

Thai Yoga –Redefining Your Yoga Experience

By Gabriel Azoulay

Thai Yoga is a practice where students learn how to move their body, through very specific positioning and breathing, creating a focus and an energetic exchange that is very similar to any Yoga class. Rather than focusing on the other, in Thai Yoga the focus is primarily on the experience of the practitioner. Practitioners develop a new understanding to why Yoga is translated as 'union.'

Yoga practice can be defined as 'the effort to connect two things', to bring together two aspects which reveal a larger picture. More specifically, to connect mind and body to reveal one's true nature.

Your mind can think of being at the beach, yet your body might be sitting on the couch. In fact, mind can wander away from the body and the body can function without the mind (such as brain "dead" cases where the mind is gone, yet the heart beat continues). Asana yoga practice draws practitioners to connect their mind and body, along the string of the breath. On one end lies the physical body, on the other end are the mental/emotional responses we experience within. As we concentrate on the breath, a new revelation occurs about our physical existence.

Beginning students often share at the end of my classes what an incredible feeling it is to actually feel their own bodies, while practitioners of all levels comment on the joy and the excitement of learning how to control and expand their own range of motion. Participants also note the effects practice has on their emotional reactions: from quick temper outbursts at any unforeseen difficulties, to a personal observation which leads to responding rather than reacting.

The practice of Thai Yoga takes this idea a step further. Thai Yoga is a practice where students learn how to move their body, through very specific positioning and breathing, creating a focus and an energetic exchange that is very similar to any Yoga class.

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Something very interesting happens when we take our practice and engage another body in it. The minute we touch another, we suddenly lose all awareness of where we are. In a traditional Yoga practice the focus is extremely individual. We turn our attention inward, in the hopes of expanding externally. The more connected we are to where we are, the more we realize the connection that exists between everything. This is exemplified in Thai Yoga, where the practitioner follows a set sequence of movements that revolve around another physical body, yet remain connected to the practitioner's experience.

Through specific positioning and transitions, connected through the breath, two bodies connect together; two separate beings become one integrated body. The minute touch is created; the sense of touch remains constant. As proficiency is gained in the movements and transitions, there will not be a loss of touch, until the entire dance has been completed.

Thai Yoga is based on two of the three primary principles of Thai Massage, the principles of stretching and compressing. The third principle, pressure points along the energy lines, is activated passively. Since the energy lines run all over the body, any movement and pressure engages the energy lines themselves. These principles apply to both practitioners. When the practitioner places the receiver's foot inside their hip, he engages the other in a yogic posture similar to 'pavanamuktasana (wind release pose)' that enhances the colon for the receiver, a stretch along the inner groin occurs. This expands the energy flow along the three inner leg lines, while enacting a pressure into the large intestine, which enhances elimination, stimulates digestion, and charges the upper body with fresh blood circulation, and thus increases energy to the heart.

Though Thai Massage is quickly becoming the leading modality in the west, with weekend courses that certify massage therapists as Thai Massage therapists, one should heed the impact it can cause on his body. Thai Yoga, with its yogic foundation, is an incredible tool for any individual to experience. Whether you are a personal trainer who would like to understand how to stretch your clients, or you are a yoga teacher or practitioner wishing to enhance your student experience and grow in your practice, or you are among friends, family and couples in search for safe and easy ways to connect with one another while learning how to touch with care, awareness and connection, Thai Yoga is suitable for you.

While you can go to masters like Pichest, or B.K.S. Iyengar (who is known for healing his own body through asana yoga and can see where energy is blocked in his students) and over time learn how to tap into these modes of therapy through postures, this process is akin to a musician learning to play his instrument. You can learn a song, which is a sequence of notes played in a certain rhythm, as much as you can learn the sequence of Thai Massage or a yoga sequence like Ashtanga, but whether you will become a musician or a Thai Massage healer lies in your artistic experience. Thai Yoga on the other hand, is the safe experimentation in playing a song that effectively transforms both bodies, while connecting individuals together in a meaningful and spiritual way.

After all, the word Yoga means to 'connect,' and the only way to step out of your own world is to go deeper into your inner experience.

About Gabriel Azoulay



Gabriel Azoulay is the creator of Thai Yoga, a yoga practice for two people, an author and an international Yoga instructor. Having spent almost two years in Thailand and India, Gabriel brings a fresh perspective to age old principles. With a passion for stories, anecdotes and koans, his teaching, writing and daily approach to the mat will leave you laughing to the stars. Thai Yoga previews and DVDs can be found on his website www.gabrielazoulay.com .