



THE ART OF THAI MASSAGE

**A Guide for
Advanced
Therapeutic
Practice**



Bob Haddad

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Introduction

Every new beginning comes from another beginning's end.

— SENECA —

If you are reading these words, you must be attracted in some way to the wonderful world of traditional Thai massage. You may have heard about it through yoga, massage therapy, or another healing art, or you may be an excited student or a practicing therapist or teacher. Maybe, after many years of practice, you've been captivated so deeply that Thai massage has become an inseparable part of your identity. Wherever you are in this process, yours is a dance of pressure, stretching, and expansiveness; a world of movement, peace, and surrender; a journey of healing that is not limited to the physical body.

Thai massage has been helping people to improve their physical, mental, and spiritual health for a long time, but effective Thai therapy isn't based on fixed sequences of techniques that can be applied to everyone. After several years of continual study and practice, most therapists can develop the sensitivity and awareness that is needed to work with each person in a customized way. Serious students and therapists study with many different teachers throughout their entire lives. They listen attentively to the body of each person as they work; they learn to sense energy and to detect blockages and tension; and they rely on intuition, sensitivity, and stillness as guidelines for each treatment.

Evolution and tradition

Thai massage is an evolving healing art, with different styles and approaches, and the underlying traditional concepts and techniques are substantive and complete. Knowledge of other forms of bodywork may be helpful at times, but there is no need to impose or integrate techniques or beliefs from other Eastern or Western modalities into Thai massage.

Medicine, healing arts, and the principles governing Buddhism are all based on the goals of alleviating and preventing human suffering, and healing may be considered with an analogy similar to the principle of the Four Noble Truths: Recognize the condition; relieve its cause; aspire to a cure; and rely on the proper treatment. Thai massage is a physical application of the wisdom contained in traditional Thai medicine and Buddhist medicine; it is not a consequence of Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, or any other body of knowledge. Because of this, in order to reach full potential as a Thai massage therapist, it's helpful to become familiar with the guiding principles of traditional Thai medicine and Thai element theory.

Many students and therapists have interesting stories about how they were attracted to traditional Thai massage, and these first encounters usually lay the groundwork for deeper

study and practice. My own love affair with Thai massage began in Chiang Mai, Thailand, while on a travel adventure after a series of big changes in my life.

On that first trip to Thailand, I took a basic course at one of the only schools in operation at that time, and I received many treatments from a variety of teachers and local therapists. When I returned home, I began practicing on friends as I followed my course manual. Later that year I studied with two other teachers in my home country, who taught me different techniques and sequences, and I continued giving sessions for free to any willing subject I could find. The following year I met my first mentor, and my connection with him guided me to a deeper understanding and introduced me to teachers who practiced other styles and worked with medicinal herbs. About three years into my study I met my second mentor, someone who deeply affected my life, study, and practice. He helped me to understand how to work with good body mechanics, and he taught me the importance of sensing and listening to the body before applying techniques.

Studying with many different teachers for a long period of time helped me to understand how I could best serve a variety of people with different conditions. What about you? What have your study and practice taught you? How have your personal experiences and life lessons shaped who you are? How can they transform you and guide you into heightened states of awareness so you can better serve the people you touch?

About this book

This book is not a how-to manual for beginners; it is intended for those who are already familiar with Thai massage, or who have a basic knowledge of other forms of bodywork, healing arts, or movement therapy. There are far too many sequence-based photo manuals in print, and none of them can teach you how to perform a Thai massage session with grace, flow, awareness, and efficacy. Books that teach methods can be limiting in scope, and by presenting sequential routines based on specific techniques, they can steer the reader away from exploration and self-discovery. Sequences and routines are not suggested in this book, but some important techniques are described in detail, along with corresponding photos. For the most part however, this book is about the concepts, guiding principles, intentions, strategies, and states of awareness that are needed to work with others at an advanced therapeutic level.

When the ideas, techniques, and concepts presented in this book raise questions or arouse curiosity, it will be up to you to consider that information and decide how to explore it on a deeper level in your own life and practice.

Energy lines and the free flow of wind

An important component of Thai massage is the therapeutic attention given to *sen* lines: the channels and conduits along which and through which “energy” flows. This “wind” must be able to circulate freely through the body in order to maintain optimal physical, mental, and spiritual health.

It’s important to know how to locate and work with *sen* lines, and *sen* are mentioned throughout this book in conjunction with assessment, techniques, sensing, and general

treatment. Unfortunately, *sen* are sometimes presented as mysterious or invisible energy lines. In some courses and books about Thai massage, the names, locations, and confluences of the “ten *sen*” main lines are presented somewhat superficially, and false or misleading information is sometimes attributed to them.

All of this creates a lot of confusion. *Sen* are physical structures in the body, and the ability to detect and treat blockages in these lines is much more important than knowing their names or imagining where they intersect. For all these reasons, I have not included charts or detailed information about any particular energy line. *Sen* exist all over the body, and ultimately, it is up to the therapist to kinesthetically learn where they are, to determine if they feel open or blocked, and to plan an appropriate course of action.

General reference

This book is prepared as a reference guide for students of Thai massage and for Thai massage therapists and teachers. Although the information is presented from the perspective of traditional Thai massage, many of the concepts and techniques will also be of interest to those who work in other types of floor-based bodywork, movement therapies, and table massage.

The chapters are arranged in a logical way, but you don’t need to read them in the order in which they appear. Feel free to jump to sections of the book that attract you at different times and when issues arise in your study and work that are relevant to a particular topic. Notes at the end of each chapter provide more detailed information or remind the reader when those topics are also discussed in other chapters. These reminders are offered so the reader can consider and internalize the issues on as deep a level as possible.

In order to be gender inclusive, she/her and he/his are randomly used to describe givers and receivers of massage. Thai language terms and other relevant information appear in the glossary, and the index is helpful to quickly locate and review specific topics. Finally, the bibliography offers a partial list of reference materials that were consulted during the preparation of this book.

A few terms used in this book

hara (core, center)

The vital center of the body, the area directly below the navel, is the place where all movement should originate. Aside from “center,” there isn’t a specific word in the Thai language to describe this area for the practice of massage, so the Japanese word *hara* is often used in this book.

clock position

A clock metaphor is sometimes used to indicate the correct angle of approach for a therapist, or the position of one person in relation to the other; thus, 12 o’clock is at the receiver’s head, and 6 o’clock is at the receiver’s feet. In order to apply pressure and execute techniques correctly and with good body mechanics, the therapist positions her body to face a particular “hour” of the clock as she works.

inside and outside

The words “inside” and “outside” are sometimes used to describe the arms and legs of a therapist in relation to a receiver. The therapist’s inside arm or leg is generally closer to the center, upper, or inner portion of a receiver’s body, while outside refers to an appendage that is farther away from the center. In Thai massage, these words are also used to describe the *sen* lines at the medial (inside) or lateral (outside) portions of a leg or an arm.

holding

Holding refers to a mostly involuntary response of resistance or tension in a receiver’s body, usually in the arms, legs, neck, and abdomen.

open (empty)

These terms indicate areas or pressure points on the body that feel unobstructed and unrestrained to the therapist.

blocked (blockage, full)

Areas or points that feel full, tight, or hard, and which are sometimes painful to the receiver.
 therapist, practitioner, giver – The person who gives the massage or applies techniques
 client, receiver, partner, person – The person receiving massage therapy

Both traditional and experiential

The vast majority of the material presented in this book is directly reflective of the Thai tradition, but some things come from personal experience with teachers, clients, and students. The importance of using core strength is often not stressed in basic Thai massage trainings, but all accomplished therapists must learn how to use their bodies in safe and sustainable ways.

The information contained in the chapter on breath isn’t based in Thai medicine, but it contains extremely important information about breath awareness that is often unexplored or overlooked in professional practice and in everyday life. Some of the exercises and tools to sharpen sensing and intuitive abilities come from my own work, and others come from the guidance of teachers.

Throughout the book you’ll find anecdotes and stories about my personal journey through Thai healing arts. These lessons and experiences have helped me to understand when to use specific techniques, how to move and breathe as I work, and when to cease movement and encourage others to engage in self-healing.

Although all techniques, postures, and movements in traditional Thai massage are carried out on the physical plane, there are also metaphysical and spiritual connections to Thai massage because of its relationship to Buddhism and other beliefs. In some cases, my personal experiences with the Thai spirit realm have affected me more profoundly than the technical information I learned from my teachers. I encourage you to remain open to

extra-physical elements as you practice. Traditional Thai massage offers fabulous manual techniques that incorporate compression, suspension, stretching, and acupressure, but the best approach to healing takes into consideration the physical, psycho-emotional, and spiritual conditions of each person.

Westerners are generally conditioned to pursue education in modules of study with the eventual goal of completion, but in order to become highly accomplished in any field, it's best to abandon the concept of learning in levels and accept that you will be studying and learning, in one form or another, for your entire life.

In the practice of healing arts, there should be equality and equanimity, and both parties must be connected, respected, and trusted. The ability to administer effective holistic treatments exists in all of us, but we must learn to be still, to work without judgment, to suppress ego, to convey love, and to listen to the bodies we touch.

I hope this book is enjoyable and helpful, and that it provides you with inspiration and encouragement.

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Tools & Preparations

“By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail”

— BENJAMIN FRANKLIN —

Most training programs for Thai bodywork are based almost entirely on techniques and fail to prepare students in the important areas of client maintenance and therapist self care. The first part of this chapter deals with materials and accessories that may already be known to some readers, but other elements, such as physical and mental preparations, preliminary client assessment, note-taking, and altar maintenance may be less familiar.

I hope you'll be inspired to review these strategies for practice, and to reconsider the best ways to treat each and every person on an individualized basis.

The treatment room

The treatment room is a sacred healing space. It should be equipped and maintained in special ways and provide solace and refuge to those who enter. An element of visual containment and privacy is important, so always keep the space protected, secure, and comfortable. For those who practice in the same room all the time, try to use that place only for massage treatments, yoga, meditation, and similar activities. Keep the room clean, and always remove shoes before entering.

Some therapists travel to offer massage to clients in their homes, or they work in several places and constantly transport a mat and other materials from one place to another. If this is the case, then a separate bag for accessories may be used, and each space can be prepared accordingly before the start of a treatment. In multipurpose spaces, a private area can be demarcated with a folding screen, a curtain, or a draped piece of fabric.

The floor mat

The mat you use for your floor-based treatments is one of the most important components of an effective treatment. It should be firm yet comfortable, as large as possible, kept clean at all times, and covered with a fresh sheet for each session.

Whether your mat is kept in a daily practice room, or you use a portable mat, make sure that it is large and firm. Grooved cotton mats aren't practical for Thai massage, because knees and feet can't establish a firm grip on a grooved surface. Also avoid using mats that are sold in several sections or those that are connected on the bottom but have spaces on the top. Finally, don't use futons made for sofa beds because these are usually too thick and too soft for efficient therapeutic treatment.

Many of the mats that are commercially sold for floor-based bodywork are too small, and

Your altar

If possible, and in accordance with Thai tradition, your space should contain an altar, even if it is only a small table or a shelf where a few objects of personal and spiritual significance are kept. Keep it ahead of you in a corner of the room so you can see it as you work with clients in supine position. A good height is 4–5 feet (1.2–1.5 meters). Thai massage altars usually contain statues or images of the Buddha and Jivaka, as well as candles, flowers, and other items. Photos of important teachers and family members (especially deceased people) are common, as well as a small cup of water and symbolic food, such as uncooked rice or a piece of fruit. It's a good idea to light a candle for each client and to position it at the head of the altar. A tea light placed inside a clear votive cup works well, because each one lasts about two hours, and extinguishes itself neatly in its aluminum cup. If you wish to follow tradition, don't extinguish a candle flame with your breath. Instead, wet your fingers to put it out, or wave your hand or a piece of paper near the flame.

For the purposes of Thai massage practice, it's important to have a Jivaka image or statue on the altar, since Jivaka is the ancestor spirit of medicine and healing. If you are inspired by the Buddha and by his words and actions, you may also place a Thai Buddha statue or image on the altar. Buddha is not a God, and Buddhism is more like a way of life rather than a religion, so his presence doesn't really interfere with other religious beliefs you or others may have.

On a Thai altar, the main figure is always placed in the center as far back as possible. If you use a Buddha image on your altar, it must be centered, placed as far back as possible, and the top of his head must be slightly higher than anything else on the altar. If, for example, your Buddha statue is smaller than another statue or item, simply place it on a stand or on a small box so it appears higher. In addition to centrality, depth, and height, odd-number configurations are also important, with objects in groups of 3, 5, or 7 in front of and alongside the central images. This is where you might keep photos of teachers and parents, mementos, a small candle, and offerings of food, water, and flowers.



LEFT: a small Jivaka altar on a shelf RIGHT: a larger Buddha/Jivaka altar.
Note the symmetry, depth of central figures, and items grouped in odd numbers.

Pre-session preparations

Preparing the space

Each day, take time to clean and prepare the practice room. In addition to the occasional chores of sweeping, vacuuming, and cleaning, allow a few minutes each morning to arrange the mat, change the sheets, and prepare the room with drinking water and materials for the day's treatments. If you work with herbal compresses, they should already be warming in the steamer. Finally, spend a few moments preparing your altar, and take time to center yourself and establish a spiritual connection there. Do all of these things long before your first client arrives.

Preparing your body

After the space is prepared, wash your body and engage in physical movement and exercise. Brush your teeth and wash your hands, face, and feet before you meet a client, and wash your hands again before you work with another client on the same day.

Move and open your body with stretching exercises, and get in touch with your breath. Slow hatha yoga is an excellent way to open your body and bring awareness to subtle movements. Whenever possible, try to engage in yoga postures that focus on strengthening the core. Awareness and control of your *hara*, the central area of the body at the lower abdomen and lower back, is one of the most valuable and important tools for working in Thai massage and other bodywork and movement therapies. This area is the point of origin for all rocking, bending, pulling, palming, thumbing, lifting, and compression. Spend a few minutes before each session to direct attention to your core muscles as you twist and hold your body while breathing deeply. Cobras, plows, forward and backward bends, leg lifts, and slow and deep twists and rotations are beneficial in preparing yourself before you greet a client. Thai *reusidat ton* techniques are also helpful, two of which are shown below.



Butterfly folding pose



Guidelines for Effortless and Effective Work

*Listen to your material with respect, patience and a little imagination
and it will reveal its hidden wisdom. Every material knows how it can
be an ultimate gift to the world.*

— MARCEL WANDERS —

Some students of massage and bodywork learn many techniques over a short period of time. Naturally, they are eager to use them, but using too many techniques in a treatment can sometimes interfere with the overall healing effect.

In the healing arts, techniques are tools to reach a deeper purpose. It's important to have a lot of tools in the "toolbox," but highly skilled carpenters can create solid and beautiful structures using only a few simple instruments. Once we understand the most efficient ways of doing things, we can focus our attention on the whole person, and engage in a deeper process of healing.

Movement and ease

Work from your core, and use your bodyweight

To work efficiently in Thai massage, a therapist learns to project energy from his core and he relies on his bodyweight to apply pressure; I have seen very small Thai women exert enormous pressure on large Western men simply because they know how to project their bodyweight. Floor-based bodywork allows us to work at levels that are appropriate for all clients, from light to very deep, without tiring or straining muscles. A Thai session can be relatively effortless when you learn to use your bodyweight and utilize gravity efficiently.

Let's use the example of a traditional Thai shoulder press. The client is in sitting position, and the therapist lightly supports the client's back with his legs as he presses downward onto the receiver's shoulders with his palms.

To take advantage of bodyweight for this technique, your elbows are locked, your arms and back are straight, and the fleshy parts of your palms make contact with the receiver's shoulder muscles. Your energy originates in your *hara*, runs through your entire body, and exits at your hands as you sink your weight downward toward the mat. Whether making contact with your hands, feet, elbows, or knees, don't use your muscles; always use gravity or bodyweight.

Side-to-side movements

When you rock from side to side, you will usually be kneeling, semi-kneeling, or standing. In a kneeling position, the tops of your toes usually rest downward against the floor, but you may occasionally flex them backward for extra height or rigidity. Keep your back straight, your chest open, and your head and neck relaxed. Don't raise or lower your shoulders as you rock from side to side. Imagine that your navel is connected to the earth with a tight string, and move your trunk from one side to the other side like a pendulum.

Forward and backward movements

Forward and backward rocking is often done kneeling or semi-kneeling, though some techniques may be done in sitting or standing position. When kneeling, your knees can be close together or farther apart, but keep the tops of your feet flat against the floor to get the widest range of motion. If you're half-kneeling, lunge forward with your bodyweight, and return as you inhale. For standing-position techniques, place one leg ahead of the other and lunge forward in a *t'ai chi*-type of movement. Keep your back and shoulders straight and your core relaxed but strong. Move your body from front to back, like a rocking chair.

Spiral movements

While kneeling or semi-kneeling, allow yourself to slowly gyrate in a spiral movement as you move your partner's body in certain ways. This type of movement doesn't need to be exaggerated to be effective, since even a slight circular movement can transfer a sense of peace and comfort to the receiver. Try to vary the rotations by moving in both clockwise and counter-clockwise directions. Your range of movement can be loose and wide, or firm and tight. It all depends on the technique you are using, the part of the body you are addressing, and the size and height of your partner's body relative to your own body.



Move your entire body to execute most techniques:
forward and back, in a spiral, and alternating from left to right.

Continually move your body position

Physical proximity maximizes the use of your bodyweight, and allows you to project your *hara* to the parts of your body that make contact with the receiver. If you feel that you are stretching to reach a certain part of someone's body, immediately change your body position and move closer. You should be moving your body and changing your body position constantly throughout the course of each session. Try to always stay directly above (or

perpendicular to) a particular area so you can apply your pressure as effortlessly as possible. Don't remain in a sitting position for a long time when you work with your hands. When you sit, your reach is limited, and it's often difficult to get enough leverage to work in an ergonomic way. Avoid sitting when you work with your arms, hands, or elbows. Kneeling, half-kneeling, or standing positions are better.

It seems logical to always move and rock your body as you work, but many people forget to do it. Let's use the example of thumbing or palming a lateral leg from a perpendicular kneeling position. You are kneeling perpendicular to a lateral leg, with your arms outstretched and your elbows locked. If you're using alternating palm pressure or thumb pressure, you will be rocking your *hara* slightly from side to side as you work; you rock to the left to press with your left hand, and you shift your energy to the right to press with your right hand.

Working in this way, you may be able to work the bottom of the leg from the ankle to the knee without moving the position of your knees, but in order to go any higher, you have to physically move your body and your knees higher. If you don't do this, the pressure you give with your hands will be disconnected from your core. So as you palm-press or thumb-press, slide your knees incrementally higher toward the client's abdomen as you move from the lower leg to the upper leg. As you shift your weight onto one knee, quickly bring your other knee a little closer. Continue to move in this way, rocking and "knee-walking" up and down and alongside the body, so the pressure of your extended arms is always directly in front of your *hara*. Try to coordinate smooth body movement with your rocking so the receiver feels your energy in a continuous, uninterrupted flow.

As another example, let's consider simultaneous palming of the feet and medial legs. You are kneeling at the receiver's feet, and her legs are open. As you give simultaneous palm-presses, you'll be rocking slightly forward and backward. To work the feet, you will probably be kneeling and sitting on the backs of your lower legs and heels in order to obtain the best angle.



As you rock forward and move upward with both hands, however, you have to raise your sitting position in order for your *hara* to be directly behind your palm pressure. Raise your body upward, and lean forward as you go higher up the legs, and fall backward slightly to assume a lower kneeling position to work the calves, ankles, and feet. Use your core strength to change your kneeling position as you work.

Work only within your reach

When I first began to study traditional Thai massage, the sequences I learned contained some postures and positions that didn't feel good to me. The techniques were numbered and taught in rote fashion without giving much consideration to relative body type. I remember one technique that always bothered me. With the receiver in supine position, you place your outside foot against his thigh, and you bend his leg inward so his sole touches his other thigh. With your foot wedged between his calf and his thigh, you extend your arms, lean forward and begin to work on his uppermost leg lines with your fingers.

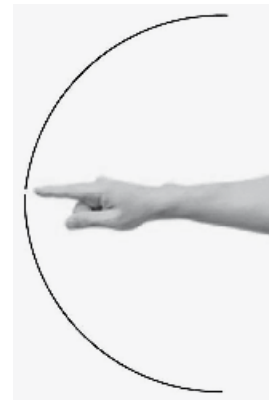
This technique was part of a fixed sequence, and everyone was supposed to do it, but my legs seemed too long to work on many of my fellow students. I couldn't project my body forward enough to be comfortable because my foot was wedged in the receiver's leg. That particular technique may have worked well for two height-appropriate people, but not when people of different sizes were working together. My back hurt every time I did it, but I was never encouraged to move my body freely as I worked, or to remove my wedged foot so I could reach farther with my hands. I wasn't shown how to work those same leg lines in a different way, and I wasn't given permission to simply avoid using techniques that didn't feel right.

Always avoid using techniques that feel uncomfortable or cause strain to your body. When you are comfortable, your work becomes easier and more effective. Move your body as you work, and work only within your reach.

The index finger rule

A good way to determine the maximum range of your working area is to draw an imaginary arc in the air with your finger above the client's body. Try it now. Imagine yourself working with someone in supine position, doing some foot-palming. From a kneeling position, your toes are flat against the floor, you are sitting lightly on your heels, and your face is looking at the receiver's head (toward 12 o'clock). Now extend one arm with a pointed index finger, and draw an arc in the air, beginning on one side of your body and ending on the other side (from 3 o'clock to 9 o'clock). This is your maximum range when you are kneeling and sitting on your heels in this position.

Now change your kneeling position slightly. Move your body upward, and curl your toes backward for support and extra height, and kneel in a higher position without touching your heels. Draw another arc, and notice that you have a wider range. Now try it again in another position. Maybe come into a half-kneeling position, and again draw the imaginary arc.



Whether you are kneeling low or high, or half-kneeling, or sitting, or half-standing, or standing, the imaginary arc you draw always shows you the maximum area in which you can safely work without having to radically change your body position. Whenever you touch areas of the body that are outside this arc, you absolutely move your body and change your position. Remember, don't strain or overstretch when you work. Instead, move your body and your *hara* closer.

Body clock and angle of approach

In the previous paragraphs, we visualized an arc to determine the maximum working area on a receiver's body. Now let's imagine the hours on an imaginary clock to determine the best angle of approach for each technique we use, and for each part of the body we touch.

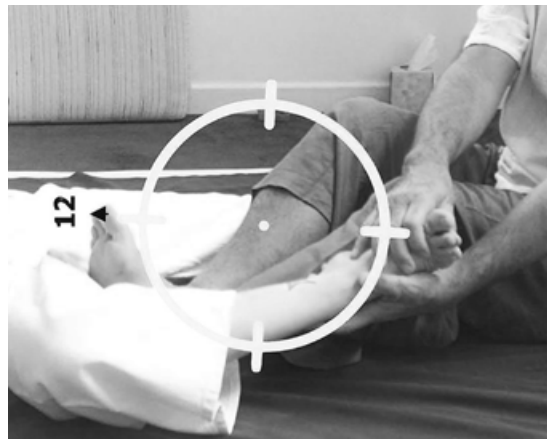
First, let's consider some examples: If the receiver is lying on her back, 12 o'clock is at the top of her head, and her feet are at 6 o'clock. If you are kneeling at her feet, 12 o'clock for you is also straight ahead of you, looking directly at her head. But when you move your body position, you will face a different hour on the clock. For example, to palm-press her left thigh, you may be facing 10 o'clock, and to palm-press her right thigh you may be facing 2 o'clock.

With this visualization in your mind, try to imagine which hour of the clock you face as you work on different parts of the body with different techniques. Which angle of approach will be most ergonomic and sustainable for you? Examine the techniques you currently use, and make sure that you are fully comfortable when you do them. If you're not comfortable, or if your *hara* is locked in place, or if you feel unstable, see if it becomes easier by changing your body position or your angle of approach on the clock. It is extremely important for skilled bodyworkers to think in this way. Always assume an angle toward the receiver's body that will be most comfortable and most sustainable. When the therapist is comfortable, the receiver will feel supported and nurtured.

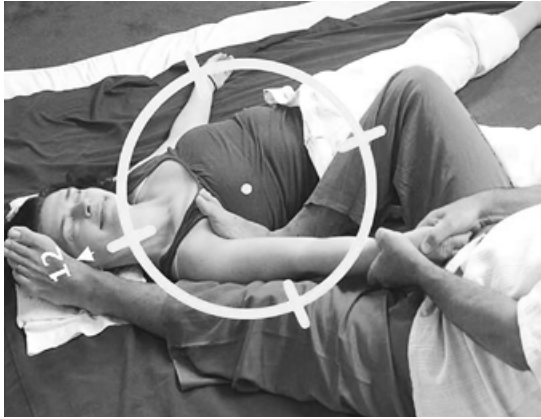
In the photos below, the receiver's head points to 12 o'clock. Toward which hour on the clock should the therapist's body face?



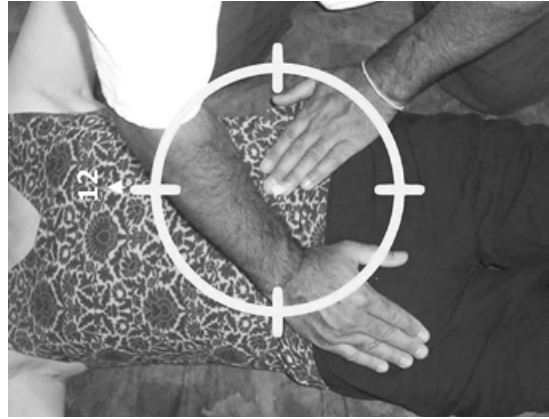
The therapist should face 5 o'clock



The therapist should face 10 o'clock



The therapist should face 2 o'clock



The therapist should face 9 o'clock

Protect your wrists

When you apply downward pressure or sustained compression with your palms, and when you use palm-walking or thumb-walking techniques, always keep your wrists at a comfortable and sustainable angle. In most cases an angle of 80 degrees is fine, but anything beyond that could be dangerous over a period of time. I've known Thai massage therapists who haven't learned this rule and who later develop pinched nerves, cysts on their wrists, or stretched ligaments.

Be safe, and never bend your lower arms at or beyond a 90-degree angle to your hands. Don't lean your shoulders and upper torso beyond the position of your hands. Maintain your bodyweight slightly behind your hand placement, keep your arm rotation comfortable and sustainable, lock your elbows, and shift your *hara* forward or downward to apply pressure. With palm-pressing techniques, shift the energy from your core through your arms and then let it flow to the center of your palm. The forward or downward pressure you apply with your hands should always have its origin in your *hara*. Never use the muscles in your shoulders or your arms. Remember to keep your arms straight, shoulders relaxed, and elbows locked whenever possible. Change your body positioning if you get tired during sustained application of pressure, and always keep your arms in a comfortable position. Move from your center, keep your back straight, and use gravity to fall forward or to sink downward in order to apply pressure. Finally, consider using more techniques with your feet instead of your palms.



A good angle



Too far away



Danger, angle is too sharp

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Assessment

*It is far more important to know which person the disease has
than which disease the person has.*

— HIPPOCRATES —

When you visit a doctor because you don't feel well, a nurse takes your temperature, measures your blood pressure and weight, and in some cases your bodily fluids are analyzed. The doctor looks at the results and examines you physically before considering a treatment. When your car makes a strange noise or when the engine doesn't start in the morning, an auto mechanic searches for all the potential causes of the problem before beginning the repair. When an inspector reviews a house before you buy or sell it, he takes a thorough look at the structure, plumbing, and electrical system; looks for leaks in the roof; and checks the basement. What do you do before you begin to work with a client in your bodywork practice?

A complete and thorough assessment takes many factors into consideration, and elements of the process take place before, during, and after each treatment. Advanced therapists address each person through visual inspection, by taking note of blocked or tense areas of the body and recognizing instances of body language and body memory. In traditional Thai massage, basic knowledge of Thai element theory also serves as an important assessment tool. Compassionate assessment gives way to a natural flow of treatment based on each person's needs, not on fixed sequences or preconceived notions and strategies. This chapter offers information and suggestions about client assessment and discusses visual, sensory, and physical signals to help therapists work in sensitive and efficient ways.

The importance of client records

In major forms of medical treatment and therapy, maintaining accurate client records and health histories isn't optional; it is required. I am concerned when I meet bodywork professionals who don't keep detailed notes of their sessions or maintain health histories of their clients. More teachers and schools should stress the importance of maintaining client records for massage and bodywork. Client health history forms and session notes are valuable tools that can take your practice to new levels of depth, growth, and professionalism.

Health history form

The first time you see a new client, make sure he completes a client intake form, and allow some time to discuss his general health before you begin a session. Health history forms

Visual observation provides information about the states and conditions of others, but it can also be misleading. Palms that are slightly rotated inward or elbows that are slightly bent may indicate tension or restriction in the lateral arms, but they could also be ways in which a person's arms rest comfortably in supine position.

As an example, my own feet appear asymmetrical because the lateral aspect of my right foot rests much closer to the mat than the other foot. Observing my feet in supine position, you might suspect that my left leg is holding tension or that it is less relaxed than the other leg. Based on this visual observation you might spend extra time trying to relax and open my left leg. The truth of the matter is that when I was born, the doctor twisted my right ankle as he pulled me out of my mother's body. As a result I wore a foot brace for the first year of my life to try to reposition and reset the foot so it would point correctly inward. But it didn't work—to this day, when I lie on my back, my right foot opens more laterally than my left foot, giving the false impression that my other leg is less relaxed. Because of situations like these, it's important to validate visual perceptions by comparing them with the way the body responds when it is touched, compressed, or stretched.

When a new or returning client enters the practice room, there may be a short discussion about how the person is feeling that day, and what, if any, could be the goals of the treatment. Soon after the client reclines on the mat, and sometimes throughout the course of treatment, the client may display body language. Our interpretations of these indicators of physical and emotional conditions, and the ways we work with them as we progress through a session, are extremely important. The sensitivity with which we work is a key to cultivating good relations and a sense of ease with others.

Tune your instrument

A thorough visual and physical assessment of the body is fundamental before each session. Before you begin working, look carefully at the person before you. How is the body displayed on the mat, and what might it be saying? Take a moment to adjust the body: straighten the head, pull on both arms to adjust the shoulders and then reposition them on the mat, and open or close the legs to a more comfortable distance from each other. During the treatment, after a specific technique is performed, notice how the body displays itself when it is returned to the mat, and make any additional adjustments as you proceed through the session.

Just as you tune a musical instrument before you play a song, and you re-tune it whenever necessary during a performance, it's equally important to continually straighten and align the body as you work, and to take note of any recurring patterns of body displacement.

Body memory

Compassion and patience are important tools when we work with clients who unconsciously hold tension in certain parts of their bodies, especially their legs and arms. Before executing techniques on a specific part of the body, make sure that the area is relaxed. If it isn't, your pressure and techniques may be uncomfortable or met with resistance, and your work will be less effective.

Try to not be frustrated by a client's inability to fully relax. I remember how I would become annoyed sometimes during the first few years of my practice. I would bend a client's leg, and place his foot on the mat with his knee facing upward in order to work on the leg lines with both hands. Sometimes, instead of remaining loose and falling into my hands, the leg would remain as hard as a rock, rigid and immobile. I found myself thinking: *Why can't this person relax? How am I supposed to do this technique if he won't relax his leg?* Sometimes, I would ask the person to relax his leg. That would temporarily address the problem, but later it would get stiff again, and I would become frustrated once more.

These situations still occasionally occur with clients, but now I welcome them as opportunities for me to practice compassion and patience. I might integrate a variety of techniques, such as percussion, thumbing, rotations, stretches, and rocking, to coax the body memory to relax before I return to the original technique. And sometimes, I decide to not use that original technique, because I sense that the person isn't ready to receive it.

Let's return to the example of a bent leg that stays rigid on the mat, with the knee facing upward. If your intention is to encourage the leg to relax and open laterally into your hand, try this: Hold the leg slightly above the knee with your outside hand, push it quickly inward (medially), and then remove your hand to catch it when it snaps back. Make sure the person feels your hand on their lateral leg each time the leg bounces back to its "holding" position. You might tap the leg lightly a few times when you realize it hasn't fully opened into a relaxed state.

Without ever saying a word, if you do this several times and "catch" the leg each time it bounces back, the receiver will eventually understand that he is holding tension there, and he will relax his leg so it opens more widely. This holding pattern may recur, however, so be prepared to continue this pushing-and-catching game whenever necessary. Often, you will notice people smile when they realize that they are holding tension there, and sometimes they will even make a comment. Their awareness is the gateway to their relaxation.

When we verbally ask or tell clients to relax too often, it can make them feel pressured. In some cases, it may bolster feelings of inadequacy or even contribute to continued holding patterns. By using nonverbal tricks like the one described above, we avoid all of that, and instead help to make them aware of their own tensions so they can dissipate them from within.

The switch

Sometimes, on rare occasions, or with clients who consistently hold unneeded tension, we can remind them about their internal "switch," a metaphor for a subconscious trigger that makes some people become tense or hold tension in certain areas of their bodies. Most often, people don't even realize that their bodies aren't relaxed. That's when the switch metaphor can be helpful.

When all else fails, softly speak to your client, and bring awareness to the part of his body that is holding tension. Ask him if he realizes that he is holding tension there. When he answers yes, ask him to try to override the holding spot by finding a mental "switch" in his brain and turning it off. Remind him that he doesn't need to hold onto that tension,

and that every time he notices it, he can turn off the switch and allow his body to fully relax. Continue to use coaxing or percussive techniques as he becomes more aware of the moments when he retains tension, and as he learns to turn off his internal switch. When we encourage people to be more aware of their subconscious reactions, they can tune in to their own patterns of holding and tension and become more calm and relaxed in their daily lives. This is a great gift.

Assessment through body language

Conventional body language research is based mostly on social, emotional, and psychological factors. Detectives and private investigators are trained to track eye movement when they ask questions because they know it is very difficult to lie while maintaining direct eye contact. Hands and fingers are also sometimes subconsciously placed in front of the mouth when a person is not telling the truth or is withholding information. When a man and a woman meet at a bar, the man might subconsciously open his legs if he is attracted to her; and if the woman is not interested, she might subconsciously cross her legs.

These types of body language have been widely studied in situations involving social and verbal interaction, but little information has been available for situations in which a person's eyes are closed, or when a body is inert, or when there is little or no verbal interaction between the two people. Clearly, however, it's extremely important to assess each person in this way before beginning a bodywork session, and to do so continually during the course of each treatment. When we understand someone's limitations and emotional conditions, it's easier to recognize protection areas or techniques that may make a person feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. Work skillfully when you observe physical displays, coordinate all movements with breathing patterns, and use strategies to avoid breaking protection barriers.

In addition to psychological and emotional indicators, clients may also display body language that points to specific physical conditions. A wince in the forehead might be an indicator of pain, or it may indicate that the therapist's pressure is too strong. A long, audible exhale can signal deep relaxation, while short and fast breaths may mean the person is under duress. Keeping in mind all of the above factors, here are some ways in which a client's body language may help to guide a therapist during the course of a treatment.

The head

Very few emotions or sensations are displayed with the head when a person is in a static, relaxed position. When broad pressure is applied to the shoulders, some people may move their heads from side to side as they attempt to release their own tension in counterbalance to the therapist's pressure. Clients can involuntarily wrinkle the brow in response to sensations or emotions such as fear, pain, or another form of concern. Foreheads often rise straight up toward the scalp if the emotion that surfaces is surprise. Sadness and grief are sometimes displayed by a wrinkle that engages the muscle between the brows and pulls it downward toward the nose. The nostrils often flare outward with this same movement.

FIRE: *fai* – ไฟ

Fire is passion, the great motivating force, and it helps people to achieve their goals. Excess fire in the body results in an accumulation of heat, so a person may sweat or urinate more often. Skin may erupt in rashes, pimples or acne; a person may get feverish, feel agitated, raise his voice, or have a reactive temperament. The tissues of the body may also become inflamed. A lack of fire in the body results in cold sensations. As the body tries to hold onto heat, there is a decrease in sweating, urination, and bowel elimination. The skin may take on a gray or pale tone, food may be poorly digested, and the mind may have difficulty processing new information.

WATER: *naam* – น้ำ

Water is the glue that connects and combines things. It is an important element for compassion, healing, understanding, and much more. Agitated water element can result in intense emotions, depression, obesity, reproductive problems, colds, and respiratory conditions. A person's mood might also be altered, which could result in them feeling confused, emotional, and indecisive. Digestion may become impaired, appetite may be reduced, and food may move more slowly through the digestive system. *Naam* that is weakened may bring about conditions such as dehydration, dry skin, weight loss, and a reduction in urination and sweating.

EARTH: *din* – ดิน

Earth element manifests in all that is tangible. It brings about loyalty, grounding, strength, and a compassionate and balanced nature. *Din* is the densest and heaviest element, the last to change in the progression of disease, and it does not go out of balance easily. When it does become imbalanced, serious conditions may result, such as cancer, loss of muscle mass, osteoporosis, reduction of body fat, and organ damage. An imbalance of earth element can lead someone to be stubborn yet unable to stand up to the challenges of the world. When earth element is balanced and working in harmony with the other elements, we feel confident, full of conviction, and open to life, but when earth element dominates, we may become rigid and resistant to change.

SPACE: *agaat taat* – อวกาศ

Space is emptiness, the most esoteric and most subtle of the elements. It is the place where all the elements interact. If you imagine a painting with many different colors, shapes, and textures, space is the canvas. Space is the infinite sky, where heat, cold, rain, wind, movement, and planets coexist and interact. For a bodyworker, working with space during treatments means sinking into layers of the receiver's body; working on one layer at a time; applying and holding pressure at an appropriate depth; allowing thumbs, fingers, palms, and feet to gradually pass through fascia and muscles; and maintaining awareness and consideration of the emptiness between all matter.

Thai massage guidelines for elemental balance

Here are some examples of techniques and concepts that can be used with people who have an excess of water, fire, or wind.

WATER PREDOMINANCE – for clients who manifest a state of agitated or increased water

- **Twisting techniques:** In supine position, you might use a cross-leg spinal twist, or twist the legs inward and outward while holding the feet. In seated position, you might use any of the upper torso twists common in Thai massage.
- **Stretching techniques:** Most traditional Thai stretching techniques may successfully be used for “watery” people. In supine position, you might pull on the legs and arms and hold them in place for a few seconds. In supine or seated position, you might stretch the neck while pulling the arm or compressing the shoulder. In prone position, you might lift the legs upward or bend them toward the person’s head, and use assisted cobra techniques.
- **Heat:** Use dry heat therapies, and “hot” balms, compresses, and liniments. Hot rubbing balms generally include ingredients such as ginger, *plai* (Thai ginger), eucalyptus, camphor, borneol camphor, clove, and turmeric.
- **Other:** Work at a regular pace. Whenever possible, try to work toward the center of the body; for example, when working on the extremities. Be careful when applying pressure, since the skin of “watery” people can sometimes bruise easily. When applying pressure, sink in slowly and incrementally through the layers.³

FIRE PREDOMINANCE – for clients who manifest a state of agitated or increased fire

- **Techniques:** Make sure to work the *sen* lines thoroughly with palming and thumbing protocols. Stimulate the lines with plucking techniques (*jap sen*). Cupping and scraping techniques may also be beneficial, as well as compressions.
- **Cool:** Use “cool” salves, compresses, and liniments. Balms with herbs such as lemongrass, kaffir lime, pennywort, peppermint, and plantain leaf are considered “cool,” and are used to help reduce fire.
- **Other:** Work at a slow to moderate pace. Try to work away from the center of the body, so as to dissipate the fire. Avoid using quick, jerky techniques, because if you do, more wind may be added to the existing fire. Instead, hold and compress blocked areas for longer periods of time.

WIND PREDOMINANCE – for clients who manifest a state of agitated or increased wind

- **Techniques:** Work sequentially, but avoid using techniques that move the body too quickly. Use slow, grounding techniques and compressions. Integrate traction and suspension techniques whenever appropriate.
- **Heat:** Use “hot” balms, oils, compresses, and liniments. Hot herbal compresses are particularly beneficial.
- **Other:** Work at a slow pace, and use slow rhythms and meditative rocking



Breath – The Key to Movement and Ease

*As we free our breath, we relax our emotions
and we let go of our body tensions.*

— GAY HENDRICKS —

Breath is the most necessary and most important of all the elements required for life. We can survive without food for over a month and without water for about a week, but we can't survive without breath for more than a few minutes.

Breath is the bridge to interconnectedness—to us, to others, and to the universe—and is considered by many as an extension of spirituality. People, animals, plants, and trees all breathe, and since all forms of life are connected to each other, then our entire planet, as one organism, is constantly breathing. With this in mind, let's take a look at how and why we breathe, how we can increase awareness of our breath, and ways in which we can work with the breath of others in dynamic bodywork.

The exercises and techniques presented here don't come directly from Thai tradition, though some of them have correlations to other Eastern and Western traditions. I share this information with you because I have found that a large number of massage therapists, physical therapists, and other bodyworkers have little or no awareness of their breath as they work. Furthermore, not enough attention is paid to the breathing patterns of those with whom they work.

I believe that a heightened awareness of breath is essential for any type of healing art or movement therapy, and is especially critical in floor-based dynamic modalities such as traditional Thai massage, shiatsu, and others. It's clear to me that when common-sense breathing concepts are applied to any physical movement, quality and ease are enhanced. I hope you will be inspired to dramatically raise your awareness of breath in daily life, and by extension, in all the activities you do, including massage and bodywork.

Understanding breath

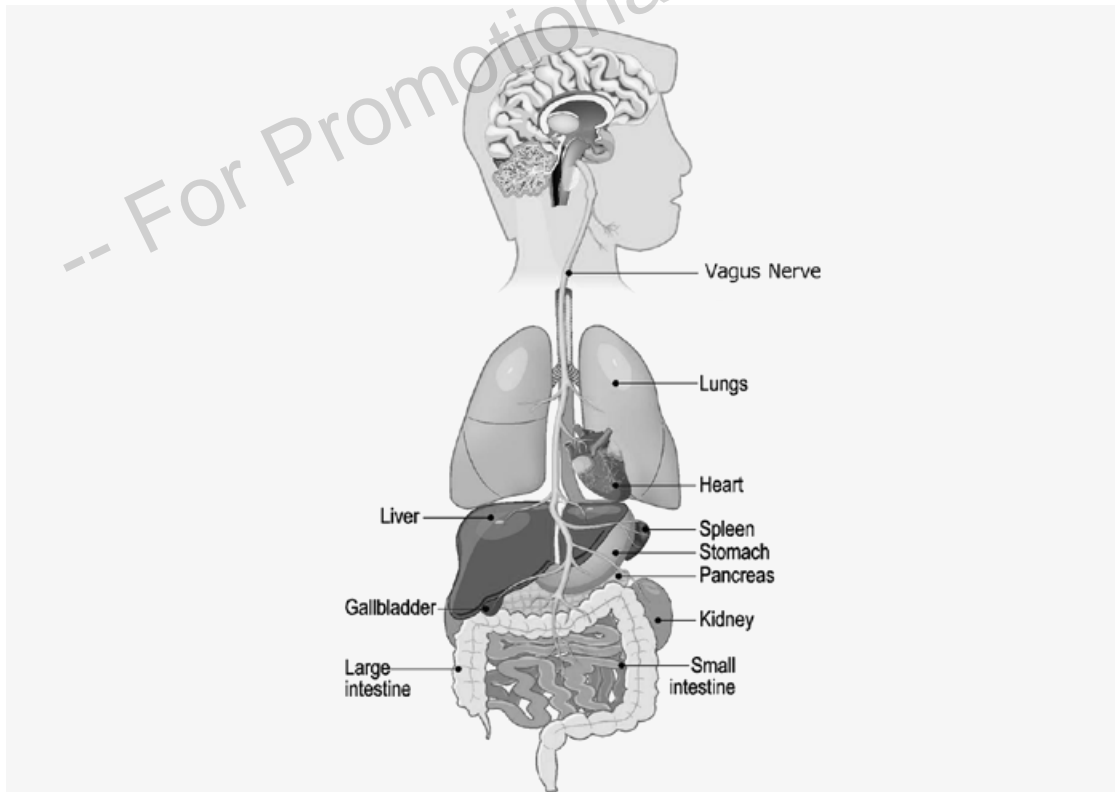
When we breathe, we exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide. The air we inhale contains around 21 percent oxygen, but we exhale up to 18 percent of it, and the remaining amount is enough to maintain proper body functions. At the same time, the air we inhale contains 0.04 percent carbon dioxide, and the air we exhale contains between 3 and 5 percent of this same gas. In order to survive, we must take in fresh oxygen, and we must let out that carbon

dioxide. Although full, complete, and easy breathing helps to maintain optimal physical and mental health, we humans often don't breathe properly, deeply enough, or in a relaxed way.

Have you ever watched a baby breathe while sleeping . . . or a dog or cat? They breathe more fully and more easily than we adults do. Their abdomens expand and move when they inhale, and they relax and deflate when they exhale. That is not always the case among adults in our modern, stress-filled world. As we get older, we transcend the innocence and purity of childhood, take on responsibilities, commute to work, drive in traffic, care for our families, pay our bills, and as we go about our daily lives we unconsciously develop breath restrictions and tension in our bodies. If breath awareness were taught as a subject in school, we would probably be living healthier lives, and our world might be a less aggressive and more peaceful place.

Stress, emotion, breath, and relaxation

Breathing is affected by our emotional states, so when we are stressed, worried, angered or frightened, we often breathe irregularly, take shallow breaths, and even hold our breath. Sometimes, stress or anxiety can affect breathing in ways that go unnoticed by us. We may not realize that our breathing is being compromised, and if we become overwhelmed by emotion or stress and don't take care to breathe properly, a condition known as a "panic attack" may develop.



this can help to prevent or minimize a wide range of ailments including stroke, heart disease, and cerebral aneurisms.

Another interesting mind-body awareness exercise demonstrates how thoughts can influence our nervous system and make us feel either nervous and tense or calm and relaxed:

- Get into a comfortable position that doesn't compromise your ability to breathe deeply. The yoga child's pose is excellent for this exercise, but you can also do it by sitting in a chair, bending your upper torso forward, and resting your forearms and elbows on your legs.
- Take some time to become fully comfortable and relaxed, and begin to take note of your breathing. Feel the weight of your body against the ground or against the chair.
- Become aware of how your abdomen and/or your chest expand when you breathe in, and also take note of the speed and the frequency of your breaths. Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable.
- Now quickly think of something that makes you frightened. Bring all your attention to this frightening situation, or recall an incident in your life when you were extremely frightened. Imagine it visually, and stay with that feeling and image. Got it? Now immediately switch all your attention back to your breathing patterns.
- Did you notice any changes in your breathing? Could you sense any restrictions or impingements in your chest, shoulders, neck, or abdomen? By imagining something frightening, could you detect a change in the rate or depth of your breathing or an increase of tension somewhere in your body?

Just as you can alter your breath with negative imagery, you can also affect it with positive imagery. Instead of a scary or angry thought, try this same exercise by immediately switching your attention to a relaxing, beautiful, or loving thought. You may also notice a change in your breathing . . . probably a positive one. Once we understand how breathing is directly linked to our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, we can use this awareness to benefit ourselves and those around us. This knowledge is especially helpful when we work with others in the healing arts.

A turning point

I had an opening of awareness about my breath many years ago that made a serious impact on the way I breathe today. It happened at a busy intersection of two streets not far from where I lived. I owned a manual shift car at the time, and very often I had to make a left turn at that corner. Over the years, I noticed that I became anxious as soon as that intersection came into view. If the light was red, I'd feel fine. I'd simply stop at the light, disengage the clutch, put the car in first gear, turn the wheel to the left, and wait for the light to turn green—no problem. But when the light was green or yellow, I would become anxious; there was something about that particular intersection that made me upset, and I didn't know why.

Then one morning, just as I approached that corner, the light began to turn from green to yellow. In order to proceed through the yellow light, I had to do so many things at once: step on the brake to slow the car, engage the clutch, downshift to a lower gear, and turn the wheel to the left—all at the same time. I found myself getting nervous again. Then suddenly I realized that I had begun to hold my breath just as I approached the intersection. I was doing all these things—the brake, the clutch, the shift, and the steering wheel—while I was holding my breath! As soon as I cleared the intersection after the left turn, I gasped out an exhale and quickly inhaled deeply. This is what I had been doing for years, every single time I came to that intersection. No wonder I disliked that corner and always felt nervous and anxious when the light was green or yellow!

Once I realized that the reason I was anxious was because I was holding my breath (and that the reason I was holding my breath was because I was anxious), I was able to train my mind to signal my body to breathe as I drove through the intersection and made a left turn. I remember on a few occasions actually talking to myself out loud in the car. “Come on, don’t hold your breath; just keep breathing, and it’ll all be fine.” Even now, many years later, when I pass that intersection, I sometimes smile inwardly and remember the big life lesson I learned there. That one experience helped to catapult me into a higher awareness of my breath; not only when I’m driving but when I’m walking, talking, bending, sitting, and twisting; when I’m doing yoga, riding a bicycle, exercising, and meditating; and of course, when I’m practicing massage and bodywork.

Try to examine your breath when you are in stressful situations. How is your breathing restricted when you’re nervous, anxious, or annoyed? Do you find yourself holding your breath when you do certain things? Once you realize how your breath is impacted by stress and anxiety, you can begin to retrain yourself to breathe better and live a less stressful, more enjoyable life.

Working with breath

Train your breath to coincide with body movements

Before we begin to work with other people’s breath, we need to raise awareness of how we ourselves breathe in situations involving body movement, weight displacement, stretching, lifting, and other daily activities.

Take some time to examine your own breathing patterns and see how little or how much attention you pay to your breath. If you can, test yourself now as you go through the following motions and movements. Examine your breathing patterns as you do (or as you imagine doing) the following actions:

- Bend down and tie one shoe, then stand up again after you tie it. (Come on, try it now.)
- Get out of bed in the morning, or stand up from a sitting position on a chair or a sofa.
- Lift a piece of heavy luggage and place it on a chair (or onto a conveyor belt at the airport).



exhale



exhale



inhale



inhale

Coordinate techniques with the receiver's breathing patterns

One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to work mechanically with clients, without being fully aware of their breathing patterns. It wouldn't be comfortable or effective, for example, if you compressed someone's abdomen while they were mid-way through an inhalation. That could create a dynamic of struggle and tension, not one of ease and tranquility. Because of this, try to "lock in" to your clients' breath from the very first moment, as soon as they lie down. Before you even touch them, study the rise and fall of their abdomens, observe their breathing patterns, and make a plan to execute your movements in coordination with their breath. From time to time during the session, check a person's breathing first before you move or apply pressure. Once you are locked in to your client's breath, then you can concentrate on your own breath.

Whether you begin by palming the feet or by working acupuncture points, time your first techniques with your partner's exhalations, and try to maintain this awareness throughout the entire session. Most people, even on a subconscious level, will recognize your coordina-

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for example, but when you release the client's body to the mat, you use synchronized breathing. In this scenario, the client exhales while she is raised into the cobra position. The therapist inhales as he lifts her into position, since the fresh oxygen provides strength and stability as he engages his core muscles. Both people, however, should exhale when the client is lowered to the floor. Since there is a period of non-movement while the client is held in position, the therapist can easily switch his breathing to match the breathing of the client, so that both people can exhale as the body is lowered to the floor.

Examine the way you breathe as you execute the techniques you learn from your teachers. If you haven't received adequate instruction in breathwork for Thai massage, try to follow the general guidelines in this chapter as you work and learn from your own experimentation. Play with your breath and see what works best for you and for your client, and above all, make sure you don't subconsciously hold your breath as you work.

Which way should both people be breathing?



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Intention and Finesse

Your technique should be at such a high level that you can forget about it.

— VICTOR WOOTEN —

Here are a few questions for you: Which techniques do you almost always use in your treatments? In other words, what are the standard “default” techniques for certain parts of the body that you use for most people? In your mind, how did they become your standard techniques? Did you learn them in your first training, or from the first sequence you were taught? Did a teacher tell you that they should be done in a certain order? Have you assembled a routine of techniques that you use almost every time you work? Take a moment to think about your patterns of work, and consider all these questions.

Now think about this: To work at an advanced level, the techniques we use should come to us naturally; not as a result of premeditated thought, or because we learned them in a particular way, or because they are part of a fixed sequence. They should arise based on what we sense and feel and intuit during every moment of a treatment.

Never use a technique that feels uncomfortable, and never put yourself or your partner in an anatomical position that is unsustainable. Avoid using fancy moves or postures simply because they look good. Whenever a little bit of ego enters the process, your intention and your therapeutic work become contaminated.

Don’t use a particular technique because you are “supposed to” do it, or because you have always done it that way, or because it belongs to a sequence that you once learned. Consider how other parts of the body may be affected by what you do in each area, and remember that each person needs individualized care. Work with great sensitivity and incremental pressure. Work more slowly when you sense a blockage (even stop your movement temporarily), and try to not think about where you are headed or what you might do next.

As you learn and use techniques based on palming, thumbing, acupressure, compression, percussion, stretching, suspension, and working with your feet, remember that they are simply tools for a higher purpose. The techniques themselves are not the only factors in healing. It is your intention, and the skill or finesse with which you use techniques that encourage the receiver to surrender to a process of healing.

Intention

Touch can be received in different ways. In therapeutic massage and bodywork, well-intentioned and supportive touch can lead to positive outcomes and promote physical and psychological well-being. On the other hand, disjointed, sharp, or intrusive touch can



Lower Body Concepts

*“If you are quiet enough, you will hear the flow of the universe,
and you will feel its rhythm. Go with this flow.”*

— THE BUDDHA —

The way you work on the lower body can have a lasting impact on the receiver throughout the entire session. Before you begin a treatment, take the time to assure comfort, assess the body, and establish trust. Remember that the lower body often provides valuable information about how to work with the rest of the body. Turn on your radar, and be ready to receive signals that may help guide you.

With your very first touch, connect with the breath, keep your intentions pure, and work with great sensitivity and finesse.

Before you begin work

As part of the preparation process for working with someone in supine position, and before you position yourself at the foot of the mat, take a moment to make sure the receiver is comfortable.

Pillow – yes or no?

If a large pillow is already on your mat, many people will automatically place it under their heads, but a pillow is usually not the best option for floor-based bodywork. For many people, a bed pillow flexes the neck and the cervical spine into an unnatural position, which can restrict upper body movement, strain the neck muscles, and decrease air flow. A pillow also presents problems for some of the assisted yoga techniques used in Thai massage, such as plows, leg lifts, and knee-to-chest compressions. Lying in supine position without a pillow helps extend the upper back and opens the upper thoracic area.



Head too low



Head too high



Good alignment



Refining Classic Techniques

When the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through. Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself.

— IDA ROLF —

It's surprising how many standard techniques are done in ways that are strained or unsustainable. Failure to use core muscles and a general lack of breath awareness are only two of the issues. Some teachers aren't trained adequately, so their students don't learn to use their bodies correctly when executing techniques. As a result of all of this, massage therapists around the world work harder than they need to; they use the muscles of their arms, hands, and shoulders unnecessarily; and they struggle to use techniques that they themselves don't feel comfortable doing.

Twelve techniques that are often done incorrectly or ineffectively are explained and reviewed in detail in this chapter. I hope these explanations help to demystify, clarify, and refine the practice of these important classic Thai techniques.

Assisted cobra

Back-bending postures known as “cobras” in the yoga world are commonly done in some styles of Thai massage, but all too often they are done with poor posture, a curved back, bent arms, and improper breathing patterns.



Setup

For the most common version of the assisted cobra, the receiver is in prone position, with legs slightly open and arms resting comfortably. Kneel lightly on the lower gluteal muscles (not on the legs) and place your legs and feet inside the opening of your partner's legs. At first, keep the tops of your feet against the floor, and sit back to rest on your ankles and heels. This position allows you to rock back and forth easily while using your core for leverage. Support some of your bodyweight with your knees and lower legs.

Reach out and hold her wrists with your palms facing outward and her palms facing inward. Make sure your arms are fully extended, without bending your elbows. Ask her to also hold your wrists and remain there for a moment while holding (but not pulling on) her arms. If necessary, hold your partner's forearms instead of her wrists, so you can fully extend your own arms.

Before you do anything further, take note of her breathing, and establish an opposite breathing pattern. When she breathes in, you breathe out. Do this once or twice until you are both breathing in an opposite pattern. When you're ready, inhale as she exhales, come up to straighten your back, and use your *hara* to lean backward. Never bend your arms or pull with your arm muscles. Always keep your arms straight and locked at the elbows when you bring her upper torso into position. Don't exceed a comfortable angle as you lean backward, and when necessary, remind your partner to keep her head straight and to point her chin slightly upward. When you sense the first point of resistance, stop and hold her in that position for a few seconds, and then slowly release the body back to the mat as you both exhale. Repeat this pattern a few more times, going slightly deeper each time if her body allows.

Although some practitioners allow clients to touch and rest on the mat before pulling them up again, this isn't always necessary. Instead, you can release most of the pressure in the stretch by rocking forward for a brief moment and then pulling upward again to a slightly deeper stretch. You can repeat the technique like this several times until you finally release the body completely to the floor on a mutual exhale.

For people who are accustomed to doing the cobra, or who practice yoga regularly, you may be able to bend their backs easily and quite deeply. If this is the case, you may hold them in each position for a slightly longer time, or rock them slightly back and forth, or even swing them very slightly from left to right before you bring them down to the mat again. For less flexible people, or when physical conditions or trust issues are concerned, you may be able to lift the chest only slightly away from the mat. This is good enough for some people, and if you return the body to the mat and repeat the cobra several times, you will probably be able to go a little bit deeper each time. Be patient, and always listen to the body of your partner as you work.

Additional note on breathing

Although it's best to execute assisted cobras with an opposite breathing pattern, it's helpful to release your partner to the mat with a synchronized breathing pattern, while both people exhale at the same time. Try it this way: When you lift the person into position, you should inhale as you lift, but you want the other person to be exhaling when she is pulled into posi-

- a few sample pages from this chapter -

CHAPTER NINE



Flow and Structuring a Sequence

Trust the universe . . . accept its messages . . . and keep your motives clean.

The client's body will tell you which way to go.

— JOHN UPLEDGER —

If we think of the body as a landscape, there is no way to move over it without leaving tracks. Every time you move, and with everything you do, a piece of yourself is left behind. That's why it is so important to flow gracefully from one technique to the next, and to develop and sustain holistic patterns of work.

Flow

Flow is the smoothness with which you move from one posture or technique to another. There's a big difference in the overall effect of a treatment that is performed with flow and grace, as opposed to one that is done in a fragmented way.

When a therapist works on individual areas of the body without considering each movement and technique as part of the entire treatment process, the receiver can be left feeling disconnected. Some things that may seem insignificant to a practitioner can have a big effect on a receiver. For example, if you let go of one part of the body before you establish touch in another place, it can affect the way a person integrates and assimilates the entire treatment. If you move around the body too quickly as you work, or if you don't follow the running and confluence of energy lines, or if you work on separate parts of the body without activating the areas that lie in between, the overall healing effect of the session will almost certainly be reduced. Always engage your sensing abilities, and try to view each technique and each movement as invaluable and inseparable components of the whole process. Don't be too persistent, or get stuck, or feel frustrated by any one technique, because in the process you may lose the overall flow of your work. To put it in musical terms: "You should never lose the groove in order to find a note."¹

True mastery of flow comes when we support our clients' bodies, integrate breath and good body mechanics, use rocking movements, and develop easy transitions from one posture to another. Breath, rocking, and body mechanics are presented elsewhere in this book, but because they are essential components of good flow, let's quickly review them again before we examine the core concepts of this chapter.

Breathwork, rocking, and body mechanics

Breath awareness is critical to good flow. In massage and movement therapy, breath awareness has three components: the breath of the giver; the breath of the receiver; and the



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, someway, 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.

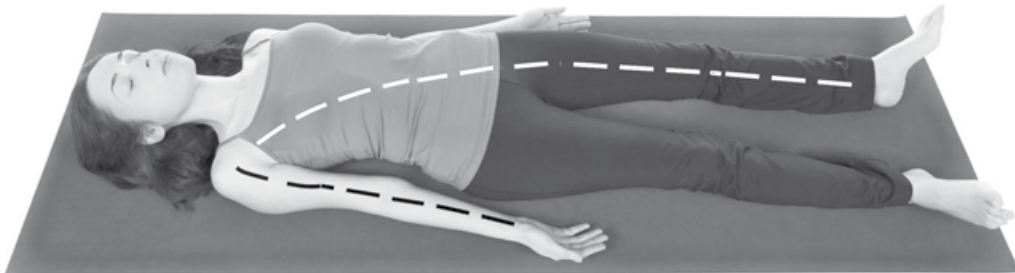
As I released the pressure, my client spoke. He said that he was beginning to feel his phantom leg come alive. Instead of the usual pain, he felt a slight tingling and a sense of presence he hadn't felt since the amputation. After he said this, his next full exhalation allowed his entire body to relax; 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.





Using Feet in Thai Massage

*Be quiet and still. The world will offer itself to you . . .
and it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.*

— FRANZ KAFKA —

Using your feet in floor-based therapies has several great advantages. For the therapist, it reduces wear and tear on the hands, arms, and wrists, and subtle energetic tensions seem to be released more easily. For the receiver, therapeutic work with the feet has a solid and stabilizing quality that encourages deep relaxation and self-healing. When the feet are used extensively in bodywork, both parties generally feel more centered, both during a session and afterward. The basic concepts and techniques presented here are meant to inspire serious practitioners to integrate more foot techniques into their treatments.

Variations and benefits

It's important to stay aware of each person's temperament, personal style, mood, and elemental predisposition, and to try to cater to each person with concepts and techniques that may work best for them. Some techniques done with feet can be very helpful for people who, at the time of treatment, may feel agitated, upset, stressed, worried, or scattered. These states may result from fire or wind imbalances, and in these cases, slower work and incremental foot pressure may be beneficial.

When we're grounded, we feel more relaxed, more integrated, and more connected to the earth. As a result, we can be more open to changes that take place in our bodies and minds, and more easily welcome outside influences into our lives and consciousness. When we're not very grounded, energy can move to or remain at the upper parts of our bodies, especially at the head, and this can result in increased nervousness, agitation, or distraction.

Fortunately, working with the feet positively affects both the giver and the receiver. Just as clients can relax more fully and feel supported and encouraged, therapists also take advantage of the relaxing and peaceful effects it provides as they work. If you've ever felt light-headed or drained after giving a treatment, try to integrate more foot techniques into your practice.

Styles and traditions

Several traditional bodywork styles from Asia use feet as therapeutic tools. Early Chinese texts mention stepping and walking on the back to relieve pain and aid in spinal alignment. Japanese *ashiatsu* has worked pressure points with the feet for hundreds of years. One of the oldest forms of massage with the feet is believed to be *chavutti thirummal* from southern India. In this tradition related to martial arts, the therapist regulates his bodyweight with a



Approach the area, lightly position the foot, bring the *hara* forward, and apply pressure.

Half-kneeling position

Only a few techniques can be comfortably done in this position, since proper execution depends on the height and size proportions of both people and a good sense of balance on the part of the therapist. While half-kneeling, a therapist's ability to move his body freely is compromised. Because of this, less mobile techniques, such as applying foot pressure to the back, are most practical in this position.

Contact, pressure, movement, and non-thinking

Many important foot techniques are done while the therapist is sitting, so let's discuss some ways to work the lateral legs and the sides of the body from this position.

Contact and pressure - the cobra and the cat

In keeping with metaphors I sometimes use to describe Thai massage techniques, let me introduce you to a few of my friends from the animal kingdom; the cobra and the cat. When using your feet in a sitting position, think about a cobra—not an intimidating and dangerous one but a friendly and lovable one. This cobra likes to approach the point of contact with a soft belly (the sole of your foot) and an upright head (your toes). It slithers along smoothly on its bent lower body (the back of your heel and ankle) as it approaches the receiver's body. The first contact it makes is soft and insignificant, but as soon as a solid connection is established, it goes deeper and deeper through an entry point on the surface. Your sliding foot gracefully makes contact with the center of its sole, it checks to make sure the connection is soft yet solid, and then it uses incremental pressure to pass through various layers of resistance. When it's finished, it slithers slightly backward, repositions itself in a new place, and begins a new approach.



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Follow the guidelines previously mentioned for touch, placement, and incremental pressure with the “eye” of your sole, and move your buttocks as necessary (monkey) so your legs are always directly ahead of your core.

Single foot press with locked ankle

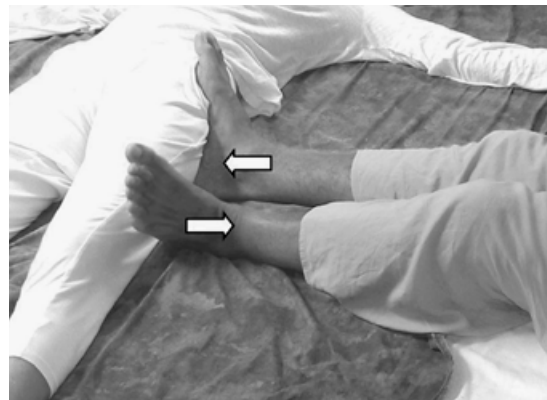
Place the receiver’s foot on top of your outside leg so her Achilles tendon rests comfortably in the soft spot of your ankle joint. While maintaining a light lock on the ankle with your outside foot, work the lateral leg from the calf to the hip joint. Always keep a slight bend at your knee, and don’t ever extend your inside leg completely. Use the center of your sole to apply pressure, and make sure the pressure originates in your *hara*. Rock your body forward, and slide your heel on the mat as you apply pressure (cobra.) Keep your toes relaxed, and move your inside foot up and down the leg as you work.

Double-foot pedaling

Dismount your foot that was holding the back of your client’s ankle in place. Begin to relax the upper leg with alternating, rocking foot pressure. Use a “pedaling” (cat) movement: one foot presses inward, and as you release that pressure, the other foot makes contact and begins to press. Only one foot should be pressing at any time. Always remove pressure from the foot that is not pedaling by sliding your heel slightly backward toward your own body. If the client’s leg gets pushed too far inward, you’re probably pressing too hard or using your leg muscles instead of leaning in with your core. If this happens, bring the leg back toward you with your outside heel, and continue working.



Foot press with locked ankle



Double-foot pedaling

Shoulder presses in final supine position

Many traditional Thai massage sequences teach students to use palms to compress the shoulders of a client in seated position. This works well in cases when two people are of similar size and height, but not as well when one person is taller or larger than another. Also, not every session addresses the receiver in sitting position. This is why using feet to work the shoulders is so important.



Thai Compresses and Medicinal Herbs

2000 BC: Here, eat this root.

AD 1000: That root is for pagans. Here, say this prayer.

1850: That prayer is a superstition. Here, drink this elixir.

1940: That elixir doesn't work. Here, swallow this pill.

1980: That pill isn't strong enough. Here, take this antibiotic.

Present day: That antibiotic is synthetic. Here, eat this root.

— ANONYMOUS —

Traditional Thai massage is generally taught around the world as a series of movements and techniques that, when applied to another person, can help bring about balance, ease, and healing. What is often missing is the component of herbal medicine, which is an intrinsic and inseparable part of the Thai healing tradition.

This section of the book offers guidelines, recipes, and ways to creatively use Thai herbal compresses in all forms of therapeutic bodywork. Other therapeutic uses of medicinal herbs are also discussed, including steam inhalations, herbal baths, poultices, balms, and infusions. A glossary of important Thai herbal plants appears at the end of the chapter.

Background information

Medicinal herbs in some form have been used for millennia in all major civilizations around the world. Although it is unknown exactly when steamed herbs wrapped in bundles began to be used in Thailand, an early record appears in a text called *tamraa phra osoth Phra Narai* (circa 1660). A formula described in this text contains tamarind leaves, spider lily, *plai* (Thai ginger), cinnamon laurel fruit, salt, and cumin. Other texts describe formulas for different ailments using ingredients such as lemongrass, turmeric, sompoi (acacia pods), chili, garlic, and camphor.

Medicinal properties inherent in herbs, when combined with heat, can have a profound impact on those who receive treatment. As heat penetrates the pores of the skin and descends through the layers, blood vessels are dilated and blood flow is stimulated. As muscles and tendons relax, range of motion is improved, and techniques based on stretching, compression, and acupressure may be better received. Most Thai herbal blends are anti-inflammatory, and offer benefits to the sinuses, respiratory system, skin, heart, and other organs. Blood circulation and digestive functions may also be improved through hot herbal compresses. The moist heat acts as a transmitter of herbal medicine, and compression techniques as well

All-purpose dry herbal blend

- lemongrass (2 parts)
- eucalyptus (2 parts)
- dried ginger pieces (2 parts)
- ginger powder (1 part)
- peppermint (1 part)
- galangal (½ part)
- rock salt (½ part)

DIRECTIONS: All the ingredients listed above are dried. For each compress you prepare with this all-purpose dry mix, add about 40–50 percent (by volume) of freshly smashed and ripped ginger root. Don't simply cut the ginger with a knife; instead, smash the pieces with a blunt heavy object, and then pull apart the fibers. In fact, whenever you use fresh herbs and roots, make sure to tear and crush them, since plant surfaces should always be irregular for optimal transference of medicinal properties.

Mix all ingredients in a small bowl, pack everything into a muslin drawstring bag (or directly onto a cotton cloth), and sprinkle some camphor crystals on top before tying and wrapping the compress. Camphor crystals will sink to the bottom with use, and that's why they shouldn't be added to the pre-made dry mix.



-- a few sample pages from this chapter --

Some Thai poultices and plasters use herbs, flowers, and plants readily found in Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia. The traditional poultice recipes below use ingredients that are common in Thailand but easier to find in other regions.

How to make an herbal poultice

Using fresh materials

Chop the herbs, roots, and rhizomes into small pieces on a cutting board. Transfer them to a mortar, and crush everything together until it becomes a pulp. As you chop and mash, the materials release natural juices and the mixture becomes soft. Mash it just enough to break down the fibers in the leaves and roots. You may also use a blender or food processor, though it's commonly believed that doing it manually results in stronger medicine. If you do use a food processor, pulse the blades through the materials rather than run the machine continuously.

If the mixture is thick enough, you can apply it directly to your body, but if it is watery, thicken it with rice flour or tapioca starch. Stir in a little powder until you obtain the desired consistency and spread it onto the affected area of the skin. Apply a generous amount, and make sure that the herbs are spread evenly. Wrap the area with a layer of gauze or cotton cloth to hold the paste in place. You may even apply a layer of plastic wrap over the finished poultice. This helps to contain the juices so they don't leak or stain clothing or bedding.

Using dried materials, or mixing fresh and dried herbs

Making a dried-herb poultice is less work than using fresh herbs because it's quicker and less labor-intensive. The medicinal properties in dried herbs are weaker than fresh herbs, but they are still effective. You can also use a combination of fresh and dry ingredients for a poultice. Combine dry herbs and powders with just enough hot water to moisten them, and then add your prepared paste of fresh ingredients. Mix it all together, and thicken it if necessary before application and wrapping.

A few types of herbal poultices

Salt for infections and abscesses

Salt plasters are helpful to pacify and diminish newly forming minor infections or abscesses. Use thick grains of salt, or break rock salt into smaller pieces. Mix with a few drops of water and rice vinegar, and add some overcooked mashed rice or rice powder as necessary to form a paste. In the early stages of an infection or an abscess anywhere on the body, clean the area well, apply the poultice, cover lightly, and keep in place for a few hours.





It Makes a Difference to Know the Difference

There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting.

— THE BUDDHA —

In recent years, Thai massage has attained great recognition and popularity in the West, yet it is often misrepresented and misunderstood. Traditional Thai massage (*nuad boran*) is a balanced blend of physical, energetic, and spiritual healing concepts. For serious students and professionals in the field of Thai healing arts, it's important to know what is truly Thai, what comes from other healing traditions but is perceived or presented as Thai, and what is simply the result of modern hybridized methods of assessment and treatment.

Thai massage isn't a part of Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, yoga, or any other tradition. It belongs to the external branch of the traditional Thai medicine system, and it is meant to be carried out through a lens of traditional Thai medicine and Thai element theory. Elements of other traditional systems cannot be forced into Thai massage without distracting from its purest intent and reducing its ultimate effect.

A fundamental theory in Buddhist medicine is the Circle of Life, whereby all beings contain elements of body, mind-heart, and energy. All three elements (sometimes referred to as essences) work together in order to attain balance and optimal health. The body element is the physical structure, nurtured and healed through diet and herbal medicines. The mind-heart element is the inner self, the intangible and invisible connection to one's own intellect, consciousness, emotions, and spirituality.

Finally, the energy component comprises all internal and external movement and change, whether metaphysical or physical, including massage. In addition to traditional Thai medicine, these essences are also understood and interpreted in Indian, Chinese, and other traditional systems of healing, but the ways to achieve health are attained and maintained in very different ways.

Integrating concepts and techniques from other systems doesn't make Thai massage more effective. In my opinion, it usually confuses and dilutes it, and in some cases, it elevates the egos of those who practice, thereby desensitizing their work as therapists. Thai massage is already a complete, wondrous, and amazingly efficient system, and it operates at its most efficient level when it is carried out using traditional Thai concepts and techniques, through the lens of Thai medical theory, and with a direct connection to the Buddhist principle of *metta*, or loving-kindness.

-- a few sample pages from this chapter --

Misrepresentations and misconceptions

In the next few pages, I'd like to discuss and help dispel a few popular myths so that serious students, therapists, and teachers can learn to understand and help to spread facts not fiction.

Thai massage is not 2,500 years old. It does not date back to the time of the Buddha.

A surprising number of student manuals, Thai massage websites, and instructional materials (some even from Thailand) claim that Thai massage is an ancient tradition, that it is thousands of years old, and that it was developed or practiced during the Buddha's lifetime. These types of statements may exist because of a lack of knowledge, or they may be deliberately fabricated as marketing and sales strategies, but they are not based in facts.

It is true that Thai massage incorporates ideas that were in existence thousands of years ago in India and other early civilizations. Notable among these concepts is that a type of energy or spirit runs through the human body, and that this energy can be manipulated by physical exercises, mental exercises, and breath. Indian religious and philosophical texts written between 800 and 500 BC mention these ideas, some of which inspired healing arts such as hatha yoga and meditation. Although traditional Thai massage incorporates these concepts, there is no proof or evidence that any techniques, protocols, or sequences were developed in India and then directly transmitted to Thailand.

The Tai people began to inhabit the territory of modern-day Thailand approximately one thousand years ago, and modern Thai culture and traditions can be traced to the Sukhothai Kingdom of central Thailand in the mid-13th century. The city of Ayutthaya, founded in AD 1350, was the second capital of Siam and grew to be one of the largest and most developed urban areas in the world. Centuries later, the long-lasting Burmese-Siamese wars caused great instability and unrest in the entire region. The second siege of Ayutthaya by Burmese troops (1563–64) resulted in Ayutthaya's surrender, and the Siamese capital became subservient to Burma. During these wars, medical texts were burned or hidden and were lost forever.

Many years later, King Rama I established a new capital in Bangkok. Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho) was designated as the primary royal temple, and construction was completed in 1801. Over the next decades, and during the reigns of Rama I and II, doctors and healers began to contribute to a reconstruction of lost medical knowledge. Medical texts and information from throughout the kingdom were collected and documented, and a Royal Department of Pharmacy was founded. The third Chakri king, Rama III, who reigned from 1824 to 1851, ordered that medical texts be etched onto stone plaques and outlined in black ink. These epigraphs show traditional pressure points that run along pathways on anterior and posterior human figures, with written descriptions on the adjacent walls.

Other medical knowledge was collected and displayed alongside these now-famous epigraphs, including treatments for a variety of diseases and conditions. Statues of *reusi*, the traditional Thai hermit-sages, were also created at this time. The statues depict self-care and self-stretching postures, and some figures appear in unusual clothing and hairstyles. During the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), a royal decree was issued for all known

-- a few sample pages from this chapter --

The Thai massage *wai khru* is not an ancient traditional prayer or mantra.

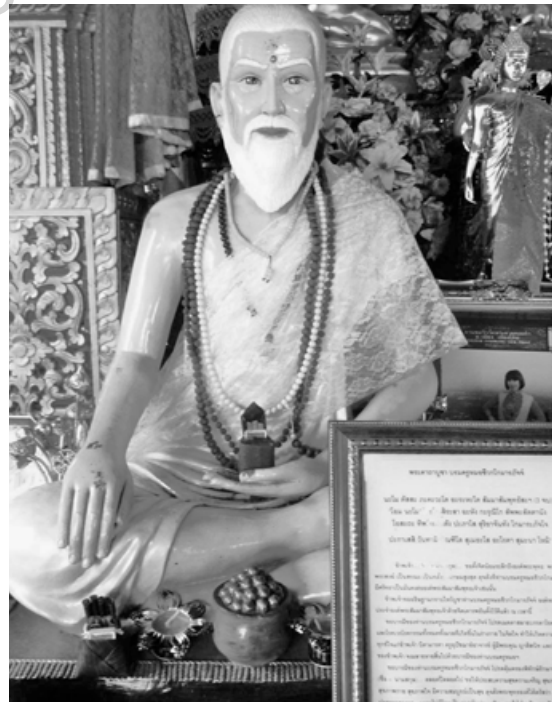
Most serious practitioners of traditional Thai massage are familiar with the Thai massage *wai khru* (พิธีไหว้ครู), a prayer that begins with the words *Om namo Shivago*. This prayer, in part, asks for intercession from Jivaka, an Ayurvedic doctor regarded in Thailand as the ancestral teacher of traditional medicine. *Wai* is the common gesture of bringing two hands together in prayer position while bowing with deference toward the receiver of the action. The word *khru* is a Thai language adaptation of the Pali/Sanskrit word *guru*. So *wai khru* means something like “honor teachers.” In the practice of Thai massage, therapists may recite this prayer silently, and students may chant it aloud in a group before beginning their lessons.

The *wai khru* is a ceremony that extends to many other segments of Thai society. School children recite a *wai khru* to thank the Buddha, their parents, and their school teachers. Thai classical dancers and musicians, healers, soldiers, and *Muay Thai* boxers also have specific *wai khru* ceremonies. Although these ceremonies involve recitation or chanting of different prayers, all of them pay homage to the Buddha, include ceremonial offerings, and request guidance from a higher power in order to carry out a specific deed or action with respect, clarity, and integrity.

Thai massage students are often told or given the impression that this invocation is an ancient prayer that remained unchanged through a longstanding lineage of healers over many generations. The story behind the current-day *wai khru*, however, is quite different.

The earliest version of the *wai khru* in use today was probably developed at the Wat Pho school in Bangkok in the middle of the 20th century by Preeda Tangtrongchitr, the school’s founder and long-time director. The Wat Pho *wai khru* contained three main sections, and each section was preceded by the homage to the Buddha chant that begins with *namo tassa*.

An early senior disciple of Ajahn Preeda was Sintorn Chaichakan. After he completed his studies and an additional four years as a teacher and therapist at Wat Pho, Ajahn Sintorn moved to Chiang Mai and began to treat patients in the area. In 1973, he founded the Old Medicine Hospital, and he and a small staff began to treat local residents with traditional medicine and massage treatments. Years later, he began to train massage therapists. He developed a sequence of Thai massage techniques for the school, and around the



Jivaka statue and *wai khru* transcription in Thai language.



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Thank you – ขอบคุณมาก

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Glossary of Important Terms

aagaasathaat – The element of space in Thai medicine.

ajahn (achaan) – A Thai language term that translates as “teacher.” It is derived from the Pali word *ācariya*.

bpert lom – Thai term for “open the wind.”

chaloeysak – The “folk style” of Thai massage, which integrates use of practitioner’s hands, feet, elbows, knees, and which is known and practiced on a wide scale by Thai people and Westerners.

dhamma (dharma) – Pali word to describe the teachings of the Buddha.

din – Thai earth element

fai – Thai fire element

farang – Thai word for “foreigner,” usually a Caucasian of European ancestry, no matter what nationality they may be. The word’s origin is *Français*.

hara – Japanese term for “belly,” and by extension, for the “center of being.” Eastern martial arts and movement therapies emphasize moving from the *hara*, located slightly below the navel. This area is an important center of movement and grounding in traditional Thai massage. The Chinese term is *dantien*.

horasaht – The division of Thai medicine that deals with divinatory sciences, such as numerology, astrology, and palmistry.

jap sen – A style of Thai massage characterized by vigorous thumbing and plucking along the *sen* lines.

Jivaka – Jivaka Kumarabhadra, the legendary doctor who was a contemporary of the Buddha, is revered as the ancestral teacher of Thai traditional medicine. His last name is also known in Thailand as Gomalapato and Komarapaj.

kayaphabmbat – The division of traditional Thai medicine that deals with bone setting, external application of herbs, and Thai massage.

khwan – A life essence that lives inside humans and all living things. In Thai medicine, it is believed to start at the right big toe for men and at the left big toe for women.

lom – Thai wind element: the word used to describe the energy that flows through Thai *sen* lines.

luk pra kob – Thai herbal compresses that are wrapped, steamed, and applied, either hot or cold, to a patient’s body. They are often used to complement Thai massage treatments.

metta – Pali term for “loving-kindness,” the cultivation of which is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism. 1

nam (naam) – Thai water element 2

nuad boran (nuat phaen boran) – Thai name for traditional Thai massage. The first word is pronounced on the first syllable: *NU-odd*. 3

Om namo – A salutation of deference and homage in Sanskrit/Pali. The Thai massage *wai khru* prayer begins with “Om namo Shivago.” 4

parasympathetic state – A state of rest and relaxation, in which the body can make repairs, recharge, and be open to transformation. 5

paetayasaht – The division of traditional Thai medicine that treats the internal body. 6

Pali – An ancient language from India in which the earliest Buddhist scriptures are written. Pali is studied to gain access to Buddhist texts and is frequently recited and chanted in ritual contexts. 7

phra – Honorific term used for nobility, monks, and Buddha images. 8

point pressure – The process or technique of applying acupressure, usually with thumbs and fingers, to specific therapeutic points on the body. 9

Putthayasaht – The division of Thai medicine that deals with Buddhism and mental health. 10

ratchasamnak – The “Royal style” of Thai massage, originally reserved for the king and the royal court, which uses only the therapist’s hands. Therapists must maintain distance from the receiver and work in a highly respectful manner. 11

reusi (ruesi, lersi) – Practitioners and custodians of ancient arts and sciences including alchemy, natural medicine, astrology, palmistry, mathematics, and music. The Thai word *reusi* comes from the Sanskrit word *rishi*. 12

reusi dat ton (ruesi/ruesri datton) – A traditional Thai practice developed by reusis based on dynamic exercises involving self-stretching, breathing, specific postures, meditation, and self-massage. 13

sai sin – A cloth or string bracelet that is tied onto the wrist of an individual and charged with blessings. 14

samunphrai – A traditional Thai herbal treatment center. 15

sangha – The first order of Buddhist monks and nuns. Lay practitioners in the West sometimes use the word as a collective term for all Buddhists, or for a localized spiritual Buddhist community. 16

saiyasaht – The division of Thai medicine that deals with shamanistic healing, spirit worship, incantations, magical tattoos, and amulets. 17

sen, sen lines – Channels and structures in the human body through which life-giving energy flows. 18

sen sip (sip sen, sen sib) – The ten most commonly addressed *sen* lines in traditional Thai massage. By name, they are: sumana, ittha, pingkhala, kalathari, sahatsarangsi, thawari, lawusang, ulangka, nanthakrawat, and khitchana. 19

tok sen – Northern Thai (Lanna) healing tradition that uses a wooden hammer and chisel to tap along <i>sen</i> lines and on pressure points of the body.	1
	2
vipassana – A style of meditation that centers on mindfulness of breath and awareness of the impermanent nature of all things.	3
	4
wai – A traditional Thai greeting that consists of a slight bow, with the palms pressed together in prayer position. The higher the hands are held in relation to the face and the lower the bow, the more respect or reverence is shown to the receiver.	5
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wai khru – A Thai ritual to express gratitude and pay respect to others that is performed in martial arts, education, astrology, performing arts, and Thai healing arts and other activities. In traditional Thai massage, prayers to the Buddha and to Jivaka Kumarbhacca are generally recited or chanted.	8
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wat – A Buddhist complex with a temple, monks’ quarters, a building of worship with a large image of Buddha, and an area for lessons and community events.	12
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