeling. Emotions are related to activity in the limbic system and part of the subjective feeling of the emotion is created by organ contraction stimulated by the cingulate gyrus.

The Sensation of Emotion



So an emotion has two parts,

- 1) its story: the situation that triggered the emotion
- 2) its sensation: the physical contraction of muscles and organs underlying the feeling.

Severe emotional pain can be so intense that we cut off from the sensation, numbing the conscious feeling and creating a blank area in the sensory map of the body. But the organic contraction is still happening and feeding back subconscious emotional discomfort to the limbic system. Subjectively, we feel uncomfortable but can't make sense of it. The result is that we project that discomfort onto our current relationships, being hurt or angry or feeling needy for no real reason.

It is useful to view the pain as being 'stored' in the tissues of our body. But, since we can't consciously sense those tissues, we can't own the feelings and deal with them. Instead we tend to blame other people for them. The answer is to become aware of the part of the body that is storing the pain and then consciously move, stretch, give space to those tissues.

The movements associated with the development of the *Yin* meridians are more internal than those of the *Yang* meridians and help a person to become aware of their internal organs and soft tissues. These are exactly the areas of the body where emotional pain is stored and working with touch and guiding the breathing into these internal areas help us to bring the sensation of the emotion into consciousness. The *sensation* of an emotion is less traumatic than the story that produced it, so the resistance to entering the *Kyo* area is not so strong. I find this an effective way of dealing with long term trauma.

A personal example illustrates this well: I was seven years old when my parents decided to send me away from home to a boarding school. Being a sensitive and unusual child, I hated the competitive and hostile environment and felt I would rather die than be separated from my parents. I felt desperate for warmth and loving acceptance, but soon buried that feeling in order to survive. However, that neediness was still in my body and created real problems in my adult relationships. People felt overwhelmed by my hunger for love and backed away, reaffirming the trauma. I was a victim to a story that had happened in my childhood and understanding it didn't seem to help.

When I started exploring the sensations of emotions through movement and body-consciousness, I found the exact tissue in which this trauma was 'stored'. The fascia between my stomach and the diaphragm was too tight and was pulling on my oesophagus. The sensation produced the same feeling as my emotional neediness. I started working with the developmental movements associated with the Spleen and the Lung meridians, which helped me to contact this tissue. This helped me to consciously move the stomach and the connective tissue around it, giving more space to the feeling. The fascia stretched and relaxed and the deeply buried emotion just disappeared. I have never been troubled by it since.

I find this work provides a powerful resource for dealing with emotional problems and I hope I share that insight with my clients. Even if the trauma does not clear, the focus on sensation rather than story gives people a practical method of taking charge of themselves as they are and tolerating discomfort rather than projecting it out onto other people.

Touch provides the focus for awareness. Movement provides a way of exploring and taking responsibility for oneself. Meridians provide the archetypal pathways for developing movement. This is Movement Shiatsu in a nutshell.

¹ *Is Energy the same as Qi?* - Bill Palmer. Shiatsu Society Journal 2008 and [http://www.seed.org/printable/Energy and Qi.pdf](http://www.seed.org/printable/Energy%20and%20Qi.pdf)

² *Science and Energy Medicine* - <http://www.seed.org/blogs/science> - Bill Palmer

³ *Zen Shiatsu* - Shizuto Masunaga.

⁴ *Chinese Characters* - Dr L Wieger S.J - Dover Language Books

⁵ *Sensing, Feeling and Action* - Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen 1994

⁶ *F.O.T.T. (Facial-Oral Tract Therapy)* - Kay Coombes

⁷ *Cortical Homunculi* : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortical_homunculus

⁸ *Why words are as painful as sticks and stones* New Scientist 4/12/12: [Lisa Raffensperger](#)