

Have you ever been touched, and it allowed you to let go and cry? Have you experienced a hug from a loved one that seemed as though it gave you permission to let it out.

Touch is healing. Some of the benefits of touch include: diminishing pain, helping with sleep, reducing autoimmune symptoms, triggering release of oxytocin, and signals safety and trust (when done in a consensual way).

As a yoga therapist. I touch people.

I have found that doing so can be very healing. Touch is considered one of the most important parts of the human connection. From the time we are born we need someone to hold us and connect with us. Babies who aren't held at birth and in the weeks following, don't grow as well as babies who are held. As we grow up many of us are held by parents, grandparents, other adults and friends in our lives who care about us. This allows us to feel safe and loved. There are many times in life where touch is not available but especially as we age. Sometimes, this can go on for years and we don't even think about it.

When I first started working with people as a yoga therapist, I was unsure about how to integrate touch. How would it be received, and would I be able to do it in a way that created safety. What I discovered was that people need touch. People need touch in a way that has no expectations. Client after client told me after our session, "I haven't been touched in a long time. It felt good to know someone was there" sometimes they cried when they realized they hadn't been touched and needed that. These women really needed this kind of touch. They needed touch that was just for them, to help them relax and connect. It was not about anything I did but about them needing to be reminded that they have a body that is worthy of being touched.

When we think about touch, we often see touch as sexual. Someone wanting a response or reciprocation in touching. This kind of touching can feel good and has benefits when it is consensual, but it also leaves out an important part of non-sexual touch. Getting a massage or any other in person hands on therapy, like yoga therapy, is a chance for someone to support you, help you feel better and get better with no other motive.

Lately, I have also been exploring self-touch and how touching your own body can be another way to access healing and remain in touch with your body.

You can put your hands on places where you feel tightness and stress and massage there. Before going to bed at night I take lotion and massage my feet. I also take time to rub my neck and shoulders. Taking this time at night helps me connect to myself before going to

bed and provides an opportunity to thank my body for getting me through my day and accompanying me along my journey.

So how can you take this into your life? Perhaps there is someone in your life who hasn't been touched in a while, who hasn't been hugged, or who you know is going through a hard time. Give a hug without any reciprocation, schedule yourself a massage, or take a few minutes with someone you care about and give them a massage and then get one from them. Find ways to bring touch into your life and know you deserve it. Read on about another way to work with touch in the sacred touch exercise in this newsletter.

Sacred touch exercise:

Ann Marie Chiasson, MD in her book *Energy Healing: The Essentials of Self Care* writes about energy work as it helps to remove energetic blockages and promote healing and free flowing energy. I highly suggest her book and the practices within it are easy to do and thought provoking. One of the practices I want to share with you related to touch is her concept of Sacred Touch. As it pertains to Sacred Touch she says "the ability to shift to the heart center is essential for moving healing with our hands." She encourages a regular practice of Sacred Touch which includes "sending Reverence, Awe and Compassion from your hands into your body." She offers a practice that helps to introduce people to the feeling of providing Sacred Touch to themselves and to others. I have placed the practice below. Give it a try and write down your experience afterwards. She suggests doing practices several times over a week or more to see the effects.

Find a comfortable seated position and close your eyes. Place your right hand over your heart area. Place your left hand on your right hand with your thumbs touching. Place your awareness into your hands. Touch your chest as if it were the most sacred object you have ever had the experience of touching. Send compassion, gratitude and reverence into your body. This is Sacred Touch. Now see if you can pitch your awareness into your body. How is the quality of this touch? How does it feel?

Now drop your hands onto your thighs? Send compassion, gratitude and Reverence into your legs. Thank them. Then pitch your awareness into the legs. How does this touch feel? What is the quality of the touch that your hands are placing on your legs?

Now send fear into your legs to feel the difference between Sacred Touch and other types of touch. Touch your own legs as if they were something you were afraid of, or as if you may

be touching something rotten. Pitch your awareness into your legs now. How does this touch feel?

Move back into Sacred Touch with compassion, gratitude and reverence, and see if you can feel the difference. How does Sacred Touch feel now? Take your hands off your legs, gently shake out your hands, and place them back on your legs casually. How does that touch feel?

Move back to Sacred Touch. Place compassion, gratitude and reverence into your legs and send them a thank you for this exercise.

Feel free to do this exercise several times or perhaps daily. For other exercises I encourage you to buy her book.