



Ida P. Rolf on Structural Integration (Rolfing)

One of the first things that people say is, if Rolfing is so darn good, why didn't somebody know about it long ago? This is a legitimate question, and there are some legitimate answers to it. One is the change in concepts I people's minds since Einstein and others propagated the idea of relativity; one of them is the contribution that has been made by the engineering sciences. After about the year 1900, a gradual revolution in ideas came about. We began to understand that any idea was a spectrum. Nobody had ever thought of it earlier because we had a background of Aristotelian ideas for two thousand years. Aristotle had been taught in schools as the father of logic and the authority beyond which there was no authority. Now, Aristotle said there is a black and there is a white. All the greys in between he just threw out, in order to facilitate understanding and teaching of the black and white separation.

In the 1900's we began to see that there was a spectrum in respect to any consideration. There was a black and there was white, but there were all kinds of greys in between. Engineers made use of the idea, and gradually it has gotten its way into our consciousness. The change has been called an intellectual revolution – a revolution in biology, in psychology etc. Every last one of these revolutions started with the recognition that phenomena exist in continuous spectra. How does this apply to human bodies? What can we look at about a body that will give us a clue to how to deal differently with it? The first thing you see, as you look at another person, is a structure. It's that simple. You see that each structure is different. A man has relatively wide shoulders or narrow shoulders; another has long legs, or relatively short legs.

As soon as you begin to look at structures, you find that a body is not a unit. It is an aggregate of units – head, thorax, pelvis, legs etc – and it is this sum total of units which we must interpret as a single unit. In accordance with the way those units are put together as a body, they function well or they function less well, they function ill or they function very badly,



or they lead into death, death being the dissolution of the whole.

The next question is what do you do about it? You can change the way those units fit together by virtue of the fact that they are held together by **myofascial connective tissue** ([link to section on fascia](#)) – chemically speaking, collagen. Collagen is a unique substance. There is none other that I can think of that even vaguely resembles it in the way that it can be changed by adding energy. Other substances in the body do not have this quality; the substances that make up the nerves do not have this quality, nor does the substance that makes up blood or the chemical apparatus of digestion. The *structure* of the digestive tract does have this quality; wherever you see structure in the body you are looking at collagen. Collagen is the material element of that word 'structure'. The next time you use the word 'structure' see if you aren't talking about relationship. Whether you can use the word 'structure' and be talking about something other than relationship. Every time you use the word structure, with respect to a living body, you are talking about relationship between parts as they fit together to make the aggregate that we call a man.

The body operates on energy, with energy, by energy; creating its own energy and taking in outside energy. A body is an individual energy machine. As you add together the parts of the machine appropriately or inappropriately, you get an addition or subtraction from the energy of the machine as a whole. If you have a liver structure that is functioning very badly and the rest of the body is doing reasonably well, you will be taking energy away from the general store to keep that liver going. And the answer is, you won't feel so well. Because what you are registering when you say 'I feel' is the sum total of your energy. That sum total is a factorial sum; you can add to it with appropriate alignment. If you stack the body blocks properly, you can get maximum efficiency in the way that body works. As soon as your blocks get unstacked then you begin to lessen efficiency.

In Rolfing, we work in terms of alignment. We align the myofascial structure, which is the



connective tissue system. Fascial connective tissue is the organ of structure. Fascial layers comprise the organ of structure, the organ they holds the body appropriately in the three dimensional material world. Nobody ever emphasized this in medical school as far as I know. When we use the word 'structure', we are referring to relationships in three dimensional space. There's nothing metaphysical about it, its pure physics, the kind taught in physics laboratories. This organ of structure is a very resilient, elastic, plastic medium. It can be changed. It can be changed by adding energy. In Rolfing, one of the ways we add energy is by adding pressure. The practitioner deliberately contributes energy to the person with whom he is working. This is not energy in the sense in which metaphysicians throw the word around. This is energy as they talk about it in a physics laboratory. When you press on a given point, you are literally adding energy to structures under that point.

You can change human beings. You can change their structure, and in changing their structure you are able to change their function. Structure determines function to a very great degree and to a degree we can utilise. The basic law of Rolfing is that you add structure to the body. In so doing you are demanding a change in function. This is the basic reason why Rolfing works as it does. It is the basic reason why there can be a study of bodies based on structure in the sense that we use the word. There can be a change of function, a contribution to the health and well-being, wholeness, and functioning of a body through balanced change in structure. This is the basic consideration that makes all manipulative techniques worthwhile.

The dominant system of healing in our culture is not manipulation, but medicine, which works almost exclusively through chemistry. The chemical school of healing came into its own about 125 years ago and spread out in all types of directions. The mechanical school of healing, the structural school, went out at that time. It had been dominant for several thousand years, I don't doubt, because unquestionably the old original schools of healing in the days of Egypt and the days of Greece and the days of Rome understood that



manipulation had to do with wholeness and with health. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we got a glimmer of the fact that we knew enough about chemistry to synthesize all kinds of things that operate in the body, we started to forget about structure. Only now is it coming up again, by way of several schools; chiropractic, osteopathy, naturopathy etc. And Rolfing.

I don't care how to many people you say this: Rolfing uses a more fundamental way, a more basic way of dealing with structure than any of the other schools. Our way is more basic because we understand that structure is determined by the relation of the body to the gravitational field. We are the only group that recognises that in order for a living body to be at ease in its spatial environment on earth gravity must be able to deal positively with it. We can't change the gravitational field; we haven't gotten that big yet. What we can do is to change the way the parts of the body fit together into a whole which can transmit the gravitational field through that body in such a way that it enhances its energy field. You can change the body by virtue of the fact that it is segmented, and when you have changed it appropriately, gravity can flow through. This is the basic concept of Rolfing. We are using gravity as our tool, not chemistry. When you come to look at, this is quite an idea.

Dr Ida P Rolf (From – Rolfing and Physical Reality by Dr Ida P Rolf and Rosemary Feitis)