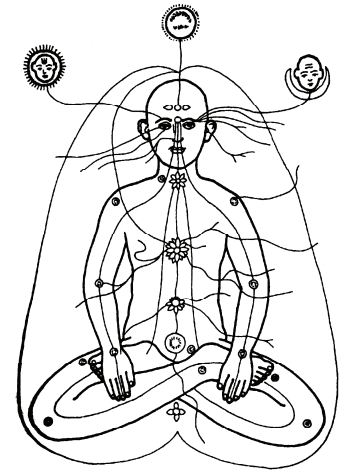


## Spirituality in Thai Massage - By Robert Henderson, RTT

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.

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.

