

Ancient Practice - Modern Therapy By Gabriel Azoulay, RTT

Dr. Ida Rolf, founder of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, used to say: "Anyone can take a body apart, but few know how to put it back together." For thousands of years, the Eastern approach to the human structure has also been concerned with putting the body back together.

Asana yoga practice, chi gong, t'ai chi and other forms of self-structural integration have proven themselves, if not simply by how old they are, but by the living testimonies of the health and well being of their practitioners.

These practices are not, in and of themselves, just a form of therapy; they enhance every aspect of living. Not only do they put the body back together, but they also rejuvenate, reform, and recreate. When you get off the massage table, don't you wish to feel renewed, reshaped, and regrouped? And, why not? According to Ayurveda, the ancient system from India known as the "science of life," every seven years we have a brand new body, with modified bones and muscle tissue. This concept is not so bizarre when we consider that every second, human cells die and new cells are immediately created to replace them.

Today, there is ample evidence and expanded research to support the physical effects of yoga, t'ai chi and chi gong, from the efficient use of the muscles and conservation of energy to the facilitation of a more economical and refined pattern of movement. Regular practice has proven to significantly reduce chronic stress and indeed can change the structure of the body. No wonder Ida Rolf practiced yoga. She probably would have liked Thai yoga massage as well. When one explores her philosophic approach to the body, and the manner in which she chose to pursue it by providing the healing aspect of intentional touch, the parallels are striking. Her techniques vary from Thai traditions, but the results can be similar.

Nuad Boran, often called Thai yoga massage or traditional Thai massage, is an ancient, powerful form of structural and energetic integration. Gravity affects our structure moment by moment, and years of walking, standing, sitting in a chair, or sleeping in our favorite position take a toll on our physical structure -- usually in ways that limit the full use of our muscles, our mental acuity, or the heartfelt sharing of our joys. Thai yoga massage can balance and rejuvenate every aspect of your day. Thai massage affects the entire structure in every session. The density of the muscle and the joints' range of motion both indicate the flow of energy in the body. Imagine a ballet dancer, flowing gracefully, moving with ease, effortlessly gliding across the stage. Or picture small children, and how they move with ease and grace even if their movements are not so elegantly executed. As we grow older, we step away from the body and focus our attention on our careers, our family, and life in general. We sustain just enough energy to keep us going through each day - unless we exercise. Then, we experience, first-hand, the jolt of energy it provides. Thai yoga massage is designed to expand the flow of energy in the body. The movements and the manipulations are all based on ancient practices, most of which have been shared by practice, rather than by writing or talking about it. For hundreds of years and currently, people in Thailand receive *nuad boran* to rebalance and increase their energy. They also work on each other at home with family members and friends. This traditional therapy unwinds tension stored up from working in the fields (or in the modern-day office and work setting), it clears the mind from mental agitation, and through the power of touch and physical connection, it expands the heart. The traditional positions and movements are effective because they address all three aspects of our daily life experience: our physical body, our emotional state, and our mental disposition.

Have you ever noticed that it is difficult to lie on your back, perfectly still, without moving? Try it now. For five minutes, simply close your eyes and lie motionless. What most people become aware of very quickly is the motion inside the ears and the flickering of thoughts in our head. *Nuad boran* begins lying on the back, which allows the spinal cord a chance to unwind and release the gravitational pull (one reason chiropractors advise sleeping on the back rather than the belly). Something interesting happens when your body is touched by another. Whether it's because the intention is to bring your body and mind into balance, or whether it's due to a nervous system trigger, what happens is that you quickly sink into a relaxed state. In this relaxed state, your body is guided through a yoga routine. Specific positions allow energy to move more freely. Pressure stimulates circulation and movement aligns bones, increasing range of motion. These various manipulations lead into the first powerful principle of *nuad boran* — the principle of stretching. This action releases stiffness, increases traction and space between bones at the joint capsule, improves joint mobility, and enhances blood circulation. Another principle of *nuad boran* deals with specific pressure points. Over years of experience, the Thai people have discovered there are certain areas where sustained pressure increases and enhances the flow of energy to the body, as if opening an energetic dam. The surge of energy helps to alleviate pain, restore balance, and even improve posture. Similar to the effect of joint pumping, this principle generates heat in the joint capsule, increasing blood circulation, and improving range of motion. When combined together in a flow-like session, the receiver arises from a session feeling enhanced, elongated, invigorated, and reformed.



Thai yoga massage is not only effective and therapeutic for the receiver, but when practiced correctly, it is also a yoga practice for the therapist. The giver improves his own physical energy flow, joint range of motion and mental balance. Each movement is designed so that both parties are balanced. Yoga is a self-practice where we discover how physical postures enhance our internal energy and improve our external experience. This discovery is revealed through sensation. What we see is what we have been accustomed to feeling. From the texture of a rock, the heat of sunlight, or the nourishment of fruits, many aspects of life are energetic experiences. In Thai yoga therapy we go a step further. We feel beyond ourselves. While staying perfectly attuned to our experience, we sense our client so we can actually serve and benefit him. This feeling, beyond ourselves, is the core element of loving kindness, or “metta”. As we develop our own capacity to extend loving kindness to another, we find that we can better share that attitude with the universe. Every day, our experience is new, and every day our body, our mind, and our emotions are different. *Nuad boran* addresses these fluctuations in a unique and powerful way. It connects us to the present moment, both client and therapist, and when we are in the moment, our possibilities for growth and knowledge become expanded and enhanced.