

# Developing Sensitivity in your Thai massage practice

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Despite the wide variety of techniques, stretches and exercises that Thai yoga massage offers, the trademark of a truly skilled practitioner lies in the ability to apply these techniques with sensitivity. It is important to use your intuition to determine which exercises are most useful for each individual client.

At the beginning of one's Thai massage practice, it is essential to learn basic techniques. We need our toolbox, based on different techniques and correct body mechanics. And, although there is no end to learning new techniques and refining our body mechanics, the next stage in deepening our practice lies in developing more and more sensitivity. A Thai massage done more or less mechanically and without tuning in to the client can be quite a disappointing experience. Many of us who have been to random Thai massage parlors in Thailand know this.

A session where the exact same techniques are used but the therapist offers a quality of presence and sensitivity will have a completely different effect. Sensitivity is mostly a function of presence. The more we manage to leave behind the chattering of the mind, the more we can be aware and open to the present moment experience, and open to the needs and the energetic state of the client.

That is why most serious Thai massage therapists that I know, and definitely all my teachers, have a meditation practice. A meditation practice teaches you to spend more time resting in a space of quiet presence; you get more and more breaks from the incessant chatter of the 'monkey mind'.

If we bring a quality of quiet presence to our Thai massage practice, these things will happen:

- Through our presence we invite the client to join us in that state. We provide a certain frequency that the client automatically tunes in to
- The inner stillness allows us to really sense what's going on in the client's body rather than mechanically moving from one exercise to the next.
- This sensitivity allows for a more appropriate, respectful and loving touch with just the right amount of pressure.

If we see our Thai sessions as extensions of our meditation practice, and if we work with sensitivity and without forcing anything, we will feel clear and recharged after we give a massage. And our clients, even without knowing what made the difference, will make comments about how peaceful and refreshed they feel.



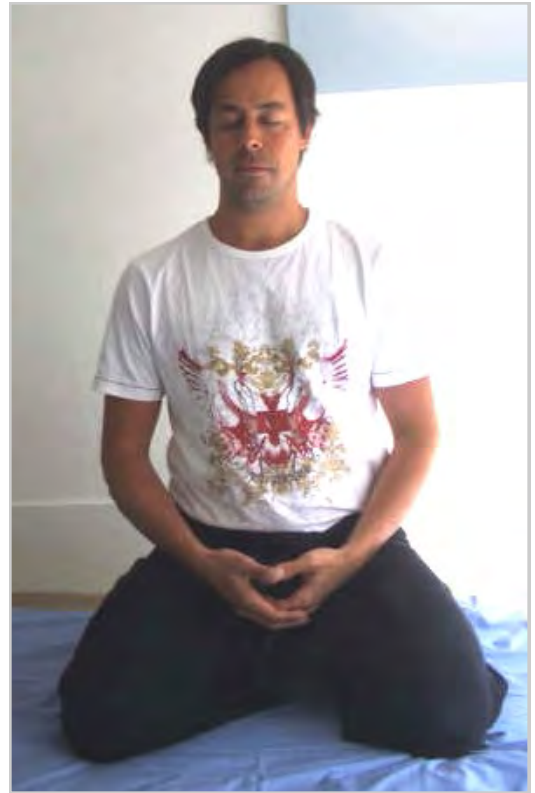
*Tibetan codex showing the Buddha, Streya and Jivaka*

## **Meditation**

Sit in a comfortable position. Spend a few moments and become aware of your body. Notice where you are making contact with the ground. Without trying to change anything, become aware of your breath moving in and moving out of your body.

Allow your attention to gently leave your experience (thoughts, sensations, emotions), and enter into the quiet presence that surrounds it.

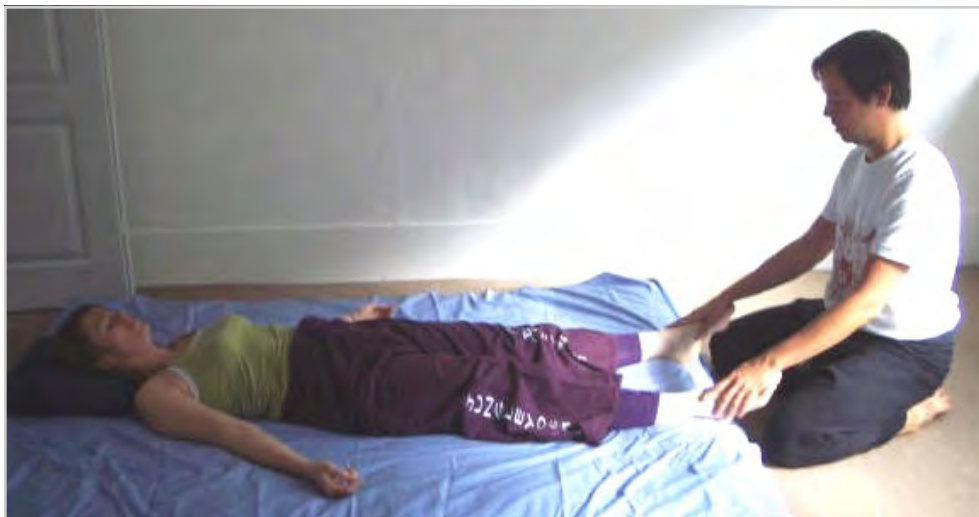
Let your mind drop into stillness and allow everything to be as it is. 'Let the grass grow by itself.' Become the silent witness of everything that arises and passes. Rest in that silent awareness for as long as you like.



## **Connecting in Presence**

Sit facing your client and place your hands on their feet. As much as possible, rest in Presence.

Instead of focusing on any techniques, or thinking about what you plan to do, simply BE THERE and DO NOTHING.



### Utilize sensing, and sink into your client's body

You can practice this concept on many parts of the body in a typical Thai session. For this first exercise, we will work on the leg branch of *sen sumana* with the client in side-lying position.

As you palm press the line, become aware of how you can 'sink into' the pressure. Sink through the layers of tissue and energy. Notice how deeply the client's body invites you to go. Be very present to every little nuance of your touch. Explore the boundary between your body and their body. Make your hands as soft and receptive as you can.



### Feedback about touch

With the receiver lying in prone position, apply alternating palm pressure on *sen sumana* on the back of the legs, from lower calves to the sit-bones and the back. With your first touch, connect with your client; let them know you are being present with them. Feel and 'read' their energy. With soft hands, sink into your pressure as you work the lines. Receivers will notice the quality of your touch and your presence, pressure, rhythm, and pace. Offer feedback to each other.

