

What is Seiki?

Alice Whieldon

Founded by Akinobu Kishi sensei, Seiki is the flowering of his immense experience and wisdom. It is also another moment in a long tradition of Japanese healing and spiritual practice and, since central to it is the injunction to become more ourselves, it is, at base, non culture specific too.

Seiki incorporates bodywork treatments, katsugen spontaneous movement and, importantly, space to experience and enjoy life as embodied beings.

The western mindset (and, arguably, the eastern also) posits dualism as a fundamental. That view prioritizes the mind over body to the extent that we think of and treat the body much like a machine that has no really intimate relationship with 'self'. The tendency of this picture of reality is that it pulls us towards polarisation with one side favoured over the other which is reviled. For instance, the male is favoured over the female, light over dark, mind over matter, heaven over earth and so on.

This view is so basic to our picture of reality that we don't see it most of the time. While it is natural to create ideas of reality that mediate between the 'experience' and 'I', it is also a basic human drive to aim to experience life unmediated .

The dualistic viewpoint is reflected in western medicine and the way in which most alternative medicines are practiced. These approaches to health encourage an alienated view of the body as a fundamentally faulty machine rather than as manifest self. This results in a dichotomised understanding of sickness and health in which sickness has become the enemy to be avoided and suppressed. We rarely embrace sickness as natural and healthy; rarely take full responsibility for how we feel about it and, indeed, how it came about. Instead, we often become increasingly anesthetised to ourselves and to our environment and regard illness as a blight acted upon us. We are so divorced from our bodies at a basic level of identification that we look every which way but ourselves for answers and cure.

In Seiki, unity is not thought of in hierarchical, dualistic terms, but as open space, a different dimension to duality and the only real alternative to polarisation. The approach of Seiki is that we are all, inherently, healthy. Our task is to recover this understanding and relax deeply within our bodies as ourselves. Real health is becoming more ourselves.

It is not about not experiencing symptoms but about non-oppositional experiencing per se. Symptoms are also uniquely educational about ourselves and how we function at a deep, often subconscious, level. Using them to explore ourselves is profoundly rewarding. In the end it is all we have and the only possibility.

Alienated from our bodies and anesthetised against experience we look outside ourselves for answers and reassurances. Most of us for most of the time mistakenly think that we are looking at ourselves when, in fact, we have substituted ideas and images of how we should be - effectively pictures of others and society - where we think that there is a mirror. While these images may satisfy us for a long time, dissatisfaction often creeps in and robs them of their luster; ultimately, we are never truly comfortable with these images of ourselves.

Maybe at that point we start to look around for something else and Seiki fosters the possibility of ourselves in which we begin to recognise and feel who we are and do not have to rely on the fickle and unreliable mirror of society for clues about how we should or do feel.

Addressing these issues

Essentially a practice for self-development, several things give Seiki its particular character.

First, although I have already stated that Seiki is a 'form' or practice, this will elicit some opposition from those who will insist that it is formless. However, Seiki is no-form in the sense that it is a way of noticing form and letting it go; it is an explicit attitude of no-form.

It is a practice of listening to ourselves, to the often muffled voice of our own desires and rhythms, to allow that natural sense of ourselves to inform our lives, to bring us into the present moment and experience life to the fullest extent. Form and polarised thought is constantly challenged and we start to see and experience its limitations.

When we do this more and more, fears begin to drop away, tensions to dissipate and mind and body start to become clearer. We are simply able to live more peacefully with ourselves and others, live more comfortably with the paradoxes that constitute our existence and, when pain does arise, we are better able to experience and learn from it, accepting change as we accept life as it is present to us more and more.

Second, Seiki is extremely radical in focusing on the body as self and undermines the mind-body split in favour of (if anything) a constantly restated and re-experienced openness. It keeps questioning alive and fosters natural, organic

change, refusing closure and polarisation as you are increasingly awake to the present moment.

Third, and really an extension of my second point is that the body is understood as being innately wise, healthy and intelligent. These qualities are available to all of us in bucketful's as we let natural feeling, desire and movement come back to our consciousness and re-establish or re-member our natural harmony. It is in the striving to be who we think we are or want to be, the looking elsewhere than ourselves for satisfaction, that we fancy ourselves to be lacking or unhealthy.

We have so often regarded the body as so minor a part of ourselves - or perhaps strongly identified it with our socialised physical image - that it is a good place to start. Re-establishing some sense of embodiedness, real-eyezing ourselves, re-claiming a naturalness and ease that we haven't known since we were pre-adolescent in many instances (or perhaps, ever). This alone can be life-changing. And Seiki makes it simple.

You are just asked to feel how you are, allow feeling to arise in and of yourself. Nothing is imposed, you are simply offered the space and support to experience yourself. Giving or receiving treatments is an act, for both parties, of feeling and relating intuitively, seeing what feels right, noticing emotions or tensions as they rise to the surface.

Fourth, Seiki encourages us to take full responsibility for every aspect of our lives. While we are all an integral part of our environments, each affecting the other in everything we do, it is not useful to us to regard ourselves as acted upon. This attitude engenders blame and stunts growth, taking the focus to the outside rather than ourselves.

Taking full responsibility for how we are in life is the only way to keep growing, to experience one's full autonomy and treat ourselves, others and the environment with appropriate respect.

Fifth, Seiki fundamentally questions hierarchical authority, particularly in treatment, but also in its encouragement of our individual development; this, too, is a symptom of dualistic polarisation.

In treatment, the practitioner does not seek to impose a picture of the ideal person upon the client but, rather, looks to the client and their own intuition to lead the treatment from the root of how the client is and how client and practitioner relate - much more like psychotherapy than body work. It recognises that we, alone, know ourselves and the practitioner too is expert only in themselves and will not promote any hierarchy of knowledge. This is not, however, a drive towards rampant solipsism but is essentially relational.

Sixth, relationality is crucial to our growth because we are human beings. Being human we are necessarily relational. As human beings, we need each other. While we can learn a great deal on our own, sharing experiences, insights, space, is also vital to our development and growth. Others can also act as mirrors to ourselves, enhancing or magnifying our sense of self in relation.

This takes me to my seventh point, that Seiki offers a mirror for us to experience ourselves as ourselves. It does this in a variety of ways. I have already mentioned the theory of the mirror.

There is a subtle but profound difference between looking outward to find an image of ourselves and the recognition of ourselves in our experience of relating, even silently, with others. In the latter, instead of searching for meaning and opinion in what seems to be acted upon us, we note, instead, the feelings, desires etc that arise in us in relation to others.

Thus, our actions become those of choice rather than reaction and arise from autonomous integrity instead of a less comfortable desire to act upon others.

In Seiki Soho, the practitioner follows their intuition as primary, testing that sense of what to do. In doing so, desire is manifested, tested and satisfied by both client and practitioner.

For the former, the body reveals what it wants in order that peace and balance be restored and the latter responds intuitively to the desire manifested by the body with touch and/or attention following through the body's movement. In this way, both are satisfied, the client's openness and wish for assistance and attention and the practitioner's desire to touch or give attention. Each acts as a mirror for the other in an environment of openness, non-criticism and relaxation that fosters unfolding, self-awareness and, ultimately, peace.