

A new path to healing - one man's journey to the heart of Shiatsu

I graduated from The Shiatsu College, London in 1997. At the time I felt I had a grasp of the basics of Shiatsu and enough confidence to begin setting up a practice. I finished my residential weekend, got into my car and began the long journey to the west coast of Ireland. My adventure as a practitioner had begun.

At that point in my life I was searching long and hard for a different approach to my relationships with pretty much everyone. Maybe the search could have been a bit gentler - I had a lot of learning to do.

There was a contradiction between how I was as an adult male, practicing Shiatsu and how I was in my personal life with my friends and especially my sexual relationships. There was an ever increasing tension building inside me. A lot of the time I was fearful, angry, sad and most debilitating of all, ashamed of who I was a man: 'I'm a Shiatsu practitioner, I'm sorted, I heal people, don't I?' It didn't feel OK to be vulnerable, flawed ... human. This was about the perfect problem free life I wanted for myself; how I thought I needed to be. No wonder I was confused and constantly trying to conceal or avoid the emotional pain I was in.

My study at The Shiatsu College was focussed and disciplined. I believe now that it was the one thing in my life back then that kept me from breaking down completely. It was through this process that, for the first time in my life, I realised I had real potential. When I came out of the printers with my dissertation in my hand I found it hard to believe it was me who had created such a strong piece of work about addiction and its treatment through Shiatsu; a great end point to a powerful three year learning process. For the most part, the intellectual aspect of my learning as a practitioner was as far as I was prepared to go at the time. I was too caught up in my daily dramas and

my adrenalin fuelled living to be willing to look deep into myself and find out what kind of frightened, wounded person I was hiding from the outside world.

In Ireland I discovered the core of that fear and explored it fully. I entered a series of short term relationships, looking, as ever, for the perfect partner. It was toward the end of the summer that I met the woman that was to be the breaking and the making of me as an emotional, sexual man. This relationship was as stormy, dramatic and chaotic as the west coast weather itself. We split, she left Ireland for England and I returned shortly after in the belief that we may be able to patch it up. More pain and drama were what I got and it was exactly what I needed. Crying quietly to myself in the middle of a Shiatsu I was giving because of the emotional pain I was in was a clear sign that my work life boundaries were blurring. If I was to continue my life as a practitioner I needed to look into the centre of this pain. There was clearly no turning back. On the back of the break up I reluctantly went into therapy and finally committed to receiving regular Shiatsu. I started to have a proper look at the issues in my life that had been so clearly holding me back. I understood intellectually the trauma and physical abuse I had experienced as a kid but it was during my Shiatsu and therapy sessions that I allowed a new healing and understanding to enter my body as well as my mind. I was beginning to truly put into practice what I was asking my clients to do in their own lives.

Looking that much deeper into what made me tick was more painful than I could ever have imagined. If I had known it was going to be that traumatic I would never have gone through with it. Up till then there had been solace in being numb to my deeper emotions. The journey was very hard for me and I nearly gave up altogether. The long term healing I found as a result of the relationship with the woman I met in Ireland had a direct impact on my Shiatsu and on my ability to practice with clarity and openness.

At this time I received a call from my brother who told me about a male initiatory training he was about to go on. He asked me if I was up for it. I felt excitement and fear rise in me and without hesitation said yes. The following weekend we drove to the training centre in Dorset and I stepped into an even deeper part of my healing process. What unfolded over those 3 days was something my soul had been seeking all my life. I was offered the opportunity

to look at my wounds and see what kind of healing they could offer me. I was totally supported by every man present that weekend and I felt safe. My work within this community of empowered men over the last 9 years has been about returning to a place of intuition, trusting and following what my body tells me. I have taken this alchemical, transformational work into my life and out into the world. I've found within me a growing sense of who I am. I now see and feel myself to be a man of integrity, vulnerability and power. It was always there it just needed rediscovering.

In the summer of 2005 a fellow Shiatsu practitioner returned my gift to him to go on his own initiatory weekend by giving me a weekend at a Kishi workshop in Devon. What I discovered there was yet another level of initiation. It was on that weekend, after almost 10 years in practice, that I finally discovered my voice as a Shiatsu practitioner. Not the Shiatsu I thought I *should* do but the Shiatsu I was *born* to do. My practice up until then had been focused on my head doing the work, the diagnosis, 'which meridian', are they getting it, am I fixing them and will they like me!' During that Kishi weekend I fully realised that stillness was as important as movement. That if my hand, my body and my heart felt a call to stay in one place or move off a chosen meridian line, I could follow it and explore it freely. The truth of where I am with a client in any given moment is in the feeling, the intuition that I'm right where I need to be.

With this new focus and self belief I have built up my client base and I now have a healthy, thriving practice in tandem with my writing career. With my issues around my deeper emotions supported through my community (12 Step, Shiatsu and men's work) I'm discovering a joy and a freedom I never knew existed or could exist. My practice has changed completely, the less I focus on fixing my clients and the more I'm able to be with them, witness them and support them in their own journey, the more they respond and the more they seem to find their own paths to healing. It's the old Zen way of sitting with nothing other than what the moment presents, no attachments just being and moving with the energies of life itself.

This new path into my spirit, my body, my mind and my emotions leads me out of my fears and away from the need to be a 'sorted' practitioner and into the being I was born to be and the practitioner I have now become.

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