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Phenomenal TOUCH • MASSAGE •

by Leslie Bruder

Picture giving a massage that lights you up, rekindles your passion, and brings as much joy to you as you give to others.

Imagine truly meeting your clients. Your depth and pressure, contact and speed are perfectly balanced. Your hands enter so skillfully they are invisible. Your transitions from one body part to another are so seamless they go unnoticed. You dance, overlapping hands, creating a rhythm of pause and movement that stems from a deep listening.

Utilizing the weight of your client's body and

own gravitational pull, there is no need for force. Cradling your clients into positions that support the muscles' natural ability to relax, their resistance dissolves without pain. There is a presence where communication is not reliant upon words and where words, when used, are like drops of healing rain.

Now, imagine this happening as if in water. Although your client remains on a massage

table, her body is no longer limited by it. Parts of her are draped off the table, others lifted into the air. Your hands move on both sides of her body at once. The client slowly rises and falls with gravity, undulating like seaweed in a wave. She unwinds. Her muscles melt and her heart opens. You invite the client into a sacred acceptance of all that she is, an ancient remembering of what she always knew was possible in a massage, but had not yet found until now. This is Phenomenal Touch Massage.

“Phenomenal Touch Massage is a profound and revolutionary approach to massage that transcends the arbitrary boundaries between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of ourselves, thus creating a truly holistic, healing experience for the giver and the receiver,” says Ellen Klaver, a songwriter and student of the technique. “It is an amazing dance that deeply respects and connects both people.”

The evolution of the technique

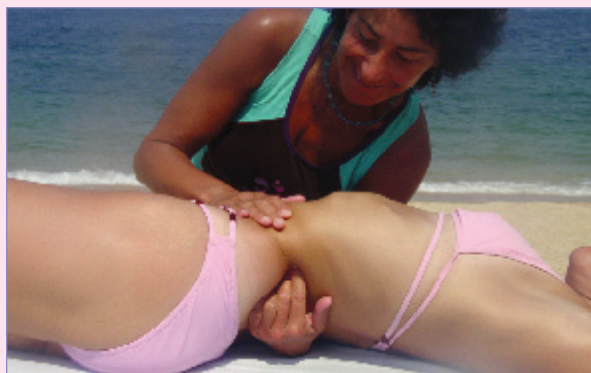
Since I was 5 years old, massage beckoned to me. My hands had to touch or sculpt the body. It was as if they knew they had a gift to be shared. I followed them. From the start, this was never really my work, but the work of spirit moving through me.

Over the years, I found myself doing unique strokes and movements on my clients. When asked where I learned what I was doing, I would always say, “I just do it.” Eventually my work began to take shape. Although each massage was original, certain commonalities were present in all of them. After being told numerous times by experienced massage recipients that they had never been touched quite like that before in a massage, that a new level of healing was happening for them, I started paying close attention to what it was that I was doing. For 10 years I analyzed my work to determine the principles that underlie its form and the moves I was creating.

At this point in the development of my still-unnamed work, clients began to notice aspects of other healing modalities, such as Trager, Watsu, cranialsacral, yoga, aikido, Thai and Esalen massage appearing in my work. Interestingly enough, I had not even experienced these modalities until after they had shown up in my massage. Pieces of each of them had come to me unknowingly. As I came to know each of these

Principles of Phenomenal Touch Massage

There are more than 100 unique moves contained in Phenomenal Touch Massage. However, as extraordinary as these moves are, none of them were created in and of themselves, but rather unfolded naturally as an end result of the employment of their underlying principles. I will briefly address 10 of the 75 principles that make up Phenomenal Touch Massage.



The Belly Wave demonstrates the principle of three dimensionality, as the therapist uses hands on both sides of the body at the same time.

1 Three-dimensionality. The body is not flat, and yet most massage therapists touch it as if it were. Using hands on both sides of the body at the same time in poetic and purposeful relationship honors the three-dimensional nature of the body and allows the client to feel deeply met. Working three-dimensionally enables therapists to move the client's body in space, utilize fulcrums, confuse muscle tension into release, and dance.

2 Body draping. Phenomenal Touch Massage often places the client's body in positions where it can drape itself over the therapist's body or off the table, as a leopard does over a limb. This not only frees the client by lifting her body off the table, allowing it to fall naturally and gracefully with gravity, but it also creates a space for the therapist to reach with ease underneath the limb in order to work three-dimensionally.



Draping body parts over the therapist's leg frees the client, allowing the body to naturally fall with its own gravitational pull, and creates space for working beneath the body.

3 Using gravity. Phenomenal Touch Massage relies on gravity, rather than strength, to gain depth when penetrating a muscle. Instead of pushing the thumb into the neck, for instance, the head is lifted and slowly lowered over the anchored thumb,

utilizing the body's own weight and gravitational pull to gain its desired pressure. A tight shoulder can be deeply released by reaching beneath the client's shoulder and creating an altar with the fingers, allowing the client's weight to slowly fall over the upheld hand. This method reduces the amount of strength used by the therapist and pain felt by the client.

4 Shortening muscle. A muscle is much easier to enter when it is in its shortened, rather than lengthened, position. The shortening can be accomplished anatomically, by bending body parts toward each other, thus placing the muscle into a relaxed versus tightened position; or structurally, by using one hand to push the muscle toward the other hand, creating a snowdrift of soft muscle, thus allowing more space for the thumb to penetrate without struggle or pain.



Shortening muscle. When a muscle cannot be shortened anatomically, it can be structurally pushed toward itself, creating a "snow drift" of soft muscle for easy and painless penetration.

When a body part is lifted as a result of the movement of the therapist's own body, it feels as though it has been levitated. There is an ease and dance that accompanies this beautiful principle.

6 Undulating. Phenomenal Touch Massage encourages the body to move in a seaweed-like, fluid fashion. The therapist finds the rhythmic movement of each client's body and then creates a posture through which a rippling motion, stemming from the undulating movements of the therapist, can occur. This fluid movement is very freeing to the spine and helps to release old patterns of muscular rigidity. It is also magnificent to experience and behold.

Lifting the body in space allows the therapist to find the client's rhythm and undulate the body like seaweed, freeing the spine.



In a move entitled Altar-nater, one hand lifts the shoulder from the armpit while the other hand creates an altar beneath. The weight of the shoulder is then dropped over the upheld hand.

5 Being the wave. This principle allows the client's body to be moved by the motion of the therapist's body. Imagine a piece of seaweed being moved by a wave. The wave does not move the seaweed, it moves itself and the seaweed moves according to the wave's movement.

When a body part is lifted as



modalities more deeply, I appreciated what each one had to offer, but felt they were insufficient on their own to provide what I wanted to experience in the ultimate massage. I found myself wishing they could all be integrated into one massage.

Eventually, as I examined my own work, I realized that I had already begun to do this intuitively. I was unconsciously creating a gestalt, a web of strands made up of all that I had instinctively come to know. Over time I was able to enhance the aspects of my massage that resembled these other modalities, further shaping and defining my work. The tapestry of extraordinary riches that was woven throughout my massage exponentially enhanced the power of each of its individual parts.

The depths my clients were experiencing made the connection between the physical and the emotional realms even more apparent to me. Thus, I decided to enroll in a master's degree program in psychology, and become an Integrated Body Psychotherapist in order to further deepen the work. This additional training, although not necessary in order to practice Phenomenal Touch Massage, helped me to integrate effective use of breath, probes, boundaries, presence, compassion and listening skills into the massage. The work became more profound, as I evolved. Eventually, after years of hearing "That was the most phenomenal massage I have ever received," the name Phenomenal Touch Massage was born.

A technique for everyone

Phenomenal Touch Massage is appropriate for everyone to receive. It can be performed on many levels, from light to deep, from the most subtle energetic version used for the elderly, injured or frightened, to its supreme yogic dance of unparalleled fluidity meant for the healthy, limber spine. The same holds true for those who perform the technique. There are practitioners of all sizes, shapes and strengths.

As long as the principles are utilized, the moves will unfold according to the body that is receiving them, as well as the body that is giving them. Certain moves are easier for taller people, while others are easier for shorter people. A few moves require some

strength, while the majority of moves depend only upon proper body mechanics. Each practitioner does each move slightly differently. This allows each session to be unique while still sharing the same principles.

Training

Short courses in Phenomenal Touch Massage are offered all over the United States, and in Mexico and the West Indies for those who want to integrate some of the aspects of the technique into their existing massage practice. These can be taken at the Institute for Phenomenal Touch Massage, in Boulder, Colorado, or organized individually at your spa or school.

A one-year training is held at the institute and results in master practitioner status and certification in the technique. This extensive training not only teaches all of the moves and principles of Phenomenal Touch Massage, but also provides experience with underlying elements, such as Trager work, Watsu, qigong, communication, boundaries, group process and heart-opening rituals. It is strongly recommended that students have previous massage training, although exceptions are made for those with natural abilities.

Whether you choose to study Phenomenal Touch Massage for a brief or intensive amount of time, your work and life will never be the same. Phenomenal Touch Massage is a gift given not only to the client, but to the therapist as well. Work becomes spiritual play. As the principles and moves of Phenomenal Touch Massage are employed, it is no longer possible for a massage to be boring or tiresome. Touch is transformed into a splendid dance of praise for the magic, power, beauty and love that is in each and every one of us.

Leslie Bruder is the founder and director of the Institute For Phenomenal Touch Massage in Boulder, Colorado. She also holds a master's degree in psychotherapy and a certificate in Integrative Body Psychotherapy. She is writing a book titled Hot Stone Massage: A Three Dimensional Approach for Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins, as well as a manual and DVDs for Phenomenal Touch Massage. She lives and works in Eldorado Springs, Colorado. Her Web site, which includes the articles she has written for MASSAGE Magazine, is <http://www.phenomenaltouch.com>.



7 Seamless transitions. This technique integrates the overlapping of hands from one move or body part to another. One hand begins the next move before the other hand has finished. This creates a delightful sense of seamlessness, continuity and integration. Clients lose track of what body part is being worked on and will often remark, "It feels as if you are everywhere all the time." This principle truly helps to calm the controlling mind.

One hand begins the next stroke before the other hand has left the last body part, creating a seamless flow of transitions

8 Following. Phenomenal Touch Massage is committed to hearing and following the calls of the client's body, rather than abiding by an orderly, rote form. This does not mean the therapist haphazardly jumps from feet to head to leg to arm, but rather that he is willing to gracefully tend to or revisit an area that may be calling now, even if it is not next in line. When the body is nurtured with such deliberation, it naturally unwinds.

9 Dropping weight. In addition to using gravity and the client's own weight to gain depth, the Phenomenal Touch Massage therapist will also drop her own weight into the client's body in order to increase pressure. This not only serves to save the therapist's hands and arms by not having to rely on her strength to attain pressure, but also feels better and deeper to the client. Dropping and shifting your weight as you move feels like you are doing a slow martial art instead of a massage, and makes the deep pressure much more easily received by the client.

10 Presence and love. All of these principles are rendered virtually ineffective if done without presence.

A client knows when a therapist is not present. Without presence, the therapist cannot authentically meet her clients. She cannot know the depth, speed, direction of movement, or type of contact that needs to occur. Without presence, love, an essential ingredient for healing and transformation, cannot reside. Without love, Phenomenal Touch Massage would be just another technique, rather than a life-changing experience. Deep presence allows for the mystery or journey of each particular session to unfold.



To honor the three-dimensional nature of this technique, clients are slowly turned over, making it a part of the seamless experience of the massage.

— Leslie Bruder