



LIVING TRADITIONS

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The Thai massage clinic at Wat Nong Yah Nang

By Chompoo Trakullertsathien

Red hot coals mean it's ready. The chubby, middle-aged man places his oiled right foot on a smoking steel plate above burning coals. He doesn't scream. When his foot is good and hot, he starts stamping it along the body of a man whose face is contorted in pain. In the corner of the room, a young girl is lying on the floor while another therapist massages her legs with his feet, supporting himself on a bamboo bar. Nearby, other arms and legs are being bent and stretched in all sorts of odd ways.

This is not a circus troupe in training. It's a healing session at Wat Nong Yah Nang in Uthai Thani province where the long-neglected science of Thai traditional medicine is bouncing back to health. Hundreds of patients who suffer from varying degrees of paralysis come to the temple seeking help from practitioners who specialize in massage therapy. They all learned the techniques from Phra Khru Uppakara Pattanakij, the abbot of Wat Nong Yah Nang who started traditional treatment at the temple in 1973.

Failing to find relief in western medicine's costly treatments, many patients are turning to traditional Thai medicine and massage out of sheer desperation. Though some people may still look down on the age-old knowledge as unscientific, 63-year-old patient Preeda Yongyuth is not one of them. I tried traditional medicine and massage," said Mr. Preeda who was once partially paralyzed. "Now I have regained my health."

Such cases are no longer rare or considered miraculous for patients suffering from chronic conditions as more and more people, disillusioned with modern treatments, are discovering the merits of the old ways. Traditional medicine was, in fact, outlawed as unscientific with the advent of western medicine in Thailand a century ago. As a result, the ancient knowledge was cast aside because practitioners were afraid of being arrested as charlatans. It was only recently that Thai medical authorities began to pay attention to traditional medicine, especially when it comes to chronic illnesses that western medicine cannot help. "We need to revive our ancestral knowledge in medicine," says Phra Khru Uppakara Pattanakij. "Patients need all the help they can get."

As well as performing his religious duties, the temple's abbot has devoted himself to treating the poor free of charge in an effort to revive traditional healing practices. His work won him the 1993 Cultural Outstanding Person Award in the field of local wisdom (herbal treatment) and the 1998 Prem Tinsulanonda Award which honors those who dedicate themselves to their communities.

The abbot first learned the science of Thai traditional medicine from his uncle at age 13. Sixteen years later as a Buddhist monk, he had his first chance to treat patients in his village. "At first, those who suffered broken bones came to see me. After using herbal medicine, many of them got better. Word spread and people have been coming to my temple ever since," recalled the 55 year-old monk.

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To cope with the ever-increasing number of patients and the different diseases they have, the abbot sought knowledge from his uncle's Thai traditional medicine texts. He has since become something of a specialist in treating paralysis-related illnesses. "Most modern doctors pay no attention to these chronic illnesses. They prefer to specialize in other kinds of sickness that modern medical technology can cure," he said. Today, Wat Nong Yah Nang has turned into an informal hospital where people throughout the kingdom come to seek help from the abbot and his nine volunteer therapists.

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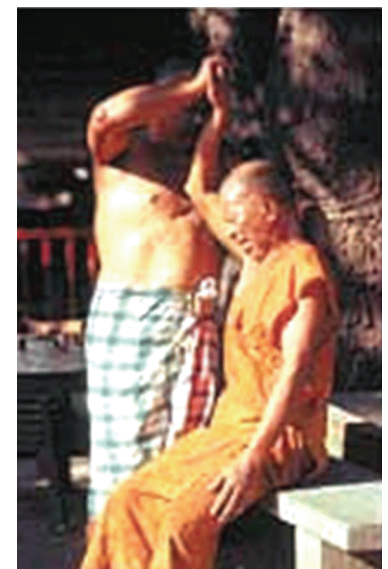
Spirituality in Thai Massage - By Robert Henderson, RTT

I recently received an email from a fellow Thai massage therapist in the UK who is at the point of self-realisation that the client he massages is nothing but a projection of himself. He writes: "I have just realised that whatever is going on with my client is just a reflection of me, as there is no one outside of me. I am still trying to get my head around that one".

This is also the experience shared by some of my students and is something I discovered in my own practice a few years ago. There comes a point one day when during a treatment, you suddenly feel that there is no space or separation between you and the person you are working on. You are, in some way, connected, completely connected with your client. You have somehow become one. Your concept of self-identity is altered and you have become extended. You intuitively understand that your client is an externalised projection of yourself, and that what you see or feel in your client is merely a reflection of what is already within yourself. This is something that we, as therapists, can experience, but cannot be taught.

There is no separation; there is no division; there is no 'other'; there is only the oneness of an extended self. There is a moment of complete spiritual clarity where the inner self (the therapist) and the outer self (the client) become one. It is an incredibly liberating space to inhabit. This is the essence of spirituality in our work; when the two become one; where there is no difference between therapist and client.

Photo below: Thai massage therapist Kanong Muenhan stretches a patient's arm at Wat Nong Yah Nang clinic in Uthai Thani. The three photos for this article are by Somkid Chajitvani.



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Some of the masseurs are former patients or patients' relatives. They get no money for the work which keeps them busy from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. every day.

"I visited the temple 12 years ago and saw a lot of paralyzed patients," said Kanong Muenhan, 53, who has been a volunteer masseur at the temple for 10 years. "I felt sorry for them and wanted to help. So I decided to learn how to help them from the abbot. My reward is the joy of having a chance to help ease the patients' sufferings. Seeing them able to walk again makes me happy," he said. A volunteer therapist works on a patient who suffers from paralysis.

"I feel that what I am doing here is like making merit every day," added Sombat Tueorn, 32, another therapist. "My work helps me learn the reality of life. That life is short so we should do good things now. And helping others is one way to make your life worthwhile."

To shelter the patients who need long-term treatment, an old wooden *sala*, or open pavilion, is used, although it is in poor conditions. The patients' relatives are also allowed to stay at the temple until the patients recover. The *sala*, which can comfortably accommodate 60 persons at most, is now packed with around 100 patients. A new building is needed, but plans are on hold due to lack of cash. A temporary shelter was built nearby to relieve the congestion but it doesn't help much. As a result, some patients can't stay overnight and must return to the temple every day. Many cannot afford transportation expenses and so cannot get treatment.

Like any hospital, all patients have to register their names as well as details of their symptoms. In January alone, the temple received around 600 patients from all parts of the country. Apart from traditional therapeutic massage, the patients at Wat Nong Yah Nang are treated with Thai herbal medicine and herbal sauna.

The daily routine begins with walking practice using a walking stick and with the help of temple volunteers. Next comes a massage session which normally takes about one hour. The patients and the practitioners then rest until 3 p.m. when the patients line up for a herbal sauna. These procedures are repeated until the patients get better.

One special method that requires great dedication and stamina from the masseurs is a hot massage (*called yam klang, ed.*). After applying oil on their foot (*normally oil of plai, ed.*), the masseurs place it on a hot steel plate, then stamp the hot foot on the patient's legs and arms. The process takes about half an hour and the masseurs must endure extreme heat for a long period.

The treatments cost the temple about 5-6,000 baht a day. This includes expenses for herbs and wages for villagers to dry and grind the herbs for a variety of traditional medicinal recipes. The expenses come mostly from public donations but, according to the abbot, the temple still owes payments to many herb stores. While countless patients have gotten better from the treatment over the years, many have lost heart because recovery is often a very slow process.

"I'm paralyzed. I've been practicing walking for 20 days but there is no sign of improvement," said 62-year-old Chan Lanketkarn, an Uthai Thani native. "Before this, I went to see modern doctors several times but they could not help me either. They gave me some medicine but my condition did not improve. I have no hope for recovery. I want to die," he said, sobbing.

Morale is important for recovery. Apart from herbal medicine and massage, all patients need support from their relatives. The practitioners, too, must be sympathetic counselors. According to the monk, the country is now facing an acute shortage of true "folk doctors" who work out of dedication, as in days of old. He lamented the fact that traditional medicine has become big business and is open to abuse.

The expertise of traditional herbal medics has also become too limited. "In the old days, folk doctors normally handled a wide range of diseases. Now, most of them deal only with specific complaints," said the abbot.

There is little hope for improvement because few people are interested in learning the science of traditional healing, added folk doctor Kanong. "This is because traditional healers have low status and they have to deal mostly with hopeless cases already turned down by modern doctors."



Above: A volunteer therapist works on a patient who suffers from paralysis.

Below: Phra Khru Uppakara Pattanakij, abbot of Wat Nong Yah Nang.

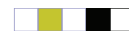


Thai traditional medicine takes a holistic approach, seeing illness as a sign of imbalances in one's body and mind and seeking to restore harmony.

"It goes beyond a person's physical discomfort to embrace that person's relationships with others and the environment, which can cause illness. Thai medicine tackles the root of the illness, not only its symptoms," explained the abbot.

Traditional medicine, therefore, doesn't separate itself from religious beliefs, human relationships and the environment. "All these factors affect one's health. A physician's understanding must therefore go beyond the patient's symptoms in order to be effective," he added. That is why the abbot asks all his patients, as well as the masseurs, to strictly observe Buddhism's five precepts, namely, no killing, no stealing, no sexual exploitation, no lying and no drinking alcohol. In addition, they have to abstain from unwholesome foods. Stronger patients are expected to help take care of paralyzed ones. With a limited budget and little assistance from the government, Phra Khru Uppakara Pattanakij and his team of folk doctors are struggling to revive the science of traditional medicine and to help those who have lost hope in modern health care.

The abbot said he realised that Thai traditional healing has its limitations. But it also has its strengths. "We want to offer ordinary people more choices in health care. And we can do this by respecting the wisdom of our ancestors and keeping this wisdom alive by practicing it."



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The Spirit Houses of Thailand

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Although fortune-tellers and astrologers offer their services around *wats* and on sidewalks throughout Thailand, spirit houses are the most apparent sign of Thai people's belief in animism and in the powers of the spirit world. In every compound throughout Thailand - outside Thai homes, hotels, hospitals or office buildings - there is a miniature wooden or cement house, placed at the height of the eyes of a standing person of average height. This is the abode of Phra Phum, the Lord of the Land.



When a new home is to be built, the first thing to do is to find a suitable place in the garden for the spirit house. Selection of the location and placing of the little house can only properly be done by someone well versed in the lore - usually a Brahmin priest. It must face either north or south - preferably north; it must not be in a spot where the owner's house overshadows it, or else the spirit will not come to live in it. A post is set up at the chosen site and the little house is perched atop the post.

The small house contains a single room with an outer terrace (slightly lower than the room) where daily offerings to the guardian spirit are placed. A symbolic picture of the spirit is carved on a small piece of wood which is placed inside the little house with its back toward the far wall. The picture is in a standing position with a leaf-like halo around the head. In the right hand is usually a double-edged sword and sometimes in the left hand, a book. It is believed that deaths of the people under the spirit's protection are registered in the book.



At the time of installation of a spirit house, food, fruit, candles, incense and flowers are placed on a table before the shrine while the spirit is invited to come into the house in order to protect the property and the residents of the new building. Each evening, fresh flowers, incense sticks and candles are placed on the small patio of the little house. Extra special food offerings are made on important days such as the anniversary of the installation of Phra Phum in his house, on New Year's Day and other special occasions, such as Buddha days and holidays. It is a rule that such food will be offered only in the morning, and not later than 11:00 a.m.

When a stranger arrives as a guest in a Thai home, he should, according to Thai customs, first ask the spirit for permission to stay for the night, and for protection before going to sleep. This is because many Thais believe that if they do not follow this tradition, their sleep will be disturbed with nightmares, or that an evil spirit might sit on his/her chest and causing great difficulty in breathing. Before a guest's departure the next morning, a farewell visit is paid to the spirit house, in order to request a safe journey. If any of the family members have a premonition of misfortune, or want to overcome difficulty or have a need for something which seems difficult to obtain, they will light a candle and incense and, in a sincere, respectful manner, ask the spirit for his help. At the same time, the family member will promise a reward for the spirit, such as a duck, chicken or a huge coconut. In rare situations, larger offerings such as servants, elephants or horses may be brought before the spirit house. This is why you will often see the miniature people or animals made of clay or wood, inside the spirit house — to symbolize the living servants and animals that have been brought before the spirit house. If a blessing is granted by the spirit and the promised reward is not given, it is believed that nightmares will haunt the guilty one or illness or unpleasant things will happen to him.

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State of Wisconsin, USA fails to mention *nuad boran* by name in proposed new bill

The following is a letter to Representative Jon Richards of Wisconsin from THAI regarding the bill that does not specifically mention Thai massage from the list of energy-based modalities that are exempt from regulation by local authorities.

Dear Representative Richards,

I am writing with regard to Assembly Bill 588, Wisconsin's proposed revision of the legal guidelines for massage therapy and bodywork. Specifically, I request that you include *nuad boran* / traditional Thai massage as one of the exemptions to this new revised law. I am aware that other practitioners in your state have written you to make the same request, and I hope my words here will be helpful in making your determination. *Nuad boran* is also known as "traditional Thai massage" "Thai yoga massage", and "Thai yoga bodywork."

Thai Healing Alliance International (THAI) is the world's international organization for proposing standards of practice and study of traditional Thai massage. THAI is a non-profit organization which operates entirely and exclusively within the sphere of traditional Thai medicine, unlike other organizations such as AMTA, AOBTA and others who include Thai massage as one of the many modalities they recognize, but do not regulate. THAI members live and practice in over 25 countries, and THAI is endorsed by major organizations and press around the world as being the point of reference for the professional practice of Thai massage. THAI has inseparable ties to the major schools and teachers in Thailand, and THAI practitioners and instructors must meet very stringent standards, and ascribe to a professional code of ethics. THAI sets stringent standards; to be recognized as Registered Thai Therapist (RTT), a member must complete a minimum of 180 hours of Thai massage training, carry out 150-200 hours of documented practice sessions, provide health history documentation for their clients, and meet other requirements. Instructors in THAI must have a minimum of 500 hours of Thai massage training, none of which can be based on western massage training.

I realize that professional practitioners of traditional Thai massage, especially those who are members of THAI, will be presumed to be exempt under the new proposed legislation (per the guidelines in Sections 17 through 19). However I sincerely request that along with Rolfing, Feldenkrais, Trager, polarity therapy, reiki and the others, "*nuad boran* / traditional Thai massage" be specifically exempted by name in your new bill. Doing so now will show that Wisconsin is progressive and forward-thinking in scope and will avoid or minimize any problems that might be presented in the future with regard to legal practice of *nuad boran* in your State.

Traditional Thai massage (*nuad boran*) is a long-established healing art, much older in practice than any western modality. It is not related to any other type of therapy. In fact, western bodywork modalities have fused aspects and techniques of *nuad boran* into their own practices. The fact that Thai medicine is unique and separate from any other system makes it worthy of its own distinction.

Thai yoga massage has often been misrepresented in the west, and especially among the (western) massage community, it is believed to be something that it is not. It is not massage, but there is contact with the human body. There is no kneading, nor oil, nor need for a massage table. There are no stroking movements, no direct manipulation of tissue, no topical rubbing of muscles and ligaments. Clients are fully clothed. Thai medical theory is, much like the concept of Chinese acupuncture, based on locating and dissipating energy blockages that are found along the major energy pathways in the body through pressure, rocking movements and assisted yoga stretches, however those pathways take a much different form than those used in Chinese medicine, and the pharmacopoeia of herbs used to treat disorders is wholly distinct. Traditional Thai massage is an ancient healing art, with thousands of years of history and development. It is not like reiki, polarity therapy or even shiatsu, which were developed in modern times. Because of the unique combination of reflexology, acupressure, and yoga, traditional Thai massage should be exempted by name from western massage regulations. Surely no regulatory agency or proposed bill would attempt to regulate yoga or yoga training, and reflexology and acupressure appear to be exempted under the current proposed legislation. These three elements form the manipulatory basis of Thai massage.

But the most important element of Thai massage is that it is based on energy healing. Traditional Thai medicine theory is based on addressing the energy system of humans, not the physical body. *Nuad boran* is, at its very essence, an energy healing modality. It is considered as such in Thailand and all around the world.

Your Section 19 says that anyone who "*uses touch, words, and directed movement to deepen a client's awareness of...patterns of movement, and to suggest ... new patterns of movement*" is exempt. Likewise, anyone who *uses touch to affect the energy systems of the human body* is exempt. And subsection b) states that the person must be recognized by, or meet the standards associated with a professional or credentialing organization, such as Thai Healing Alliance International.

I regret not being able to personally address the group at the hearing today, but I hope you will see fit to include by name "*nuad boran*" and/or "Traditional Thai Massage" or "Thai Yoga Massage" into your current list of exemptions, alongside the aforementioned modalities. In my opinion, doing so now, rather than facing an amendment or a potential problem at a later date, will make your new legislation more clear and concise, and will be in the overall best interests of the State of Wisconsin.

For more information on traditional Thai massage and Thai Healing Alliance, please see www.thaihealingalliance.com

Do not hesitate to contact me directly if I can be of further assistance. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Bob Haddad, RTT, Director

February, 2010

History of the Thai Calendar

The Thai solar calendar, or *suriyakati* calendar is used in traditional and official contexts in Thailand, although the Western calendar is used for business.

The months and days of the week are the same as those used in the Western calendar, only their names differ. The year however is counted from the Buddhist Era (B.E.), which is 543 years earlier than the Christian era (A.D.). For example, 2003 A.D. is equivalent to 2546 B.E. The era is based on the death of Gautama Buddha, which is dated to 543 BC by the Thai.

Until 1888 Thailand used a lunar calendar, in which the date of the New Year (*Songkran*) was between April 13 and 15. The new calendar, decreed by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), was called *Ratanakosinsok*, and was nearly identical with the western Gregorian calendar. However the New Year date was fixed to April 1, and the year numbering started at the founding of Bangkok, 1781. King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) eventually changed the year counting to Buddhist Era in 1912.

In 1940 Prime Minister Pibunsongkram changed the official New Year to January 1. Now both New Year's days are public holidays. The Buddhist feasts and holidays are still calculated according to the lunar calendar, so they change their date in the solar calendar every year.

Spirituality in Thai Massage - *(continued from page 1)*

There is, however, a great challenge - a seismic shift in experience and understanding when you enter this space; when you recognise yourself in your client, when you recognise your client as yourself. Everything you have ever learned about the work suddenly becomes irrelevant.

Traditional beliefs and teachings about diagnosis become redundant as their focus is on making a diagnosis on another person. So what do you do when you realize in the session that there is no other; when it is not only a client you are treating, but also yourself. Who do you diagnose? Whose problems or pains need treatment?

Traditional beliefs and teachings about treatment may also be dismissed, as they too focus on the physical application of a treatment on another person. The question that comes to the spiritually-aware therapist is: Who is working on whom? The answer might be: It is the self treating the self.

When we understand this, we may also realize that all the answers, all the correct techniques and all the correct treatments have to come from the self and can only be applied to the self. To apply them to another supports the notions of duality and separation, neither of which is necessarily spiritual. This is something we cannot be taught, we can only self-realise.

There is a lot of pseudo spirituality in the healing arts. People are often content to chant Om, the unifying sound of the universe, but few are happy to "do" Om, or to "be" Om.

The spiritually aware teacher knows that the answers are to be found in the self. The same teacher therefore knows that to find the answers (to correct diagnosis, treatment, technique etc) he/she has to inquire of themselves. This they do by looking at themselves deeply, finding their own pain and investigating that pain until they come out the other side with the answers and the life lessons contained in that pain. The same teacher learns that to teach a student proper techniques is to teach the student to investigate their own pain, their own life, until they learn the ways of healing from within.

This is the essence of spirituality in Thai massage and in all healing arts: to heal oneself first. When we understand the nature of pain in ourselves, you understand the nature of pain in others. All is One. When you have understood how to heal ourselves, we can understand how to heal others. We don't need to know a hundred different techniques to unblock a pain; we first must discover a way to unblock it from within. Only by healing ourselves can we heal others, or teach others how to heal.

This simple, clear wisdom is often lost in the mire of so many Thai massage teachings and programs. Let's have the courage to do the hard work, to go deeply into pain until the truth underlying pain is revealed? Let's not pretend that chanting Om, doing a *wai*, bowing, or saying 'Namaste' is enough. It isn't.



Thai Spirit Houses *(continued from page 3)*

The home owner who starts out with a small home and a small spirit house, when and if he is blessed with good fortune and able to afford it, will improve or enlarge the spirit house before his own house.

While spirit houses belonging to Thai homes are typically the size of bird houses, they are often much larger when they are placed in front of office buildings or hotels. A number of particularly large spirit houses can be seen in Bangkok near the intersection of Rajadamri Road and Ploenchit Road. Located there is the most famous spirit house - or rather spirit shrine - of Bangkok, the Erawan Shrine. The shrine was built in 1956 when the nearby Erawan Hotel was under construction. However, misfortune accompanied the work at the hotel; a number of injuries occurred, and when word spread to the workers that spirits were against the hotel construction, an astrologer and spirit doctor was called. He concluded that, indeed, the spirits of that place had been offended because some trees where they had sought refuge had been chopped down. After the cause of the accidents had been diagnosed, the shrine was completed rather hastily. Interestingly, this shrine has nothing to do with Buddhism. The statue housed there is of Brahma, one of the gods of the Hindu Trinity. Nevertheless, most of the worshippers at the shrine are nominally Buddhist. Since its completion in 1956, Erawan Shrine has been a place where people go to pray and hope to have their wishes miraculously fulfilled.



Carved teak spirit house in front of a condominium in the Sukhumvit area of Bangkok.

Working the outside leg lines with your feet - By Paul Fowler, RTT, LMT

When it comes to working with fascia (of which the IT band is entirely composed), it is best to work very slowly. According to John Barnes, founder of the Myo-facial release technique, it takes 90 – 120 seconds for fascia to even begin to let go and soften. This pose is a good example of how to slow down, relax your body while at the same time making profound changes in the fascia.

To begin: Sit comfortably, perpendicular to their leg. Your center should line up with their knee. Take a breath and relax your body.

Your bottom (inferior) foot: Although it basically remains where it is throughout this pose, your bottom foot is important as it keeps the foot/leg from rolling when you release the pressure from your top foot. When you are engaged into their IT band you do not need to have your bottom foot even touching them. But when you release your superior foot from their IT band, the leg wants to roll out. This is when I gently secure their foot so their leg doesn't roll out. That way, I don't lose the line that I am working on.

Your top foot: Walk your top foot up and down between the knee and the greater trochanter (the knob-like bone that signals the end of the IT band) slowly, getting them used to the touch and gently warming the line. You will find this will create a gentle rocking motion. As you are walking the foot up and down, pay attention to the relative tension of the IT band. Does it feel tighter or harder near the knee, in the middle or closer to the hip? After 3-5 times of walking the foot up and down, find a point just above the knee, maybe one that you noticed as being particularly tight, and stay there. Make sure that you feel connected to the tissue.



Important details for a longer hold

- * Place your foot flat against their leg
- * Straighten your leg so you have full engagement
- * Keep your foot relaxed and don't "push" into them
- * Remain for a minute and then assess further

If you don't know your client very well or even if you do, you can ask them to tell you where their pain level is. I find that using a scale of 1-10 is helpful. I let them know in advance so that they can just give me a number when I ask. If it is below a 6, I know I need to engage more. If it is 8 or above, I know I need to ease up a bit. I find that a 6 or 7 is a good place to be for most people.

If your client needs more pressure, here are some options:

- * Lean your shoulders slightly toward the recipient. This action will bring the *hara* forward and it will connect to your foot. This way you can give more pressure without "pushing" your foot into them.
- * Use the outer edge of your foot. This concentrates your pressure into a smaller area and has the effect of increasing pressure.
- * Use your heel. This is usually too strong for many, though for larger recipients, it might be exactly what they need. Make sure you engage the heel on line 2, not line 3.

Taking time, going deeper

After working for a while, you will find where the IT band is tight and tender. You will also find where their pain threshold is. Compress three or four points up the leg and then down the leg. At a minute or two for each point, you may spend between 6 and 15 minutes here. The time you spend here can be valuable for your client because it takes so much time to get the IT band to truly release. But once it does, it can benefit the knee, the hip and potentially the entire fascial train.



Letters To and From THAI By Bob Haddad, RTT

Greetings!

I just returned from Thailand and Laos after participating at the Circus with Arno et al, and an Osteo-Thai course. I plan on applying for membership. As my training is strictly through Thai Massage and not via "western massage" curriculum, I am wondering what you know about recognition and availability of insurance? I do have a 200 hr. yoga teachers certificate.

Metta, S

Hi S,

Regarding legal practice, this often depends on where you live and practice, what the local ordinances are, and also what you officially call yourself. For example, many US states and Canadian provinces restrict the use of certain words (body work, therapy, massage, etc.) to describe healers that are not western (table) massage therapists. You'll need to read the local massage board statutes, see which words are prohibited, and try to "fly below the radar" by avoiding infringing words.

If you live in a place where table massage training is required in order to treat a client, it can be complicated, but many non massage therapist Thai practitioners are operating this way. It is unfortunate that traditional Thai therapy is often not recognized as separate and distinct from western massage therapy. With some insurers, by stating your RTT, you can get liability insurance for practicing Thai massage even if you're not a licensed massage therapist.

Hello THAI,

I have been practicing thai massage for a few years now and I haven't ever worked on a pregnant woman. My sister in law is pregnant and I am wondering about the contraindications. Actually, I was hoping to speak with someone knowledgeable on this issue because I have a few to avoid? I was once told not to press into the three kidney points

on the inside of the heel of the foot because it could cause a flushing which can encourage menstruation but is not suitable for pregnant woman because it can induce labor or even abort the child). I was also wondering about specific stretches, for example, in first trimester, the woman lying on her back, practitioner steps on each side of her stomach/chest and brings her legs to outside of yours and push her legs down to her chest. like *baddah konasana* in yoga posture. Thank you, hope to speak to someone soon, - A

Dear A,

Regarding pregnancy and Thai massage, you should consider using the side-lying position for practically the entire session. Do not keep the client on her back for extended periods, and when you must do it, prop up her upper torso with bolsters (for example, if you work the face toward the end of the session.) Aside from that, stay in side position for the entire session. There are points you need to avoid completely, on the ankles, the hands and head. Make sure you learn and memorize these points beforehand. Keep them nearby the mat, if necessary, to remind yourself. It's best to avoid acupressure points in general, and just do palming and line work, and gentle "opening" postures to give more room to the stomach/fetus. Careful with the kidneys and lower back. No direct palm pressing on the stomach (obviously) - in fact, no strenuous stomach pressure at all. Definitely do not step on her in any way! Use common sense and work gently at first until you gain confidence. Have plenty of pillows around to prop her up on her side.

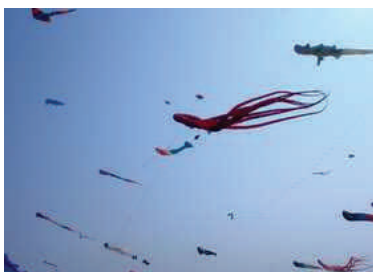
You may be able to find additional info online, and Asokananda's "Advanced Practitioners" book has a few pages of guidelines for pregnant Thai massage. His "Traditional Thai Massage in Side Position" is a also good book to have on hand.

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Thai Culture Spotlight : Kite Flying Festivals

Kite flying is popular among Thai people from all walks of life, especially for children in the countryside. The best flying weather is between February and April, after the rice crop is harvested and while the southwest monsoon blows inward from the Gulf of Thailand. Kites are said to have originated in China over 3,000 years ago.

In the early Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya, kites were so popular that they were prohibited to fly over the Royal Palace for fear of damage to the delicate architectural spires. Kite flying reached its highest popularity during the reign of King Rama IV when a Royal decree was issued allowing all citizens to fly kites at Sanam Luang, the open area opposite the Grand Palace in Bangkok. Still today, kites of all sizes, shapes and colors are regularly flown in a large park in this same area.



To preserve the early summertime traditions and to encourage tourism, kite flying has been encouraged and supported by government authorities in recent years. Kite enthusiasts from around the world are invited to display their crafts and show their skills at festivals throughout the country. Thai teams also take part in these festivals, and they feature a special type of Thai fighting contest between traditional styles of kites known as Chula and Pakpao. The fights are fun to watch, the object being to bring down the kite of your opponent. An important International Kite Festival is held every year near the seaside resort of Hua Hin, a three-hour drive south of Bangkok. As the festival gets underway, the sky is a riot of colors with kites of all shapes vying with each other. This event features kites from all over the world and kite demonstrators from the four regions of Thailand take part in this festival. Many international guests participate in this festival. On two other separate fields the Thais fly their traditional kites in various competitions.



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Letters to and from THAI

Dear THAI,

I have a question for you, I have been wanting some more information on the sen lines. I wonder if there is a more information out there with regard to the different emotional implications of the various lines. If you are aware of any research I would love to see it. I have many Thai massage books, but none of them really mention the correlation of sen lines to emotional states. Are there any books that you have found useful? Thanks for being here - C.

Hi C,

Thanks for the note. Your question is a fascinating one. And it's something I've often wondered about myself. As far as I know, there is no detailed study of Thai sen lines that corresponds theoretically to the human emotional condition. As far as I understand, Thai massage traditions are not organized or carried out from an "emotional" perspective.

Naturally, you could parallel Thai *sen* and pressure points to their Ayurvedic (or Chinese) counterparts and make deductions as to working for emotional health. But maybe the best way would be to keep in mind the body parts that each of the sen lines course, and then make intuitive deductions based on that.

For example, the anterior portion of *sumana sen* runs through the *hara*, solar plexus, diaphragm, sternum, heart, throat, etc. So based on where it courses, it could be correlated to heart opening, grief release, deep breathing, throat chakra work, etc. Then again, *sahatsarangsi* and *thawari* also course organs that could relate to emotional work such as sadness and grief. *Kalathari* is a central sen line, and since it crosses paths at the navel, it could be considered important in re-establishing any sort of "balance."

There are a few sources which discuss physical conditions that can be treated by individual sen line routines, but I don't know of any that specifically address the emotional component. I remembered that Rose Griscom from ITM-USA had some ideas about emotional correlations in a sen line course that she teaches. After your letter, I spoke to her about it, and she said that for the most part her ideas reflected personal deductions, and were not based in Thai medicine or Thai tradition.

Generally speaking, our intuition is what guides us, and visualizing the lines as we work and utilizing sensing often affords us some feedback about how and when and where to work.



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Inside you'll find great information on traditional Thai massage