



# BODY by Annet King OF KNOWLEDGE

## INTRODUCING THAI YOGA THERAPY

**O**UR GLOBAL VILLAGE grows smaller every day, with the once-exotic made mainstream through the unstoppable acceleration of media, international travel and technology. Today, we take for granted that sushi is sold in our local supermarket, and that we may have our hands and feet decorated in ancient “bindi” henna patterns at our neighborhood shopping mall, right beside the Starbucks and Banana Republic.

The skin care industry has been enriched—even inundated—with international techniques and traditions in the past decade. While these imports are invariably alluring, like throwing on a lush, antique kimono over your blue jeans, truly integrating these practices into the American lifestyle in an enduring way may prove more of a challenge. ➤

### Loving kindness

Thai Yoga Therapy as introduced to the American market by Deon de Wet (pronounced de “Vet”) is an illustration of perfect synergy between the American psyche and the wisdom of ancient Asian wellness practice. The technique, also known as Thai massage, is based on the Buddhist concept of “Metta” or loving kindness, and is considered a form of energy-work. Although the practice was not conceived as a skin care method per se, the deeply nurturing practice offers the skin care therapist a powerful, holistic approach to connecting with clients and enhancing facial treatments.

The immediate afterglow of a Thai yoga therapy session is similar to the warm, pleasantly “spent” sensation following a satisfying workout, but without any of the potential trauma, such as pulled muscles or other symptoms of overexertion. The technique’s benefits include improved flexibility and alignment, better balance and circulation, and a deepened sense of well-being. It is not unusual for a session with a skilled practitioner to produce tears of catharsis. Quite obviously, although the practice does not relate directly to the skin, the skin inescapably benefits from the process. Wet reports that after even one session, the faces as well as the bodies of his clients literally look entirely different, not just merely relaxed, but radiant.

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### Providing an escape

Part of the reason that the time is right for America to experience Thai yoga therapy, which is much more like “assisted yoga” than massage in any Western sense, is that skin care clients are seeking escape. This concept of escape and our need for it reaches far beyond mere relaxation. In spite of technology and all of its wonders, we are the most stressed population in the history of human beings. Remember—our grandparents never even heard of “adrenaline” or “cortisol.” Today, we are relentlessly pushing our adrenal systems to the brink of collapse, worrying about everything from terrorism on the subway to mercury-levels in the tuna sandwich we make for our children’s lunches.

Yet, even the resources to which we turn to feel better about our lives exert still more pressure on us. Even Oprah, America’s most popular icon of self-acceptance, goads us to “live our best lives” (translation: no cold pizza or cookie dough for breakfast). Pilates aficionados quest after core strength with a machine ominously named “The Reformer,” and so on. America’s Puritan work-ethic is deeply rooted, even as we pursue pleasure and recreation. Wet’s frame of reference for his work is that each of us is already enlightened. Our journey, he says, is not to acquire wisdom, which the body already possesses in every cell, but rather to reveal what is present but dormant.

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*The therapist acts as the apparatus, which guides and supports the client through the movements' precise, specific sequence.*

### **Total surrender**

Wet, a certified massage therapist in Swedish and circulatory massage, an instructor in anusara-style yoga, and a Thai yoga therapy practitioner and teacher, says, “Thai yoga therapy is a way to feel incredibly good right here, right now. It does not require self-improvement, or meeting any challenges. All it takes is total surrender to the moment, and the movements make this surrender pretty much inevitable, even in the first session.”

According to ancient traditions, the session takes place on the floor, and may last for four hours or more, with two hours being what Wet recommends as a minimum duration. Both participants are clothed, all of this in direct contrast to the typical, Western-style table massage.

Surprisingly, Wet comments that remaining clothed (comfortable, breathable, nonbinding yoga or athletic garments are recommended) actually “... allows the client to go deeper. Let’s be honest, our society is not one that easily embraces nakedness. Lots of people pretend, and may actually believe, that they’re totally relaxed being naked in front of strangers, but in my opinion this is just part of the protective psychic shell, which the practice of Thai yoga therapy breaks down and dissolves. Think about how much draping and rustling of fabric has to go on during a conventional table-massage, all ostensibly to keep the client feeling comfortable and to protect the client’s modesty. Actually, I think it’s very uncomfortable, mentally and emotionally for most people, and actually limits the experience.”

Also surprising: although the floor-session may appear more interactive than European table-massage, Wet describes the client’s role as “totally passive. They are not working at all.” The treatment consists of gentle, deep pulling, pressing

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and stretching motions, with the therapist acting as the apparatus, which guides and supports the client through the movements' precise, specific sequence.

"Things can get pretty competitive in your average yoga class," chuckles Wet. "There's a lot of mat-envy, and struggling to be noticed, and vying to be teacher's pet, and all of that sort of thing, especially in Los Angeles and New York, where I do most of my work. By contrast, during a Thai yoga therapy session, the client just relinquishes all control. The practitioner or therapist must take total responsibility for the client's alignment and overall experience."

### **Perfecting his craft**

Wet did not set off in life with an interest in energy-work or the healing arts. In fact, he was enjoying a much-needed break in Thailand from his demanding career in the business world in the year 2000 when he first experienced what was locally called Thai massage on the beach there. "It was my gateway into the real practice, which is quite precise from a therapist's point of view," he recalls. "What they do on the beach there may not be the real deal, but it was enough to set me

on the path to find the real thing." Soon after he returned to his home in Los Angeles, Wet noticed that a weekend workshop was being offered in Thai massage—a coincidence he terms "synchronous." Two years of intense study followed, which culminated with his certification in the practice. He opened his own Los Angeles-based studio ([www.deonthaiyoga.com](http://www.deonthaiyoga.com)) in 2002, beginning with only one client. Today, he teaches the practice and visits clients around the world, including A-list celebrities. "Because they're A-list, they're also Type-A personalities," he says. "Like all of us, they desperately need to be able to release themselves from all of that tension."

The appeal of Thai yoga massage to actors and other performers is no accident, says Wet. "At least actors know when they are acting," he says. "The power of this technique and experience is that it enables every participant to take off the mask they're wearing. Only by removing the mask can we experience our own inner radiance."

Wet explains that the focus of most of his sessions involve redirecting energy from the head and neck area, where blockages often manifest in the form of facial tension. This tension distorts the expressions of the face, and is ultimately a factor in aging less than gracefully. "I often find myself pulling energy out of the head, down toward the hands, feet and toes," he explains. "As Americans, we are so trapped in our heads. To actually feel our bodies, their innate power and strength and grace, is a feeling of bliss, which is available and accessible to everyone." ■

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