

## WATSU

### WATSU-THERAPIE

**Márcia Ortiz & Rhomy Pereira**

*Keywords: Warm water, bodywork, relaxation, shiatsu massage, emotion*

*Schlüsselwörter: Warmwasser, Körperarbeit, Entspannung, Shiatsu-Massage, Emotion*

*Zusammenfassung:*

*Watsu ist eine Hydrotherapie, welche Entspannung und den Wiederaufbau des inneren Wesens durch die Vereinigung des Körpers mit der Seele zum Ziel hat. Mit Hilfe eines/einer erfahrenen TherapeuIn werden Shiatsu Manipulationen mit Streckübungen, sowie anderen Bewegungen, welche den Körper sanft massieren, ausgeführt, und zwar in einem geheizten Schwimmbecken, mit vermindertem Einfluss der Schwerkraft. Von dem/r PatientenIn bzw. EmpfängerIn wird nichts erwartet. Er/Sie braucht nichts zu sagen oder zu tun und kann sich ausschließlich schwimmend bewegen und stützen lassen.*

*Watsu ist eine Erfindung des amerikanischen Therapeuten Harol Dull, indem er Anfang der 80er Jahre die orientalische Philosophie des Zen-Shiatsu mit der westlichen therapeutisch-körperlichen Sprache vereinigte. Die Anwendung dieser Therapie in einem geheizten Becken stellte sich noch wirksamer heraus. Seitdem ist die Watsu-Therapie weltweit bekannt geworden. In Brasilien wird Watsu seit 6 Jahren von der Direktorin des Watsu Centers, Ursula Garthoff, und deren AssistentInnen ausgeübt und verbreitet.*

Watsu is an expansive aquatic bodywork, with philosophy and language by zen-shiatsu, that aims the relaxation and recomposition of the essential being through the meeting of body and mind. Its effects (water + shiatsu = watsu) have a greater increase in the range of motion, than traditional methods. Warm water, at around 36 degrees Celsius, is the ideal medium for freeing the body. When the whole body is in continual movement, each move is flowing gracefully into the next, there is no way to anticipate what's coming next and build up resistance. Watsu is the exploration of freedom and creativity. It's being attested to be the way those who develop and practice. During one session stretching, breathing and integration are combined. The patient/receiver is not required, to do or say anything only float, letting theirselves be free, conducted and supported. Watsu is so multidimensional and works on so many levels, no two people come at it in exactly the same way.

Harold Dull created watsu in the early eighties, joining the eastern bodywork language with the holistic western bodywork philosophy and language, more specifically zen-shiatsu. Zen shiatsu incorporates stretches which release blockages along our meridians, the channels through which our "chi" or life force flows. Zen shiatsu's principle of continuous support takes on a new dimension in water. The result of this union provides an experience of "unconditional acceptance" which can encourage individuals to seek this kind of attention in other areas of their life. As the patient/receiver gets to know watsu, experiments its long-term effects, with an inclination to changes in patterns of thinking and behavior, due to the search for keeping the sensation of satisfaction that is felt in a session.

There are innumerable ways to use watsu. It can be done with almost anybody. It's widely indicated to people with stress who look for relaxation, as well as assisting in cases of muscular pains, back problems, motor deficiency, rehabilitation of injuries caused by sports, acute and chronic tension, depression and insomnia.

The benefits of watsu are numerous: stretching and decreasing muscular tension, reaching a greater width of movement and bringing the tonus into normal levels, increasing peripheral circulation, making deeper breathing possible, improving the posture, reducing stress, physical pain and emotional anxiety, improving body awareness, general state of health and providing a calmer sleep. There is a Sunny Mehler's case study about the rehabilitative benefits of watsu showed us by Harold Dull (1993) in his book:

“Joe is a 40 year old male, presently in his second marriage and the father of 20-year-old daughter. He is the oldest of seven boys and comes from a very dysfunctional and alcoholic home, with physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse. Joe is also a recovering alcoholic/addict with almost six years of sobriety training through 12-Step programs and five years of private therapy. He is currently working in a chemical dependency hospital as an addiction counselor. Joe has chronic back pain and had been seen at Timpany Center for aquatic physical therapy and watsu treatments.

My first two sessions were very relaxing and soothing, but my level of trust was low and I wasn't able to totally surrender and get the most out of them. About six weeks ago, I started getting in touch with some very painful memories and feelings from my childhood and I wanted to access more of the emotional component, so I set up extra psychotherapy sessions and body work, including massage and watsu. I went into my watsu session with a willingness to surrender to whatever came up.

In one watsu session following a very traumatic therapy session using regressive guided memory, I was able to be in touch with a great amount of abandonment pain as my watsu practitioner was cradling me. I was able to cry and let the pain go and felt a sense of release. As the session ended I felt very young and totally relaxed and was in touch with a sense of well being. In another session, I was able to get in touch with some rather pleasant childhood memories that had been blocked out. I plan to continue to use watsu to help me unlock and to be in touch with memories and emotions that are difficult for me to access with psychotherapy alone”.

In the northwest of Brazil, in Natal City at around 38 degrees Celsius, many practitioners and myself are using watsu in the small warm pools in the ocean, at around 32 degrees Celsius, obtaining significant results when it is combined with the traditional program treatment in the swimming pool. One of the most outstanding results has been happening with Parkinson victims. The clinical panorama presents itself with typical forward inclination of the body, shortening length of step, provoking disturbances in body balance; frequent muscular tremors, dizziness and depression. After the beginning of watsu treatment, through visual observation and testimonies taken from patients, there is more security in walking, there is control of posture tonus, tremors are lessened for three or four days after each session and signs of depression tend to disappear.



Fig. 1: Warm water and watsu in the ocean /Forte Beach in Natal - Brazil



Fig. 2: Watsu is the exploration of freedom and creativity.

## References

- Dull, H. (1993). *Freeing the body in water*. USA: Harbin Springs Publishing.  
Dull, H. (1986). *Shiatsu and Water*.

Marcia Ortiz, Watsu Center Brazil, Rio Grande do Norte, Rua José Mauro de Vasconcelos, 1855 Bloco C,  
Aptº 201 Natal RN, Cep: 59082-210, Brazil  
E-mail: m.ortiz@ig.com.br