



SARGA BODYWORK

A NEW TAKE ON
BAREFOOT MASSAGE

BY DANIEL TSUKAYAMA





USING the feet as massage tools is nothing new. Many traditions have long-standing foot-based bodywork practices: Thai massage, Chavutti Thirumal of South India, shiatsu varieties from Japan, lomi a'e from Hawaii's lomilomi tradition, and Fijian massage. More westward and more recently created, we have the Rossiter System and Ashiatsu.

In the last two years, a new form of barefoot massage has launched that employs the use of a fabric strap fastened to a massage table to deliver therapeutic myofascial and deep-tissue techniques: Sarga Bodywork. The fabric strap is used by practitioners for stability and to add tensional and gravitational force to specific manual therapy techniques. These techniques, combined with the broad contact surface of the foot, facilitate less restriction and more ease and relaxation in recipients' bodies.



Founders Jivatma Massaguer and Daniel Tsukayama of Honolulu, Hawaii, developed both the unique methods and the proprietary equipment Sarga Bodywork offers in its nationwide, NCBTMB-approved continuing education courses.

HOW IS SARGA BODYWORK DIFFERENT?

Ashiatsu, as we know it in the West, is a modality characterized by practitioners' exclusive use of their feet to deliver deep, broad, flowing manual therapy techniques with oil or cream for lubrication. It is usually practiced on raised massage tables in treatment rooms with overhead support therapists use for balance, such as parallel bars mounted to the ceiling. Ashiatsu is a relatively new modality pioneered by Ruthie Hardee and her team in the early 1990s. Hardee's Ashiatsu Deepfeet Bar Therapy developed standardized protocols that train massage therapists in the specific technique, safety, sanitation, and equipment considerations relevant to Ashiatsu.

While Sarga Bodywork is a barefoot massage method that uses the feet as primary tools for manual therapy techniques, and while its instructors have background in Ashiatsu, Thai massage, barefoot shiatsu, and Chavutti Thirumal, Sarga Bodywork is none of the above. "We draw inspiration from these methodologies, and we honor our teachers and the rich lineages that inform and inspire our work," says Sarga Bodywork cofounder Jivatma Massaguer. Just as there are many methods that use the hands as manual therapy tools, Sarga Bodywork is a new addition to the growing world of foot-based massage.

There are three elements that make Sarga distinct from other types of barefoot massage:

1. The use of tensional force via Sarga's proprietary equipment
2. Myofascial technique and the sparing use of lubrication
3. Directionally oriented myofascial technique

There are many schools of thought around fascia and the manipulation of fascia; however, myofascial technique is defined here as manual therapy characterized by sustained, oblique, and high-friction contact with the aim of stimulating a stretch response in the fascia associated with muscle ("myo") tissue. Sarga Bodywork celebrates the broad, densely innervated surfaces of the feet as incredibly effective and intelligent tools for this purpose.

THE EVOLUTION OF SARGA

The word *sarga* has meaning in both Spanish and Sanskrit. In Spanish, *sarga* refers to a tapestry woven from many different threads. "This is a fitting concept for us, since

Sarga Bodywork synthesizes techniques and teachings from many different traditions," Massaguer says. "It is appropriate that this metaphor of a tapestry is connected to the fabric that we hold in our hands for balance and support." In Sanskrit, the word *sarga* can refer to "creation" or "origin energy" made manifest into form. This idea sustains Sarga Bodywork's mission to provide techniques and materials that help inspire bodyworkers to resource their innate creativity in ways that are mindful, safe, minimally strenuous, and efficient. "Adding tensional force to your barefoot massage practice opens up an entirely new biomechanical relationship to your work," Massaguer says.

One of the traditions that has influenced Sarga Bodywork is structural integration and the work of Ida Rolf. While Sarga Bodywork is in no way a form of structural integration, it employs directionally oriented myofascial techniques, or techniques applied in specific directions that aim to encourage patterns of structural efficiency in the body.

More broadly, Sarga Bodywork techniques seek to align with the gravitational and tensional forces expressed by the principles of tensegrity. Tensegrity, a concept coined by architect Buckminster Fuller, is the pattern that results when "push" and "pull" have a synergistic relationship. Tensegrity is that sweet spot between push and pull. It is the fundamental "one-point" on which Sarga Bodywork is founded, discernible by its qualities of ease, focus, and presence.

SARGA CONTRAINDICATIONS


While Sarga Bodywork aims to stay on the soothing, parasympathetic side of manual therapy, it does wield some heavy-handed tools (barefoot massage, myofascial techniques, tensional and gravitational force) that if misused or misrepresented could be (or appear to be) invasive, aggressive, or even injurious. As manual therapists, it is our responsibility to be actively engaged in the dialogue of client consent, safety and trust, and boundaries in our practices. No matter how longstanding the client-therapist relationship, consent needs to be reestablished in every session.

In addition to checking in with clients about contact, pressure, and comfort, perhaps the best way to maintain trust, communication, and consent with our clients



TABLE OR FLOOR

Sarga Bodywork has equipment and courses that are designed for either raised massage tables or floor-based mats. While some practitioners prefer the versatility of working with portable raised massage tables, others may choose to work on the floor because of the stability that a larger working area provides or because they can incorporate Sarga Bodywork into their existing floor-based bodywork practices such as Thai or Fijian massage. Each configuration has its unique benefits and limitations and students will tend to gravitate toward one or the other.



See a snapshot of Sarga
Bodywork's 2019 course calendar
here: [www.sargabodywork.com/
course-calendar](http://www.sargabodywork.com/course-calendar)

is to educate them in the techniques and theories we employ in our practices, and to be honest about our own understanding and limitations of these techniques.

Sarga Bodywork is not for every client and shares the same contraindications as Ashiatsu and deep-tissue massage. Because of its myofascial and compressive elements, therapists must take extra care to be aware of any client contraindications. These include, but are not limited to, pregnancy or trying to conceive, high or low blood pressure, acute injury, advanced stages of osteoporosis or other degenerative bone conditions, certain medications, recent surgeries, and advanced diabetes.

THE SARGA EQUIPMENT

Sarga Bodywork marries method and design, enabling practitioners to gain tensional support and force with a fabric strap fastened to a massage table or floor mat via its patent-pending equipment. In addition to providing support, the strap can be transformed into a variety of tools and facilitates a wide range of body mechanics for practitioners. By pulling up on the strap while applying downward pressure, for instance, the practitioner gains tensional force that can be transferred to the recipient's body.

Sarga Bodywork equipment also allows practitioners to be completely mobile with their barefoot bodywork practices. Whether working at multiple locations or driving to outcalls, this equipment allows practitioners freedom from the limits of treatment rooms.

WHY LEARN TO MASSAGE WITH YOUR FEET?

As massage therapists, the ability to use our feet for manual therapy can be a career-saving practice. With the typical career longevity of a massage therapist being less than 10 years, the ability to incorporate body mechanics that utilize body weight and gravitational force is not just intelligent, it can also stave off repetitive use injury and fatigue.

This is especially true for therapists with practices that focus on deep-tissue or myofascial massage techniques.

The number of therapists who practice some form of foot-based massage is steadily on the rise, both because of its benefits to the practitioner, and because of consumer demand. Although foot-based manual therapies are ancient

practice, consumers in the West have taken a while to warm up to the idea. In recent years, the massage industry has seen foot-based practices such as Ashiatsu and Thai massage become mainstream because of the therapeutic results and efficacy of these practices.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

There are less than 200 certified Sarga Bodyworkers worldwide, and it's been less than two years since Sarga began offering its continuing education courses, but the work has garnered a loyal following and the attention of a growing wellness industry that is continually evolving and looking for new ways to provide effective therapeutic services. "One of the greatest privileges of working in the healing arts is being a part of a community whose interests center around the mechanisms that catalyze positive change in the world," Massaguer says. "Our mission is to provide a distinctively transformative and healing therapy, while offering the techniques and materials to help inspire our fellow bodyworkers to resource their innate creativity in ways that are mindful, safe, minimally strenuous, and fabulously efficient." **m&b**

6 Cofounder of Sarga Bodywork, Daniel Tsukayama believes there are many ways to access our innate regenerative abilities, but in a culture that is often distanced from a sensational experience of our bodies, a somatic approach to healing is increasingly vital. Tsukayama maintains a structural integration and Sarga Bodywork practice on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. For more information on Sarga Bodywork, visit www.SargaBodywork.com, or email Sarga@SargaBodywork.com.