

## THAI YOGA MASSAGE- MEDITATION IN ACTION

*By Ralf Marzen*

Thai yoga massage (TYM) is an ancient form of bodywork that has been an integral part of traditional Thai medicine for thousands of years.

In recent years TYM has seen a widespread boost in popularity in the Western world.

In Thai yoga massage, the practitioner uses his or her thumbs, palms, elbows, knees and feet to apply a combination of acupressure, gentle rocking and twisting, joint and spine mobilizations and assisted yoga stretches. With the masseur using bodyweight instead of strength and a steady and meditative rhythm, Thai massage looks and feels like a meditative dance between giver and receiver.

If you are a bodyworker or massage therapist who suffers from occasional exhaustion, tension and pain as a result of your work, then expanding your repertoire to include Thai yoga massage may be a very wise decision.

In my 9 years of training people in this unique style of bodywork I have come across a large number of therapists whose work had taken a big toll on their body. Back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic tension in arms or shoulders seem to me the most common bodyworker complaints. I have heard from more than one colleague and former student that learning Thai yoga massage has saved their career and opened up an entirely new perspective on bodywork in general.

Most of the frequent bodyworker ailments are based on repetitive movements with incorrect body mechanics. In many styles of massage the therapist is required to use his or her muscular strength to achieve the desired effect on the client's body.

In Thai yoga massage we rarely ever use strength or force but instead work with our own bodyweight to apply pressure or induce movement. The practitioner generally leans into their pressure with a straight spine and straight arms, thus creating a sense of 'sinking in' rather than pushing or kneading. The trademark stretches and manipulations are also performed in a way that allows for ease rather than strain on the therapist's body.

Often Thai yoga massage is described as passive yoga or 'lazyman's yoga' but in a way, one could also look at it as a form of partner yoga where (correct body mechanics provided) both participants, therapist and client, get a great workout and come out of the session feeling balanced and rejuvenated.

If, as a therapist, you feel good and energized after a treatment, then treating your clients is something you're really looking forward to.



*Picture 1: The 'Paddle Boat': Hamstring compression with the feet*

Besides the distinct and unique body mechanics, another aspect that sets Thai yoga massage apart from other styles of bodywork is the connection to Buddhist spirituality.

Around 2000 years ago Thai Massage was brought from India to Thailand along with Buddhism. Since then it has been practiced, developed and handed down through the generations. It was never seen as just massage but as a spiritual practice, in the context of Buddhism, and until fairly recently mostly practiced in wats, the Thai Buddhist temples.

Despite the fact that nowadays you can easily learn just the technical aspects of Thai yoga massage in courses and workshops this is not the whole picture. Most serious practitioners of this art train their own minds through meditation and share the benefits with their patients.

Thai yoga massage can be seen as a meditation in action:

Through the practice of Samattha (concentration) the mind becomes more quiet and peaceful. Out of a quiet mind the quality of Metta, which can be translated as loving kindness, arises quite naturally.

A massage performed in this mindset allows the masseur to be intuitive, accepting and tuned in to the patient's needs. Both giver and receiver will then enjoy the treatment and leave with a sense of rejuvenation and peace.

In the Thai yoga massage trainings that I offer I try to cover all aspects of this work. I feel very fortunate that I have learned it myself this way from my teachers and I know how much it has changed my life.



*Front Thigh and Psoas Stretch in Side Lying Position*

The trainings and retreats I run focus strongly on the technical aspects of Thai yoga massage, especially correct body mechanics so that giving a session becomes really enjoyable. Equally, we include subjects such as meditation, emotional aspects of bodywork, practitioner self-care and spiritual foundations in our trainings. They tend to be remarkable personal experiences as much as rewarding career opportunities for participants.

After practicing Thai yoga massage for 12 years and teaching it for 8, I am still amazed at the elegant flow of the practice as well as its therapeutic benefits on both giver and receiver. Even at times when life feels a bit more stressful I can use my Thai yoga massage sessions to calm down, come back to my centre and practice some meditation in action.

***Ralf Marzen has been teaching workshops and trainings in Thai yoga massage internationally for many years. He lived and trained in Thailand with masters Asokananda, Pichet Boonthumme and Chaiyuth Prysith.***

***Ralf is based in London where he runs StillPoint, a meditation and therapy centre (www.stillpointlondon.com)***

***Information about his Thai yoga massage courses and retreats can be found on [www.muditathaiyoga.com](http://www.muditathaiyoga.com)***

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