Reflexology is a form of foot massage but it is difficult to determine what it achieves, for the practitioners of this therapy vary in their claims and practices. One practitioner encourages the reader of his book to learn how to use this foot massage on oneself and is enthusiastic about this (Dr. Wolfgang Spurzem, *Foot Reflexology*, p.16-17), whilst another writes that “you will find it difficult to massage your own feet” (Dr. Maybelle Segal, *Reflexology*, p.92) and so recommends massaging your hands instead. Yet another admits that, “it is impossible to apply strictly rational empirical criteria to determine how reflexology works, because, like any therapy, there is an art side to its application...and results can depend on the relationship between the client and the practitioner” (Christine Issel, *Reflexology: Art, Science and History*, p.107). In one section of her book, Christine Issel quotes from several practitioners, each of whom has a different opinion, strongly held, on whether the left or the right foot should be massaged first. Dr. Maybelle Segal warns her readers not to become too concerned if they have trouble trying to work out the reflex points because, “you may purchase a few books on reflexology and each one may have areas in a slightly different place” Segal, p.13), so recommends always massaging the whole foot in case an important area could be missed. It does sound a little hit or miss, especially when, for such an important part of the body, the reflex point of the pituitary gland, is the size of a pin head on the big toe.

Even though it is acknowledged to be an art form, scientific claims are made for reflexology based on a book called *Zone Therapy*, written by Dr. William Fitzgerald an American ear, nose and throat specialist, early last century. He divided the human body into ten perpendicular, “reflex zones”, representing all organs of the body. His claim was that “the impurities of the blood” are supposed to descend along these lines, finally settling as crystalline urea in the nerve endings of the soles of the feet, where experienced reflexologists claim to be able to feel them. These deposits would then, not only indicate which organ was affected, but would also be important to treatment as massaging the spots would dissolve the impurities. In other words, “the basic concept of reflexology is that the surfaces of the feet reflect the entire image of the body and the image of every organ.” (Spurzem, Ibid p.6). The new miracle therapy spread all over America, but, after the 1920s, it was forgotten and became popular again in the 70s.

**SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE**

It seems that whilst most serious practitioners of reflexology consider this therapy an art form, there are several who claim there is a scientific basis. Dr. Samuel Pfeifer, in his book, *Healing At Any Price?* explains that the term, “reflex zone”, was originally coined, not by Dr. Fitzgerald, but by Dr. Mead, who published his discovery of reflecting zones in the human body, especially the trunk, in 1898. Dr. Pfeifer believes that these reflex areas can be explained medically, but foot reflex zones cannot be. So it is a false claim by some proponents of reflexology to connect Dr. Mead’s discovery with the work of Dr. Fitzgerald, (Pfeifer, Ibid, p.57). Dr. Pfeifer states that the American Medical Association calls reflexology a “cult”, whilst Drs. Sneed, in their book *The Hidden Agenda, a Critical View of Alternative Medical Therapies*, quote a Dr. Ronald Hoffman, medical director of THE WHOLE LIFE MEDICAL CENTER OF MANHATTAN, as stating, “that reflexology has
scientific validity hasn’t been discovered yet”, (Sneed, p.167-8).

**NON-SCIENTIFIC CLAIMS**

There is much information in the manuals to indicate that the benefits claimed for reflexology stem from the effects of a foot massage, which takes up to one hour, generally with conversation between client and practitioner, rather than so-called scientific/medical benefits. In addition to some scientific hypotheses and acknowledging that no-one really knows how reflexology works, Christine Issel (Ibid, p.112-116) quotes the views of other practitioners, with a variety of explanations, “Hypothesis of the relaxing effect. Many physical problems have to do with persistent tension and stress. Reflexology relaxes the patient” - “The Psychological Hypothesis. A reflexology massage is a wonderful way to provide physical contact for the sick person. It allows you to show care and concern to the dying person while decreasing pain”. (article by Barbara Zeller Dobbs in *Alternative Health Approaches*, Nursing Mirror, Feb.27 1985, p.41-42)

- And - “T L C” (Tender loving Care) is worth its weight in gold. Jacques Hanton acknowledges- “Placebo research shows that one third of people in a study will improve as a result of just thinking that something healthful and creative is being done”.

“Rest - for many people this is the only time they slow down and do something for themselves. An hour’s rest is just the right thing for many people to give their system a chance to mend and rejuvenate”. (quote from California Conference of Reflexologists, (C.C.R) Conference Brochure March 4-5, 1985:3)

In the preface to his book, *Foot Reflexology*, Dr. Wolfgang Spurzem explains that he found an old beautician who practised foot reflexology and he describes his first appointment with her, “The education I received from her was the most comfortable education I have ever received because she began with an hour-long massage of both my feet. While massaging, she told me stories from her life, until I finally fell asleep”. (Spurzem p.4). Did he really need to go further and associate dozens of so-called reflex points with all the parts of the body?

Maybelle Segal (*Reflexology*), explains that whilst she is massaging, she discusses diet and exercise with her client. Perhaps it is the 30 minutes or longer discussion of diet and exercise on each visit which has the lasting benefit! - “We discuss proper diet and then I offer to lend the client a book in order that he may become more familiar with the value and importance of good nutrition. Believe me, many a client has found a whole new way of life through this self-education”. (Ibid, p.21)

**SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

Is reflexology, however, simply an hour’s relaxing foot massage with the benefits associated with that experience? Certainly not, if one is alert to what many of its advocates claim. “Reflexology works on three levels; the physical, the mental, the spiritual, according to a quote in Christine Issel’s book, (Ibid p.115; Devaki Berkson - *The Foot Book*, p.12). And what does Devaki Berkson believe the spiritual aspect to be? - “a healing force from the universe is called upon and used, by both the client and the practitioner”. (Ibid p.115). So, a further question, what is this, “healing force from the universe”? It is explained in slightly different ways, but the basis of this “healing force” has a common thread and its source goes back to ancient times. “this knowledge is as old as mankind…. (it) goes back to Native American folk medicine and to aspects of Chinese acupuncture (Spurzem, Ibid p.6)

Christine Issel (Ibid p.4) claims that reflexology was known to the ancient Egyptians, Grecians and Arabs and was known 5000 years ago in ancient India (Ibid p.11) and acknowledges the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism in quoting a Hindu author, Ajit

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Mookerjee, that the feet symbolise the unity of the entire universe - “all the elements of the universe are represented by the signs and they also indicate the many aspects of the Ultimate One”. (Issel, Ibid p.12; MOOKEERJEE, AJIT, TANTRA ASANA BASEL, SWITZERLAND, BASILIUS PRESSE, 1971:54) Issel believes that through the migration of Buddhism, reflexology could have travelled from India to China.

Certainly, many practitioners, if not all, acknowledge the influence of Chinese thought on the practice of this therapy - “like acupuncture, reflexology has been used by the Chinese for 5000 years” (Segal, Ibid p.1). Dr. Samuel Pfeifer warns that in the philosophical background of reflexology we find all the elements of Eastern philosophy found in other practices, such as acupuncture and quotes from reflexologists to support his claim. Quoting Devaki Berkson, “the feet are one of the most effective body areas on which to practice reflexology because they are strong energy poles of the body - they link with the energy which emanates from the earth, specially the grass, sand and snow (Berkson, Devaki, The Foot book: Healing the Body through Reflexology p.7, in Pfeifer, Ibid p.54) The idea of Chinese yin and yang are found in Berkson’s writing as well, - “reflexology removes the blocks that impede the proper flow of the body’s energy currents" (Berkson, Ibid, p.2, in Pfeifer, Ibid, p.55). Yin and yang are the two fundamental forces which generate all of the transformation of the universe, according to the ancient Chinese thought called Taoism. Each major organ of the body is designated as either yin or yang and health is a state in which yin and yang are in perfect, dynamic balance. The key to this lies in the concept of a universal, invisible life energy which is said to flow through all the living organisms. Illness occurs when the flow of Ch’i through the body is obstructed or excessive in any area, thus destroying the balance of yin and yang. Healing occurs when balance is restored. “Chinese medicine is the child of Chinese religion and, at their core, both have the same ingredients, the Tao, yin and yang, the universal energy Ch’i and the five elements”. (quoted of Ilza Veith, Nei Ching on p.54 of Reisser, Weldon, New Age Medicine)

In their book, The Holistic Healer, the authors write that they believe that the attraction of the alternative medical therapies, including reflexology, is that the concept of universal energy is the crucial link in the chain between science and religion which many are anxious to find. But the warning is that this life force, which supposedly flows through us, can be nothing less than God. (Reisser, Weldon, The Holistic Healer, p.39) Is this the God of the Bible? Another warning from these authors, “there is no neutral “science” of life energy and meridians but rather a highly developed mystical system with strong ties to the psychic realm” (Ibid, p.54)

Dr. Pfeifer states clearly that, “foot reflexology belongs to the group of natural healing method which have their basis in Eastern philosophy” (Ibid, p.56) and that Christians should not hesitate to question any alternative medical practitioner about his or her world-view - is his or her work based on the idea of harmonising cosmic energies in the client? (Ibid, p.61)

Christians cannot be too careful when searching for solutions to problems whether they be physical, mental, emotional or spiritual and need to be especially wary of methods which have a background of New Age philosophy.

REFERENCES
Proctor and Gamble again!

SNEED Dr. David & Dr. Sharon: *The Hidden Agenda, a Critical View of Alternative Medical Therapies* Thomas Nelson, publisher.