

# Ortho-Bionomy

## Teaching the Body to Remember

*By Barry Kapke*

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Ease and harmony — that’s what the body seeks to rediscover with Ortho-Bionomy, a gentle osteopathically-based system for working with the body’s self-corrective reflexes. According to Ortho-Bionomy founder Arthur Lincoln Pauls, D.O., ease and harmony are things we already know, and Ortho-Bionomy is one way of remembering. It is an educational tool “of a high order. When we begin to understand why we are ill, then we understand, also, what to do about it, and to prevent it.”<sup>1</sup> While Ortho-Bionomy is mostly identified as a bodywork modality, it is also very much a way to approach life and can help anyone to function more harmoniously within his body and environment.

As an approach for working with patterns existing within the whole person — physical, emotional, mental and “auric” — Ortho-Bionomy is effective in addressing a wide range of disharmonies. Ortho-Bionomy is a comprehensive system that includes positional release, postural re-education, subtle touch and energy work. These techniques are effective for chronic stress, injuries, and pains or problems associated with postural or structural imbalance.

During the 1970s, Pauls developed what he called Phased Reflex Techniques (PRT) — the first stage in the development of Ortho-Bionomy. “Through the Phased Reflex Techniques, we bring about an understanding to the body via the reflexes and so increase the body’s awareness. In so doing, the body functions better at all levels.”<sup>2</sup> Pauls believed there is an innate tendency in all things to move toward its own perfection, and that this self-corrective reflex only needs an occasional nudge, or reminder, to “kick in.” The Ortho-Bionomist provides stimulation to activate the self-healing response and then supports the individual in such a way as to not interfere. The term Ortho-Bionomy translates loosely as the correct application of the natural laws of life.

Pauls felt strongly that the role of the practitioner should be indirect, listening and responding to ongoing patterns, rather than using manipulation to impose change. “We only show reminders of what is, the rest is spontaneous,” Pauls said. “Would you show water how to run down a hill? It knows how, it only has to be set free. The body of man is the same; it knows, so who are we in our practiced intellect to teach it? It is better it teaches us and we observe the events that follow on.”<sup>3</sup> Pauls’ background as a black belt martial artist and judo instructor had trained him to work with the energy of another, rather than conflicting with it.

## Positional Release Techniques

In the structural application of Ortho-Bionomy (also known as Phase Four), positional release techniques are utilized to correct physical imbalances and to restore efficient functioning in muscles, joints and organs. Unlike osteopathy or chiropractic, Ortho-Bionomy does not use forceful manipulations. It is gentle, non-intrusive and safe, even in cases of acute injury and severe pain. The guiding principle in Ortho-Bionomy is to work with the body to activate self-correcting reflexes.

Consider a stuck door. Trying to force it requires a lot of effort and you may end up with a doorknob in your hand instead of an open door. However, simply pushing into the door where it is stuck will often prompt it to release, opening easily. Ortho-Bionomy works in a similar way. Instead of trying to stretch a muscle that is tight, an Ortho-Bionomist will compress into it, giving the body direct feedback that the muscle is “stuck” and allowing the muscle fibers to slide apart. More precisely, through positioning, gentle touch and focused compression, proprioceptive reflexes in the joints and the stretch reflex in the muscles are activated. Our proprioceptive system tells us where we are in space and where the different body parts are in relation to each other; the stretch reflex lets us know what the relative tension in the tissue is. When the “self-picture” arising from these activated reflexes is processed by the nervous system, the body can decide whether the current state is optimum or not. Since our bodies naturally seek balance and most efficient function, the organism will self-correct once it becomes aware of an imbalance. Unless there are additional complications in other parts of the body or in the body-mind-emotion interface, corrections occur spontaneously and the consequent changes are long-lasting and well integrated since they are initiated from within, rather than being imposed from the outside.

Positional release techniques are specific and easily learned. In addition to providing powerful tools for bodywork professionals, Ortho-Bionomy also offers concrete skills for individuals and families to address minor accidents and to practice self-care. Pauls said even children can effectively learn and practice Ortho-Bionomy. He felt this information should be available to all people, not just professionals, and he began teaching Ortho-Bionomy in the 1970s to anyone who was interested.

It is this concrete body of positional release techniques for which Ortho-Bionomy is best known. Working with the body, rather than merely on the body, is one thing that differentiates Ortho-Bionomy from more mechanical positional release approaches. However, Ortho-Bionomy also works on more energetic levels as well. It is often referred to as the homeopathy of bodywork.

“Anything which affects the physical body will affect the etheric field and vice versa,” said Pauls. “We prefer to start with the physical body for economic reasons, as it is a saving of the energy potential of the person involved. Anything done to a person, on any level, must be paid for in energy in some way or another. The more we economize, the greater will be the individual’s strength in the understanding process,” said Pauls.<sup>4</sup>

In subtle touch work (Phase Five), the practitioner does less and listens more. The experience of blending and flow guide this work. The client is allowed to direct his own self-correction through a process of “unwinding” in which the practitioner supports and follows the client’s spontaneous, yet passive, movements. Compensatory patterns which may have been proprioceptively

ingrained are “disentangled” in these explorations of movement. This work is a bridge between the purely physical work of Phase Four and the purely energetic work of Phases Six and Seven.

“An awareness of the life and movement present in all of us tends to make Phase Five a more dynamic exchange between client and practitioner,” wrote advanced Ortho-Bionomy instructor Luann Overmyer in 1991.<sup>5</sup> “Take a Phase Four movement, connect yourself to it and move where you are led, by the client or yourself. Make it a dance, a give-and-take where the lines are blurred between doing and not doing. Let the client experience their own choices in movement and self-exploration with as little interference as possible.”

Pauls also discovered that the self-corrective reflex could be stimulated without physical contact. This is the purely energetic phase of Ortho-Bionomy — Phase Six. Here, the practitioner performs this “following” of energetic patterns with little or no physical contact, or works with mental geometries as in Phase Seven. These applications provide invaluable options where people may be in too much pain, physical or otherwise, to be touched.

“The most important piece to remember about working with the aura is that it is not our ideas, thoughts or agenda that create the movement with our hands or determine the contact we make with our clients’ energetic field,” said Bettina Seidl, 1997.<sup>6</sup> “We are waiting for and listening to the energetic expression of our partners/clients and then mirror/represent those expressions through the movement of our hands, our mood and body posture.”

The energy phases of Ortho-Bionomy work at all levels of life. They affect animals and plants, as well as human beings. Overmyer used Phase 6 to remind a beetle to use its damaged leg. Others tell stories of helping birds or other hurt animals.

“[T]hink of Phase Six as speaking to the patient in a different way than with words,” said Pauls. “The beauty of this Phase Six language is that it is universal. You can speak to people with it, or to animals and even to plants. In other words you are using the natural energy available to all which is recognized by everything.”<sup>7</sup>

In a world of experts, Ortho-Bionomy offers a refreshingly comprehensive system of healing and self-understanding that is simple, direct and accessible. Ortho-Bionomy honors the instinctive wisdom of the body, facilitating self-healing to occur as the body remembers its natural ability to move away from pain or tension and toward ease.

Ortho-Bionomy instruction is available throughout the United States, and elsewhere. The Basic Practitioner Program involves 500 hours of instruction and practice, and an additional 520 hours for the Senior Practitioner Program. For more information, contact the Society of Ortho-Bionomy International, P.O. Box 257899, Chicago, IL 60625-7899; or call 800/743-4890, 773/506-6540; fax to 773/506-6543; or visit their website at [www.ortho-bionomy.org](http://www.ortho-bionomy.org).

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## **References**

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