



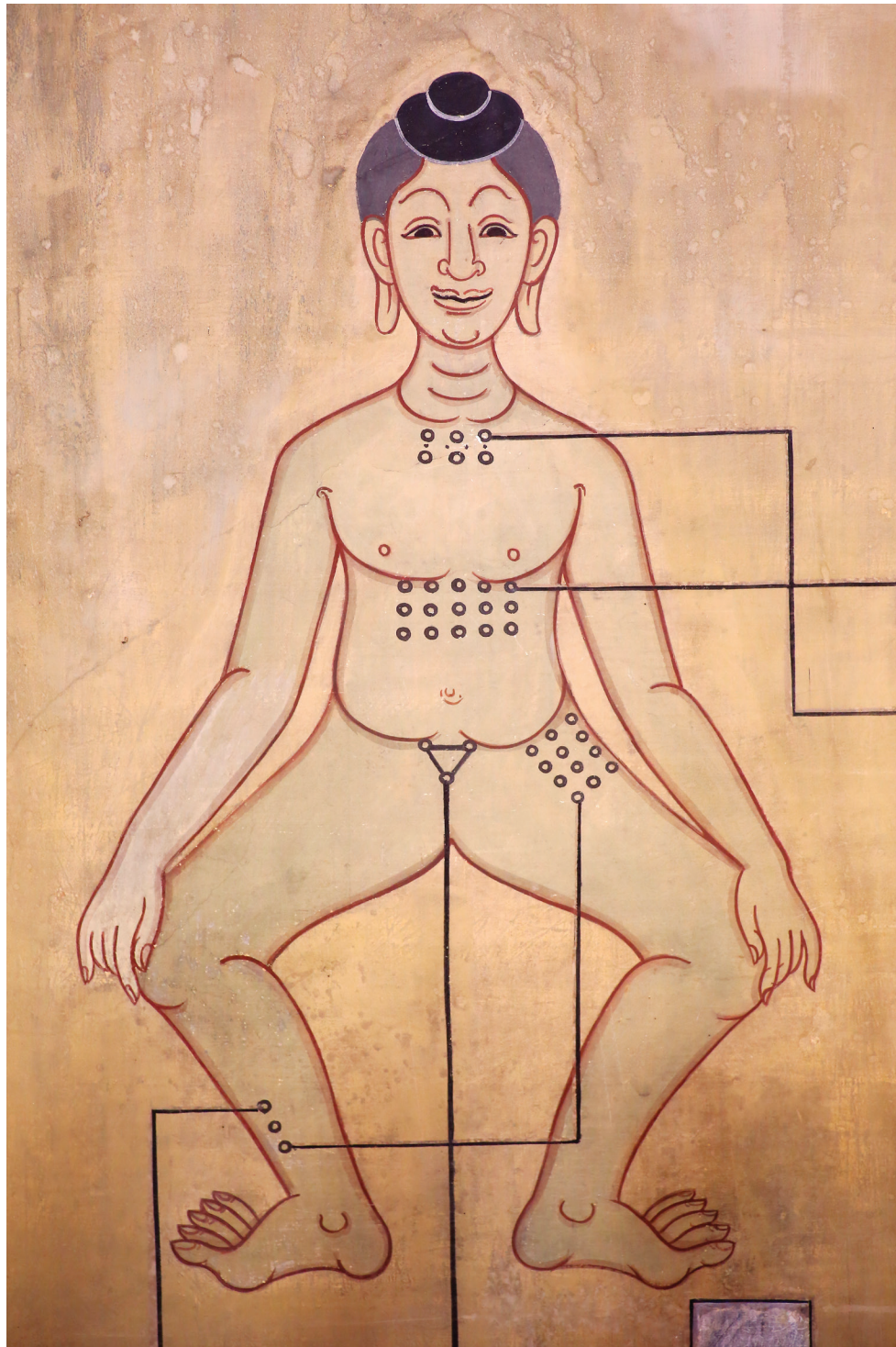
ENERGY RELEASE — AND — THE ART OF SELF-PROTECTION

By Bob Haddad



Whether you perform Thai massage, energy work, shiatsu, focused acupressure, or table massage, you can act as an agent for the release of your client's anxieties, grief, stress, and tension. However, if you don't maintain a strong sense of self and take precautions, the releases you facilitate in your clients may easily alter your own state of being, bringing about headaches, nausea, tension, or even illness. As professional healers, it's important to work with great compassion, but this doesn't mean we should allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

Experienced healers should understand the importance of preparation before they work with clients, the need for self-protection at critical moments during a treatment, and how and when to detoxify after a particularly stressful session. In my work with clients, students, and teachers over the years, I've learned and developed a number of concepts, exercises, and techniques that have helped me keep clients' energies from entering my own energy system as I work. Here are several that may be helpful to a wide variety of bodyworkers and therapists.



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Energy Flow

For thousands of years, civilizations have developed and maintained healing systems based on belief in a life force that circulates through energy pathways in the body. Indian Ayurvedic medicine calls this life force *prana*, the Chinese tradition refers to it as *qi*, and traditional Thai medicine calls it *lom*. This energy is believed to be absorbed into the body from the food we eat, the air we breathe, and all living things around us. In traditional Thai massage, energy follows pathways or energy lines that are called *sen*. A blockage in any line may impede or prevent the free flow of energy and may lead to aches, disease, and pain on emotional, psychological, physical, and even spiritual levels.

PRE-SESSION PREPARATIONS

Before you greet a client, take a few minutes to focus on the person you are about to receive into your space. Remind yourself of any restrictions or concerns indicated on the intake form, review personal likes and dislikes, and scan your notes from previous sessions to see what you did and how the client responded to your work. Take a moment to think about what you might do today with this person based on your previous work, the client's needs, and your mood and energy.

Yoga

After you have reviewed your client's information, take some time to prepare yourself on the physical and spiritual planes by practicing some yoga. Plows, cobras, and spinal twists may help bring attention to your hara, the core energy center right below your navel. Also concentrate on poses and postures that address your specific weaknesses—we all know where those areas are in our bodies. Bring awareness to them as you warm up your body, and focus on feeling strengthened and at peace.

Meditation and Breath Awareness

A short period of silent meditation can be very helpful in strengthening the protective energy layer that is believed to exist outside the edge of our physical bodies. Centering can be achieved through meditation and breath awareness. If you're centered and focused as you work, it is easier to distinguish between your own energies and those of your clients.

Pranayama Exercises

Ayurvedic breathing exercises (*pranayama*) can also be helpful in preparing for your session. Pranayama exercises were developed long ago in India as a self-healing tool to induce states of meditation, relaxation, and inner strengthening. They may be used by the therapist prior to a session, and can even be recommended as homework to clients who have shallow breathing patterns. Pranayama exercises also may be useful before and after a difficult session.

Here's a basic breath exploration that may help ground you before you greet a client. Find a comfortable seated position and begin to take note of your breath. As you inhale, notice when and where your breath moves freely and where it feels stuck. Begin to gradually deepen your inhalations and exhalations. Notice how your body feels as your breath changes. When you're ready to begin, exhale completely. Now inhale through your nose for five counts and exhale the same way for five counts.

Allow your breath to rest naturally for a few seconds after each exhalation. Repeat this breathing pattern for as long as you'd like and feel free to change the length to a longer count, further slowing the flow of air and your heart rate. Regardless of how many counts you do, keep your inhalations and exhalations of equal length. As you practice this calming exercise, stay focused on the movement, sound, and quality of your breath. When you finish, notice the grounded feeling it provides, and take that energy with you into your session.

Visualization Exercises

Visualization exercises may be used to establish a field of protection around your space. The one described on page 93, named Prana Eggs by the late Thai massage teacher Asokananda, is a powerful way for a therapist to establish a protective field before beginning a session. The objective of the exercise is to surround yourself in a field of protection, and to minimize the transference of your client's energies to your energetic field. If you know in advance that you will be working with a client who is undergoing severe emotional, psychological, or physical stress, consider doing this exercise before the client arrives.

DURING THE SESSION

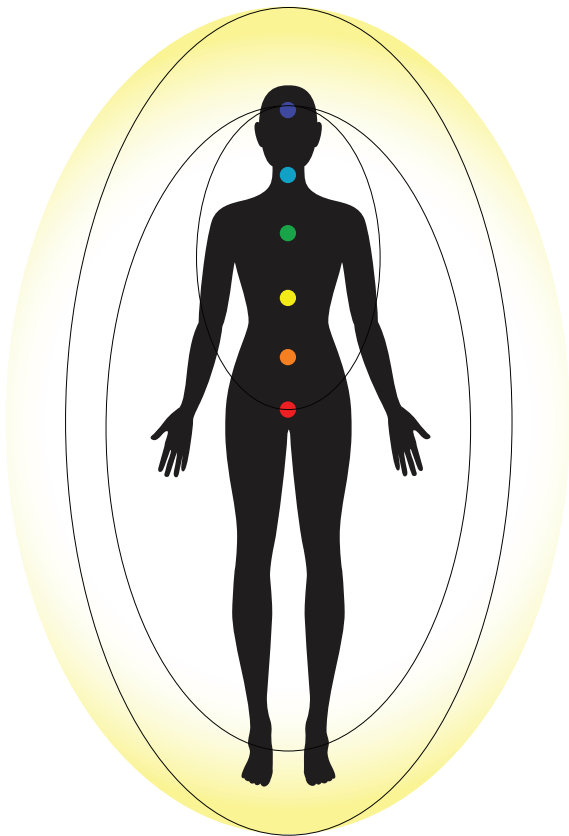
If at any point during a session you feel you have absorbed an external energy, bring breath awareness to that feeling. Inhale with the intent to purify yourself, and exhale with the intent to purge the negative energy. In addition, a number of visualization techniques may be helpful for self-protection during a session in which energy release is being facilitated. Here are a few:

Energy Shield

Visualize a strong mental shield of positive energy around your body and hold it there. Imagine gathering all the energy from different areas of your body and bringing it together slightly outside your body to form this protective shield. Now, flood the shield with sunlight or golden light, and imagine that this boundary is permanently in place around you as you work.

Mental Wash

Utilize this technique when you sense something is uncomfortable or negative in your client. Imagine clean, fresh water running down through the top of your head and continuing through your entire body. The water should be at a comfortable temperature, and it should run inside your body from your head to the bottoms of your feet, where it exits. As the water passes through you,



Prana Eggs

Depending on how many times you perform each “layer” of the egg, you will need a minimum of 5–10 minutes for this exercise. The more times you do each part of the exercise, the stronger the field will be. Try to perform each section in cycles of odd numbers, which, in Thai Buddhist culture, are considered more powerful than even ones.

Outer Egg

Lie on your back, preferably with your head pointing north. Use your mind like a pencil. As you slowly inhale, imagine drawing half of an oval on the right side of your body, beginning about 6 inches below your toes and ending 6 inches above the center of your head. As you slowly exhale, draw the other half of the egg on the left side of your body, starting at the head and ending below the toes. Imagine that you are lying in the middle of a large protective egg. Breathe in a slow, peaceful, and protracted way. Repeat this sequence with coordinated breathing in odd-numbered configurations.

Middle Egg

On the in-breath, start directly at the toes, drawing an oval closer to the body that intersects the top of the head. As you exhale, close this new egg on the left side, running from the top of the head downward and again touching your toes. Repeat this cycle in the same odd-number configuration as you did with the first egg.

Inner Egg

Finally, draw a small egg starting at the pelvis and ending at the third eye in the middle of your forehead. Visualize drawing the oval up the right side as you slowly inhale, and down the left side as you slowly exhale. Repeat this exercise in the same odd-numbered configuration as the previous eggs.

After the exercise, remain on your back in corpse pose (savasana) for a minute or two as you hold the field of protection in place around your body.

The Closer You Get

Healing arts that are carried out on a floor mat involve considerably more body contact than table-based therapies. While Western massage therapists use mostly fingers, hands, forearms, and an occasional elbow in their sessions, Thai bodyworkers also make body contact with their clients using their legs, feet, toes, knees, backs, shoulders, sides, and buttocks. Because long-term, full-body contact is more common, energy transfer between client and therapist may be more likely to occur.



Photo courtesy of Bob Haddad.



imagine it cleansing each section of your body, including particular areas or organs you feel may need it most.

Awareness of Your Hara

Focus attention on your hara. If your client becomes emotional, stressed, or upset, bring more attention to your hara and imagine it as strong and unwavering. If necessary, you may even lightly put your hand to your hara to enhance your awareness.

Burning Energy at the Source

As you feel or sense emotion, energy, shaking, or tension emerging from your client's body, imagine a bright flame of fire between your hands and the client's body. As the energy comes out, visualize that it is being burned at the source, and that there is no way it can enter your body.

Acting as a Conduit

An alternative to burning energy is to imagine it entering through one side of your body and exiting the other side. If you are facilitating a release using your left hand, for example, extend your right hand, palm upward, and imagine the energy running through your body and exiting through your right hand. Be creative with this technique, but make sure you focus on the exit point, and that you imagine the energy completely leaving your body. Maintain deep, focused breathing when you do this exercise.

AFTER THE SESSION

Some detoxing exercises require a private space and a fair amount of time. Since you may not always have the necessary space and/or time, here are several ways you can cleanse and detoxify yourself in a short period of time after a difficult session.

Washing

I can't overemphasize the value of post-session washing. Use cold or room temperature running water and plenty of natural soap. If running water is not available, use salt water or water infused with something tannic, like sour tamarind or the rinds of lemons or limes. You can keep a bowl or jar of liquid nearby and pour it over your hands and arms, then brush it across your face and head. If the session was very stressful or emotional for you or your client, try to take a shower as soon as possible afterward.

Clearing Energy

Even if you haven't directly absorbed energies from a stressed client, the mood of your treatment room can be altered by lingering, stale energy left over from your client's session. Neutralizing solutions can help clear energy from the treatment room after a deep or stressful session. You can prepare your own solutions using an essential oil, a transmitting medium such as alcohol or witch hazel, and some water. No matter which combination of essential oil and transmitting agent you choose, send healing energy into the room as you spray high into the air after your client has left.

Open the windows and let the room breathe a bit. As you change the sheets and pillowcases, make a deliberate effort to bring new, cleansing energy back into your room. Imagine the negative energy being lifted as you treat the room.

Brushing and Breathing

This exercise can be done as soon as you leave the treatment room, even as the client is still resting or getting dressed. First, wash your hands. Then, using the outstretched palm of one hand, vigorously brush the other side of your body with a downward sweeping motion. With every downward stroke, rotate your wrist slightly away from your body, and vigorously sweep away negativity from your energetic field. Begin at your head, then work downward across your face, neck, shoulders, arms, and hands on one side of your body. Next, work your chest and low back with both hands. Start again from the top of your head on the other side of your body until you reach your groin, then finish the



Brushing after a session can minimize absorption of energy. *Photo courtesy of Bob Haddad.*



rest of your body with two hands at once, covering the front of your body, your legs, and as much of the back of your body as possible until you end at your feet.

This exercise can be even more powerful if you combine strong exhalations with every downward stroke. Keep your cheeks slightly rounded, and exhale deeply with every brushing stroke. Imagine you are removing traces of bad energy, both with your hands and with your breath.

Rapid Diaphragmatic Breathing

This is a classic pranayama exercise in which only the abdominal area moves while the chest remains still. Make sure you maintain good posture—it's easy to strain your chest muscles if you're in the wrong position. Sit on the floor in a half-lotus posture, or in an armless chair if necessary. Place your hands on your knees, making sure your body is straight, but relaxed and not stiff.

Do a series of rapid breath expulsions in quick succession. After each breath expulsion, your diaphragm pumps air back into your lungs, and you naturally proceed immediately to the next expulsion. The first few times you do this, place a hand on your abdomen so you can feel how it should contract on the exhale. Quickly and forcefully contract your abdomen by snapping it inward, and allow the air to exit through your nose and mouth. To clear your sinuses more thoroughly, exhale only through your nose. Your abdomen will relax for a fraction of a second between contractions before new air automatically flows back into your body. Make sure your shoulders don't bounce up and down, and that only your abdomen moves during the exercise. Also be sure that the air is being expelled only as a result of the contraction of your abdominal muscles and the movement of your diaphragm.

Take at least 15 breaths in rapid succession. You may do even more expulsions, or a second round of 15, as long as you don't get too dizzy or excessively strain your system. You can easily feel light-headed after this exercise, so make sure to relax and reintegrate yourself before you stand.

Shaking and Draining

This is a Chinese qi gong exercise that is especially helpful for table workers. To clear yourself of negative energies following a difficult session, vigorously shake your hands for 30–45 seconds while you focus all your energy on your hara. Imagine the negative energy rising through your body and gathering at your hands as you shake them. As you are doing this, take deep, prolonged inhalations and long, protracted exhalations.

After a minute or two, your hara and hands will become warm. Immediately place your outstretched hands on a rock, brick wall, tree, drainpipe, or anything that runs directly into the ground, which allows the energy that just surfaced through your body to drain into the ground. Try to sense the energy exiting your body as you make contact with the connection to the earth.



In this exercise, making a connection with the earth can allow for the release of negative energy.

Photo courtesy of Bob Haddad.

Sun/Moon Visualization

This is a creative visualization intended to restore peace and balance. As you slowly inhale, imagine golden sunlight entering the toes of your right foot, moving up the side of your body, and leaving your head. After you finish inhaling, hold your breath for a few seconds. As you exhale, imagine silvery moonlight moving downward from your head, through the left side of your body, and exiting through your toes. Breathe long and deep, and repeat this visualization in odd-numbered cycles until you feel a deep sense of relaxation.

GREATER AWARENESS

With greater awareness of the need for self-protection, and a little bit of practice, these and other concepts and techniques can help protect you against outside energies, and fortify and maintain your own energy system so you can be a stronger and more effective healer. Never stop working with an open and compassionate heart; just make sure to protect yourself along the way. **m&b**

6 Bob Haddad, RTT, has studied traditional Thai massage since 1999, mostly in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In 2005, he founded Thai Healing Alliance International, an organization that promotes basic standards for the study and practice of traditional Thai massage. His book, *Thai Massage & Thai Healing Arts: Practice, Culture, and Spirituality*, is available from Findhorn Press. He teaches workshops internationally, and can be reached at thaimassage@mindspring.com.