



# Berliner Schule für Zen Shiatsu

## Art of Touching

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### SEIKI, A WAY OF DEVELOPMENT

by  
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Dedicated to Akinobu Kishi, who died peacefully, at home in Japan, on 23rd October, 2012.

When this article began to write itself, one evening, some time back, in 1996 or 97, I had already known Kishi for 15 years or more. I met him in 1981, and soon afterwards found myself in Japan, part of the first group of westerners he invited to practise with him within the precincts of a group of ancient Shinto shrines near Kyoto. I knew that he had studied with and assisted Shizuto Masunaga and I was looking to further my own understanding and practice of Shiatsu, but this soon became a secondary issue. This was a life-changing affair that plunged me into the depths of a personal quest for truths beyond the usual concepts of illness, health and healing. Much later, by then more familiar with his highly individual approach and perhaps a little more daring in the dance, I asked myself once more the oft-repeated question, "What is Seiki?" Somehow, at that moment an answer began to emerge. It eventually took the form of the article below, first published in The Shiatsu Society News and revised in the ensuing years.

It was possible to write it only by assuming responsibility for interpreting what I recognised as Kishi's philosophy. Of course he had a philosophy; he just didn't present it as such. He lived it practised it and demonstrated it, joked and made light of it, but his commitment to "this shining Life" was clear. Why hold on to fixed ideas? Maximise feeling. We are free to choose.

Only because of what I felt through the work - Kishi called it osmosis - could I make so bold as to articulate this delicate web of affinities between considered method, thoughtless practice, subjective experience and disciplined investigation into reality.

#### So, once again, what is Seiki?

##### Being Natural

Seiki could translate simply as "life-harmony movement". On this level the word serves as perhaps just an invitation! In practice, it could be the catalyst by which we distil and synthesize the wisdom of our cultures to realise our full potential; a self-evolving process which develops feeling or sensitivity and fine-tunes the nervous system. Trusting our feelings, acknowledging our desires and developing these in an atmosphere of consideration and co-operation is an alchemy of the heart. This is the core of Seiki, a work of reconciliation that involves courage and skill, joy and celebration.

Seiki is a Way of development, offering a number of practices which may be consciously adopted by anyone seeking to clarify or determine their own path. It is a way by which we can attain a deep sense of health and well-being based in the innate intelligence and autonomy of the physical body, whose natural capacity for movement, feeling and self regulation generates spontaneous harmonising processes without intervention.

We can recognise that this very body is at once our dwelling and our connection with all other humans and with the whole of nature. Our mutual human needs, for nourishment, protection, expression and communication are linked with our capacity to realise any individual potential we have for true independence of mind. Paradoxically this mind is rooted in the physical body, dependant on this earthly environment. Thus, it becomes clear that respect for the environment, for others and for the self are inter-related, that if we wish to develop as individuals we must first respect and take care of ourselves, which implies taking care of everything.

However, we do not always take care of ourselves, others or the environment very well. But nature and the environment actually take care of themselves, despite or regardless of what human beings do. So, it is the other way around; in expanding our spirit, opening ourselves to the Cosmos, we can begin consciously to allow Nature to care for us and inform us. This is happening anyway, but ignorance, small mindedness or habituated, conditioned behaviour often reduce or inhibit the natural benefits we could experience.

##### Trust, Desire, Right Thinking and Complete Vision

At root then, we need do nothing but trust to get the best out of life - trusting our bodies as vehicles, our nervous systems as receivers and regulators of cosmic energy and information, and Nature as both infinite resource and field for our own exploration and joyful creativity. However, if our capacity for trust and openness becomes weakened, eroded or buried and obliterated by adverse experience, what are we to do?

This reveals the importance of our capacity to link our imagination and desire. In surviving, all beings naturally strive for what

they need, and the attainment of necessities sometimes demands fearsome adaptation and sacrifice, but anything beyond survival, though it may not be easily recognised or acted on, offers increasing degrees of choice and of freedom. In this regard human beings have achieved remarkable creative potential.

Nonetheless, through accident, repression or neglect, this potential is frequently distorted, underdeveloped or both, as our innate desire is misdirected into narrow compensatory activities, goals and attachments. This in turn leads to the impoverishment of societies even though they may be culturally sophisticated and materially rich.

Cleverness tends to be used narrowly and selfishly; we are more frightened of each other and the world than we care to admit, and the greatest cause of danger is our lack of common feeling and the misdirected energy of our own alienation. Divided against ourselves, we are unable to transcend the egoic, tribalist or nationalist mentality and move into a trans-egoic, truly global culture. However, if we see this, if we want, we can change. We can begin to practise healing as “way”, and celebrate the present rather than compensate for the past.

Seiki is based in the recognition of ‘desire’ as a natural principle of the life force; on a vision of human intelligence as an extension of cosmic intelligence and of human beings as belonging to nature; on the “reawakening of trust” as a natural and sensible focus for that desire in order to release our full creative potential and diminish the negative; that any activities and efforts not embracing this trusting state will necessarily be wasteful, confusing, limited, or add to the burden of suffering.

We might see healing, then, as lifting the illusion of separateness that leads us to behave detrimentally to ourselves or others, and health as understanding our belonging, and a feeling of intimacy with the whole of life. This may involve realizing that suffering exists and cannot be simply eradicated, though it may be transformed or transformative; it can be a matter of conscious practice, of exercise of the will, perhaps a process of acceptance or the influence of grace. It may be a short or a very long road!

### **The Way of Practice; Gyoki**

Seiki is a way of practice offering appropriate and accessible methods that will benefit the body system, harmonise emotional energy, foster our deeper wisdom and help us develop our personal path; a path with heart.

The practice of Seiki begins with an informal movement meditation. This involves, first, deciding to take the time to explore and develop, then finding a conducive place in which to sit comfortably; second, bringing oneself to a “zero point” through mental intention and physical gesture. This means nothing more than joining the hands in prayer position and closing the eyes. The hands are then separated, opening up a consciously monitored space to feel for sensations in or between the hands and allowing associated movements. Relaxed attention without expectation is continually sought. Nothing is forced, nothing enacted that does not arise from or with the feelings or movements of the body. This practice is called Gyoki, “feeling for Ki”. This is the foundation of Seiki.

Many people know about “off the body” sensations. Spiritual healers, martial artists and body-energy workers have used similar hand exercises either to demonstrate or to enhance Ki. But this is usually seen as a small or incidental part of a larger, more complex system of practices. In Seiki, which can also mean “original emptiness/movement”, Gyoki is the principal practice - pursued with a simple, single-minded perseverance and openness that eventually allows everything to enter.

Gradually, one can release the excessive controls exerted through education, social conditioning, or other disturbing influences, realising that physical and mental pain has arisen in natural response to prevailing circumstances, that the body-mind has been overwhelmed with conflicting, even if well meaning, interventions as well as by abuse, trauma and neglect, but that everything in the past has been unavoidable and necessary to bring us to this moment. We realise that the practice itself does not cause us to lose anything that we cannot do without, only unnecessary fears and pain, and that the increased sense of harmony, unity, well-being and ease extends beyond our practice and enters our daily life; a deeper truth emerges, a truer self.

### **Seiki Soho - Treatment or Guidance**

The self-awareness of body and breath arising through the practice of Gyoki prepares us to work together with other people. We can just touch, following a simple framework or sequence of checks that provide the ground for meditative connection and open us to vibrational guidance. A relaxed state and non-judgemental attitude help our developing sensitivity. With our mind and heart unified and our observation and touch focused on the breath, the life movement common to us all, a resonance develops between giver and receiver. With practice we can recognise and follow subtle movements within our partner’s body. They are guiding our touch and we feel connected in the movements. We need only remain aware and accompany our partner in the process, allowing them space and time to complete any transformation spontaneously and naturally. When we are quiet and tranquil our hands are like a mirror. Internal movements are then increasingly perceived by our receivers as authentic and natural, allowing them to suspend unneeded resistance and confirm for themselves the unfolding stages towards more healthy, harmonious and sensitive states of being. Awakened consciousness is integral to the development of a more complete self-sense and creative co-operation with others.

This “treatment” practice is called Seiki Soho, or “guidance/empathy” within Seiki. The form is approached step by step and based on an ordinary view of the body. The body is its own map. Physical contact becomes less necessary as, through attention and presence, we develop a feeling for the whole situation. The space becomes charged with subtle qualities whose deep and significant meanings may only slowly emerge. We do not need to see the layers of the aura, or other subtle emanations of the etheric body. We just begin with the sensitivity we have.

If we are trained in any of the more formal systems or techniques associated with bodywork therapy these may be incorporated into Seiki. However, the emphasis is neither on treatment nor diagnosis, as there is nothing wrong! Merely our aim is to remain aware of our own state alongside the other, to check our instinctive inclination to help or to ‘do’ something, then to ‘just touch’, as our senses indicate, feel and allow. Learned techniques are thus evoked or invited at times but not performed or carried out; they are simply “realised” as occurring in the present context.

### **Katsugen - spontaneous movement**

During Seiki practices or treatment, some spontaneous movements may occur. They are natural expressions that arise when

mental control is relaxed and conditioned inhibitive mechanisms are released, allowing reharmonisation of the vital energy centres, nervous system and body functions. This phenomenon, known in Japan as katsugen, is also recognised and incorporated into certain other healing traditions. Although sometimes appearing strange or extreme and accompanied by crying, shouting, laughing, moaning or other vocal expression, these movements are quite natural, indeed much the same as blinking, sneezing, yawning or intestinal 'rumblings'. The process may continue internally, promoting elimination via the body's normal channels and functions. Katsugen is purification. It manifests as a strong reaction at times when blocked energy or pent up feelings are released. It is a healing response. With a more open view, it could be said that anything and everything in the life of the body is Katsugen, ordinary and natura and Seiki is the context: life manifesting continually from emptiness. To discover this space and move with that flow is the aim of practice; to occupy this space is to free ourselves of judgement.

### **The Inner Dimension, Celebration and Conclusion**

The first thing to say here is that the experiences associated with all the above practices, will be interpreted by each person in a particular way. They represent the interior dimension of the work. The living body-mind is charged with inter-associated memories, feelings and images. Each person's story is important. If we fail to give due space and attention to personal interpretations and subjective expressions of meaning, there will be no development. Even so, these meanings are often provisional or temporary. Seiki approaches the body-mind with the gentlest and simplest of disciplines, among which empathic listening is paramount.

Up until now, among the senses that we have evoked for healing, there has been no mention of taste. Taste and smell are senses of refined discrimination - enabling us to reject what is bad or unpleasant and take what is wholesome and good. But many are the instances when we have suffered the reverse and obliged to accept and digest repugnant offerings.

However, in the here and now of our practice, things are different. As we recover our appreciation for ourselves and the opportunities that life affords us, our sense of taste also expands beyond the simple and subtle delights of well-cooked food to include the wider range of experiences. All our senses become more refined in a profound appreciation of all that is varied and different. Seiki treatment includes the possibility of celebrating life as art, a ceremony of savoured moments and deep appreciation of the whole environment.

Beyond all this, Seiki can encompass many other helpful or supportive disciplines, such as sitting meditation, physical stretches as in hatha yoga; also dance, music or other creative and artistic endeavours and social activities. Its spirit is universal and directed towards communication, understanding, tolerance and respect. Its practice is imbued with directness and simplicity, originating in Shinto, inspired at times by Daoist, Zen and other great traditions, but looking always beyond them to the roots of our own condition and opening to any and all sources of current inspiration.

It was initiated this way by Akinobu Kishi, who has seemed to me a mischievous adventurer, an enquirer into the nature of healing and humanity, and an inspired, perceptive and unassuming teacher and friend to whom I am deeply grateful. Kishi once said, "Seiki is not mine. Anyone can have it". Thus each of us must find resonance with the transmission, examine ourselves for a true and authentic response and through a matching discipline, allow its spirit to transform us; this is the only way we can share it with others. It is not intended to mystify. We are all on a path. However, as the Tao Te Ching begins, "The way that can be described in words is not the eternal Way. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name".

Q. "Kishi, what is Seiki?" A. "I think, empty space; blue sky".

Akinobu Kishi maintained connections in Shiatsu circles throughout Europe for reasons historical and circumstantial, not least his ten year association with S. Masunaga, widely known as the originator of Zen Shiatsu. While deeply respecting his own teachers and the Japanese healing tradition, he presented Seiki as a departure from convention in every sense. Thus he was often ambivalent, or even critical, not only of Shiatsu but of medicine in general and the attitudes espoused within the professions, but he remained open and enjoyed his dialogue with the Shiatsu community to the end.

Kishi's work embraced a broad vision, drawing strength and inspiration from his deep connection with the spirit of Shinto, in which tradition he was a lineage initiate, and especially his feeling for the Ki Culture of Japan.

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He worked with Kishi extensively and facilitated many of his workshops in the UK. More recently he introduced Seiki practice to groups in Spain where he now lives for most of the year.

Paul's current writing and workshops are dedicated to exploring the fundamental nature of healing, transcending the boundaries between various therapeutic schools, disciplines and styles, as well as between professionals and "ordinary people"; to make effective healing understandable, practical and accessible.

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