

8 Steps for performing localised Shiatsu

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Shiatsu clients often come with complaints that show only in one specific area of the body. Direct Shiatsu to such areas of localised complaints can be very effective and a relief for our clients. According to the experiences in my Shiatsu clinic Zen-Shiatsu meridian work often has a tendency of not being specific enough to allow a change in some localised complaints. Such complaints maybe joint pain, neck and shoulder problems or back pain. Emotional pain often concentrates in one part of the body, such as a feeling of pressure behind the sternum or in the neck.

According to TCM localised pain shows as a result of Ki stagnation. It is possible to see and work with these patterns in a direct way and watch the changes taking place under our hands.

Shiatsu with a specific area can be illustrated in several steps for better understanding: the 8 steps of a localised meridian-free Shiatsu, (of course some of these steps are also important for a meridian related Shiatsu):

1. Receive exact information from the client
2. Take the area into your hands and look into it with centred attention
3. Touch the centre of this area with Pure Attention
4. Support the body's own movement
5. Support Pure Attention by touch "from outside"
6. Connect energetic antagonists / polarities
7. Apply structural techniques
8. Integrate the local into the whole

1. Receive exact information from your client

In order to be able to work with a problem area we need the most precise information from the client on the nature of her ailment, as well as on its history. This includes information on the first appearance and the duration of the problem, whether it appears continually or periodically (every night or during menstruation), what factors, if any, contribute to an amelioration or make it worse (e.g. stress or relaxation), whether the client herself has an explanation for the appearance of the condition and whether there have been special circumstances in her life at the time of its first appearance (the problem may well be related to such circumstances).

The exact location of pain is of great importance; you should ask the client to point at the spot where it is, if possible and ask at what depth it hurts the most. Knowing the exact location of pain supports your orientation as you are looking into the area with the Inner Eye.

All these pieces of information support the practitioner's understanding of the client's situation. A deeper understanding positively influences the Therapeutic Space that is being created by the therapist and the client. This Therapeutic Space is most essential in all holistic work including Shiatsu.

2. Take the area into your hands and "look into it" with "centred attention"

This is a further essential precondition for good local Shiatsu. In taking the area concerned into your hands and "looking into it", the practitioner brings all their attention into it and gives meaning to this place for the duration of the treatment. Without such a step there is a danger that the physical touch that follows will only have a weak effect.

"Looking into it" or "feeling into it" also says that this work is not about a superficial observation or touch but about something that is happening in the deep space under the body surface. This space may be bigger or smaller, but we can always perceive different energetic patterns and structures within it.

It is clear that "looking into it" does not happen through the visual field of the eyes, even though a glance may support the focus of attention: what we are looking at, there goes our attention. Nevertheless, many people use the term "looking" for this activity. Others would say "feel" or "sense" as a more appropriate term.

It is the attention that expands from the inside of the practitioner's body into the space that is being "observed". If it works well then this attention comes out of the whole of the observer. When you are doing this for the first time, you may not "see" anything and you may want to give up right away. If you stay longer in the area that is to be explored, then you will suddenly become aware that it does not feel or "look" homogeneous anymore, but that there are differences. Some places feel or look different to others.

What we "see" here, some people may consider as totally unreal, as the product of pure imagination. In fact I like to call this procedure "dreaming into the body". However, practice shows that the patterns are very real. In the same way as we can "see" or "feel" them when we first look into a space, we can also observe its pattern changing while we work with them.

3. Touching the centre with the Pure Attention

Within the energetic patterns of the explored space the practitioner now chooses a "prominent" area that they feel is most related to the client's condition, respectively the subject of the treatment. You guide the focus of your Hara's attention right into the centre of this chosen spot, stay in it and observe, if and how this centre changes, e.g. wanders or weakens/ becomes more prominent.

If the centre starts to wander, just follow and do not let yourself be distracted. If there is a really prominent change showing up (e.g. the pattern becoming weaker) this is most often a sign that the work at this place can be finished and that we can move on. There is no need to stay until a pattern has fully dissolved,

which will not happen anyway. Once a clear change has started to occur it is the right time to go on to some other place or point. The change will now continue to unfold even if the practitioner's attention is not with it anymore. If you should decide to come back to that spot 5 or 10 minutes later, it will feel and look different.

Energetic patterns, which the Inner Eye is perceiving are unclear, by their very nature, they are fuzzy and less sharply perceptible than physical structures or patterns. For this reason it can be hard to perceive anything at all, or to "overlook" them, or not to take them as being important or reliable. Some experience is needed to find your way in there, in order to take what is "seen" for real and to take it seriously. Then however it is all simple and not different from watching a thrilling movie on television, only that this movie is truly interactive.

To touch with attention is touch with Ki, by itself an effective therapeutic technique and at the same time the basis for every touch in Shiatsu.

4. Support the body's own movement

In order to use this valuable technique the practitioner has to be relaxed, open focussed and really present. When you hold a body area without using much pressure, not wanting to change anything but simply being there, it may happen that it feels like the contacted area wants to move slightly under your hands.

What can be perceived here are energetic impulses of movement (that are often being felt physically). Here we experience that any body tissue or part of the body is in a permanent, living dynamic state. Where there is pain and problems, this movement is usually restricted. You could say that this restricted energetic movement is a definition for any energetic blockage. Under our relaxed hands it feels supported and tries to break free. Therefore it makes sense to tenderly support it, to follow it with a soft touch only – or better to become a part of the movement oneself without developing the activity too much. Usually you will notice right away that the client reacts positively to these subtle movements, with a deepened breathing or that the energetic pattern in the area changes.

When the Shiatsu is more physically oriented such tendencies of movement will hardly be noticed, as the physical activity in the practitioner's body is much too loud to perceive the subtle impulses within the client's body. It is the wide-open calmness of just touching and looking into an area, that is needed to sense the impulses of movement.

All that has to be done then, is to follow the movement, to support it in going where it wants to go by its own impetus. With more experience you will become aware that there are directions or places that the movement is excluding or that it wants to describe the same arc over and over again. In this case it can make sense to tenderly guide the motion from inside (as we are being part of the movement), to support certain directions while not allowing others.

The impulses of movement that are being perceived here are described elsewhere as movement of the fascia.

5. Supporting Pure Attention with touch from outside

While the attention of the practitioner is still resting in the centre of the problem area, it can become important to support this with physical touch from outside, more distal points. With thumb or fingertips touch the surface at a point, which feels to be related to the place inside. This touch can range from being very light and tender to very physical, strong and deep. It is always a vertical touch that is aiming right at the centre of the area in to the depth that you are working with. In doing this the practitioner perceives whether the effect of her touch reaches down into this depth, respectively changes their technique in order to make this possible.

6. Connect energetic polarities

To support the work that has been done so far it is often highly effective to connect two opposite polarities (Jitsu and Kyo) or two Kyo points through touch. If the practitioner meets density (Jitsu) at the place of pain (as often occurs with acute problems) then you start looking for a place of energetic emptiness (Kyo) in the area.

If you are finding Kyo in the area chosen as the origin – this happens more often with chronic ailments – you can look for a Jitsu, or another prominent Kyo, as the deep connection of two different Kyo places can as well kick-start an effective energetic dynamic.

Let's take the example of knee problems with a painful density in the area of the internal cleft of the joint: in such a situation there may be an emptiness, a Kyo in the knee pit, under the patella or in the area of the external cleft of the joint. These are merely examples; in fact, energetically prominent points can occur at anywhere. The energetic counterpart is often found on the other side of the body area in question. It can however also be found in a totally different place, sometimes even close to the Jitsu.

While you are resting with your attention in the centre of the Jitsu you can touch the Kyo in the knee pit in its centre with your finger or thumb. Imagine that both places connect to one single place, respectively that you are touching one energetic space at both it's ends. This imagination makes energetic connection and balancing much easier – thoughts and imaginations are energetic fields and as such influencing other energetic fields.

Everything else happens naturally. The polarities communicate with each other all by themselves and get balanced, two Kyos communicate with each other respectively and thus kick-start deep energetic movements – if it is right for the "system" of the receiver at that time. Most important is that the practitioner is touching with light and wide attention. This offers Ki the space to change.

The important thing is to stay in contact with the Jitsu (as it is our example) in the painful area during the whole process with the touch – as well as with the attention – and perceive any change that occurs! Often the density will start wandering or changing in some way. Whenever we get the impression that its centre is moving we follow it with our attention, if necessary also with our hands.

7. Apply structural techniques

“Looking” into the energetic space and perceiving the pattern there is also a prerequisite for applying any structural techniques. In this sense working locally with Shiatsu, as I describe it here, is a perfect preparation for applying structural techniques on a joint. Being present in the space of a joint allows you to “see” its internal energetic state. You can get all the information that you need to choose the right technique. It also immediately shows up any change that the technique used has affected.

Once you have reached step 3 of this 8-step-model, all steps that follow do not have to be applied in the sequence as I describe. Instead they may be used at any time in the process that seems appropriate. This also counts for structural techniques: it may feel right to introduce a specific technique into the treatment right after being in contact with your attention. It may also feel right to do this before you connect the local area with the whole body – or at any given point in between.

8. Integrate the local into the whole

After the local work has been finished (because changes started to happen in the energetic pattern of that area - sometimes also because no changes have set in), the glance of the practitioner becomes wider and perceives how the local area is embedded in the whole of the body. In our example the surrounding area of the knee becomes interesting: the way down to the ankle and the feet as well as the way up into the groin and buttocks.

As the body is an energetic space, every area is always related to every other area, in a lively connection. It is always the whole of the human being and the whole body that is involved in a state of feeling well or not. This means that a local problem can never be isolated, but can only develop “in collaboration” with all other areas. A Jitsu can only arise when there are Kyos evolving in other places – and vice versa.

Accordingly, a prominent energetic area always has several corresponding partners in the body, be it of the opposite or of the same quality. These corresponding places are always prominent and that is why they can be found by the practitioner. They can lie in the immediate surrounding of the local area or at the body’s opposite end. The work with such corresponding areas usually directly influences the pattern in the focus area; the effect is stronger and reaches further. This is why they should be included in the treatment.

There is the valid option that we go to these resonance areas by directly jumping there. However, when our attention is looking for these areas in the client's body, it may be that not only individual points spring to our attention, but also lines that are running from prominent Kyo and Jitsu points into the surrounding area. In doing this they are sometimes exactly following the meridian pathways, more often they go their own ways, though. These lines too, as all energetic patterns, are perceived rather vaguely, we guess them more than we see them. Despite of their seemingly very volatile nature they give us important hints about

which lines we can follow on the way from the local area into the whole body.

Integrating local Shiatsu as described into a meridian based or meridianfree Shiatsu treatment increases the richness of your Shiatsu as well as its effectiveness.