

## ❧ Palming the Legs in Supine Position ❧

Palming (and thumbing of the legs), with the therapist in a comfortable kneeling position, appears in all basic sequences of folk-style Thai massage, regardless of lineage. Palming of the feet and legs is one of the first techniques used in a typical Thai session, and the pressure, combined with outward rotation of the legs, is very relaxing to receive. In addition to general relaxation, however, the goal is to tone the muscles and stimulate the *sen*. All too often, palm pressure is applied too softly, not in a sequential pattern, with rigid hands, or for too short a period of time. Another common problem is that pressure is often applied at an incorrect



angle and to the leg bones rather than the fleshy areas where the *sen* reside.

Before you begin palming, open the receiver's legs to approximately the width of her shoulders so the knees aren't stressed when the legs rotate outward. The space between the legs also allows you to move your body up and down in a half-kneeling position as necessary. More information about palming the feet is discussed in the "Lower Body" chapter.

### Medial legs

#### *Below the knee*

An excellent way to work the lower legs is with the heels of the palms, near the transverse carpal ligament. Regardless of the relative sizes of therapist's hands and client's calves, this option allows easy access to the muscles and *sen* of the lower legs and minimizes contact with the tibia. To work in this way, assume a comfortable kneeling position inside the arc of the receiver's open legs. Rotate your arms so their inner (anterior) surfaces face each other. Position your hands on the receiver's inside lower leg, slightly above the ankles, with your fingers facing outward and resting over the lateral calves. Keep your hands soft and free of tension, straighten your arms completely, lock your elbows, and use the fleshy heels of your palms to apply pressure as you rock your body. Work simultaneously (both legs together by rocking forward and back) and/or in alternating fashion (first one leg and then the other, by rocking left to right). As you work, direct your pressure at a slight inward angle into the calf muscles, instead of directly downward toward the mat. Avoid "skin burn," and don't rub or slide on the skin as you press inward.

*Above the knee*

Unlike the hand position for the lower legs described above, use your entire palm to work the upper legs. Keep your hands firm but soft, and keep all your fingers together, facing upward toward the person's face. All five fingers of each hand should touch each other with light pressure, and your palms should be slightly cupped, not completely flat and rigid. Keep your thumbs connected to the other fingers of each hand, and point all fingers upward.

Remember, the idea is to work in the fleshy parts of the thighs, so don't press on top of the leg bones; instead, angle your palms slightly inward, and allow your elbows to tilt slightly upward as you apply pressure. Lift your chest cavity to position your hands, lock your arms and elbows, and then sink inward into the legs as you shift your body and your *hara* downward. Simultaneous palm pressure is usually best for upper medial legs; don't routinely alternate your pressure from left to right. Press into the thighs with both hands at a slight angle as you rock your energy forward and backward, and slide your hands up and down the legs. Visualize the running of the *sen* as you work, and try to stimulate all three lines in each leg at the same time with your palm pressure.

As you work the upper legs, and as you palm the entirety of the legs, remember to move your body when necessary. Keep your arms and hands directly in front of you, and never bend your arms at the elbows. Don't overextend your reach at any time, because your angle and your touch may become sharp or hard.<sup>1</sup> As you work up the legs, raise your posture slightly before you sink down again with your hand pressure. Move your body up and down as you work by sliding your knees in the space between the receiver's open legs. If you find a place on the upper medial legs that seems to need a longer touch, stay there for a few extra moments before continuing with palm-presses up or down the legs.

*Palming single legs*

An efficient way to work one medial leg at a time is to assume a half-kneeling stance with your *hara* facing either 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock. Maintain a slight curve in your hands, and rock from left to right as you palm the medial upper and lower leg in a palm-chasing-palm pattern, or better, in a random pattern, where sometimes one hand follows the other and sometimes it moves in the opposite direction.<sup>2</sup>

**Lateral legs**

To work the lateral legs with your palms, it's important to move back far enough from the receiver's body so you can palm-press with outstretched hands and project your energy from your *hara* rather than using your arm or shoulder muscles. Position your body completely perpendicular to the client, toward 3 o'clock or 9 o'clock. Make sure that you have enough room to stretch out. Bend your upper body downward as far as possible, extend your arms, lock your elbows, and rock your body from left to right as you palm the lateral leg. Remember to constantly "knee-walk" along the side of the body so your arms always remain connected to your core energy.<sup>3</sup>

Working the lateral legs with palms in an ergonomic fashion requires a lot of space and good body mechanics. Because of this, it's practical and efficient to use your feet instead.

Remember to project your core energy through your feet without using your leg muscles. Keep your back straight and your chest open as you work with feet on the lateral legs. Close your eyes from time to time to feel and sense with your feet, and try to empty your mind of thought as you work.

### Reminders

- As you work the legs in supine position, don't press on the leg bones. Direct your pressure to the fleshy medial areas of the legs, where the accessible *sen* reside.
- When working below the knee, consider using the heels of your palms, with your fingers pointed outward. Work with simultaneous or alternating pressure.
- When working above the knee, use your entire palm, and direct your pressure at a slight angle into the thigh muscles and *sen*. Working with simultaneous pressure is usually best for the upper legs.
- If you work on one leg at a time, get into a proper position, and rock from left to right as your palms or thumbs move up and down the leg in a random fashion.
- When you work on the lateral legs, get back far enough so your arms can be fully extended, or instead, work the lateral legs with your feet.<sup>4</sup>
- As you work up and down the legs with palm pressure and thumbing techniques, always try to finish the last round of techniques “up” toward the person’s head, rather than “down” toward their feet.

