



Sensing and Intuition

The master therapist is real, calm, non-judgmental, intelligent, sensitive, strong yet flexible, supportive, compassionate, empathic, and joyful.

— JOHN BARNES —

Massage and bodywork are especially effective when they are practiced with heightened sensing and intuitive abilities. These concepts, along with sustainable body dynamics and breathing patterns, help the work to be more enjoyable and much more effective. Sensing and intuition become strengthened when we stop thinking and when we direct all our attention to the point of contact with another person. Eventually, as we deepen our awareness and hone our sensitivity, we can begin to work at a level of healing that is not limited to (or limited by) the physical body.

Intuition

A few years into my study of Thai massage, I became curious about exploring areas of the body in more intuitive ways. My teacher at the time, Asokananda, encouraged me to direct my awareness to the *sen* lines, and to follow my intuition based on what I was sensing. Later, in a formal interview I conducted with him, I asked him if sensing and intuitive abilities could be taught to others. He replied: “Only to a certain extent. You can teach people how to develop their sensitivity, but intuition has to come by playing with the energy lines and feeling the energy. Ultimately, it comes from within, and most people have the ability to tap into it.”

So what is intuition, and how can we use it? How do we know when to linger and when to move on? What does energy feel like? How do we know where to work, and which techniques to use?

Intuitive sensitivity comes from within. It flows out of each person, and naturally becomes stronger the more we practice and study; however, some basic guidelines help encourage the development of strong intuitive abilities. Being present and aware at every moment is easier said than done, but as we go deeper in the practice of healing arts, we learn to detach from outside stimulations and distractions and be more present and in the moment. We listen to and sense our bodies and the bodies of our clients. Just as in meditation, it’s important to bring ourselves back to inner stillness whenever we become distracted.



Trust your judgment

Each person is different, and all techniques do not work the same way for all people. Try to never follow the same basic routine for each client. As much as possible, be aware of what your client needs at each moment, and don't be afraid to deviate from a routine or sequence you were taught in order to observe and treat your client in the best way possible.

Rely on your senses and your instincts. If, when you pick up a client's leg, you feel that she is "holding" in her upper lateral thigh, take a moment to go there and make a quick assessment before you continue your work. If you sense that one area is more blocked than another, you may decide to spend more time there, instead of moving to another position or technique. If necessary, consult with your client to get feedback, direction, or approval. When you allow yourself to follow your instincts, your sense of intuition will naturally become sharper and deeper.

An important lesson in intuition

One of my first experiences of working on an intuitive level in Thai massage happened about five years into my practice. One of my regular clients had his left leg amputated because of a misdiagnosed cancer that eventually metastasized. Shortly after he recovered from the physical trauma and surgery, he asked to continue Thai treatments with me. He was a client of mine prior to his surgery, and I wanted to be of help in any way possible.

To prepare for the first session, I had researched the phenomenon called "phantom pain" in amputee victims. When he arrived, we talked quite a bit. He let me inspect and touch the stump of his leg, and told me about the strange sensations of tingling, pain, and itching he sometimes felt at various points along the missing leg. As I thumb-pressed the stump, I realized that I could apply quite a bit of pressure to the area, and that helped me relax, knowing I wouldn't be hurting him.

I folded the remainder of his pant leg over the stump, knelt at his feet, and offered a silent prayer for his well-being. When I opened my eyes, I was faced with an unexpected dilemma. How should I begin my work? I couldn't palm-press two feet or touch two legs at the same time. If I worked only on his remaining leg, would the energy be balanced on the other side? After a few seconds, I decided that somehow, somehow, it was important to work with both of my hands. I rationalized that even though his leg was missing in the physical realm, his energy still existed on a metaphysical level. After all, he had told me that he was experiencing phantom pain.

At that moment I decided to palm-press with both hands simultaneously. My left hand pressed into his right leg and my right hand pressed onto the floor. I did this for a few moments, but it didn't feel right. I didn't feel balanced, because one of my hands was sinking lower than the other. I realized that if his leg were there in physical form, my right hand would be pressing about 4 inches higher than the mat. I lifted my hand off the ground and began to "feel" for his leg in the air, at the same height as his other calf. My palm presses suddenly became balanced, and my shoulders fell into alignment. My left hand was pressing into his right calf, and my other hand was pressing into the air, sensing for his energy.

I began to work the phantom leg in exactly the same way I worked on the physical leg. Whenever I pressed on the real leg, I also pressed the invisible leg. A few minutes later, as I was palm-walking up his physical leg, I felt a strong vibration midway up the medial thigh. I stopped, and as I directed my awareness to that area, I found a large blockage with my thumbs. The energy was very strong there, and I eased my pressure a bit in order to be more sensitive. I stayed there for quite some time, holding that pressure.

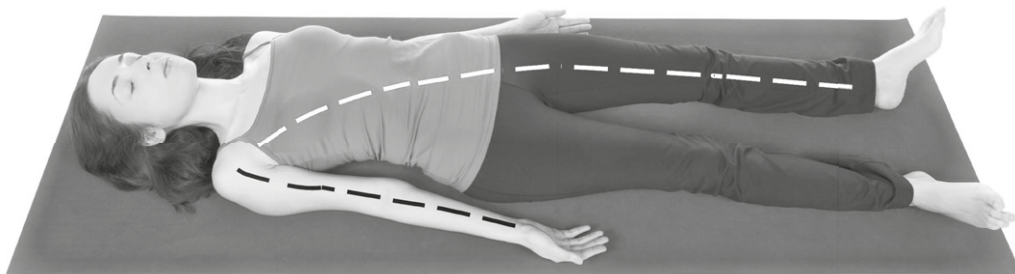
As I released the pressure, my client spoke. He said that he was beginning to feel his phantom leg come alive. Instead of the usual pain, he felt a slight tingling and a sense of presence he hadn't felt since the amputation. After he said this, his next full exhalation allowed his entire body to relax; his breathing became much deeper, and even his facial expression changed. Aside from the obvious physical restrictions, the treatment proceeded normally, and I felt more at ease knowing that his entire energetic body was being affected by our work together.

Developing intuitive abilities in bodywork

Each person is different, and it's unrealistic to think that all techniques work in the same way for everyone. You have the ability to develop and sharpen your intuition. Be still, pay attention to the point of contact between the two bodies, and rely on your senses and your instincts. Here are a few simple exercises that may inspire you.

Intuition exercise 1

This exercise is designed to encourage and allow you to be drawn to a place on a particular *sen* line that is not the place where you are currently working. Let's say, for example, that while you're palming or thumbing a medial leg line, you stop somewhere along that line because you sense something. Naturally, you should be doing this continuously as you work, but sometimes, you may have an inspiring thought. Is this spot related to another place on the same energy line? The place where you stopped could be a chronic "holding" spot, or it could be something else. A blockage that you find on a medial leg, for example, may have a correlating point in the pelvis, stomach, chest, or arm. Discomfort or pain in one area may be connected to another place on the body.



Check for correlating points on the same line or on intersecting lines

If you sense that this might be the case, or even if you just feel curious, take some time to explore the rest of that line, up or down on the anterior body. Here's one way to do this:

- Maintain contact on the spot that you found; the place where you originally stopped. With your other hand, palm-press or thumb-walk upward or downward on that *sen* line to see if you find another blocked area, or another place that is calling for your touch. As you explore, glance at the receiver's face for any visual signals. If you find nothing of interest, then work your way back to the original spot where you left your other hand, spend a few more moments activating that blocked area, and proceed with the session. However if you are called to another place on that line, try either or both of these techniques:

a. Thumb-press or palm-press both spots at the same time.

Apply simultaneous pressure to both places, sink into the first level of resistance, and remain there with constant pressure. Always release slowly before you sink in again. If your client reacts, responds, or emotes, don't press beyond that first level of depth, and be ready to soften or release your pressure at any time. If your partner yields and opens as a result of your pressure in two spots at the same time (or if you feel a surge of energy in one or both spots), then consider applying deeper, incremental pressure, maybe in patterns of threes or fives. Continue in this way until you feel it is right to stop, then test to see if one or both of the areas have softened.

b. Apply alternating pressure to both spots by rocking your body slightly from side to side, and by shifting your weight from one place to the other.

You might start the rocking directly at the two blocked areas, but don't stay only in those spots; instead, work above and below each blocked area, along all the portions of that line that are within reach. Work with a "thumb-chasing-thumb" or a "palm-chasing-palm" pattern along the blocked area as your hands or thumbs come closer to each other, move away from each other, and follow each other. Constantly move your hands or thumbs with light-to-medium pressure, and rock slightly from your *hara* as you move. Continue this technique for a few moments, and then test to see if one or both of the areas have softened.

Intuition exercise 2

For this more advanced exercise, your mind must be still and your senses should be as awake as possible. First, you assess the body visually, with all the sensory perception you can gather. Then, by quickly touching the body and observing the responses to your touch, you follow your intuition to go directly to a specific area of your client's body to investigate a perceived blockage.

After years of study and practice, our intuition is right more often than not. Great healers around the world can “see” blockages and “read” energy without touching the body, and do other amazing things we would never believe possible. Even though this exercise may seem daunting at first, after years of practice you may be able to locate a blocked area of a body with just a light shake or a quick touch.

Try this test

Place the client in supine position, and open his legs as if you were beginning to palm-press his feet. Now scan the anterior lower body, and look for asymmetries. Is one foot lower to the mat than the other? Is one leg more twisted than the other? Is one knee slightly more bent than another?

If you notice, for example, that one foot is resting higher on the mat than the other, try to imagine which sets of energy lines, muscles, and tendons could be the source of this asymmetry. Visualize three main lines on the medial aspect of the leg and three on the lateral aspect. Now see where they meet at the pelvis and hips, and briefly scan the entire anterior body. Where could the obstruction be that is resulting in this situation you are assessing?

Now with both hands, simultaneously push both feet toward the mat with a very quick motion, and release your hands immediately. Observe the bounce-back reflex of both feet. Do it a few more times, as you observe both legs snapping back into their original position on the mat. Look at the upper legs and the thighs. How many times does each thigh jiggle back and forth before it comes to a complete stop? Which leg stops jiggling first? If we assume that the leg that stopped first might be less relaxed than the other leg, then why could this be? Can you see or visualize a place on the leg that may be the reason?

Be still, meditate with your eyes open, breathe in a deep and relaxed way, and allow yourself to be drawn to a place that you suspect may be connected to this situation. Move your body positioning so you have good access, place a hand there, and explore the area with your palm, fingers, or thumb. Use both hands if you like. If you find something of interest, work with it in creative ways to try to loosen the blockage. If you don't find anything, feel for another spot in the general vicinity. For example, if you originally thought the restriction was in the medial thigh, but you didn't find anything there, move the position of your body so you can explore the lateral aspect of the same leg. Be creative, but keep your mind empty, and allow your intuitive abilities to guide your work.

Whether or not you found something or helped facilitate a release of some kind, this exercise in building your intuitive powers has served its purpose, and the more you work in this way, the more intuitive you may become. For now, move along to the next area of the body, and continue to work with this same type of awareness and sensitivity throughout the entire session.

