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The Joy of Traditional Thai Yoga Massage

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History of Traditional Thai Yoga Massage

Traditional Thai Yoga Massage, also known as Thai Massage and *Nuad Bo' Rarn*, is an ancient form of energetic bodywork that has been practiced for over 2,500 years in East Asia. *Nuad* means "to touch with the intention of imparting healing" and *Bo' Rarn* means "something which is ancient and revered."

Traditionally, Buddhist monks and nuns administered this healing work to people in their villages. Thai Massage has a deep connection with Buddhist spiritual practice and mindfulness, and its origin is traced to Dr. Jivaka Kumar Bhacca, a physician and contemporary to the Buddha in India. Over the years, Thai Massage migrated to modern day Thailand where it continues to be taught in Buddhist temples and schools.

According to Buddhist tradition, offering Thai Massage is a practical application of *Metta*, or loving kindness. Cultivating loving kindness helps people heal at very deep levels. Those who embody *Metta* wish for true happiness for others and a desire to ease their suffering without personally taking on their pain.

Elements of Thai Yoga Massage

Thai Massage is a unique form of interactive bodywork that blends yoga stretching, rhythmic compression along energy lines, acupressure points, breathing and meditation. Unlike conventional western-style massage, Traditional Thai Massage is practiced on a special heated futon on the floor. Since the client wears loose comfortable clothing, no oil or lotion is needed. Most stretches, however, can be easily adapted to the massage table and incorporated into other forms of bodywork.

- **Stretching**

Thai Massage is a beautifully intuitive and choreographed "dance" between the client and practitioner. The client is taken into a variety of passive stretches that simultaneously relax and energize their body. Pin-and-stretch and range of motion movements are combined with other stretches to help improve mobility and reduce joint pain. One advantage to learning Thai Massage is that both the client and practitioner receive stretches throughout the session. This is an effective way for practitioners to take care of themselves while doing their work.

- **Full Body Experience**

Thai Massage is a full body experience for both the client and practitioner. Clients may be worked on in four different positions: supine, side lying, prone and seated. This gives the client a rich experience for receiving a wide variety of stretches. Besides using fingers and hands, practitioners also incorporate the use of their elbows, forearms, knees and feet. This way, no one area of the practitioner's body gets overused and fatigued.

- **Proper Body Mechanics**

One of the keys to practicing Thai Massage effectively knows how to properly use body weight, gravity, leverage, and good body mechanics. This helps the therapist minimize their effort while maximizing the benefits of a stretch. It also reduces the impact on the therapist's body and helps prolong their career as a healer.



- **Breathing**

In Thai Massage, most stretches are done on the exhale. As a result, much of the breathing between the client and practitioner is done in unison. This synchronized breathing generates an energetic bond that is very powerful. If you've ever matched your breath with another person, you know how deep that connection can be.

- **Energy Lines**

Thai Massage is considered an energy massage. Practitioners massage the ten main energy (*Sen*) lines by compression with their fingers, hands and feet. *Sen* refers to the pathways along which energy travels, and the energy itself is referred to as *lom*. This energy powers all our physical, mental, and emotional processes.

In Thai massage, the practitioner's intent is to harmonize and clear energetic imbalances. Such imbalances may present themselves physically in a number of ways such as body pain, muscle cramping and stiffness, insomnia, irritability, anxiety, constipation, or disease. When the system is working well, a person feels happy, relaxed, and free from pain. The goal of Thai Massage is to rebalance the energy so that the client's physical, mental, and emotional states are in harmony. After a session, it's very common for clients to feel relaxed, grounded and calm while simultaneously feeling energized and alert.

- **Pacing**

The pace of a Thai Massage is slow, rhythmic, and steady, much like a heartbeat, drum beat, or the cadence of a slow song. This rhythm taps into the parasympathetic nervous system and creates a sense of calmness and inner peace. By creating and maintaining a consistent pace, both the client and practitioner can experience a deep meditative state.

A popular phrase in Thailand regarding Thai massage is "One hour good. Two hour better. Three hour best!" In Thailand, it's common for people to receive a Thai Massage lasting up to three hours, especially when it's done slowly and with mindfulness. In the west, where few people choose to devote three hours to self-care, it is still possible to receive a very good Thai Massage in 90 or 120 minutes.

- **Finding the Perfect Fit**

One of the key elements a Thai Massage practitioner needs to master is knowing how to contour their fingers, palms, forearms, elbows, knees or feet to their client's body. Finding that perfect angle is what makes all the difference for a good session. For example, consider the concave arch of your foot and see how it fits perfectly against the convex shape of the adductors or hamstrings. When your client's eyes are closed, they should have no idea whether you're using your hands, knees or feet during the massage. It should be seamless and effortless.

- **Playfulness**

Practicing Traditional Thai Massage invokes a sense of playfulness, experimentation and *sanuk*, the Thai word for "fun." If something is not inherently fun, then why do it? Conversely, when doing something mundane, such as folding sheets, we should find the joy and *sanuk* to make it a more pleasant experience.

Benefits of Thai Massage

Thai Massage is very effective for people suffering from muscular tension, sports injuries and motor vehicle accidents. Athletes and physically active individuals benefit from the muscular compressions, range-of-motion movements, and joint mobilization. Office workers and those who sit for long periods of time doing repetitive movements often experience energy, blood and lymph stagnation. These individuals particularly benefit from the Thai Massage stretches and spinal decompression.

There are hundreds of different Thai Massage stretches that one can learn. A well-trained practitioner will be able to select the most appropriate stretches for their client, while taking into account their physical condition, age and body size. While most people can receive Thai Massage, everyone's session will look a bit different.

An Evolving Practice

For the last 2,500 years Traditional Thai Massage has been passed down orally from teacher to student in a mentor-like basis. Within the last 30 years, many books have been written detailing the wide variety of stretches one can learn. Today, Thai Massage continues to evolve as it is easily combined with other healing modalities such as osteopathy, physical therapy, and Chinese medicine. Fortunately, the need for skilled Thai Massage practitioners is growing as more people learn about and experience the benefits of Thai Massage.

