

# talk about touch

WITH MARY KATHLEEN ROSE AND MARY ANN FOSTER

## GROUNDING: A BODY-MIND PRACTICE



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MARY ANN FOSTER: A student I was coaching with body mechanics complained of pain in her knees, hips, and lower back. She was struggling to hold the bent-knee position that she had learned to keep herself “grounded.”

MARY KATHLEEN ROSE: If this student was uncomfortable, not only was she not truly grounded, but her discomfort may have translated to the client through her quality of touch. How did you help her?

MAF: I suggested that she stand up and align her legs under her spine.

MKR: Like the image of a tree, the roots sink into the ground and the limbs of the tree reach up and out. The more the tree roots itself into the earth, the more stable it is. Its strength allows it to flex and bend with the winds.

MAF: The student said she was reluctant to stand up, because she feared locking her knees. However, when she finally did, she exclaimed, “This is too easy! I feel so much more relaxed.” In this upright posture, she found a fluid alignment that she was then able to carry into her massage movement.

MKR: This brings up an important point. Grounding is not a position to hold. It is a dynamic process of sensing a flow between the polarities of up and down; self and other; and gravity and levity.

MAF: Yes, and it best begins in an upright posture, which allows the body’s weight to settle down through the bones and joints. As Isaac Newton discovered, for every force there is an equal counterforce. Likewise, grounding while standing helps us lengthen the spine and lift the head while sinking and pushing down through the feet. This sets the tone for the whole massage. From this place of ease, a practitioner can simply step into the massage and begin working.

MKR: Here’s a simple exercise to help bodyworkers experience grounding. Imagine standing on an ink pad. Let the ink saturate the soles of your feet. Then, stand on one foot and step out of the ink pad with the other foot, making an inky footprint on the floor. Then, return to the ink pad. Next, step forward with the other foot, making another inky footprint onto the floor. End the exercise by walking slowly around the room, focusing on a sense of sinking, shifting weight, and connecting to the ground.

MAF: When you move from your feet as you massage, you move with your whole body, which maximizes leverage and the economy of effort. Whole-body movement also reduces strain, because it distributes the mechanical stresses of pushing and pulling throughout the entire body rather than overusing one area. An exercise that highlights this concept involves the use of contrast. Practice making each massage stroke a full-body motion. Then, hold your entire body still and massage with only arm movement

People feel the difference immediately. Whole-body motion translates into a fluid, coherent quality of touch. The other feels stiff and disconnected.

MKR: Our connection to the ground also allows us to be more aware of the world around us. Think of a radio. When not sufficiently grounded, it produces static. With greater grounding, it can tune into a broader range of specific, resonant frequencies.

MAF: Likewise, when practitioners are centered and grounded, they are less distracted by the static of internal discomforts. This enhances their ability to meet their clients’ needs with greater focus and sensitivity.

MKR: Full, deep breathing also improves focus by deepening body awareness, helping us to move easily from one position to another. Breathing balances the opposing forces of levity and gravity. A full inhalation opens up the chest and abdomen, lifting and lengthening the spine. A relaxed exhalation allows us to let go and yield to the ground.

MAF: Grounding is also a body-mind practice. This meaning of the term *grounding* was initially coined by the renowned body psychiatrist Alexander Lowen to describe the process of releasing chronic muscular holding that develops around unresolved psychological issues. You can recognize an ungrounded person as scattered and spacey; whereas a grounded person is usually relaxed and confident.

MKR: Once you are grounded in the practice of grounding, it becomes a familiar state of being, a way of life, and a pathway to success. **m&b**

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