

Going Deeper With Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy

By Sharon L. Bryant, LMT



One of the most common complaints massage therapists hear from new clients is that they have never had a massage that was deep enough.

For many massage therapists, this singular and repeating complaint sends them on a career-long odyssey spending tens of thousands in continuing education, all the while searching for the perfect combination of techniques to relieve their clients' pain and go deeper. While no one massage modality or technique is appropriate for every client, Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy

(AOBT) seems to fit the bill for many previously unsatisfied clients seeking deep tissue massage.

New clients often schedule their appointment skeptical, nervous, and in pain, hoping this exotic-sounding Ashiatsu massage can help. Typically, all they know about AOBT is that it's a deep-tissue massage, and a friend or family member had one and spoke highly of their experience. While AOBT is a deep tissue massage, it is also much more.

The most notable difference between AOBT and many other massages is that it's a barefoot massage modality. Disguised in the name of this modality is a literal translation: ashi (meaning foot) + atsu (meaning pressure) = ashatsu or foot pressure. Thus AOBT-certified therapists use soft, clean feet and parallel bars mounted into the ceiling to perform a flowing, dance-like massage. The gentle appearance of a trained AOBT provider sweeping and gliding her feet over the back of a client is deceptive. This is a deep massage drawing on the large

muscle groups of the therapist's legs and leverage from their body weight.

Many clients arrive for an AOBT session expecting the therapist to walk on them, and thus, give them a somewhat painful and unpleasant massage. The fact that they show up at all speaks to the nature of the pain they are experiencing. AOBT is not about walking on people, though. It's about relieving pain.

Because the foot is a larger instrument than the point of an elbow, the knuckles, or thumbs, the client experience of the deep work of AOBT is much more comfortable than the standard deep tissue massage. Accessing the deeper levels of muscle tissue, tendons, ligaments, and fascia with little to no pain sets the stage for healing. Most notably, AOBT, when performed properly, has been proven to relieve the pain of irritated spinal nerves. By utilizing the "push-pull-pump" effect of the gliding moves along the paraspinal and lumbar muscles, it enables the intervertebral disc spaces to widen, allowing much sought-after relief for clients with back pain.

Along with stimulating the lymphatic and circulatory systems, which help with metabolism and cellular detoxification, AOBT strokes also stimulate the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system. In lay terms, it's a stress-buster. One AOBT-certified instructor, Jeni Spring of San Antonio, Texas, believes that one hour of AOBT packs three times the punch of a hands-on Swedish massage in terms of stress relief. AOBT has been successful at alleviating client pain not only from stress, but also

from scoliosis, bulging disks, and sciatica.

Unfortunately, AOBT is not for everyone. The founder calls it, "the deepest most luxurious massage on the planet," but is quick to say it can be harmful if performed improperly, or on clients who suffer from circulatory problems, take blood thinners, have had recent surgical procedures, or are pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

AOBT can be, and oftentimes is, a career saver to those massage therapists who have spent their career delivering deep tissue massage by hand and now find themselves dealing with chronic back pain from bending over a massage table and repetitive use injuries to the hands and wrists. Ruthie Piper Hardee, the founder of AOBT, states, "This form of gravity-assisted barefoot effleurage was created to help any massage therapist who desires to specialize in deep tissue work without the

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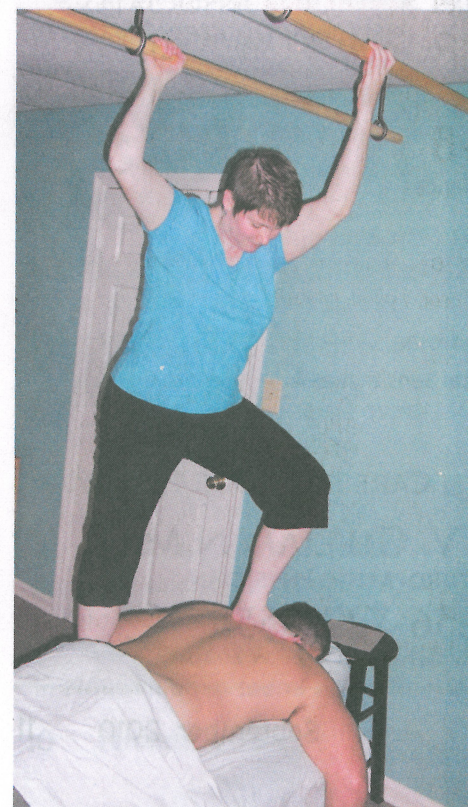
tremendous strain on their hands and body." AOBT also allows petite bodyworkers to deliver massage to large, athletic clients whose size would ordinarily result in a less-than-optimum experience for both the client and the therapist.

With the bodyworker in less pain from delivering massage and utilizing the larger muscle groups to perform, he or she is usually able to deliver more hours of AOBT massage per day than using traditional hands-on techniques. This translates to good business for the therapist, but it also ensures that the last client of the day gets the same (and sometimes better) quality of massage as the first client of the day. This feature alone has the potential to eliminate the frustration many bodyworkers face when forced to choose between seeing fewer clients or risking personal injury.

Drawing from the Eastern influences of Keralite, Shiatsu, and Thai massage, Ms. Hardee formally developed a curriculum and began teaching AOBT. Her training was the first overhead supported barefoot massage modality approved by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) and has also been approved by the American Massage Therapy Association.

Extensive training is required to become a certified AOBT provider. Master certification requires more than 50 hours of training with an AOBT-certified instructor, and therapists must submit to written and performance examinations, ensuring the highest levels of skill and professionalism.

Sharon L. Bryant, LMT, is a master AOBT provider in Decatur, Alabama. For more information, visit her online at harvestmoonmassage.wordpress.com or call 256-603-4596. For more information about Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy, Ruthie Piper Hardee, and local AOBT providers, visit www.deepfeet.com.



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