

# SEIKI, A WAY OF DEVELOPMENT

by Paul Lundberg, 1998

The work of Akinobu, formerly known as Shinmei, Kishi has attracted considerable attention in Shiatsu circles for reasons both historical and circumstantial, not least his ten or twelve year association with S.Masunaga. However, Kishi does not teach Shiatsu and has maintained ambivalent view of both Shiatsu and the practice of medicine in general.

His teaching, such as it is, tends to produce a wide range of responses in those attending workshops, from fear and distrust to revelatory transformation and awe. These responses are as much part of an individual's process as anything else. In fact his approach is stunningly simple and direct, equally imbued with seriousness and humour, touchingly personal and ordinary. He called it Seiki for want of a better name.

After a few brief appearances around 1981-82, Kishi was absent from these islands for ten years, but since 1992 he has been returning to the UK with increasing regularity to give workshops, demonstrations and treatments. So, there are many Shiatsu students and practitioners, among others, who have now experienced at least a taste of his work. For some it has brought a new sense of meaning and interest to their practice of Shiatsu and perhaps their own life, yet for others it seems too challenging, obscure or irrelevant.

I myself have found a deeply transforming path opening through many years of involvement with this work that has paralleled my study and practice of Shiatsu and oriental medicine. So I offer this personal view, a response, finally, to my own oft repeated question, "What is Seiki?".

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After many years of involvement with this work, I finally attempted to answer my own oft repeated question, "What is Seiki?".

Principally Seiki is a Way of development for Human Beings, offering a practice, at once simple and profound, which may be consciously adopted by anyone seeking to clarify or determine their own path in life. It is a way by which we can attain a deep sense of health and well-being based in recognition of the innate intelligence and autonomy of the physical body, its natural capacities for movement, feeling and self regulation at each moment allowing a harmonising process to take place without intervention. This is intimately connected with a parallel recognition that our mutual human needs for nourishment, protection, expression and communication in the broadest as well as the most particular of senses are coupled with our capacity to fully realise any individual potential we have for true independence of mind, but that paradoxically this mind is rooted in the physical body, itself dependent on this earthly environment.

Thus a certain understanding develops that self-respect, respect for the environment and respect for others are interrelated, that if we wish to develop as individuals we must first respect and take care of ourselves, which in fact implies so far as is possible taking care of everything.

However if we are honest we will also realise that we do not know how to take care of ourselves or others or the environment very well. Neither our near or distant forbears or any of our peers have been very successful in this regard. Though we may have a sense of partial or temporary achievements and we may sometimes feel fortunate in our current state, we can also be painfully aware of the setbacks and reversals that societies and their individual members often experience.

Then we may realise that nature and the environment actually take care of themselves, whether in response to, despite or regardless of what human beings do. So, then it is the other way around; in expanding our spirit, opening ourselves to the Cosmos as it were, we can begin consciously to allow Nature to care for us, and actually to inform us. This is happening anyway, but if our ignorance, small mindedness or habituated, conditioned behaviour actually reduces or inhibits the natural benefits we could experience, then feelings of separation and fear may develop into arrogant defensiveness, jealousy or aggression with all their damaging consequences. Really, then we need do nothing but trust to get the best out of life. Trusting our bodies as vehicles, our nervous systems as intricate receivers and regulators of cosmic energy and information, and Nature itself as both an infinite resource and a field for our own exploration and joyful creativity (given that in common with all creatures we are and always will be subject as individuals, to limitation and challenge, that everything changes and passes and that this is the necessary part of conditioned existence). however if our capacity for trust and openness, present at birth and often retained into early childhood or later if we are lucky, becomes weakened, eroded or buried and obliterated by adverse experience, manipulation and betrayal, what are we to do?

This reveals the importance of our capacity for desire - the urge to go forward for something. In continuing and surviving all beings naturally strive for what they need. The attainment of necessities sometimes demands fearsome adaptation and sacrifice but anything beyond survival, though it may not be remembered or easily recognised or acted on, offers increasing degrees of choice and of freedom. In this regard human beings have in general attained remarkable potential; but individually and collectively, whether through accident or neglect, this potential, present in all of us, is vastly, distorted, underdeveloped or both, as our innate desire is frequently misdirected into narrow compensatory activities, goals and attachments. This in turn leads to the impoverishment of societies even though, apparently, they be culturally sophisticated and materially rich.

Seiki, then, is based in the recognition of 'desire' as a natural principle of the life force, on a vision of human intelligence as an extension or a mirror of cosmic intelligence and of human beings as belonging to, not separate from or above nature, on the "reawakening of trust" as a natural and sensible focus for that desire in order to release the full creative and joyful potential and diminish the negative and harmful among human beings; that any activities and efforts not embracing this view or trusting state will necessarily be wasteful, confusing, limited in their effects, or add to the burden of suffering.

[We might see healing then as a lifting of the veil of illusion of separateness which has led us to behave detrimentally to ourselves or others - to operate against ourselves, and health as understanding our belonging, and a feeling of intimacy with the whole of life. This may involve realising that suffering exists and cannot be simply eradicated, though it may be transformed or transformative; it can be a matter of conscious practise, 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!].

Now, regardless of whether any of the above is recognised or accepted, the practise of Seiki initially involves adopting a simple sequence of steps:

First, deciding to take the time for oneself to explore and develop, then finding a quiet or conducive place in which to sit or kneel comfortably with space around sufficient to allow for a degree of unencumbered movement (actually, standing or sitting in a chair are equally valid starting positions but in the beginning sitting on cushions, a blanket or just the carpet is probably better),

second, the bringing of oneself to a zero point by a combination of mental intention and physical gesture. This means nothing more than joining the hands together in the prayer position and closing the eyes in order to avoid external visual distractions, then focussing the attention momentarily on the sensation within the palms as they contact each other. The hands are then separated, opening up a consciously monitored space, merely to feel for any mild or stronger 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 Gyo-ki, "feeling for Ki", a conscious exploration of vital energy fields, developing sensitivity for and moving with Ki, breath, the life-force. This is the foundation of Seiki. It may be practised alone or with one or more others.

Many people know about, or have tried experimentally to feel "off the body" sensations; spiritual healers, martial artists and body-energy workers of all kinds have used similar hand exercises either to demonstrate or to enhance their Ki. But this is usually seen as a small or incidental part of a larger, more complex system of practices. In Seiki, which means "original emptiness/movement", it is the only practice, pursued with a simple, single-minded perseverance and an openness that eventually allows everything to enter.

The "Zero Point" is associated with the observing mind or consciousness which may eventually locate itself within the physical body centre but which is initially directed towards the space between the hands and to further developing feeling sensibilities, through the hands at first, then in and around the body, practising with gradually developing trust and a deepening sense of care for the self and for truth to allow whatever feelings, movements, emotions or insights that spontaneously occur. These may seem sudden or unusual but nothing need be withheld or controlled.

One may invoke the intelligent guidance of the higher self or centres and of cosmic universal influence in relaxing ones fears - awareness affords protection from physically harming oneself or others. Gradually then, one can release the excessive controls exerted through education, social, or anti-social, conditioning, or by distorted and disturbed centres within, 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.

A softening then occurs, further opening the body-mind to various, perhaps strange, evocative sensations and thoughts., stirringly delightful or painful emotions and physical feelings may arise but with the clarity and calmness that comes with practice, with attention from time to time placed on the natural rhythm and power of the breath, an ability to observe and allow develops and an emptying takes place - the space we feel around us begins to reveal and merge with a space within, as, identifying more readily with this observer than with these transient feeling states, we may indeed experience and perceive that higher consciousness is still in charge, 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, and a truer self.

After this we can work together with another person, using guidance and a sensitivity with touch informed by resonance that can be felt and enhanced, to follow a pattern of movement (life-energy or Ki) within their body, allowing our partner space and time to complete any possible transformation spontaneously and naturally to a more healthy, harmonious and sensitive state. This "treatment" practice is called Seiki Soho, or "guidance/empathy" within Seiki, and for this a greatly simplified traditional form of Hara (abdominal) diagnosis with a sequence of connecting or resonant points has been adopted for entry into, checking and completing a session.

Any of the more formal systems or techniques associated with bodywork therapy (massage, Shiatsu, chiropractic, cranio-sacral work etc.) may be incorporated into Seiki, as indeed can the traditional asking, listening and palpation skills associated with (Oriental) diagnosis. However, the emphasis is neither on treatment or 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', simply 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, coalescing spontaneously with other natural modes of touch communication and response, while the practitioner maintains the practise of non-judgemental and detached observation of his or her own feelings.]

Our ordinary experiences of daily life - being with other people, children, animals, in the street, the garden, the kitchen, the bedroom - are as valid a training for this work as any, but to develop it takes time, and this also we are bound to recognise.

The name given to the spontaneous movements and adjustments within the body which occur during practise or treatments in Seiki is Katsugen. Although sometimes appearing strange or extreme and accompanied by crying, shouting, laughing, moaning or other vocal expression, this is understood as being quite natural in this moment, indeed much the same as blinking, sneezing, yawning or intestinal rumblings that are sometimes regarded as embarrassing or impolite. The process may continue internally, promoting elimination via the body's natural channels and functions. Katsugen is purification.

With a more open view, it could be seen that anything and everything that happens in life is Katsugen, it is ordinary natural responsiveness, and Seiki just the continuing fact, the actuality and the space in which it all takes place. To discover this space is the only aim of practise (Gyoki practise is a way of meditation); to occupy this space is to free ourselves for this moment of any judgement, to have no reaction.

This is unification (healing) and the only possibility of freedom.

Beyond all this Seiki can encompass any other helpful or supportive disciplines, such as sitting meditation, physical stretches as in hatha yoga, any traditional or innovative movement exercise, also dance, music or other creative and artistic endeavours and social activities. Its spirit is universal and directed towards communication, understanding, tolerance and respect between individuals, communities and cultures. Its practise is imbued with directness and simplicity, originating in Shinto, inspired at times by Taoist, Zen and other great teaching traditions, but looking always beyond them to the very roots of our own condition and opening to the source of current inspiration.

It has been initiated in this way by Akinobu Kishi, a mischievous adventurer and enquirer into the nature of healing and of humanity, an inspired, perceptive and unassuming teacher, to whom, among others, I am deeply grateful.

FOOTNOTES: In this article, I have described Seiki in terms of practise, as this is how I chiefly understand it, though it will seem as if it has elements of a 'teaching' about it. This is because I have personally experienced much in the way of teaching through the study and practise of Seiki, and a large part of this has been transmitted by or through the agency of Akinobu Kishi, who I still regard as my most significant individual teacher. However I have received 'teaching' from many sources and I have let my own perceptions and insights colour this piece. It was the only way I could have written it and it reflects to some extent my own position both as both a student and a teacher, including the limitations set by my own ignorance and laziness. Seiki, then is something to be understood through practise, a vehicle for the experience of truth, an opening to what 'is' . The subject of "what constitutes a teaching, a way of knowledge or wisdom etc.?" is a huge and separate discussion. Suffice it to say that most practices of any value, ways of meditating and (physical) systems of development included, are best undertaken at first under the guidance of a more experienced teacher, and Seiki practises are no exception. As was stated at the beginning, one needs to take care.

Initially, the practise of Gyoki or of Seiki Soho fosters the awakening of such insights and experiences within the body-mind as have been outlined above. Continuing even intermittent practise (or treatment) supports our remaining in this wakeful and trusting state, attaining true independence and enhancing our human creative potential. Groups of people meeting together for practise can specifically encourage, support and allow each other in this way to develop. Initiative is an individual matter; leadership can only arise by consensus but can be rotated or shared.

Professional qualifications are not available. Therefore to practise Seiki Therapy 'professionally' may depend first on having or obtaining a sufficient training and qualification in something else (and this may be cooking, gardening, medicine or structural engineering) and then perhaps unlearning it all, for Seiki itself is practised by letting go - clearing everything out of the way.

Q. 'Kishi, what is Seiki?'

A. 'I think, empty space; blue sky'.

P.L.