

Gift from the Water

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I was reading a fitness magazine, Shape, and a photograph of a woman being held and stretched by another person in water caught my attention. It was an article about Watsu® which is a floating therapy done in a heated pool (Latona, "Soothe" 130). Since I had been believing in healing effect in water, and I had just started a massage school few months ago, I read an article with a great interest. My interest led me to receive Watsu® treatment, and it amazed me how much healing it had on me. In a process of finding informations about Watsu, I found any written document about Watus is far less than some other modalities, and I also found that many people is hesitant to receive Watsu® treatment because of the way it's done. I think Watsu® is a wonderful healing tool for physical and emotional pain and beauty of it is that it empowers anyone who is willing to transform ones life.

First, what is Watsu? Harold Dull explains how he developed it in 1980's in a book, Watus/Freeing the Body in Water, that he authored.

Watsu® began at Harbin Hot Springs where I came to teach the Zen Shiatsu I had studied in Japan. Zen Shiatsu incorporates stretches which release blockages along our meridians, the channels through which our "chi" or life force flows. It strengthens muscles, and increases flexibility and range of motion. I found these effects can be amplified and made more profound by stretching someone while floating them in warm water (qtd. in Dull 11).

Dull also tells us how it is like to receive Watsu® in a book.

Warm water is the ideal medium for freeing the body. Let yourself be floated in someone's arms in water that gently lifts each time you breathe in, its warmth penetrating, melt the tension in your body. Drift into deeper and deeper levels of relaxation as your body is stretched freer and freer. Flow into states of consciousness to which stored tension or trauma otherwise deny access. Flow onto a level of Being where there is such joy and peace and wholeness, the causes of that tension or trauma can no longer overwhelm you.

This is Watsu® (qtd. in Dull 11).

In Finding yourself in warm water: the spiritual possibilities of Watsu, Andrew Yavelow says that Watsu® is done by the help of the therapist, client float comfortably in a large pool of warm water while client's muscles are massaged, joints are mobilized, tissues are stretched, and energy

pathways are opened, and client's whole body is swished and swayed gently throughout the water (Yavelow, "Finding" 1)

My experience with Watsu® started from making an appointment with Watsu® practitioner, Gary Jaeger, LMP, who I found in New Times.

A week later, I was at a pool in a small retreat in Redmond which somehow reminded me a temple in Japan. Gary explained to me that water temperature is kept about 96 fahrenheit and overall water quality including pH and other chemical balance is well kept in a pool for safety and comfort. I have to admit that I became nervous when I was talking to him because I would have to let him have a control of my body during Watsu. I also felt awkward about the idea him holding me close to his body during treatment when I and he were wearing bathing suits. I was not sure how I could set my boundary. The sheets and massage table could set my boundary in regular massage done on land, but we were in water. Although I was nervous, I let my body float in water with Gary holding my head and floating device around my ankle. As he moved and stretched my body, I started to let go of my body. All I heard was a sound of water because my ears were submerged, and my skin felt water swirl around my body. I didn't see anything since my eyes were closed. Although I enjoyed all the sensation, I forgot that I had a body since I didn't feel my weight on anywhere in my body. I, then, started to feel as if I was a fetus in a womb. I was filled with motherly like love and felt very safe as if I had never experienced fear. Gratitude for my parents for giving me a life came at the same time.

The experience brought tremendous healing into my life. As I grew up in Japan, I felt that I didn't receive unconditional love from my parents, and I thought they did not accept me as who I was. I constantly felt I was different from other Japanese girls who my parents wanted me to be, and I had hard time accepting my identity as a Japanese.

Moving to U.S. seven years ago had had made my internal belief intensified. I had been having low self-esteem, and I constantly thought I was not good enough. Experience of being a fetus made me reconnect with essence of myself, and I knew I found something beautiful and precious in me that I had never seen.

After a Watsu® treatment, I realized that I was the one who couldn't accept and love who I was physically, mentally and emotionally. I had been pretending to be someone that was not who I was to please or gain acceptance from others and my self. Motherly love I felt was empowering, and I gained the strength to face my issues.

How was it possible for me to have such a spiritual and healing experience? According to The Complete Illustrated Encyclopedia of Alternative Healing Therapies, water's main effect when used for healing purposes is depend on its temperature, and ability to provide weight-bearing support to the human

body (Shealy 173). Watsu which is done between 94 to 98 fahrenheit is therefore ideal for healing.

The book also explains that hydrotherapy has considerable psychological benefits, and it can reduce stress and induce relaxation, which in turn stimulates release of the endorphins, the body's own painkillers and main mood enhancers (Shealy 172). Sunny Mehler, a psychotherapy facilitator for family and group for eighteen years, has been exploring the value of Watsu® as a supplemental treatment and has followed client's experiences of Watsu.

She claimed that from the day that we are born, intimacy and unconditional acceptance are a fundamental physical and psychological need. Yet many of the clients whom she interviewed with admitted that they were not accustomed to unconditional acceptance.

She thinks that her clients' sense of OK'ness came from their ability to do, how well they perform, or how good they look. They perform accordingly until they get hurt or fail ill and can no longer perform in those ways that gave them the recognition that they were earning.

She thinks Watsu® offers people to share an intimate and nourishing exchange with another person without a list of conditions, and it gives people a sense of intimacy and unconditional acceptance (Dull 109).

Is there any other conditions that Watus is indicate for? Gary Jaeger, LMP, Watsu® therapist, told me that clients with Parkinson's disease, Fibromyalgia, and chronic injury and disability seem like get most benefit from Watsu.

Harold Dull did a case study on a 62 year old female with a one year old rotator cuff injury and muscle spasm in her right shoulder. Originally, this client jnjured her rotator cuff in earthquake in 1989. She had been receiving physical therapy including ultrasound and gentle exercises.

This treatment was discontinued because her pain increased, and she showed decreased ROM. She, then, started massage therapy and active water exercise with emphasis on stretching, strengthening. Although she experienced some reduced pain and increased ROM, her pain and tightness

in her shoulder still interfered her daily activity.

She

was referred to receive Watsu® treatment, and after five Watsu® treatment, her shoulder showed a dramatic increase in flexibility, decreased pain and muscle gurdng, improved posture and breathing pattern. According physical therapist's evaluation, abduction of right shoulder increased from 90 degrees to 150 degrees and lateral rotation increased from 30 degrees to 65 degrees (Watsu® 106).

My healing journey has been continuing with Watsu® along with accupuncture and counseling. One time during Watsu® treatment, I had a vision of taking a diamond out from a deep dark pound. I shared that with Gary, and to my surprise, he told me that he saw a diamond in my stomach.

It helped me to view myself as a matter that co-create the world and the Universe, and I gain sense of belonging. I now view myself as human who is no less or no more than anyone else. I am a unique individual who was born and raised in Japan and who is female those traits are shining as diamond in me.

My

self-esteem has became higher, and I have been treating myself with love and respect. Watsu® is not the answer for every physical and emotional pain, but I believe that Watsu® tells us to take what you need throughout treatment to heal yourself in your own unique way. Healing is a gift of life.