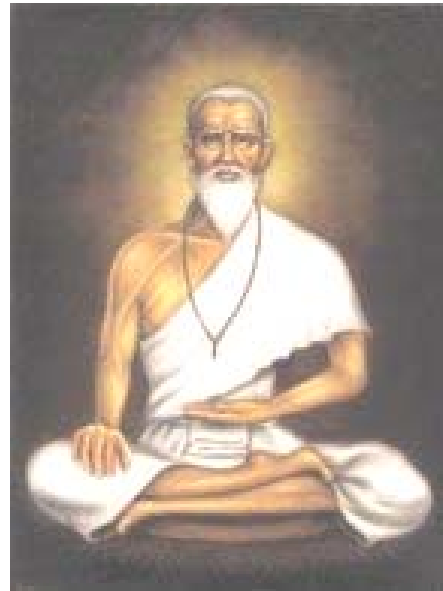


Good Energy, Bad Energy. . . Who Knows?

By Paul Fowler

In the world of bodywork, we often talk about protecting ourselves from the “bad” energy of the person we are working on. But how often do we think about the “bad” energy we might be giving to someone else? And what is “bad” energy anyway?



I have heard Pichet say, “Oh, tension. . . giving, giving.” By saying this, he is noting that the tension we hold in our own bodies while working may move from us into them. “Cannot relax”, he will say; meaning, since I as the giver am not relaxed, the receiver cannot relax either. For example, if I am pulling them back against my stationary foot, but I am holding tension in my foot, that tension moves into their body. When their body senses this tension, they cannot fully let go. They may be pulled in one direction, but they are holding back and not giving themselves fully to the pose. Our clients may contract muscles all over their body as they (usually subconsciously) resist the stretch. Those of us who practice yoga may more easily recognize this problem. Going deeply into a stretch while you are holding tension or not breathing

correctly can make a pose unproductive, and it can also be a cause of injury. When this happens, it may create in the receiver, as Pichet would say, an “amazing (energy) block”, perhaps even in another part of the body. So, when we try to “force” things, we can sometimes cause more problems than we relieve. This is ironic. The more we want to help the person and the more we want to “fix” them, the less we actually help them. Perhaps this is where our “doing” culture makes things more difficult.

When I began practicing in 1999, I was “doing” 90 percent of the time and “listening” only 10 percent. I think the healthiest practice would be “doing” 10 percent and “listening” 90 percent. I once asked Pichet how he understands the problems in a person’s body so quickly and clearly, but he had no verbal answer. He just moved his body into lotus meditation posture. “Listening” was the unspoken answer. But how can we listen when our minds are filled with so much? Here are some examples that you might recognize.

“Is my client enjoying this?”

“Am I doing the right thing for him/her?”

“What does he/she expect from me?”

“When I’m in this position it hurts me a little, but it seems like this is what they need.”

“I’m afraid to skip this position because they are expecting me to do it.”

“This person had a Thai massage from someone else before. I wonder if he’ll like me as much as the other therapist.”

“I can’t tell if he is enjoying this, perhaps I should impress him with a dramatic position.”

I admit it -- all of these thoughts have been in my head at one time or another. Most of the time, they pass through subconsciously, causing tension in my mind and body. Then, I may unknowingly transmit this to my client. But when I become conscious of these thoughts, recognize they come from misunderstanding, and then breathe them into the present moment, then I can relax the tension in my body and truly “listen” to what their body is asking for.

So, perhaps the “bad” energy we are giving to someone else comes from our “monkey mind” -- our fears, our anxieties, the difficulties we face in recognizing our motivations and their potential consequences.

So, how do we fix this situation? One word: meditation. We talk about Buddhism being the spiritual foundation of this practice. After all, the cornerstone of Buddhism is meditation. Through meditation we learn to recognize the tension in our mind and body. Through meditation we learn to release it. Through meditation we learn right understanding, right thinking, right attitude, and right effort. Through meditation we open to the truth of the moment.

I am never free of tension. Tension comes in layers. When I release one layer I find another one below it. We see it in our clients all the time. We should never think that we are tension free. We should always be aware that we can let go more. So as you work, become aware of the tension you are holding in each position, in each movement, and in each breath. It is only through awareness that you can let it go. Be okay with it, recognize it constantly, and breathe into it. As you relax, “good” energy can move through you into the other person in a profound, healing way.