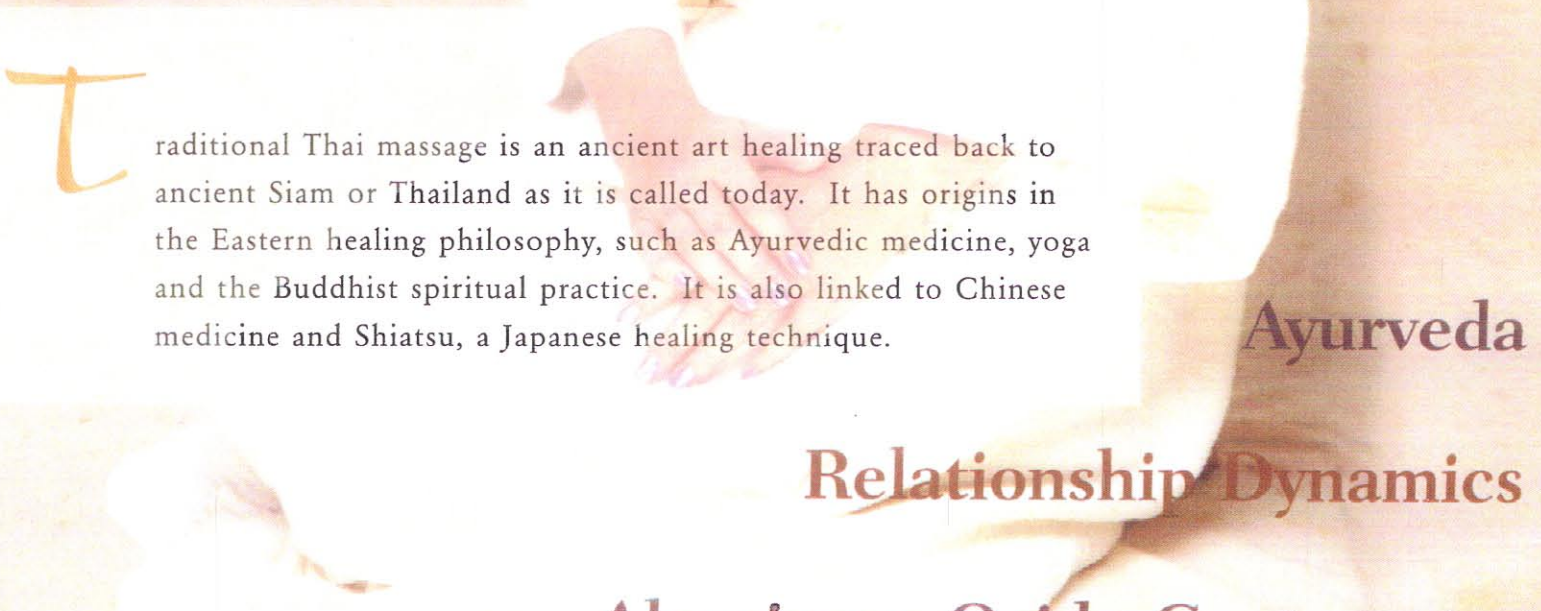


## Traditional Thai Massage

by Fabienne Guichon-Lindholm



**T**raditional Thai massage is an ancient art healing traced back to ancient Siam or Thailand as it is called today. It has origins in the Eastern healing philosophy, such as Ayurvedic medicine, yoga and the Buddhist spiritual practice. It is also linked to Chinese medicine and Shiatsu, a Japanese healing technique.

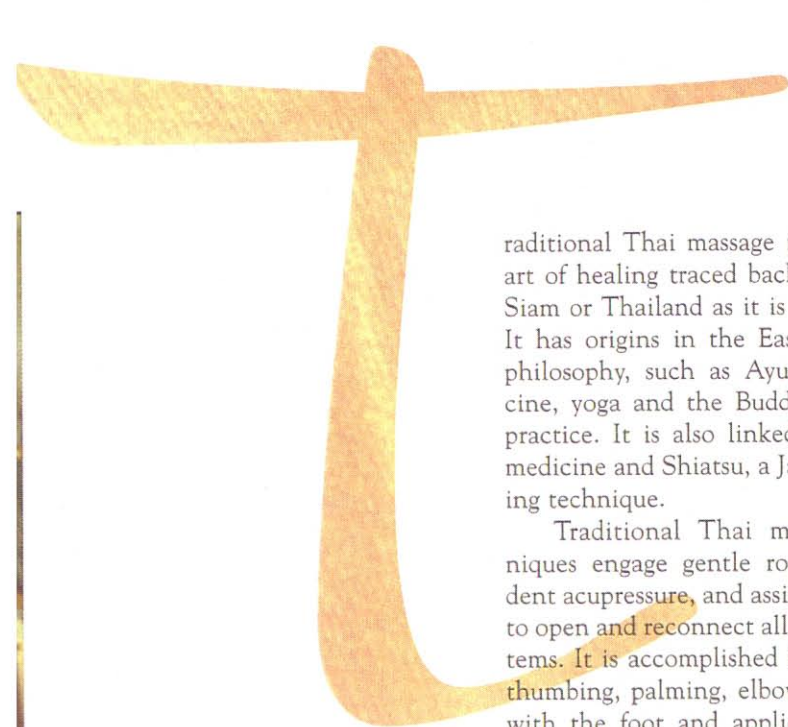
**Ayurveda**

**Relationship Dynamics**

**Aluminum Oxide Controversy**

# Traditional Thai Massage

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Traditional Thai massage techniques engage gentle rocking, confident acupressure, and assisted stretches to open and reconnect all the body systems. It is accomplished by a blend of thumbing, palming, elbowing, heeling with the foot and applied stretching techniques. This can also be described as applied yoga. The technique is performed while the client is fully clothed on a floor mat.

Ironically, the earliest source of Thai massage was found, not in Thailand, but in India. Revered as "Father Doctor" today, the founder of Thai massage, Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha, was believed to have been a doctor

from northern India. He was a contemporary of the Buddha over 2,500 years ago and was the personal physician to the Magatha King Bimbisana, a powerful king-like figure of that time. Father Doctor was very close with the order of Buddhist monks and nuns, so it is believed that his teaching reached Thailand at the same time as Buddhism.

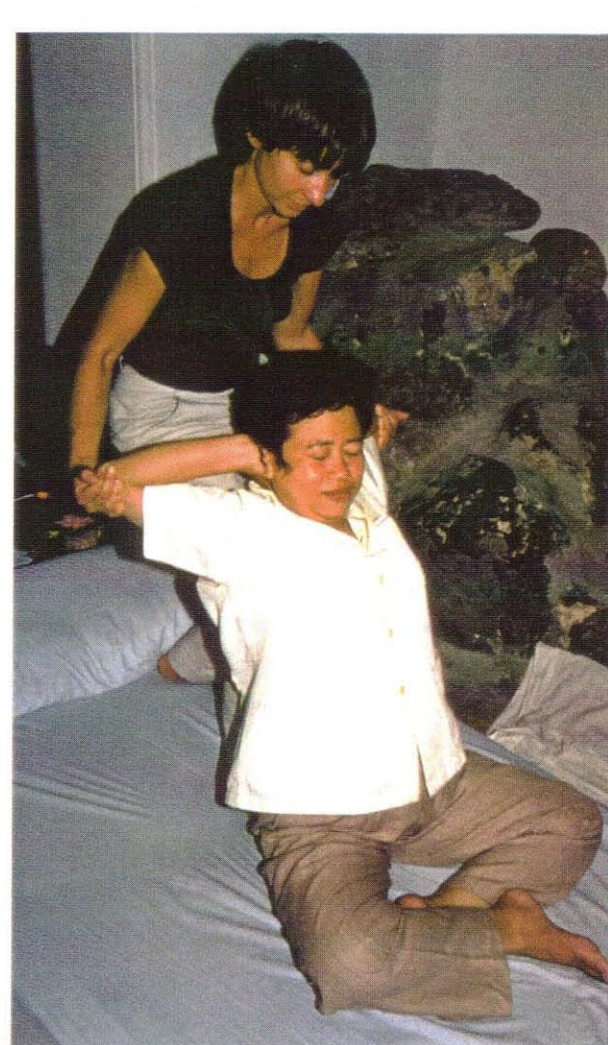
Despite the documented history on Father Doctor, it is unknown if another type of massage existed prior to his technique. It is also uncertain how Chinese medicine and acupuncture influenced the practice of Thai massage. This is because the technique was transmitted entirely through word of mouth for many centuries, without written documentation.

In the medical scriptures of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, massage is mentioned as a healing practice. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ayuthaya, the capital of Siam, was destroyed along with some of the old scripture. Only fragments survived; the

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## Thai Massage



scriptures saved were then carved in stone and placed in the famous wall of the Wat Pho temple in Bangkok.

For many years, Buddhist monks were the only ones allowed to practice Thai massage as a technique to release sickness. During that time, massages were only performed in temples. The Wat Pho temple continues to this day to be a spiritual place to receive Thai massage, as well as an education center to learn the technique and understand Thai medicine.

Thai massage is considered a spiritual practice and is closely connected to the teaching of the Buddha. It is understood to be a physical application of "loving kindness" to the clients.

The origin of the Thai massage clearly lies in the yoga philosophy. According to the Yoga

tradition, everyone is

comprised of, not only the physical body, but rather five bodies. Each person consists of the physical body, the Prana or energy body, the memory of consciousness body, the body of the subconscious, and all four unified in an envelope to make the fifth body, called the cosmic body. The Prana, or energy body, is the primary focus in Thai massage and other energy-healing techniques.

The Yoga philosophy believes that life energy, or "Prana," is absorbed through the air we breathe and food we eat. The network of "Prana Nadis" energy lines channel the energy flow through the body, and connect all parts of the organs and cells with the life energy surrounding it. This will maintain the energy balance, keep the physical body in contact with the energy of the universe, and provide a

healthy body and mind. Similarly, the foundation of Thai massage is based on a system of invisible energy lines called "sen" running throughout the body. It is believed there are 72,000 Sen, which cover the entire body. Ten of the major lines are vital and used for the practice of Thai massage. The Sen are closely associated with Yoga and the Nadis of Ayurvedic medicine.

The theory of Thai massage is based on the same concept as the Yoga theory. In fact, a relationship between the terminology of these two philosophies is evident. Many words are derived from Sanskrit, the ancient language of India. For example, three of the 10 Sen lines are not only linguistically connected but follow a very similar path as the corresponding Prana Nadis.

The theory describes that disturbance in the flow of energy caused by stress, emotional distress and other physical tension will lead to blockage of energy in the network. The consequences of this blockage will bring sickness, pain and unhappiness. Working with the energy lines, Thai massage will restore the free-flowing energy and bring the body and soul into balance, harmony and peace.

To better understand this concept, visualize the body's energy lines as a network of electricity. The flow of electric power in daily life is essential. If it breaks down, as it has at times, the world could potentially stop and begin to disintegrate. Catastrophic events could then happen in every corner of the globe! It is the same scenario for the body to function properly.

Thai massage technique consists of a series of coordinated movements. These include:

Pressures applied on precise points to disperse tension.

Compressions with the palm of the hands on the major lines and circulation arteries to increase blood circulation and detoxify the body.

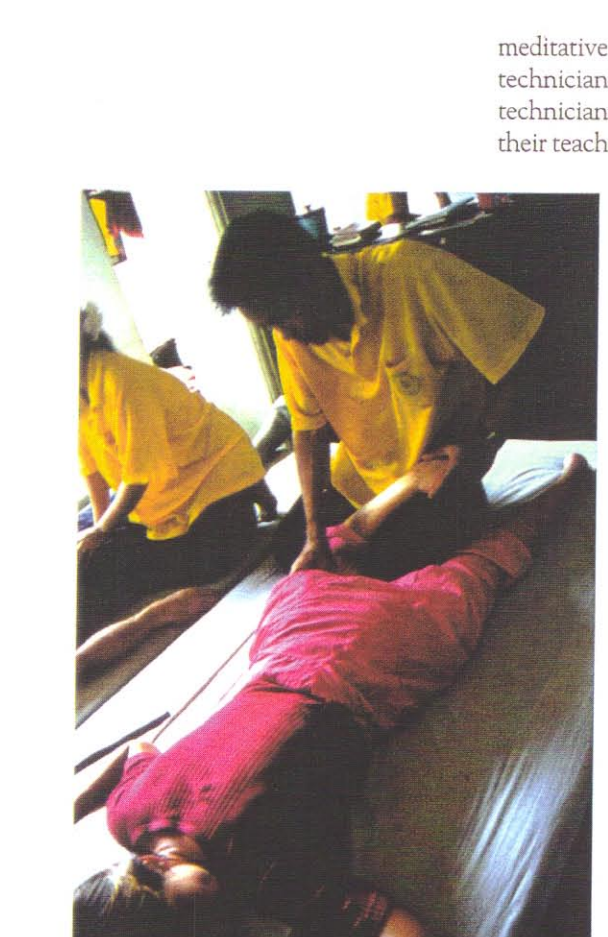
Rocking and stretching exercises to increase flexibility in the joints and restore body balance.

The work is very rhythmical and

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meditative for both the client and the technician. Prior to the massage, the technicians must say a prayer to thank their teacher and to center or focus on the healing they are to perform.

The massage is performed on a floor mat with the client wearing loose, comfortable clothes. Thai massage consists of four positions: front, side, back and seated positions.

Extensive massage is performed on the front position, and a range of movements on the legs to help release lower back problems. The upper back and neck are treated in all of the positions. The entire body will receive treatment at some time during the massage.

Deeply therapeutic Traditional Thai massage is still practiced today as part of the healing routine of many Thai people. Thai people believe in very long treatments; and a three-hour massage is not uncommon. In the western world, a one-and-a-half-hour to two-hour treatment is more appropriate.

Thai massage also incorporates Phytotherapy, the healing powers of herbs and minerals. Herbs such as bergamot, menthol, lemon grass and ginger are minced, heated and wrapped into moist linen to create "poultices". These poultices of medicinal herbs follow the old traditional practice of ayurvedic medicine and are often used before a massage. The poultices are applied in the back and especially the shoulder area to relieve tension prior to massage.

Conditions such as headache, knee pain, menstruation pain, frozen shoulder and circulation problems have been improved with a series of treatments on a regular basis. The benefits of treatment are total well being and balance of body and mind.

Two different styles of Thai massage are available: the Southern style

of and the Northern style. The latter style offers more of the applied stretching techniques and movements that increase flexibility in the joint. The focus of the Southern style is more on legwork and pressure points to increase the energy level of the client. Although different, they are both very beneficial for relaxation and well being. They accomplish the same effect on releasing the blockage in the network of energy lines.

A typical comment made by clients after each treatment is that they felt their body was reconnected with their mind. That, regardless of their beliefs, may derive benefit from the experience.

Two famous schools offer official Traditional Thai Massage training in Thailand. The Southern style is offered at the Wat Pho massage school and temple in Bangkok; and the Northern style at the foundation of Shivago Kamarapaj in Chiang Mai. The Wat Pho offers a 10-day class on traditional Thai massage at the Buddhist temple.

Holistic healing practices, such as the traditional Thai massage, have enormous possibilities in the time-deprived, stressed-out lifestyle today. In combination with the science of the West, it has brought awareness in the way that people care for their body and soul. Providing ancient healing massage to clients will distinguish a spa as offering the quality treatments for true relaxation and harmony in the world.

*Fabienne Guichon-Lindholm, founder of Spa Source, has worked in the beauty industry for 15 years earning a CIDESCO International diploma and French National Diploma in 1985.*

*Fabienne worked for five years in France at several beauty centers and destination spas. She was a spa director with Mario Tricoci Hair Salon and Day Spa for 12 locations in the greater Chicago area. Six of the 12 spas she managed were opened under her direction. Currently Fabienne is an educator for Decléor and the Institute for Advancement of Aesthetics. Fabienne can be contacted at 888-697-9717, or at [www.thespaxperts.com](http://www.thespaxperts.com).*

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