

## **TOM HENDRICKSON, D.C. OF HENDRICKSON METHOD**

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to help people. I have also always been fascinated by the human body. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade I got my hands on my first anatomy and physiology book and couldn't put it down. I've been studying the musculoskeletal system ever since. I have a deep respect for the body and its capacity to heal and feel very blessed to be a part of a profession that assists in this healing every day.

I started my career 37 years ago as a massage therapist. I went on to become a chiropractor in 1986 and have had a full time clinical practice specializing in soft tissue therapy ever since. I see an average of 100 patients per week, and nearly everyone is in pain. I consider it a privilege and a calling to be able to help. Although as I chiropractor I do adjustments, nearly 90% of my treatment time is spent performing soft tissue therapy.

I learned early on that soft tissue and joint dysfunction are almost always the source of the pain. This reality inspired me to research and create an effective and efficient method of therapy that would heal soft tissue injuries and bring my patients' bodies back to optimum function. The technique I created and use every day in my clinic is called Hendrickson Method. I've enjoyed teaching it to massage therapists for over 30 years.

The creation of Hendrickson Method developed over time organically. I felt led down a path of curiosity, discovery, and revelation. It's been a path blessed by the wisdom of many teachers and healers from different massage and manual therapy traditions; a path that's included both intuition and rigorous study of the musculoskeletal system; a path rich in spiritual as well as scientific principles; a path I'm tremendously grateful for.

It all started when I was 24 years old...

### **“FIRST WE MUST CALM OUR MIND”**

The roots of Hendrickson Method go back to 1972. Yoga opened the door. I walked into my first class not knowing what to expect. I left amazed by the energy I felt moving through my body when I did certain poses. I'd never felt anything like it before and wondered what “it” was and where “it” came from. Being a very curious person, I began to read books on energy and quantum physics and took more classes in yoga.

A growing fascination with energy and the body led me to study Shiatsu with Riuho Yamada, a Zen priest and Shiatsu master. I remember the first time I met him in 1974. He started his class by putting his hand on his belly and saying, “First we must calm our mind”. I knew I was entering an entirely new world.

Whenever Riuho worked on me, the same energy I felt in yoga pulsed through my body, but in much stronger waves. How could a gentle touch have such power? Riuho taught me that meditation, energy, human touch and healing are all connected. He was a vehicle of this energy, which he called “ki”. His inner stillness and connection to healing energy that moved through his hands became a model of what I wanted to achieve in my

bodywork. Inspired by his humility, kindness, and depth as a healer, I realized that I wanted to devote my life to becoming a vehicle of healing.

During this time, I was encouraged by a yoga teacher to explore emotional based bodywork. She said that emotional blocks in my body were responsible for some of the tightness I had in my muscles. This was entirely new thinking for me.

I decided to study Lomi bodywork since it combined deep tissue massage, gestalt therapy, and breath work. Although the sessions were painful, Lomi helped me connect with my emotions in ways I never had before. Over the course of the next year, the work helped me release repressed emotions that had been buried deep in my body for years. And with this release, I experienced a new sense of aliveness and openness that positively affected all of my life.

The connection between emotions and soft tissue fascinated me and led me more deeply into the study of my inner life. My teachers encouraged me. They taught me that the more personally aware I was, and the more I let go of limiting thoughts and feelings, the more I would be able to connect with the energy that moved through me; the more I could become an open channel of healing energy.

So, in addition to Lomi, I received sessions in Reichian therapy, Rolfing, and Jungian dream work. The more I learned and experienced, the more I wanted to share and help others. I decided to become certified as a Lomi practitioner and opened a practice in Lomi bodywork. I also led groups using Gestalt and Reichian based breath work.

In 1976, I began studying tai chi and took my first of many Vipassana meditation retreats. Although I trained in other styles of meditation, I felt like I had come home with Vipassana. The practice of mindfulness in moment-to-moment awareness changed my way of being in the world in both my work and my relationships. I learned to notice when my mind and emotions were taking me out of the immediate experience and used the Vipassana practice to gently bring my attention back to the moment.

My meditation teachers taught me that only in the present moment could I fully experience life and be an open vehicle to healing. This inspired me to begin a daily practice of meditation, yoga, and tai chi. And this daily practice has been the foundation of my life ever since. It's how I prepare on the inside every morning to see my patients. Every morning, for 37 years.

I know that connecting with my body, mind and spirit in this way supports me and helps me to be a more open channel of healing for my patients. Some people say that it must require extreme discipline to stick with a daily practice for almost 40 years. But for me, I don't feel like it's about discipline. I want to take good care of my body, mind and spirit. I can feel the profound difference this makes in my daily life. It's a gift I give myself that allows me to give more to my patients. So it's an empowered and grateful choice I make every morning.

Now back to the 70s. It was also during this period that I met one of my principle mentors, Muriel Chapman, D.O. Muriel was a gifted healer, well into her eighties when I was

introduced to her. She was trained as an osteopath and would gently touch the body and often heal long-standing complaints with ease and great humility. I remember feeling tremendous tingling and pulsing streaming through my body during her treatments. I asked Muriel if I could study with her to learn what she was doing and how she accessed so much energy. She simply smiled and said, "You pray dear and you'll do what I do." I took her advice literally and have been praying to be a vehicle of healing every day since.

### **"LET'S FIX IT!"**

My career took a powerful turn in 1978 when I met a man who would change my life forever. His name was Lauren Berry and he was legendary among those who had the privilege to cross his path. Lauren was a physical therapist and mechanical engineer and had been in practice 50 years when I began my training with him. What I learned from watching Lauren treat patients astounded me.

For two years I had been working with people in pain. My process of helping them involved discovering the emotional roots of their pain and then slowly releasing it through Lomi bodywork. When I watched Lauren Berry work with his clients, he simply asked them about their pain and then said, "Let's fix it!" And he did, often in just a few minutes!

It seemed like a miracle that he could have a patient walk in with low back pain or neck pain or shoulder pain and then perform seemingly simple manipulations on their muscles and joints and correct the problem that was causing the pain. He didn't do any emotionally based bodywork. He didn't ask many questions. He just fixed it. I was astonished and intrigued. I'm a very pragmatic person when it comes to pain and what he was doing was working -- quickly. I made a commitment to take every class Lauren offered. I trained with him for four years and then was invited to do a one-year apprenticeship in his office. I packed my bags and moved to Redding, CA.

Lauren's work came out of an oral tradition. His mentor was a Finnish doctor who practiced manual therapy for 50 years before he passed on his knowledge to Lauren. I felt honored that this healing tradition was being passed on to me during that one-year apprenticeship. I took it all in and wrote it all down, knowing that I was receiving an extraordinary gift from a master.

Lauren showed me what he knew and gave me the tools to immediately and profoundly change a person's life. He explained how the body worked mechanically and what the patterns of dysfunction were. He taught me that soft tissue and joints can misalign and that with simple manipulations the function can be restored. He showed me how to realign the soft tissue and joints of shoulders, hips, knees, feet, necks and low backs. When function was restored, the pain resolved.

Something inside of me lit up. I loved that he could explain what caused pain and how to correct the problem. It was nuts and bolts. Simple mechanics. And that satisfied something deep within. The more I learned, the more curious I became about the human body and how it is designed. I not only wanted to know how to correct musculoskeletal dysfunction, I wanted to know why Lauren's simple techniques worked so well. What were the scientific reasons behind the healings I was observing?

Shortly after my apprenticeship, Lauren passed away from cancer and I decided to start chiropractic school. I realized that if I wanted to practice manipulation (chiropractic adjusting) I needed to get a license in order to perform his techniques. It was 1982.

Being a chiropractic student, I was required to spend thousands of hours studying the science of the human body. Anatomy and physiology, kinesiology, neurology. I loved it! Radiology, motion palpation, joint mobilization. I was fascinated.

During those four years of intensive study, the science behind Lauren's magical touch and why his techniques worked so well started to become clear. I learned what happens on a cellular level when the body is in pain as the result of an injury or cumulative stress and why a particular treatment would be effective. Knowing why something is happening in the body, allowed me as the therapist to create a very specific intention of treatment. It wasn't solely based on intuition or memorizing what to do, it was supported by knowledge of the science of the body and the reasons why something would work. This depth of understanding inspired me and I became determined to pass on Lauren's work to other massage therapists.

In order to do this, I developed a way to change his manipulations into mobilizations so that they would be within a massage therapist's scope of practice. At the same time, I decided to move away from his more vigorous style of soft tissue work and began to design a way to deliver the treatments in a gentle and nurturing fashion.

My goal became to create a system of soft tissue and joint mobilization based on Lauren's principles that would cover the entire body. It would be gentle and relaxing for the client to receive. And it would be relaxing for the therapist to perform. I saw back then, and it is still true today, that many massage therapists have shortened careers due to the stress put on their thumbs, fingers, wrists, and elbows. I was determined to create a way to deliver effective results without causing repetitive stress injuries for the therapist.

## **HENDRICKSON METHOD**

I felt like both a scientist and an artist as I experimented and designed this new system of therapy. My clients were receptive. Even at the beginning of the creation of Hendrickson Method, the treatments were delivering excellent results. Sciatica was resolved. Rotator cuff injuries were healed. Painful degenerated hips were restored to pain-free function. Neck pain from whiplash injuries was successfully treated. I was encouraged.

One of my intentions during this creation period was to incorporate the tai chi principle of *wu wei*, or effortless effort. I learned through my tai chi practice that in order for energy to move through the body, the body needs to be supple and relaxed. Having witnessed Riuho Yamada and Muriel Chapman's work, I knew there were ways to deliver profound results without pushing, forcing or efforting. But how could a massage therapist stay relaxed and push on people at the same time?

Almost immediately I discovered that one way was through my stance as a therapist. When I worked on clients, instead of bending over them to give a treatment, I assumed an

upright, relaxed tai chi position, which I found more comfortable and effective. I asked my clients to lie on their side, and adjusted the table so that it was the ideal height for me to sink into a tai chi stance. With my patients relaxed in a fetal position and me comfortable standing upright, my treatments began to feel more like effortless effort.

I also developed a brand new massage stroke, one that mimicked an ocean wave. Now you might be wondering what an ocean wave has to do with soft tissue therapy, but there's a very powerful connection. When I studied tai chi, I learned about Taoism. Taoists look to Nature for the principles of how to live one's life. They believe that water is the supreme element in nature since it occupies air, puts out fire, and dissolves rock. It's both powerful and receptive, taking the shape of any container it is put into. With the body being 70% water (the same percentage as the earth), I became curious about the connection and began studying wave dynamics. I looked at how energy moves through water in the form of ocean waves, hypothesizing that energy would move through the body in a similar way.

Ocean waves move in a rounded motion perpendicular to the shoreline. Lauren taught me that to heal soft tissue, the strokes always need to be done perpendicular to the line of the fiber because this is the direction that dissolves the adhesions and realigns the tissue. So, seeing this exciting parallel, I started applying a rounded scooping, wave-like motion to my strokes. I discovered that when I applied these strokes rhythmically to the frequency of the resting heart beat (about 60 strokes per minute) the results were even better. This new stroke was so much more effective than my previous linear strokes. I knew I was onto something profound.

I called my new wave-like massage stroke *wave mobilization*® and through its rounded scooping motion, rhythmically performed transverse to the line of the fiber, Hendrickson Method was born. With each treatment, I kept my body supple, relaxed, and upright in my tai chi posture. My clients felt nurtured and it became easier to create profound changes. I was achieving Lauren's results but with a gentle approach that could be duplicated by massage therapists.

In addition to *wave mobilization*®, I incorporated two other modalities into Hendrickson Method – Muscle Energy Technique (MET) and Joint Mobilization. During my years of chiropractic training, I had the opportunity to learn MET from two masters, Karel Lewit and Vladimamir Janda. MET is an extremely sophisticated system of reestablishing normal neurologic function, releasing hypertonicity in muscles and stretching fascia. It is infinitely easier on the patient and the practitioner than what I had practiced early in my career when I did deep tissue work. Chiropractic school also taught me a tremendous amount about joint dysfunction and injury and how to use joint mobilization to correct dysfunctions and injuries.

So with the effective combination of *wave mobilization*®, MET and joint mobilization carefully synthesized into a full body system of therapy, I began teaching Hendrickson Method to massage therapists. These classes began in the early 80s and I have been teaching every year since.

I enjoy teaching my students not only what to do to correct the body's pain and dysfunction but also the science behind each technique. This knowledge empowers the therapist to understand why they're doing what they do, which dramatically enhances the results. My teaching led to the creation of a manual that turned into a textbook that was published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins in 2003. It is now in its second edition, *Massage and Manual Therapy for Orthopedic Conditions* (LW&W, 2009) and has been translated into five languages. (This book is available through Amazon.com.)

## **IN CLOSING**

It's been 41 years since that first yoga class that set me on my path. What a journey this has been! And it's still unfolding. I feel blessed to have the health and vitality to enjoy a full clinical practice and to teach Hendrickson Method through the Hendrickson Method Institute. Thanks to my method's principles, I have no repetitive stress injuries and God willing, plan to work at my clinic and teach for the next two or three decades.

I love my work. For me, every treatment feels like a moving meditation and fulfills the desire I've always had for my work and spiritual life to be deeply united.

I invite you to visit the Hendrickson Method Institute website to learn more about our Certification Trainings and CE workshops, including a special 5-day retreat that I am leading in September. I invite you to join me. [www.hendricksonmethod.com](http://www.hendricksonmethod.com)

In closing, I want to say that I truly believe that it is time for advanced massage and manual therapy to find its rightful place in the health care system for the treatment of musculoskeletal injuries. It's been my life's work to develop an efficient and effective system of therapy that is nurturing to receive and energizing to perform and it's my sincere hope this system can continue to make a contribution for years to come.

Blessings,

Tom Hendrickson