

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S Herbal Legacy Newsletter

December 14, 2011

Thai Yoga Massage - Mishelle Knuteson M.H.

I have been very blessed these past few months to be an apprentice to my yoga teacher learning a healing therapy called Thai Yoga Massage. The origins of Thai massage can be traced back 2500 years to India. At this time the Thai Buddhist temple was an operation center for the health care of the common people. The walls of the temples bear epigraphs depicting the *sen*, the body's energy line network. There are also various stone-carved statues eloquently holding Thai massage postures outside the temples.

Thai Yoga Massage is performed on the floor in loose, comfortable clothing. When a person receives a Thai Yoga Massage they also receive the benefits of practicing yoga. A Thai Yoga Massage session incorporates martial arts moves, rhythmic motion, palming and thumbing along energy lines, gentle stretching and breath work. A session not only stretches and tones the muscles, Thai Yoga Massage also improves circulation, relieves muscular tension and spasm, helps expedite metabolism, boosts the immune system, and balances the body energetically, inducing a calm mental state. The recipient receives both a physical and an energetic massage.



The practitioner and the recipient perform a series of yoga positions that creates what many call a graceful or flowing “dance”. The practitioner uses his/her hands, feet, arms and legs to gently guide the recipient into various yoga positions. The practitioner works from a meditative state of *metta* (loving kindness) while moving in a rhythmic flow, transitioning from one posture to the next. There is a strong emphasis on safety and on using the least amount of effort to achieve the maximum results.

The systems of the body stagnate when they are not pumped, stretched or worked out. The body systems that are helped through Thai Yoga Massage are the skeletal, circulatory, muscular and nervous systems.

Skeletal System - The human being is the only animal that walks erect. Keeping this upright position puts a lot of pressure on the spine. The spine is designed to perform six distinct movements which are incorporated into the Thai Yoga Massage session: flexion

and extension, left and right lateral flexion, and left and right rotation. Stretching the spine increases the space between the vertebrae and allows the fluids to circulate more effectively.

Circulatory System - The compression touch of palming (pressing on the *marmas*; pressure points or energy centers) and thumbing (tracing the *sen* lines; energy lines of the body's organs) in Thai Yoga Massage acts as an assisting pump to the heart. This stimulates blood flow without causing any strain to the heart. The pressing and pulling of the extremities also stimulates circulatory pathways.

Muscular System - Muscles work on a "relax and contract" system. The muscle in action (an agonist) is balanced by the work of a muscle stretching in the opposite direction (the antagonist). The stretching and messaging in a Thai Yoga Massage session activates the circulation of blood which will in turn increase the muscular relaxation and elasticity which effects the mobilization of the muscle.

Nervous System - The nervous system breaks down into two categories; the autonomic nervous system that regulates involuntary action, and the somatic system which guides sensation and movement. Further breakdown of the autonomic nervous system is the parasympathetic system, nerves that calm the body, and the sympathetic system, nerves that prepare the body for action. Thai Yoga Massage stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to lower the pulse, slow the breath and relax the body.

A short example of how Thai Yoga Massage has helped clients of my yoga instructor: She was on a trek with several youth. One young girl twisted her knee during the hike. By the end of the day her knee was swollen and it was painful for this young lady to walk. After just 15 minutes of palming and running the *sen* lines, the young girl felt better and by night fall she was running around with the rest of the group. In the morning her knee had swollen up a little yet the pain was gone. Another 15 minute session allowed her to hike all day with the rest of the group. There are numerous similar stories but not enough room to share them with you!

My husband has been my willing recipient as I have been practicing the techniques of Thai Yoga Massage. He has two bad knees that affect his mobility from time to time. So far he is loving the results that he is getting through the sessions. We are hoping that with continued therapy he will recover faster from muscle stiffness and joint pain following racquetball games as well as enjoying greater flexibility in his daily life.

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