

**SERIES 1:1**

# RELIEVING STRESS WITH SHIATSU



*"There must be a readiness always to handle stress.  
It is part of the human physiology. Basically, the human body is adaptive.  
It can adapt to stress levels but it needs some help if  
the stress levels become overwhelming. This is where shiatsu can help."*

*Kensen Saito, Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo*

**2006**

## THE SHIATSU POINTS AT A GLANCE • ALL VIEWS

Anterior View • Lateral View • Posterior View



There are 700 pressure points in the body. The purpose of shiatsu is to stimulate the body's natural powers of recuperation by: relaxing the nervous system; improving the circulatory system; and correcting the structural imbalance of the body.

## SHIATSU AND STRESS

Since the beginning of time, stress has been imposed upon the human race and its effects have been felt in various degrees on the physical, mental and emotional levels. Stress will always be with us, so it is how we choose to manage stress in our lives that is the key to preventing chronic conditions and health crises before they arise. Kensen Saito, Director and owner of the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo in Toronto, ON who studied in Japan with the founder of shiatsu, Tokujiro Namikoshi explains, “I am seeing a rise in stress levels among people. Physical and mental discomfort is a stress related problem. Humans have always faced stress where it has affected human physiology. Stress has been the cause of many conditions throughout history. It is the cause of human aches, pains and discomfort.” Counter to drug therapy, shiatsu is a preventive measure, allowing the body to heal itself, restoring homeostasis physically, mentally and emotionally. Saito continues, “Regular shiatsu treatments make the clients know more, as the body innately senses how to bring it into balance. In other words, the body has its own inner intelligence when shiatsu is applied on a regular basis. The maintenance of the life force becomes more direct. The sense and direction of what to do for the body becomes apparent. The knowledge of well being is communicated to the client through the intelligence of his or her own body.”

Shiatsu’s inventor Tokujiro Namikoshi, born and raised in Japan, developed shiatsu in the early 1900’s at an early age. The “shi” of shiatsu means “thumb and finger” and the “atsu” refers to “pressure” in Japanese. Shiatsu is a gentle, soothing pressure applied to specific anatomical points

on the body using the thumbs, fingers and palms. There are 700 pressure points in the body. The purpose of shiatsu is to stimulate the body’s natural powers of recuperation by: relaxing the nervous system; improving the circulatory system; and correcting the structural imbalance of the body. Shiatsu is administered to a client lying on a soft mat on the floor, special therapy table or chair. Loose-fitting clothing is worn during the treatment such as shorts, a t-shirt, or light track pants. Pressure is applied to the whole body as a basic treatment and if there is a pathological condition, the practitioner focuses on that area after the basic treatment. Shiatsu alleviates migraine headaches, carpal tunnel syndrome, repetitive strain injury, menopause, premenstrual discomfort, depression, stress and numerous other conditions.

In order to maintain a healthy body overall, consistency in using preventive measures should be applied both internally and externally. From an internal standpoint, by implementing proper eating habits and cleansing, the body can flush the toxins out and keep the levels from getting too high. In addition, regular exercise optimizes healthy living by including it into one’s daily regiment. There is no question that the body is meant to move. Movement encourages the flow of endorphins that promotes natural healing. Both exercise and the application of shiatsu create this result. Shiatsu complements other preventive measures and assists in harmonizing internal bodily functions, thereby returning the body to a state of homeostasis.

Structural imbalance is one of the causes of stress today. For example, people sitting at a desk for eight to ten hours don’t use their lower limbs,



**Kensen Saito of the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo applies one thumb application on the Anterior Cervical Region of the client.**



**Saito applies thumb on thumb application on the client's palm of hand where there are three major shiatsu points.**



**Saito applies gentle palm pressure on the client's abdomen in a clockwise circular motion preceding pressure point application.**

causing tension in this area. Over a long period of time, sitting in one position using the arms only on a daily basis precipitates an energetic imbalance in the body where some muscles move but not others. Consequently, this causes an imbalance in the whole body.

“When you overuse one part of your body mechanically compared to another,” explains Saito “then the body is thrown off mechanically. A mechanical imbalance leads to an energy imbalance that causes stress on other levels. This causes emotional and energetic stress. The circulation is going from the brain to the right hand as the mouse is clicked with the fingers of the right hand frequently which then causes an imbalance in the circulatory and nervous systems.” Shiatsu positively affects the autonomic nervous system by creating a

balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic functions. Consequently, this relieves stress on an emotional level. Some positive results of shiatsu leading to equilibrium in the body are: improved function of the endocrine system; deep, sound sleeping patterns; better posture; a reduction in blood pressure; improved circulation; and easier breathing.

“Lack of exhaling deeply causes blood pressure to go up,” says Saito “and as practitioners, we always try a counter approach when doing shiatsu so that blood pressure doesn’t go up because of shallow breathing. Longer, deeper breaths stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system whereas short breaths make the sympathetic nervous system hyper.”

Four clients who have received shiatsu treatments on a regular basis can verify the short-term and long-term benefits of shiatsu. The four recipients

are: Debby; Casey; Mary; and Anne. As requested, their last names are absent from this article.

Debby is a housewife and the mother of two grown children. She has been receiving shiatsu treatments averaging two to three times per month for approximately two and a half years. She was aware of handling a certain amount of stress but it wasn't until she started getting shiatsu treatments that she was able to appreciate how much she was coping with.

Some of the physical differences she became aware of after receiving treatments are noticeable, "especially," Debby explains "with regard to muscle aches, tightness, spasms, twinges, numbness and pain." Does the dissolving of rigid physical and emotional patterns in her body have a lot to do with the treatments? "Absolutely!" she confirms. "After a treatment, I find my attitude more tolerant of life's little irritations. Life is less irritating in general and my behavior in dealing with stress, problems or difficulties is more relaxed, calm and temperate. A sense of rigidity feels released. I generate a better all-around mood with less drastic fluctuations of high and low, surrounded by over-all feelings of well being. These persist for hours, well into the next few days and often a few days after that."

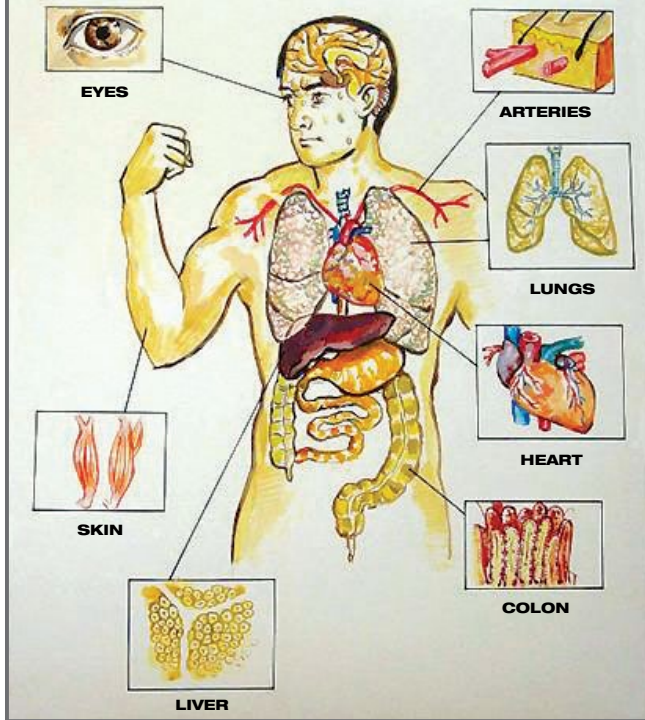
Debby's experience has proven the short-term effects of shiatsu seamlessly become long-term effects with regular therapy. Changes and feelings that last a few hours begin to last for days, then weeks though they may vary at times in intensity, especially in the affected areas. The fact that shiatsu has helped her deal with stress emotionally as well, has been a "bonus" since she was expecting a physical response alone. Stress reduction and manageability on both plateaus have attributed to her sense of well being.

"Immediate physical relaxation begins during a session, and like the emotional changes, continues for the next few days or more," adds Debby. "For the first year and half, after each session, I felt a lethargy of bone-deep rest and mental quiet bordering on trance-like. The very first treatment was especially intense in these sensations where I experienced an aura-like glow of serene, peaceful contentment aligned with complete physical comfort unlike anything I have ever known before or since. More recently, along with relaxation I find my energy levels are slightly elevated and a sense of being refreshed and mildly revitalized has replaced the trance-like condition most of the time. So far it lasts only a couple of hours before a mellower, sleepy stage sets in. I expect this will change as therapy continues. I have always slept much better and more deeply after a treatment. When normal patterns resume, they are often improved."

In addition, shiatsu is beneficial in relieving female symptoms related to PMS, menopause, insomnia and depression during the female cycle or at the onset and/or in the process of menopause. Saito suggests that the sympathetic and parasympathetic aspects of the nervous system become imbalanced during the female cycle, causing anxiety. "Women often have this anxiety disorder which is related to their female cycles. Shiatsu improves the function of the endocrine system, thereby making the female more harmonized," he insists.

There is truth to this according to Debby since it has a "domino effect" of positive results in the body that she never expected. For example, she discovered these surprising results: PMS is less severe; depression is much less frequent, considerably milder and shorter in duration; improved sleeping patterns; and fewer trips to the bathroom

## AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM THE BODY RESPONDS TO STRESS AS FIGHT OR FLIGHT



during the night. Debby expresses her gratitude and describes what shiatsu has done for her as illustrated in this metaphor. “Having shiatsu helps prepare your mind and body for healing. If you were buried under a mountain of stress, smothered in darkness and pain, you’d feel helpless, unable to do anything but if someone was to lift the top off so you could see daylight, you can start digging a path out. Shiatsu ‘lifts the top off’ and opens that pathway to follow.”

Along with shiatsu, Debby uses other alternative measures to maintain a healthy body that includes a daily exercise program. In the last five years, she

has implemented numerous nutritional and dietary changes as well. The results have been excellent overall when used in conjunction with shiatsu, allowing her to experience improved health and wellness on a consistent basis.

After Casey, Debby’s husband, saw the positive effects shiatsu was having on his wife, he also started receiving shiatsu treatments. Casey is a Power Engineer (PE) who is a Chief Building Operator for a prominent company in Alberta. In addition, he is a part-time, self-employed website designer. He began getting treatments shortly after Debby and tries to maintain a schedule of receiving a treatment every two weeks. Casey had similar effects occur after the treatments but admitted that he didn’t get immediate results. “It took two, maybe three visits in order to fully get the ‘calm and at peace’ feeling that I now get after each treatment.”

Casey’s posture was affected due to stress from his engineering job and his part-time work where both jobs require hours sitting in front of a computer. Following the application of shiatsu on a daily basis, he noticed a big difference in his posture and so did his co-workers. “I tend to stoop” explained Casey “but after treatments directed at my back, my posture is more erect. In my job as a Chief Building Engineer and my part-time employment as a website designer, I spend many long hours at a computer terminal. I have found that after treatments, neck and shoulder tension is greatly reduced.”

Casey’s release of stress as a result of shiatsu sometimes occurs at the thought of anticipating a treatment. He feels more relaxed going into a session and comforted, knowing that a peaceful feeling will immediately occur with his upcoming



treatment. As far as short-term and long-term effects of shiatsu, he explains that it is hard to define. "I usually feel extremely relaxed immediately after or before the end of a treatment. I need to take a rest or sleep for at least a couple of hours. If my schedule does not permit me to take a serious rest for a while directly after the treatment, I will feel sleepy and dazed during the next day. I have noticed that when getting treatments regularly, the intensity is enhanced after each. I also noticed that when there is a longer break between sessions, the intensity needs to be built up again." Along with Debby, he complements his shiatsu treatments with herbal remedies, cleanses and dietary adjustments. Overall, Casey is handling the stress from both jobs successfully with a combination of alternative therapies, one being shiatsu.

A third long-term recipient of shiatsu is Mary who has a challenging job as a Department Administrator for a busy Oil and Gas company. In addition, she is a wife and mother who has to balance her schedule so that she can have some down time for herself. She began getting regular treatments three years ago and continues to receive maintenance treatments every two weeks. She confesses that her stress level when she started getting treatments was "pretty high." However, now her stress level is nowhere near as high as it was before. Her job requires a lot of multi-tasking and sitting in front of the computer so the physical differences after receiving shiatsu are apparent as she explains the change in comfort level. "I am more relaxed, more able to recognize the release of emotions when I'm experiencing a treatment. It helps with circulation, especially during times when I'm experiencing stiffness in muscles or joints. It really gets the circulation going and helps to relieve stress and discomfort."

Mary takes a holistic approach to maintaining healthy living and believes that working from the inside out is just as important. Seeing a Master Herbalist where she has received help through diet, herbs and lifestyle changes in conjunction with regular shiatsu treatments has helped her to define unhealthy emotional and physical patterns.

"I notice emotional breakthroughs during the treatments now and can recognize them when I'm experiencing residual effects of the treatments, after the treatments and sometimes for a few days," she explains. As far as the other alternative therapies she has included in her maintenance program, "they have all contributed to a greater awareness and understanding of my body's emotional and physical patterns that are unhealthy and a movement towards patterns that are more healthy," she continues.

Also, Mary "definitely" has become more aware when stress is releasing from her body. "The treatments totally relax me and I can feel when I'm releasing emotions during a treatment. Sometimes it will take a little while for the complete release of strong emotions, for example, sadness and grief, but now I recognize what is happening and allow myself to first feel the emotions before releasing them. I always sleep well after a treatment. Sometimes, I feel a tingling all over and warmth spread all over my body or just in the trunk of my body, signaling an increase of circulation. It always feels so invigorating, yet calming. I also noticed that when I receive a chiropractic adjustment a day or two after a shiatsu treatment, I sometimes feel an even greater release of endorphins and a greater feeling of complete calm overcomes my body after an adjustment."

The short-term benefit of the shiatsu treatments are release of tension and emotions that

can build up and get stored in the body. As well, there is help with digestion or gastrointestinal imbalances and an alleviation of headaches and stiffness. Long-term effects for Mary have been a sustained, balanced emotional state due to the effectiveness of the treatments and releasing stress from the body on an ongoing basis. Regular treatments allow Mary to deal with stress on a daily basis and she looks forward to her treatments. “It’s time I get to take totally for myself,” she explains “with no other distractions or demands made on me and I can totally zone out during the treatments.”

As far as the importance of using other alternative modalities to complement shiatsu, the holistic approach was described to her. “As explained by my Herbalist, herbs can only treat 4 of the body’s systems at any given time, while something like shiatsu has the ability to cover all seven of the systems at once, as long as a full body shiatsu treatment is given.” Together, these modalities have helped Mary cope with stress on a daily basis, giving her the tools to deal with the demands of a busy work and home life. She will continue to receive shiatsu treatments and see her Herbalist because it has been so effective in bringing equilibrium to her life. Would she recommend shiatsu to others so that they may benefit from the empowerment it gives to an individual? “I already have,” Mary confirms.

Anne, the fourth recipient of shiatsu, completed a Master’s degree in Environmental Design in her mid 40’s and has not been able to find work in her area of study until recently. Previously, Anne went back to administrative work in order to make ends meet. She blames her inability of finding work partially on the changes in her physical and emotional well being

associated with aging and menopause. She is struggling through a “textbook” menopause and an array of mood swings that only menopause and PMS can bring to a woman’s emotional and physical state. Anne defines this as “the inability to think clearly, weight gain, not taking care of myself the way I used to, paying attention to the physical needs of exercise and the joys of just moving and getting out doing things. I talk a lot about doing something, but cannot make it happen, yet.”

She also lost touch with her favorite pastime of dancing. Although not a professional, she stayed involved with dance as a form of exercise until her late 30’s. In addition, she has given up other physical activities such as swimming, skiing and walking. There was change in her body due to being physically active, where her body was always moving, to sitting in front of a computer all day. She has been receiving shiatsu treatments on a regular basis for approximately six months and is beginning to notice a difference.

“My stress level was quite high due to moving and my partner’s surgery and just way too many physical belongings of unnecessary ‘stuff’ that needed to be sorted, packed or discarded, hence the continued frustration causing stress,” says Anne.

Some obvious physical differences she has noticed since receiving treatments are the “loss of retained water and more flexibility in the shoulder and neck muscles.” As far as having breakthroughs on the emotional and physical levels where negative patterns are transformed to more positive ones through awareness, Anne agrees there have been noticeable and significant changes that are not only allowing her to start feeling “movement” on a physiological basis but also on an emotional level. “I am not having the feelings of depression



as much and even went off medication for depression. I am not feeling ‘sorry for myself’ as much, but I still have frustration of not being able to define goals and work toward achieving them. Rather than feeling resignation to my worldly situation, I am now gaining the energy to try to make a change in my outside realm. How I interact with the outside world and how it sees me is important.”

In addition to going off her anti-depressants, the doctor has reduced her thyroid medication significantly. Prior to starting the treatments, her doctor said she would reduce her thyroid medication. After several months on a lower dose, her blood was tested again. Her doctor felt that the dose was too high and so she reduced it further. “This second reduction comes after almost four months of treatments,” Anne confides and she is not sure if there is a correlation. “It is interesting after years of different doctors increasing the amount, that the amount is being reduced,” she explains.

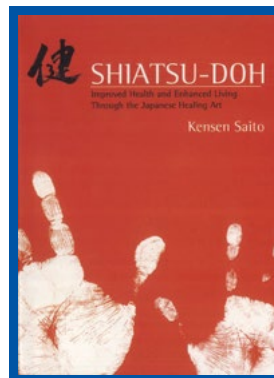
Though the shiatsu treatments are helping her physically, she also attributes the slow shift to a more overall positive state in the ability to say out loud what is wrong and having someone hear her, a practitioner who offers solutions in a way that makes one think, not just say “you should do this or that.” She believes that just as important as the effects of shiatsu is also the receptivity of the shiatsu practitioner and whether he or she understands the process of healing on the emotional, mental and physical levels. “This leads to a trusting relationship,” Anne insists. “I trust the message that is coming through the therapist’s hands. Every time I have a session, the message may be different. How the body receives the therapist’s energy, though it is different each time, leads to progressive healing on a mental,

emotional and physical basis.”

In the past, Anne has given up on other types of treatments with other practitioners. However, her present shiatsu practitioner and the understanding and progression of her healing process have made it a priority in her life that takes precedence over other therapies as well as financial consideration. When a shiatsu practitioner takes a genuine interest in the long-term goals of a client and is a catalyst for positive results, this is what sets one practitioner apart from the rest.

“I realize the importance of maintaining a balance in my body for positive living,” Anne explains. “Since menopause, there was a change in my personality and my physical body. Having shiatsu is getting me back on track. I have to learn to live with this aging body. Through shiatsu, I am starting to reconnect with my body. Through physical activity I was used to reconnecting with my body so by getting shiatsu maintenance treatments is allowing me to connect on a regular basis until I can add an exercise program.”

The most obvious effect Anne notices at the onset of the treatment is the “ability to breathe deeper” where she experiences “a change in mood,” is “less



For more information on shiatsu, the book [Shiatsu-Doh](#) by Kensen Saito is available at the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo. It is an autobiographical account of Saito’s exploration of shiatsu starting with his life in Japan and his subsequent move to Canada.

depressed” and more “optimistic.” Short-term effects are the physical release of tension and stiffness, which varies from treatment to treatment. Also, a sense of “well being” and “happiness” occur immediately after the treatment. Long-term effects are hard to say at this point but according to Anne, after six months, there have been some. “Small improvements have allowed me to make minor shifts in life that are starting to reduce the frustrations in my life, mainly the inability to organize and get on with things.”

Anne is gradually able to cope with stress as shiatsu is changing her life. “It is a slow adjustment,” she admits “but I do believe I am changing. One of the ways of coping with stress is to remove it or reduce it and I am just starting to take control of small things and reducing the stress they cause.”

It is a definite “yes” that Anne would recommend shiatsu to co-workers, friends and family. “Having had massage and physiotherapy, I believe shiatsu to be so different and targets much more than just the manipulation or relaxation of the muscles. It is a much deeper and more extensive stimulation of the body than I have experienced with any other form of treatment. It does not just relieve the symptoms of stress, but helps to get to the root causes of the stress and helps one deal with them as mentioned, to eliminate or reduce the problems associated with stressful situations.”

Though shiatsu improves clients’ emotional, physical and mental states on a short-term and long-term basis, Saito admits that a client might have to change his or her environment so that the changes are more complementary to one’s maintenance program. “A person’s environment might not be suited to a person anymore,” he insists. “When a person becomes more physically balanced leading to

emotional balance, they start to see the changes that are needed in their environments. Definitely, there are changes surrounding the person. They complain less of the pain so others in their environment are affected by the positive changes that shiatsu brings to the person.”

Saito suggests that people are mentally and physically defeated when they cannot handle stress. Negative energy must be transformed into positive energy so that the liver function is healthy and detoxifies properly. When you don’t handle stress well, the liver doesn’t assist in digesting with a proper balance of enzymes. One must be ready to handle stress at all times in a good way. As a drugless therapy, shiatsu allows one to let stress go more readily so that there is not a build up that causes detrimental responses in the body.

“We cannot avoid stress,” concludes Saito. “We respond to stress all the time, whether we can cope with it or not. How we deal with stress is the key. When we have good health, we can handle the stress but if we are not healthy, then we are overloaded and the stress suppresses our physical and mental states. There must be a readiness always to handle stress. It is part of the human physiology. Basically, the human body is adaptive. It can adapt to stress levels but it needs some help if the stress levels become overwhelming. This is where shiatsu can help.”

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## **TORONTO, ONTARIO**

### **Where can I receive shiatsu treatments?**

**Professional Shiatsu Clinic** - Shiatsu therapy is offered by Shiatsupractors at two locations in Toronto.

#### **Shiatsu Masters (Shiatsu Dohjoh)**

Carrot Common Mall  
206 - 320 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, ON M4K 1N8  
(near Chester subway station) 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
**Tel: 416-466-8780**

#### **Shiatsu Masters**

Standard Life Centre  
121 King Street West (at York Street)  
Concourse Level, Toronto, ON M5N 3T9  
**Tel: 416-366-8780**

#### **Student Clinic**

The Shiatsu Academy offers student treatments in the student clinic at:

#### **Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo**

206 - 320 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, ON M4K 1N8  
**Email: [sait131@rogers.com](mailto:sait131@rogers.com)**  
**Website: [www.kensensaito.com](http://www.kensensaito.com)**  
**Tel: 416-466-8780**  
**Fax: 416-466-8719**

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF SHIATSU MASTERS**

Shiatsu Masters refer to graduates who have been fully and successfully trained in the technique outlined by the founder of shiatsu, Tokujiro Namikoshi. This traditional shiatsu technique is a process that involves a specific procedure where the application of shiatsu is given and where the clients benefit from the thoroughness of its procedure. The name "Shiatsu Masters" was initially created by the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo in Toronto, ON Canada to identify the students who have graduated from the private school.

## **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN CANADA:**

### **VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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### **TORONTO, ONTARIO**

**Shiatsu Diffusion Society**  
822 Broadview Avenue  
Toronto, ON M4K 2P7  
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### **CALGARY, ALBERTA**

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**Tel: 403-246-0996**

## **A SPECIAL THANK YOU**

A special Thank You is extended to the Shiatsu Academy of Toyko for sponsoring this article and the series of articles that will be released in the near future. For more information on shiatsu, visit this website that also includes information on national news across the country featuring Toronto ON, Calgary AB and Vancouver BC: **[www.eagleheartdynamic.com](http://www.eagleheartdynamic.com)**

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**Tokujiro Namikoshi**

**Toru Namikoshi**

This series of articles is a collaboration with the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo and is dedicated to: the founder of shiatsu, Tokujiro Namikoshi; his son Toru Namikoshi who dedicated his life educating people about shiatsu worldwide; and to Kensen Saito (front cover), Director, teacher and owner of the Shiatsu Academy of Tokyo in Toronto, who brought his knowledge of shiatsu to Canada years ago.