

Robert Gardner LMT, RYT
Thai Massage



INTRODUCTION TO **THAI YOGA MASSAGE**



Introduction to Thai Massage

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Table of Contents

A Message from Robert	3
What is Thai Massage?	5
How I Came to Thai Massage	6
Contraindications	7
General Guidelines	8
Sen Lines	9
Supine	13
Low Back Pain	34
Working on a Massage Table	35
Prone	36
Supine Flow	50
Prone Flow	51
Bios	52

A Message from Robert



Years ago when I spoke with my teacher about my desire to teach Thai massage she gave me her full approval and recommended I write my own workbook.

Little did I know that years later you would be receiving this Introduction to Thai Massage Workbook for free. I've many reasons for deciding to give this away. One is that Thai massage belongs to no one, it's a gift to humanity.

This healing art has been passed down by the people of Thailand and cherished by all those who've been blessed enough to truly receive it. In receiving that blessing myself, I've done all I can to practice, give, receive, and repeat for the past ten years. This distillation process in my practice allows me to give you the rudiments, the foundation you will build your practice on. I can give you the cerebral intellectual text but you must feel it, work with it and use it until it's a part of your heartfelt experience.

Another reason I've decided to give this to you is to let massage therapists know there's a better way. I'm saddened to hear massage therapists complain of self injury, pay that's so low they cannot survive, and clients who keep asking for more pressure. Great harm comes from wrong view. Thai massage is different, leave your presumptions behind.

Put aside your table, leave the client's clothes on and learn to use your feet. Trust me.

Any and all errors contained in this workbook are mine. The workbook is intended to be used while you work on someone, flip through the pages as you go through the routine. This is an Introduction to Thai massage, there's much more to come. Stay tuned!

I've done my best to remove esoteric energetic concepts and things that can be impediments to western practitioners. I've included anatomy to make western bodyworkers and massage therapists more aware of the structures we're working with. The hardest part about releasing something definitive is that nothing is definitive about this living tradition. I implore you to explore, work hard, be patient and open- hearted, and most importantly to **play**.

Thank you to Jivaka, the people of Thailand, and my teachers, great and small. You've helped me heal and I'll never take that for granted. This is what I share and pass on to any who will listen. The time to heal is now.

What is Thai Massage?

Thai massage is a traditional art practiced since time immemorial in Thailand. It's considered part of the Thai people's indigenous healthcare regimen and isn't massage as westerners think of it. Young and old receive the work and it has some relation to Chinese medicine and Ayurveda which surely influenced it. Buddhism has a strong influence on the practice as well, one which I enjoy.

The myth is that Shivaga Komarpaj or Jivaka, the father doctor, invented this healing work and was the Buddha's doctor. As Buddhism grew and spread so did his healing work which was preserved as a tradition in Thailand, predominantly amongst the Buddhist monks. These monks continued the practice, working on each other to bolster their health and ability to sit for prolonged amounts of time meditating. The monks would also work on villagers who would visit the monastery as part of their Buddhist practice of compassion and metta.

Asokananda or Harald Brust is a German man who lived in Thailand and studied Thai bodywork and Buddhism. He began teaching Thai bodywork and sharing his knowledge with westerners who traveled into the country. Many, if not most, of the first generation western Thai bodyworkers were taught due to his help.

One doesn't have to be Buddhist to practice though a compassionate heart is necessary. This transcends all religious and spiritual traditions.

My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.

-The Dalai Lama

How I Came to Thai Massage

I worked as a Licensed Massage Therapist in Louisiana for about a year and found it frustrating. I got a gig as a cook at a local retreat to pay for my CEU's that year and met a young woman who'd given a demonstration of Thai massage. I looked at the mat - the way she stretched someone- and it seemed to come out of nowhere. It wasn't massage as I'd ever seen it.

I had a single session with one of her students and told myself I would take anything the teacher taught. Over the course of two years I took all of my teacher's classes; then I became her teaching assistant.

My practice of yoga started a few months before my Thai session and immediately I felt these two things must be related. I consider yoga and Thai massage to be the most healing regimens I've personally encountered. One is passive, one is active. Use both.

A regular yoga practice will make you a better massage therapist as well as a better human. Learning Thai bodywork will allow you to save your wrists, save your posture, and promote a longer practice that's more beneficial to yourself and your clients. Thai bodywork and yoga are peanut butter and chocolate, two sides of the same physiological and energetic coin. A regular yoga practice will focus what you're working for in the people who receive your work; your own understanding of your body will translate into a better understanding of bodies and healing as a whole.

Contraindications

Thai massage has the same contraindications as most massage does. You're not going to stretch a fractured leg. You don't want to put excess pressure on varicose veins and also want to make sure someone doesn't bruise due to the use of blood thinners like coumadin. Most of the work shown in this book is safe for the bulk of receivers. If you have concern be gentle, go slow and communicate with the receiver.

One particular area of concern due to the movement involved in Thai bodywork involves twists. If someone has a herniated disc you're not going to want to move the person in a way that twists their spine. If you have any further questions about this please ask. When in doubt, don't.

General Guidelines

The general concept is:

- 1) Pressure is general to specific
- 2) Pressure is superficial to deep

This means you will use palm pressure on a line first, then finger pressure. You will use broad pressure of the plantar surface of your foot before using your heel.

I like intense bodywork. I love being worked on. I consider this riding the wave. If you can push a receiver right up to their edge, where their attention is with you, you're both working and breathing together in unison and they exhale and you feel the tissues give way, I think that's some of the best bodywork. If you press too sharply, too pointedly, too quickly you'll elicit a pain response. This work is supposed to reduce pain, not increase it.

This is extremely potent work and gives you the power to do great things, including harm if you do not communicate with the receiver. I cannot stress this enough. I've had great emotional outbursts from clients over the years for a variety of reasons including the fact that they felt I was mean to them during a session. Thai bodywork uses body weight, it's not just my pressing arms into someone, it's leaning my 185lbs of weight into them, very potent stuff. Keep it in mind as you work

If the receiver's breathing becomes shallow, back off. Ask the receiver to breathe with you and exhale into a stretch. If the receiver knows you're working with them and not against them you'll get much farther and have a friend for life. If the receiver's body feels as if it's struggling or fighting, back off. Move in more slowly and ground yourself by breathing. Read facial expressions! If the receiver is grimacing you're pressing too deeply, too quickly and need to decrease the pressure, speed, intensity or a combination. If a receiver's muscles are contracting for protection, you've gone over the line. The goal is to relax tissues not create more tension. This is ongoing work for a worthwhile goal.

Healing is our goal – the destination is what's important and many paths can lead there. I will do my best to teach you scales, it's your job to play jazz. You must improvise on this work wherever it takes you and use your own intuition when working with people.

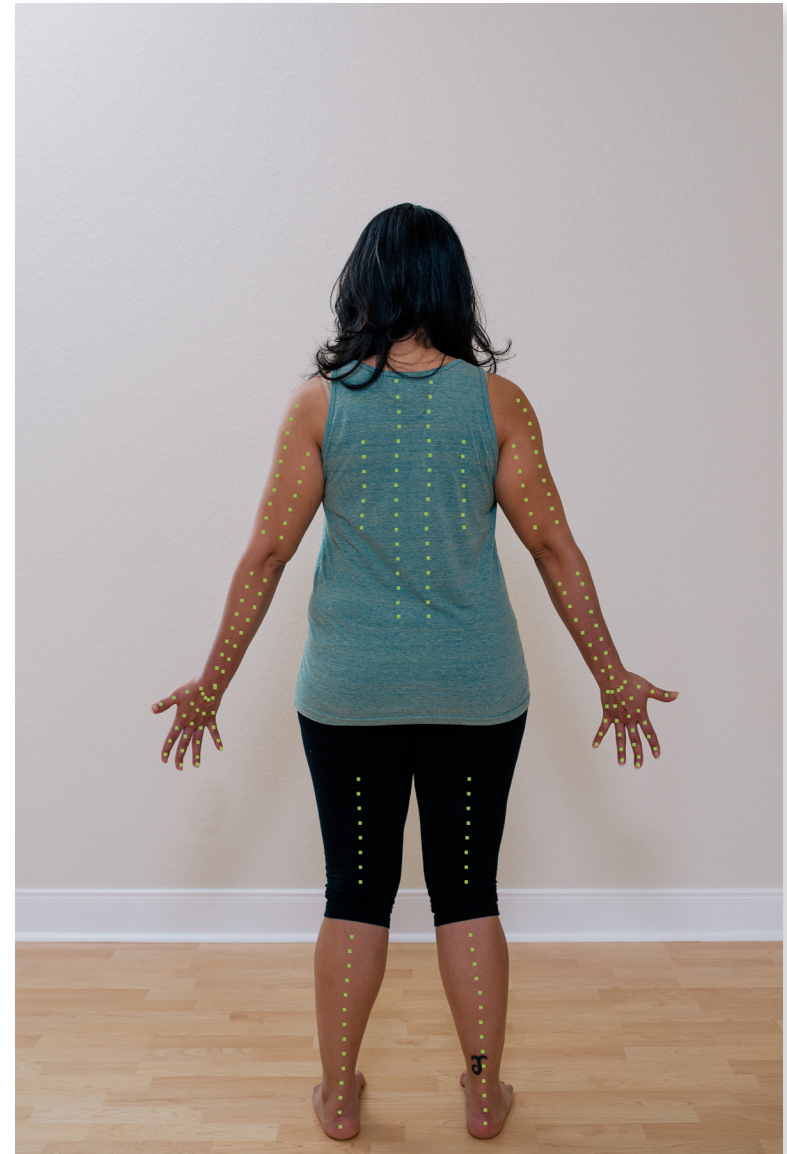
I currently work in a chiropractic office and find that the clients who rave most about this work have lower back problems. It's not uncommon for someone to get an abbreviated one hour Thai massage at the office and walk out saying that was the best massage they've ever had. It's not just a gift, this is good and essential work. Anyone can learn it. Anyone can master it. I'll help give you the tools, but you must practice.



Sen Lines

Sen lines are the energy lines in Thai bodywork. If you think energy lines are hocus pocus have no fear. You don't have to believe in things for them to exist experientially. These lines run throughout the body and much like nadis in yoga they are said to be the pathways where energy flows.

Unlike Chinese medicine there are no particular points on the line. They're just lines, you stimulate and unclog the line, you've done your work. There are correlations between meridians and sen lines but they're not used the same way in my experience. The sen lines do however particularly correlate to stretches in yoga and what you'll feel when you're in a yoga class. If you want to really learn Thai massage, start practicing yoga. It will make much more sense experientially.





For those who have issue with the energetics of it all, just push on the lines gently. You'll see how many people respond by saying that it's painful and you'll find no western anatomical correlation as to why they should hurt there.



Supine



Start by centering your breathing and kneeling between the receiver's legs. Look at the receiver, ground yourself and notice if one leg rotates out more than the other. Notice if the receiver's arms seem drawn in and if they are holding.

Make no judgments, just notice their body positioning.



Hold both of the receiver's legs at the ankles and traction them by leaning.



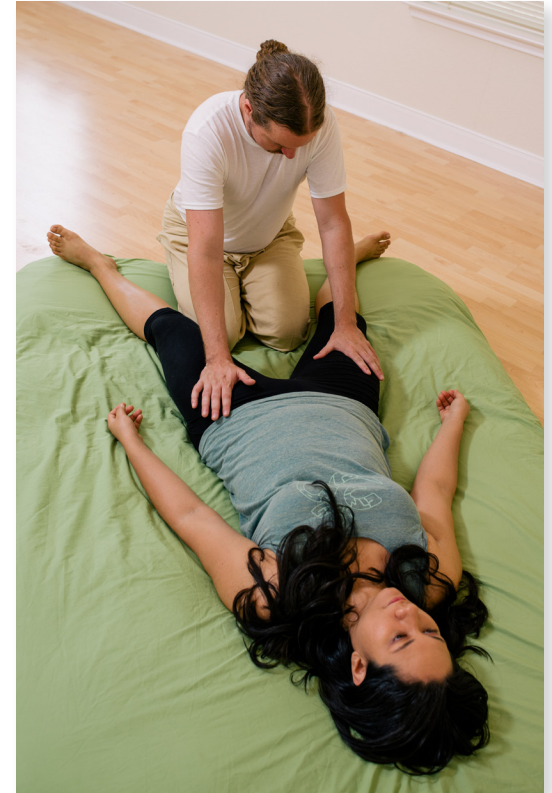
Grabbing the receiver's feet press both feet down gently toward the mat.

Then grabbing the balls of the feet and pushing cephalad (towards the head) curl your hands around the toes for a stretch. Hold for a few seconds until you feel a release in the bottoms of the feet.

Western anatomy: The first stretch lengthens the dorsal surface of the ankles and feet. The toe stretch grabs adductor hallucis, abductor hallucis, flexor digitorum brevis and abductor digiti minimi in the plantar surface of the foot and stretches them all the way to their attachment sites.



Mobilize the feet and thumb press the foot fan lines. This rocks to receiver's legs opening the line channels.



Gently palm press the inner leg line from the ankle to $\frac{3}{4}$ the way up the inner thigh then down again. Skip over the knee.

Finger press the same line.

Use this time to notice if one of the receiver's leg seems to roll out more easily than the other or vice versa. We're looking for muscular and tension patterns to follow them back to their source.



Your hand goes to the ankle bone and it sits snugly in the center of your palm. Your other hand sits on the greater trochanter of the femur and it sits snugly in the center of the palm. Leaning forward with both arms locked, rotate and stretch the receiver's leg medially (in towards their body). This lengthens the outer leg lines.



Palm press the outer leg lines from just above the ankle up to $\frac{3}{4}$ up the thigh while skipping over the knee.

Finger press the same lines.

Western Anatomy: On the lower leg you're working tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum longus and peroneus longus. On the leg above the knee you're working the iliotibial tract or IT band as it's called in addition to rectus femoris, vastus lateralis and the deeper vastus medialis.



Place the receiver in a relaxed tree pose. Palm the inner leg line skipping over the knee while leaning side to side, back and forth. Notice that the receiver's pelvis and torso will start to rock side to side, this begins opening up the low back and lumbar spine. Finger press the same line starting at the ankle and moving towards the hips then down again.

Remember to use the flat of your thumb finger pad to distribute pressure. Nothing sharp is needed. The inner leg line is particularly tender on many people.

Western Anatomy: You're lengthening and opening flexor digitorum longus, soleus and the edge of gastrocnemius in the lower leg. Above the knee you're palpating sartorius, rectus femoris, rectus medialis and starting to open the adductors. Note that we don't have to touch gracilis, adductor longus and pectineus but the bent leg being pushed to the mat begins stretching there gently into the attachment sites on the ischium and pubic bones.



Use interlocked hands underneath the knee to hold firmly and lean back with arms outstretched. This tractions the lumbar spine and hip. Lean your head back and stretch your upper back, this allows you to work on yourself while you work on the receiver.

*** Note: If the receiver's hip feels like it starts to pull gently out of socket have them resist you. Have them pull their hip into the socket as you traction their lumbar spine.

Western Anatomy: The palms and fingers split the belly of gastrocnemius and also press into soleus on the lower portion of the leg. The lumbar traction stretches all of the pelvic girdle and into the lumbar spine including the quadratus lumborum, the thoracolumbar fascia, the psoas and the lumbar paraspinals.



Bend the receiver's leg to 90 degrees. Position the receiver's leg while gripping their ankle firmly, one hand on top, the other on the bottom. Press your foot into their hamstring with the flat arch of your foot and toes lateral to the receiver. Your foot is pressing on the sen line that runs the length of the hamstring. When your leg is straight, pull on the ankle and pull the receiver's leg into your foot. You can move your foot up and down the hamstring several times as you repeat this motion.

Western anatomy: This puts pressure directly into the belly of the hamstrings, semitendinosus, biceps femoris and the deeper semimembranosus.





Rotate the receiver's leg out into almost tree pose again by turning your foot medially and allowing their leg to fall open. Allow the receiver's lower leg to fall over your shin with the toes tucked under to form the grip. If the receiver's body doesn't allow this just hold a comfortable grip. Using your hand, grasp the receiver's heel with your available hand on the same side and then allow your opposite hand and arm to rest comfortably. Your free foot, not tucked behind the receiver's leg, can now begin to press into the hamstrings.



With the receiver's leg in hand come to kneeling to push their bent leg knee to the shoulder on the same side. Have the receiver's foot fall into your holster, at your hip. You're leaning in using your hips and helping the knee of the receiver's leg to go to the shoulder on the same side. Repeat this several times, leaning in for 2-3 seconds then backing off and repeating.

Then aim the receiver's knee to the opposite shoulder while the knee is comfortably bent. This allows you to test mobility and range of motion. Then you lean in and press the bent leg knee to the opposite shoulder and hold for 2-3 seconds. Remind the receiver to breathe. You stretch them on the exhale.

As the receiver's leg is anchored with their knee closer to the opposite shoulder, shot put their bent leg heel to stretch the hamstrings of the bent leg. Most people will be tight here so start with gentle pressure. Repeat 2-3 times.

Western anatomy:

This makes a deep stretch into the hip and hamstrings. The primary stretch is in piriformis and the gluteals. Then the shot put stretches into the belly of the hamstrings, biceps femoris, semimembranosus and semitendinosus.





Cross the receiver's leg over their body so they partially turn onto their side. Step your foot underneath the bent leg helping hold them in place. Your hands are free so you can palm and finger press on the lines that meet near the greater trochanter of the femur.



Western Anatomy: The twist in the lumbar spine begins stretching the rotatores, multifidus, and more superficial erector spinae, spinalis, longissimus and iliocostalis. The finger pressure isn't specifically western anatomical in its focus but we're pressing on gluteus maiximus, gluteus medius and gluteus minimus in addition to piriformis and rest of the deep lateral rotators. They all get a light stretch from the receiver's position.



Position the receiver so that your leg is in the small of their back. You're holding them in place so they don't roll out of position. Your foot is still underneath their bent leg. Have the receiver grab onto your forearm with a solid grip. Using both hands grip them then have them take a deep in breath. As they exhale, squat gently and holding their arm, find the sweet spot that allows you to sit in your seat and lift them. Lift with your legs and with as little effort on your spine as possible.

Western Anatomy: The lift begins to access latissimus dorsi and the thoracic paraspinals, spinalis, longissimus and iliocostalis. The real depth from this move comes from the stretch into quadratus lumborum.

We've now worked one leg. Repeat all previous on the opposite side.





Palm press the belly gently. This establishes contact and lets the receiver feel grounded and safe. The belly is a tender area and is often neglected or looked down upon by people. Just keep it in mind as you work. You make clockwise motions from the base of your palm to the fingertips, then fingertips to palm around the entire stomach.



Lengthen the anterior arm line by placing one hand on the shoulder and your other hand on the wrist. Palm press and finger press the line skipping over the elbow.

Western Anatomy: This stretches the muscles of the arm and places some palm pressure along the forearm flexors and splits the upper arm along the line between the biceps brachii and the triceps brachii.





Lengthen and stretch the fan lines of the hands.

Traction the arm cephalad (towards the head), then lateral and finally, caudad (towards the feet).





Lengthen the posterior lines of the arms in the same way you did previously and then palm press and finger press the outer arm lines.



Western Anatomy: This lengthens the entire arm again but your main focus on most receivers will be the forearm extensors, primarily extensor digitorum and extensor carpi radialis longus.

Repeat pages 28-30 on the opposite side.

Rotate the receiver's head to one side and traction the neck. You're gently turning the head while anchoring at the shoulder and rocking. This stretches the neck muscles at their origin and insertion and is extremely effective. You can apply some finger pressure to the posterior neck muscles while you stretch. Work both sides of the neck.



Western Anatomy: This stretches longissimus and allows you to put pressure on splenius capitus and semispinalis.



Kneeling on the receiver's opposite side use your fingertips to pull and traction the neck from the top of the shoulder to the base of the skull. The hand grips but the weight and pull comes from leaning and kneeling into the stretch. Work both sides of the neck.



Work the receiver's scalp in any way you choose. I like to shampoo the scalp and work around the temples.

Western anatomy: This primarily works the temporalis.

Low Back Pain

Many who learn Thai massage will see great improvement in clients with low back pain. I was puzzled by this at first because I wasn't really putting my hand on the back or on the erector spinae muscles that always seemed tender in clients.

By working the legs, hips, gluteals, and deep lateral rotators down to their attachment sites you're accessing the foundational structures that often lead to low back pain. Correct the foundation and the structures above rebalance. "Low back pain? What low back pain. I feel **great!**"

It's made more sense over the years but Thai massage is the most effective bodywork I've found for low back issues. The only thing I've found that works as well is yoga. I use both.

Hip mobility in westerners is greatly diminished from sitting in chairs. Next time you're around a baby notice how they use their legs, all very pliable and open, knees one way or the other. Extremely supple hips allow a greater freedom of movement in the pelvic bowl and lumbar spine. This is what we're helping recreate when we give a good Thai massage.

Western massage receivers are often used to telling a therapist "I hurt here" and having the therapist go to that specific spot. What I've noticed over time is that people will tell me their upper back and neck hurts and I'll go to their feet. They may be puzzled at first but after a 2 hour session with me they're scratching at the door to schedule their next appointment.

The problems often come from below where the pain manifests. You pull on their feet and legs, you'll notice their neck let go and unwind.

Working on a Massage Table

Most of this work can be improvised for a table for western clients. I use it when there are no other options and clients aren't ready to take the leap to the mat.

You often have to meet clients where they are and I recommend incorporating whatever small portions you can on the table before the client takes off their clothes. If they have low back pain in particular you can save your hands, work on low back pain more effectively for 15 minutes then have them undress for the deep tissue work in the erector spinae and quadratus lumborum.

Practice, feel things out and explore.

Prone



Walk on the receiver's feet gently. Start with one foot then as you find your balance use both.



Palm press the back leg line up the legs to $\frac{3}{4}$ the way up the hamstrings then down again. Finger press the same line. Be sure to skip over the popliteal space at the back of the knees.



Holding one foot on top of the other lean forward and stretch the quadriceps. Put the opposite foot on top and repeat.



Holding both legs cross one leg over the other while bent. Place the top of the foot of one leg in the popliteal space (back of the knee) of the other and lean forward holding the opposite foot in your hand. Stretch the quadriceps and palm press the outer leg line. Move your body position so you can comfortably stretch the quadriceps and palm the opposite legs outer line. Repeat on opposite side.

Western Anatomy: This stretch works the quadriceps: rectus femoris, vastus medialis, vastus lateralis and vastus intermedius.

Palm the back line on one side of the back while stretching the quadriceps. This is preparation for the psoas stretch and helps the receiver relax the front of the lower body.



Western Anatomy: This continues the quadriceps stretch while allowing the giver to palm the paraspinals or erector spinae.



Contraindications: Avoid this if the receiver has herniated lumbar discs.

Stretch the psoas. You hold one hand in the small of the receiver's back and use the other to grab underneath the knee on the same side. Have the receiver take a deep in breath and position your own body to begin the lift as the receiver exhales. You lift your torso up, then your bottom drops back to your heels for a deeper stretch and twist.

This particular stretch is beneficial to many with low back pain. The psoas is a difficult area to work directly and this non-direct approach to opening it works for many people. Most are unaware of this muscle and it's a good place to educate the receiver if they make pleasant groans while you stretch them here. If both sides of the psoas are tight it puts strain on the lumbar spine. It can be a lifelong problem for some people.

Western Anatomy: You're stabilizing the lumbar spine with one hand and focusing on stretching the psoas major and psoas minor along with iliopsoas.



Lift one of the receiver's legs and shake it out with the leg bent. You're opening the hip and making sure the receiver's leg is relaxed. Then, move in between the receiver's legs by lifting one leg and sliding in. Use your forearm and elbow to work the glutes and piriformis.

You can palm and finger press the lines or use your forearm and elbow to put pressure on the lines along the thigh. Use your intuition, it's usually correct. Go for what you feel in your gut and what the receiver's response tells you. Communicate with the receiver verbally and non-verbally.

Repeat pages 40-42 on the opposite side.



Western anatomy: You're working pointedly with the forearm and elbow into the gluteals, specifically gluteus maximus, gluteus medius and gluteus minimus. Piriformis is given ample attention as well as the rest of the deep lateral rotators.



Kneel in the glutes and slowly, purposefully lean the knees in the musculature. Be mindful of the the receiver's tenderness. Many are very sensitive in this area but get a huge amount of relief from having this worked.



Western Anatomy: This is a deep compression of the gluteus maximus and more specifically piriformis and all of the other gluteal musculature including the deep lateral rotators of the hip.





Kneel at the top of the hamstrings. Find the spot in between the muscles to sink into. Most receivers find this pleasurable. Start soft then sink more deeply as you work.

Western Anatomy: The knees kneel right at the insertion of the hamstrings into the ischial tuberosities. You're splitting the biceps femoris and semitendinosus.

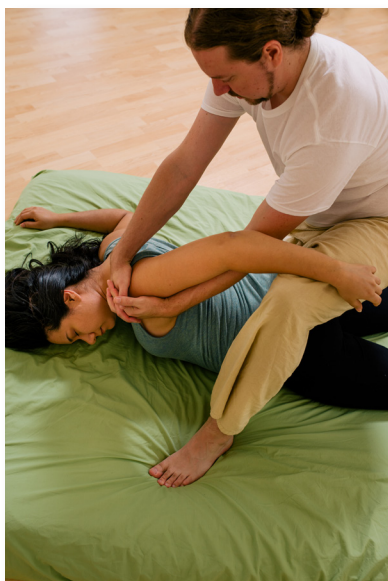


Palm press and then finger press the back lines starting in the lower back and then working your way up. The inner line along the spine is particularly tender on most people and they find a huge relief from pressure placed in the area. The upper thoracic around the scapulae are particularly sensitive.

Western Anatomy: The erector spinae are the focus.



Lift the receiver's forearm onto your thigh. Grabbing their shoulder begin to move the scapula gently to judge mobility. After opening and rotating the the scapula get a two handed interlaced grip on the anterior portion of the shoulder. Make sure the receiver's opposite arm is in the kickstand position and that the receiver's head is turned toward the shoulder you will lift.



Have the receiver take a large in breath and position yourself kneeling, prepared to lean back when the receiver exhales. Lift your torso then lean back and down and help the thoracic spine twist open while lifting the receiver's shoulder. Your bottom will come to your heel. Remember that you're using your body weight to lean, you're not pulling with your arms. As my teacher told me, "queen bee, queen bee...no worker bee."



Western Anatomy: You're opening the scapula and its attachments. This movement helps lift the scapula off of the upper back where it's constantly glued. You're stretching the pectoralis major, pec minor and helping the spine back-bend on the side you're lifting.



Rotate and mobilize the shoulder blade. You can press underneath the shoulder blade and around the scapula. The heel of the foot can be used to help hold the arm in position while you work. This is an optional fun way to use your newly found additional limbs to help you work efficiently and gracefully.

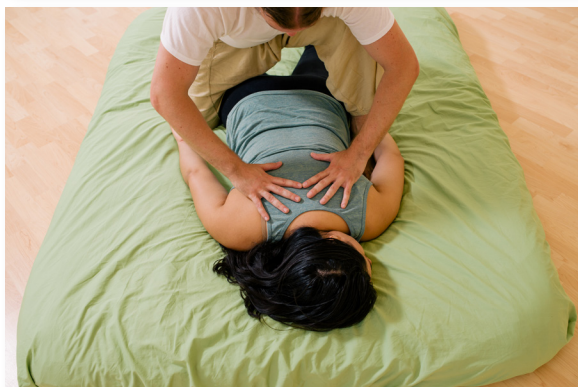
Western Anatomy: You're opening the scapula again with a focus on the rhomboids and trapezius.

Repeat pages 45-47 on the opposite side.



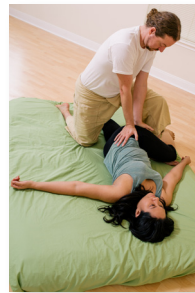
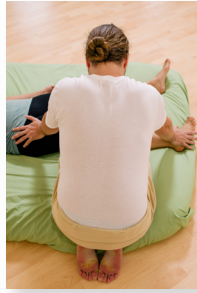
Position yourself at the receiver's head and palm the back lines from the top of the shoulders down. Traction the receiver's lumbar spine and sacrum. Work on your downward facing dog pose, allow your own shoulder blades ample movement. Allow your spine to lengthen and your back leg line to stretch to the bottoms of the feet and out of the fan lines of your toes.



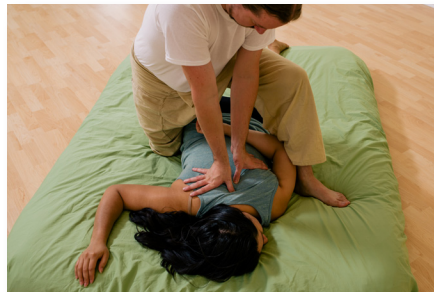
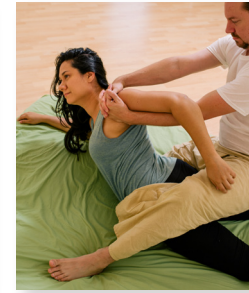
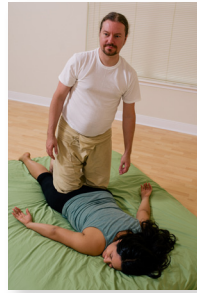


Conclude the session in the way you prefer. I typically do some tapotement then I like to stroke the back with finger pressure sweeping motions from the spine to lateral movements. Then I place my palms at heart level on the receiver and thank them for the session that day.

Supine Flow



Prone Flow



Bios



Robert Gardner II

At 22 my health was taken from me by a drunk driver and our legal and medical institutions did little to help. I've worked every day since then to overcome adversity and become whole. At 36 years of age I'm better than ever and have much to share to help others on their healing path.

Much of my free time is spent doing yoga, playing no limit hold 'em poker, cooking, gardening and entertaining friends.

I can be found somewhere in central Texas doing a headstand, pondering the deeper mysteries of life.

My home is now in Round Rock, Texas just north of Austin.

Find me on my website and follow me on whatever social media you use. <http://robertgardnerwellness.com/>

Thank you to my wife Andrea, who always knew I could accomplish anything I focused on.

Anne Marie Carson

<http://www.annemariecarson.com>

I am a wedding and portrait photographer based in Austin, TX and Indianapolis, IN who focuses on photographing real moments for awesome, down-to-earth people.

My approach to photographing is to observe and capture images that may otherwise be missed or forgotten while you are in the moment. I see my camera as an extension of myself and making pictures as an opportunity to capture both seldom and often seen aspects of others.

I'm the mother of a beautiful 10-year-old girl, wife to one fabulous man, and caretaker to a dog who loves herding chickens and a cat who thinks he's a dog. We are very involved in the local food and farming community; and keep chickens, bees, fish, and a huge organic garden.

Practicing yoga and receiving Thai Massage have impacted my physical and mental well-being in many positive ways - allowing me to continue toting heavy cameras, spend long hours editing images, and still enjoy everything else.





Lisa Chouinard has been making handmade artisanal soap for her company Feto Soap (<http://fetosoap.com>) since 2003. She makes handmade soap in small batches and is probably best known for her lotion bars and her razor blade soaps, both of which have been featured in FHM Magazine, in the Chicago Tribune, on HGTV – That’s Clever! and more.