

WHAT IS SHIATSU?

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The essence of shiatsu is touch. The essence of touch is connection. Connection between the giver and receiver. Connection between separated parts. Connection between heaven and earth. Connection between spirit and matter, ideas and emotions. Thus the central role of shiatsu is in integrating the being within him or herself, and with his or her physical, social and spiritual environment.

Connection means a flow of energy from one place to another, or back and forwards between two places. Shiatsu is the art of creating a flow of energy between parts which do not have a strong flow of Ki. Thus it can bring alienated parts of ourselves into the whole, it can bring forgotten parts of ourselves alive, it can connect us with our vitality and creativity, and it expands our awareness of ourselves and the universe.

When we touch, we convey what is inside of ourselves to the receiver, so how we develop ourselves is paramount. What we have realized, what we are aware of (have made connections with) we bring into our shiatsu, and so create the possibility of the receiver to open to. As giver, we are the limitation of what can happen in the shiatsu, but also we can allow an incredible breadth of opening.

To develop ourselves as shiatsu practitioners we therefore need to keep opening ourselves, connecting to more and more parts of ourselves and our environment, to become more and more effective in our role as catalyst and healer. This is a lifetime journey. This is real, this is one person giving what he or she has learnt so far about life to another person. This is about sharing our collective knowledge about life and increasing it, developing it as a group activity.

We shiatsu practitioners do not live in isolation, rather we are the connectors within our communities. So there is a big need to study and develop our understanding of the world so that we can more effectively provide these connections for others. As well as

our role of helping individuals, our role is also on a social level creating healing within our communities and in the human race as a whole.

What does this look like when we are actually putting our hands on a person in giving shiatsu? Preparation is important, so that when we touch, we are in touch with all aspects of ourselves, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. We can then touch all these levels within our receiver, and look for the parts on any or all of these levels that are resisting joining the whole. When we find these parts, we first recognize them, then make contact with them ourself, and only then is there the possibility of the person opening to it themselves. It is our connection that offers the chance for them to make a similar connection for themselves. We are in the true sense of the word, a catalyst.

Now our ability to make connections with hitherto separated parts is not necessarily conscious. Sometimes we may be very conscious of what we have touched, and at other times we may be completely unconscious. Therefore the attitude we need to develop within ourselves is of being forever open to the new, of being open to new discovery, of a willingness to go to difficult places within ourselves and maintain our focus there. When we develop this attitude within us, to the point where it becomes habitual, and quite possibly an automatic, unconscious response to life, then our touch will have this quality whether we are conscious of it or not. Our touch will then open even places that we are not yet aware of and have not met within ourselves. In this way the giving of shiatsu is profoundly about discovery, and becomes a further way for us to learn about life and develop ourselves.

This is the point at which we can say we are truly giving shiatsu, that is shiatsu becomes an habitual activity, where we are totally focused, and yet also totally empty and open to the new. This is the true meaning of 'empty mind' or 'beginner's mind', being in the worlds of activity and movement simultaneously with the world of peace and grace and stillness. This is the true path of the shiatsu practitioner!