

HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF FOOT REFLEXOLOGY

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Considering the size of the feet in relation to the body they support, the humble feet are nothing short of remarkable. The feet have been scientifically studied, and myths and cultural values have developed around them. For instance, Leonardo da Vinci thought the foot was a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art. The human foot has been given much attention over the centuries for various reasons, and the ancient history of “foot work” or foot reflexology extends back into ancient cultures.

A widely held theory is that reflexology originated in China about 5,000 years ago. From ancient illustrations and artifacts we know the early Chinese, Hindu's in India, Japanese, and Egyptians worked on the feet and hands to promote better health. The oldest documentation depicting the practice of reflexology was unearthed in Egypt. This evidence, a pictograph dated around 4498 to 4328 B.P. (Before Present), (2500 – 2330 B.C.) was found in the tomb of an Egyptian physician, Ankmahor, at Saqqara. It was also recorded that pressure on the feet enhanced the benefits of acupuncture. In China about 981 B.P. (1017 A. D.), Dr. Wang Wei used acupuncture. He positioned needles in the appropriate areas of the body and then applied deep pressure therapy on the soles of the inside and outside edge of both feet. He then applied a concentrated pressure on the big toe. The reason he used the feet in conjunction with the needles was to channel extra energy through the body. Dr. Wei said that the feet were the most sensitive part of all and contained great energizing areas. Remnants of foot work practices span time and place ranging from the Chinese, to the Tomb of the Physician's in Egypt, to the Physicians Temple in Nara, Japan from 1308 B.P.(690 A. D.), (depicting illustrations on the bottom of the foot on a sculpture of Buddha). Over the centuries it is possible that reflexology migrated slowly to Europe through movement of the Roman Empire and as a result of Marco Polo's travels as well as those of missionaries in China.

Another theory claims that a form of reflex therapy was passed down to the Native Americans by the Incas. Apparently the use of reflex pressure applied to the feet as a healing therapy has been practiced by the North American native peoples for generations. For centuries the Cherokee of North Carolina have acknowledged the importance of feet in maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual balance. The Bear Clan from this tribe who live in the Allegheny Mountains can attest to this. Jenny Wallace, a Cherokee from the Bear Clan, practices as a foot therapist today. According to Wallace: “In my tribe working on the feet is a very important healing art and is part of a sacred ceremony that you don't have to be ill to take part in. The feet walk upon the earth and through this your spirit is connected to the universe. Our feet are our contact with the earth and the energies that flow through it.”

In Europe a form of reflexology was known and practiced as far back as the 14th century and perhaps earlier. According to Dr. Harry Bond Bressler in his book *Zone Therapy*, “Pressure therapy was well known in the middle countries of Europe and was practiced by the working classes of those countries as well as by those who catered to the diseases of royalty and the upper class.” Doctors Adamus, A'tatis and Ball wrote books on this subject in the late 1500s.

Europeans and Americans who were intrigued by the concept of reflex therapy laid the foundations of reflexology as we know it today. The term “reflexology” is Russian in origin, was originally defined as “behavior according to the reflexes”, and equates with the word neurology in Western terms. The modern history of reflexology is rooted in research about the reflexes in Europe and Russia 125 years ago. Russian physicians of the early 1900's followed the reflex research of Nobel Prize winner Ivan Pavlov to create reflex therapy. Their basic idea, to influence reflexes and thus brain-organ dynamics, survives as a medical practice today thanks to physician-researchers, such as Vladimir Bektarev who coined the word “reflexology” in 1917. The theory behind these earlier researchers was that an organ experiences illness because it receives the wrong

operating instructions from the brain. By interrupting the body's misguided instructions, it was supposed that the reflex therapist was able to prompt the body to behave in a healthier manner. Thus the conditioning of healthier behavior is achieved by the application of a series of such interruptions.

The idea that a stimulus applied to the body produces a response was utilized as a therapeutic tool by British physicians and researchers who applied heat, cold, plasters, and herbal poultices to one part of the body to influence another. While such uses did not take root in the medical communities in the United States and Great Britain, the furthering of such ideas for therapeutic use continued in Germany and Russia throughout this century.

In the late 1890's and early 1900's massage techniques developed in Germany became known as "reflex massage". This was the first time that the benefits of massage techniques were specifically credited to reflex actions. Dr. Alfons Cornelius was possibly the first to apply massage to "reflex zones". The story goes that in 1893 Cornelius suffered from an infection. In the course of his convalescence he received a daily massage. At the spa he noticed how effective the massages of one particular medical officer were. This man worked longer on areas he found painful. This concept inspired Cornelius. After examining himself, Cornelius instructed his masseur to work only on the painful areas. His pain quickly disappeared and in four weeks he completely recovered. This led him to pursue the use of pressure in his own medical practice. He published his manuscript "Druckpunkte" or "Pressure Points, The Origin and Significance" in 1902.

In the early 1900s, Dr. William Fitzgerald, ear, nose and throat specialist working in Boston, London and Vienna developed the "zone therapy" theory, which later became the contemporary basis of reflexology. In Vienna he came into contact with the work of Dr. H. Bressler who had been investigating the possibility of treating organs with pressure points. Fitzgerald found that if pressure was applied on the fingers, it would create a local anesthetic effect on the hand, arm, and shoulder, right up to the jaw, face, ear, and nose. He applied pressure using tight bands of elastic on the middle section of each finger, or by using small clamps that he placed on the tips. He was then able to carry out minor surgical operations using only this pressure technique. He divided the body into zones. The theory states there are ten zones throughout the body. There are five zones on the right side of the body and five on the left; one for each toe or finger. In 1917 he wrote a book called "Zone Therapy or Relieving Pain at Home". His theory continues with the hypothesis that the parts of the body found within a certain zone will be linked with one another by the energy flow within the zone, and the parts of the body can therefore affect one another. Fitzgerald found that many spots in the nose, mouth, throat, tongue, hands, and feet when pressed firmly deadened definite areas of sensation and produced pain relief. He also found that when pain was relieved, the condition that produced the pain was most generally relieved.

The American Reflexologist Eunice Ingham's nephew Dwight Byers, explains -- "The zones are like the wiring in a house; the reflexes travel through the zones similar to electricity through wires." We can imagine a zone as a series of longitudinal lines, running from the head to the toes of our body--a system subtler than the physically observable system of nerves. The zones are used in determining various locations of reflexes within the feet and hands.

In America Dr. Joseph Shelby Riley was a follower of Dr. Fitzgerald's work but preferred not to use devices, finding that finger pressure was equally as effective. Riley refined the techniques and made the first detailed diagrams and drawings of the reflex points located in the feet. He added to Fitzgerald's longitudinal zones his discovery of eight horizontal divisions that also govern the body.

Working with Dr. Riley was a physiotherapist*, Eunice Ingham, who in turn found that intermittent pressure on the feet of her patients produced benefits greater than pain relief - actually allowing the body to balance itself for better health. In the early 1930s, Eunice studied the response of different areas of the body to zone therapy. The feet, which proved to have the greatest level of sensitivity, were most responsive. Ingham

performed intensive study on the physiology and responses. Probing the feet using precise thumb pressure upon certain areas, tender spots were discovered. Ingham then began equating these spots with the anatomy of the human body, thus devising a map of the feet that "mirrors the body." Her method was then named the "Ingham Method of Massage Compression," which later became known as the "Original Ingham Method of Reflexology." It is important to note that zones and reflexes have been proven and charted through these and other studies.

*Physiotherapy: Coined in 1902 and synonymous with physical therapy. Physical Therapy is the treatment of the body by the use of physical and mechanical means other than with drugs. It comprises the use of physical, chemical, and other properties of heat, light, water, electricity, massage, exercise, and radiation.

Eunice kept alive a specific practice of foot reflexology. She accomplished this by traveling around the country teaching groups of people, and perpetuating a grassroots enthusiasm for the subject in the United States. Thus, a community of reflexology users emerged. Legal questions were subsequently raised about the practice of medicine without a license. Ms. Ingham's book of 1945 ascribed the workings of reflexology to the nervous system. The revised work published in 1954, deleted any such mention. The explanation of the workings of reflexology took on metaphorical terms that colored the practice for decades to come.

Through extensive foot reflexology and teaching the work, Eunice Ingham has become known as the Mother of Modern Reflexology, publishing books of her case histories "Stories The Feet Can Tell" (1938), and "Stories The Feet have Told" (1963). After her reflexology methods relieved the asthma of her nephew, Dwight Byers, he joined her work for 30 years and on her death in 1974 put the knowledge together in his book "Better Health with Foot Reflexology" and the detailed foot and hand charts. Dwight Byers continues teaching the Original Ingham Method of Reflexology under the heading of the National, now the International Institute of Reflexology, P.O. Box 12642, St. Petersburg, Florida 33733-2642.

The term reflexology itself was considered illegal until a legal skirmish over the publication of Mildred Carter's book "Helping Yourself with Foot Reflexology" in 1970. The U.S. Postal Service asked that the publisher cease and desist publication of the book on the grounds that it consisted of the practice of medicine without a license. The publisher's attorneys successfully defended the publication of the book. Subsequently the word could be used to describe one's practice; it was also used in the titles of books. The idea became widely disseminated as Mrs. Carter's book sold one million copies and became one of the best-selling titles ever for the publisher.

In the following quarter century, the idea gained informal sanctioning in the United States on a community level. Since then, practicing Reflexologists have emerged, some 30 reflexology books have been published, and the number of magazine articles published has climbed by 500 percent since 1982. Television appearances by Reflexologists have increased by 500 percent since 1988.

It may be time to take foot reflexology another step further and expand on existing knowledge by combining it with the ancient Chinese system of meridian therapy. As acupuncture/acupressure and reflexology are both concerned with balancing energy flow in order to stimulate the body's own healing potential and restore a state of health, and as both therapies are concerned with treating illness and medical conditions in a holistic manner, it seems logical to combine reflexology with meridian therapy in order to provide a more comprehensive and effective treatment program.

Archetype, and Archestructure of Reflexology

It was postulated in the early 1980's that one form or another of reflexology was an *archetype* rediscovered over and over again. Archetypes are "...without known origin and they reproduce themselves in any time or in another part of the world--even when transmission by direct descent or 'cross fertilization' through migration is

ruled out.” (Jung, C.J., Man and His Symbols, Dell Publishing co., 1968, p. 58) In other words the health practice of massage/pressure techniques on the foot is very old and was passed down through the centuries in one form or another and seemingly kept getting discovered over and over again using similar and added techniques.

There has been further speculation that reflexology is an *archestructure*. An **archestructure** is a physiological component to our nervous system which drives us to certain behavior, like rubbing our own feet. In more scientific terms “An archestructure can be defined as a felt or perceived function or structural feature of the nervous system, projected or unconsciously acted out in the lifestyle or the beliefs, customs, and social structures of the individuals concerned or of whole communities. (Gooch, S.F., Total Man, Ballantine Books, 1972, p. 299).