

Mary Burmeister, Master of Jin Shin Jyutsu

By Melissa Higgins

The tiny, energetic woman placed one of my hands in hers, grasping my forefinger firmly but not tightly. Her eyes sparkled as she looked into mine and said, "See? Isn't that simple?" Miraculously, the tension of months of work disappeared. It was jin shin jyutsu in action, she explained.

Categorizing jin shin jyutsu can be as difficult as pigeonholing its one-woman leading force, Mary Ino Burmeister. More than a style of bodywork, it's a philosophy of life taught by a master who lives her philosophy.

Burmeister describes jin shin jyutsu (which means "art of the Creator through compassionate man" in Japanese) as a "physio-philosophy" that is used by everyone unconsciously, doesn't "do" anything, yet encompasses everything. "I call it the art of life, the art of life itself. It is the whole cosmos and cannot be categorized," Burmeister explains.

The purpose of jin shin jyutsu is to release the tensions that cause various physical symptoms. The body, Burmeister teaches, contains energy pathways that feed life into all cells. When one or more of these paths become blocked, the damming effect can lead to discomfort or pain. Jin shin jyutsu, like acupuncture and acupressure, reharmonizes and balances the energy flows.

Recently I participated in Burmeister's five-day jin shin jyutsu course to learn more about this little-known "art" from the Orient and its only authorized teacher, the enigmatic Burmeister. Although she has a large and loyal following, Burmeister keeps a low public profile and, until now, has never allowed an interview. This, coupled with the unavailability of her books in bookstores and the fact that she has not yet authorized any of her students to teach the material to others, explains why jin shin jyutsu is not more widely known.

Based on ancient knowledge of the body and creation, jin shin jyutsu was passed down orally from one generation to the next and had virtually disappeared in Japan when it was rediscovered in the early 1900s by Jiro Murai, a Japanese philosopher. As a young man, Murai contracted what was diagnosed as



COURTESY MARY BURMEISTER

a terminal illness. He asked his family to take him to the mountains and leave him in solitude for seven days.

In a feverish state, Murai imagined sages in spiritual meditation using hand mudras, which he applied to himself as he went in and out of consciousness. By the seventh day he was completely healed, and he vowed to spend the rest of his life studying the connection between his amazing recovery and the mudras he had used.

Searching for answers, Murai studied the Bible (which he translated himself) and ancient Chinese, Greek, and Indian texts. But it was the *Kojiki*, the Japanese "Record of Ancient Things," that opened the door for him.

"He unraveled the mystery of a plain, old story, the *Kojiki*, which describes creation in allegories," says Burmeister. "He read into the words."

From his study of the *Kojiki* and his 50 years of personal experimentation, Murai concluded that jin shin jyutsu was more than a philosophy of the body.

"Murai studied the Chinese acupressure points, then took them a step further by experimenting on himself and fasting. He compared what he experienced to the ancient acupuncture writ-

ings and compared them to what he felt. His experiences were much deeper than what he found in the writings. There is an awareness in jin shin jyutsu that is deeper than technique," Burmeister says.

Theories of the body and philosophies of creation were far from Burmeister's mind when she met Murai in the late 1940s. A first-generation Japanese-American born in Seattle, she went to Japan to learn Japanese, not to study jin shin jyutsu. "A young lady came to me and asked me to tutor her in English," Burmeister recalls. "It was through this casual meeting that some months later I met Jiro Murai at her home. The first words he said to me were, 'How would you like to study with me to take a gift from Japan to America?' I had no idea what he was talking about, but I went to hear him speak and knew I would stay to listen. I studied with him in Japan for five years, then in America through correspondence for seven more years."

It was 17 years, however, before Burmeister started sharing jin shin jyutsu with others. "I just felt I had to know something before I could say I knew it. Then I realized you can't say you ever really know an art like this. One day I found myself timidly putting my hand out to a neighbor with a back problem and saying, 'Maybe I can help you.' After five years of working with her, I moved, and she then went back to her chiropractor, who called me soon after and requested that we meet. The chiropractor became my first student.

"After two years of sharing with the chiropractor, I started to translate and write down what I had learned from Jiro Murai. I'd stay up late at night after taking care of the children, writing and making drawings. The chiropractor said she had a few colleagues with whom she'd like me to share jin shin jyutsu. Our group grew to about six students, including a psychologist, a physician, and another chiropractor. That's how it began."

Burmeister explains that our revitalizing energy, which flows up the back and down the front of the body, can become blocked in 26 "safety energy locks," or

Profile

what she terms "specialists," located throughout the body and in the organs themselves.

"As we abuse our bodies in our daily routines, mentally, emotionally, digestively, or physically, our safety energy locking system becomes activated," says Burmeister. "This is simply to let us know we are abusing our bodies."

A flow can be unblocked through a sequence of steps, or through a "quickie" step as simple as grasping a finger. The revitalizing energy then flows through the hands, or what Burmeister calls the "jumper cables," and can penetrate through clothing, even a brace or a cast.

"Light pressure goes through the skin and into the bone. If pain is present, it's because there is blockage and the pain is coming from the person, not the pressure. We don't have to dig into the very marrow of the bone. All we have to do is take away the dams."

Burmeister says that in jin shin jyutsu there is no diagnosing, healing, or curing. "Some of you can go out today and look at the book and try this out. But you're not doing it, it's the light and the 'specialist' that are doing it. And the person you're working on says, 'Hey, my headache's gone.' But it's not you who's done it, it's the 'specialist' on step one, step two, step three, that's cleaning the debris for that particular complaint. We cannot do wrong because we are not doing anything. We are only jumper cables."

"Not doing anything" while at the same time doing something is one of several paradoxes in jin shin jyutsu. Despite its esoteric principles, however, Burmeister maintains that jin shin jyutsu is an inborn art that anyone can learn without much training.

"Plato said, 'Learning is remembering.' There's nothing we have to learn. We're always utilizing part of jin shin jyutsu naturally, but as soon as we come into the world, it's 'gotta get,' 'gotta go,' 'gotta get your education,' and the skill lies dormant."

A student with a sprained ankle tells Burmeister that after her accident she has developed a habit of holding her wrist. "That's helping the sprained ankle," Burmeister replies. "We carry a baby a certain way, and that's helping the little one without our knowing why. When a baby sucks its thumb, we tell it, 'No, no, that's wrong,' but the baby is telling us about its needs. It's in need of real energy, or its digestion needs help. Sucking the thumb helps the baby's nervous and muscular systems. As adults, we can hold the thumb and get

the same result."

Burmeister says that jin shin jyutsu not only aids the body, but changes the attitudes that underlie the physical symptoms. "Jin Shin Jyutsu helps everything from head to toe and toe to head. There are 27 trillion cells in the body, and if we smile, all 27 trillion cells smile with us. This is how we help ourselves in health."

"A five-year-old girl came in for a session with her parents. At the first session she was unhappy, all frowns. After the third session, she smiled at her mother and said, 'I love life.' Isn't that dynamic?"

During the five days of class, Burmeister shared other success stories. A woman in a wheelchair whose hands were stiff with arthritis was unable to enjoy her favorite hobby, knitting. A friend who was familiar with jin shin jyutsu told her about holding the fingers. A few days later, after using jin shin jyutsu on herself every night, the woman was knitting again.

A teenager working in a fast-food restaurant burned his arm in a vat of hot oil. His mother, a student of Burmeister's, placed her hands gently on his calves, the location specified in jin shin jyutsu for helping skin ailments. The next morning, not only had all signs of the burn disappeared, but his complexion had cleared up as well.

Amazing as these stories are, I wondered how any kind of body therapy that didn't include direct and deep manipulation of the spine or muscles could be so effective. Although I felt tension disappear when Burmeister held my finger, I was not completely convinced.

Then I experienced a full jin shin jyutsu treatment firsthand. In a class practice session, Burmeister took one look at me and said, "You're a 'doer.' You're always out in the world trying to get things done, rather than relaxing and letting things be."

From observing my body — the bend of my toes, my hands held over my stomach, my left shoulder higher than the right — Burmeister seemed to know almost everything about me. Yet she insists there is nothing unusual in what she does.

"When someone comes in for a session, I know the way they eat, I know what their needs are. And they say, 'Gee, you're psychic.' I'm not psychic. There's nothing mysterious about it. I'm just reading what the body is telling me."

At Burmeister's direction, one student placed her fingers under the back of my

neck and another held my big toe and ankle. Two students on either side of my body each put a hand under my back. Then one of these students grasped my inner thigh at the knee, and the other put his free hand on top of my calf. Over the next 20 minutes I felt the tension in my back muscles melt away. Gurgles rose up from the depths of my torso. Toes and fingers twitched and moved. My breathing became deeper and more even. In general, I felt a sense of calmness, balance, and well-being. Even the puffiness in my cheeks disappeared.

Other students experienced their own small successes. Obviously something was working, but would the results last?

"The physical, mental, and emotional may be cleaned up for now," Burmeister says, "but if we go out and dirty it up again, we need to clean up the dirt, dust, and grime again. That's all it is. You'll just come in for more housecleaning, or you'll do it yourself."

Although dedicated to her work, Burmeister is hesitant to promote jin shin jyutsu as a business. She does no advertising for her courses or private practice in Arizona, yet her classes fill quickly with students from around the world, and new clients have to wait up to one year for treatment. Watching and talking with Burmeister, I soon understood why: By living the simplicity, calmness, patience, and self-containment that lie at the heart of jin shin jyutsu, she has become its best promoter.

"In jin shin jyutsu there are no teachers or masters, they are all the same. I always say, 'Be the example.' We don't have to preach to other people. When people see me and say, 'You're so calm and relaxed. How do you do it, are you on pills or something?' then I can tell them about the hands. The jumper cables are the light. I've been studying for 30 years, and I know nothing."

"I don't see a future. I'm just in the now. Whatever direction it is, so it is. Whatever direction comes up, that's what I am. We're having this interview because David [her son and business manager] said it's time to get out a little bit more. I never butt into God's plans, I just go along with what is. Life is not a struggle, life is enjoying the now. It's simple." □

Melissa Higgins is a freelance writer living in Santa Monica, California.

RESOURCES

Several times each year Mary Burmeister teaches five-day courses around the country. For more information about jin shin jyutsu, write to: Jin Shin Jyutsu, Inc., 2919 North 67th Place, Scottsdale, AZ 85251.