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Series: Worship Workbench
Issue: Essay 261 + May 2021
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ANOINTING THE FEET **A Rite of Welcome. A Spiritual Exercise**

1 Years ago, my wife Kathy and I took to anointing the feet of visitors to our home. We had come across the practice of shiatsu, or foot reflexology, and we put it to use among us at home.

2 Shiatsu is a Japanese version of an originally Chinese practice from Asian folk medicine. It is based on the theory, hundreds of years old, that every organ – every aspect – of the human body has a corresponding location on the human foot. (There are corresponding sites on the human hand as well.) See the enclosed chart.

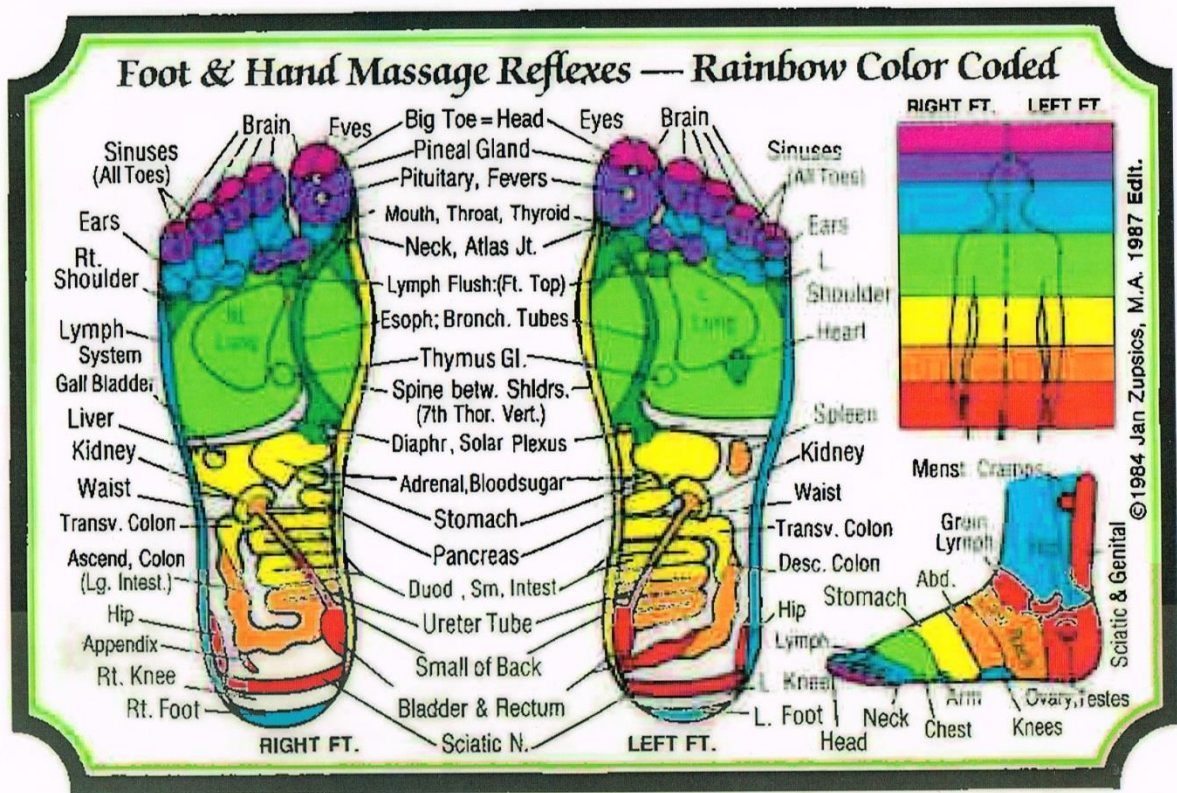
3 These were my earliest campus ministry days, myself and my wife both dewy post adolescents. Most of the people we knew were likewise post adolescents. Although I can remember messaging my dad's feet through his socks while he lay in his hospital bed in the days before his death at 78. And when our own children were little kids, they loved it!

4 So the practice is greatly appreciated, by all ages. You don't have to be a dewy post adolescent! See below at numbers 12 - 18.

5 But in recent years I have come to regard the practice from a Biblical perspective. So I offer Anointing the Feet this month as still another Spiritual Exercise. This posting would therefore be the eleventh in my ongoing series. Previous entries include:

Essay 204 Signs of the Kingdom
Essay 208 A Spiritual Autobiography
Essay 211 Daily Prayer
Essay 214 My Ten Greatest Hymns
Essay 220 Benedicite Omnia Opera and Berachah
Essay 229 A Wound Map
Essay 233 A Supergraphic Mural
Essay 235 The Seven Deadly Sins
Essay 243 A Blind Walk
Essay 244 The Classic Collect

6 The practice is simple enough. Provide yourself with a shallow dish of oil. It could be an unassuming vegetable oil, like canola, or more costly olive oil; It could even be scented. Position yourself at the feet of the one you are serving.



7 Think of yourself as Mary in the Gospel accounts. See John 12:1-8. Picture the person you are serving as Jesus.

8 The person being served takes off shoes and socks, of course. You drizzle your hands with oil, or dribble a very little oil on to the foot you are messaging, and go to work.

9 You may ignore completely the enclosed diagram. On the other hand, the diagram is actually useful therapeutically, the Asians are convinced. You might ask your client, what ails you today? Where shall I work? Your heart? Your kidneys? Be certain to anoint both feet: Each foot is slightly different.

10 After about ten minutes, change places. Now the server is being served, the client taking the role of server.

11 Anointing feet can be a meaningful gesture of welcome. You could even suggest a simple dialogue, based on John 13:

The client: "Why do you anoint my feet?"

The servant: "I give you an example, that you should do for others what I have done for you."

12 This puts me in mind of an experience at Holden Village, that splendid but remote Lutheran retreat centre in the mountains of Washington State.

13 When our children were kids, my wife and I served on the Teaching Staff at Holden several summers in a row. I taught Christian worship, Kathy taught family and life classes.

14 As a special event one summer, I advertised a session on Anointing the Feet. I was surprised to note the numbers of people who showed up. Fully two dozen – there are more than 400 people in attendance at Holden during a typical summer. Both grey hairs and dewy adolescents!

15 I explained what we were about to do, encouraged attendees to pair up, and distributed dishes of oil. We were all in high good humour, but I noted that this event could be a kind of welcome ritual in any home, based on Biblical custom, quoting John's gospel.

16 We were presently all at work, giving and receiving pleasure. Suddenly a shrill whistle broke our silence, and in through the several doors of our room, twenty staff and residents burst, shouting, "This is a vice squad raid! Everyone up against the wall!"

17 We all laughed heartily at this! And we've told the story many times thereafter, you can be sure!

18 But the comic story does acknowledge one reality in the situation, the erotic. If you attempt anointing the feet, please be aware: It can produce a modest degree of the erotic. No matter the age or sex of participants!

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