

WHAT IS ROLFING ABOUT?

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In general mankind has subscribed to the idea that even though they must acknowledge their apparent animal origin in relation, they nevertheless feel themselves unique in being, as they think, "upright." The idea of "upright" has a value to humans such that it is used not only to apply to the physical body, but to the mental and emotional make-up as well. The problem is, however, that no really reliable methods have been developed for the establishment of the truly upright stance (let us at this point confine our considerations to the physical body) other than the time honored and army honored formula of "shoulders back — guts in — head up." Unfortunately, as a method for the establishment of a truly upright stance, these directions are a snare and a delusion. In the average body, any effort to take the shoulders back actually forces the spine forward; and "effort" applied to bringing the gut in gives rise to structural aberration of the pelvis; while the direction, "head up," elicits almost as many postural misalignments as there are people who try, and each variation speaks clearly of the particular physical individual making the "effort" and underlines his structural aberrations.

For the fact is that verticality of the person can only be attained by the organization of his basic structure, the establishment of deep lying structural relationships appropriate to the inherent design of mankind. Or, in other words, the establishment of an order which is expressed outwardly in balance and symmetry. Such balance can be seen in the outer contour of the individual and shows up clearly in photographs, especially lateral photographs.

In schools of body mechanics, from the most to the least orthodox, agree on the importance of verticality in human structure. Measurements accompanied by pictures have been made within the past few years demonstrating the improved energy patterns of the muscular system as bodies have been aligned and verticalled by Rolfing (Structural Integration). Valerie Hunt of the Movement Behavior Laboratory of the University of California, in Los Angeles, has demonstrated clearly the improved functioning of the myofascial system as the body structurally approaches the vertical.¹ Silverman in a pilot project on the effect of Rolfing, demonstrates significant changes in the blood chemistry, especially of substances known to be associated with changes in emotional levels.² All schools of body mechanics define the vertical in one fashion, and only one. Seen in profile in a structurally balanced body, the knees are vertically over the ankles, the hip joints vertically over the knees, shoulders vertically over the hip joints (and if this is so, the lumbar vertebrae will be normally "back") and finally ears will be vertically above the shoulders.

Fifty years ago, it would have been thought impossible that a body could be substantially altered towards straightness, toward verticality. At that time,

bodies were imagined as units. However, it is precisely because the body is not a "unit" that it can be changed! In point of fact, a body is an aggregate of large segments each having significant weight (head, thorax, pelvis, legs) and "straightening" a body depends on changing the relationship between those segments. Again, it might be thought that we have reached the end of our capacity for change when we get to this point of our analyses. But we find the body truly a "plastic medium." By dictionary definition, a substance may be called plastic if under pressure it may be deformed, but can revert again to its original shape under the application of appropriately directed energy. The various body units are joined by ligaments, tendons, and fascial sheets of connective tissue. In other words, by collagen structures. Collagen is a protein usually well adapted for its role. Like all proteins, it forms a colloidal suspension in water, not a true solution and like all colloidal suspensions, it changes its characteristics in response to its energy level. The addition of energy by whatever means, moves it along its spectrum from the more solid "gel" to a more fluid "sol" phase. Energy may be added as heat or as chemical (i.e., change in the oxygen content) or mechanical energy (the pressure of the Rolfer's fingers or arms.) As the collagen is energized, i.e., moved toward its sol stage, the body loses its stiffness and is able to move more freely, to move more truly with respect to its joint structure, thereby showing a wider and at the same time a more subtle range of movement. Therefore, the body is more comfortable, it feels more competent, as well as more graceful. On the other hand, as energy is withdrawn, for example with a lower temperature or as happens after traumatic accidents, there is a greater random, less appropriate joint organization, and the sol state of the colloid again reverts toward the more solid gel state. As the body departs from the vertical, the additional energy which could have been contributed by gravity is withdrawn. The structure itself in consequence shows a lessened energy as witnessed in the changes which we think of and label as "old age." This restricted movement registers with the individual as "incoordination." The body slows down in its movement, feels itself as rigid, unmoving, awkward.

Through the years, these effects have always been so apparent that a vertical stance has always been valued. A "standing straight" directive has always been among the "horrors" stored in our memories of childhood. It was not recognized that the child whose basic structure was badly organized was required to put out an "effort" which defeated the goal, that there was neither physical pleasure nor graceful movement resulting from the "shoulders back — guts in — head up" system. However, the value of verticality as such seemed beyond question and the more metaphysically minded postulated many esoteric positive factors for this value. Among the many voices raised in praise of vertical stance, no voice proclaimed the self-evident fact that when a body was truly vertical the energy of the gravitational field, itself a "vertical" energy in relation to the horizontality of the earth's surface, would not and could not tear the body down. It could only flow through the vertical body, and in so doing add an energy increment, thus augmenting and supporting it. But if one views a body not as a unit but as the manifestation, the expression of a basic energy field and recognizes that this energy field exists within the much larger earth field, gravity, then it becomes all too apparent that gravity can literally cancel, in whole or in part, the smaller energy fields which expresses as the individual. It becomes clear that this smaller

field, verbally referred to as "a man" or "a human," may be conscious of itself as augmented by the supportive presence of the larger field flowing through or diminished if its own energy is partly cancelled. In human terms, the field of gravity acts as a "therapist" under conditions in which it can support and augment the human field.

We have now arrived at the place where we can define Rolfing (Structural Integration). Rolfing is a system for aligning the random body into an orderly balanced energy system which can operate within the field of gravity, accepting and transforming energy from this larger field. In doing so, the human's potential is expanded. It is gravity that is the therapist and the Rolfer merely makes possible that the Rolfee (through manipulation, verbal direction, and understanding) be able to use his body in all situations in a way which allows gravity to contribute energy. In short, Rolfing consciously and deliberately utilizes gravity as a tool in the enhancement of human potential. Quite apparently, this potential is not limited to the physical body only, but expresses through the mental and emotional manifestations of the individual because of the chemical changes induced by the Rolfing. With reference to Silverman, all trauma of whatever origin expresses itself and perpetuates itself in hook-ups in the physical body.³ It can only be released totally when and as the physical body, the outward manifestation of the energy field, can attain the degree of balance and order which can be designated not as average but as normal. At this date (January, 1977) there are approximately 150 Certified Rolfers located throughout the world and predominately in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. In the earlier stages of integration, body changes are induced by manipulation in which muscles which have deviated from normal positions are brought nearer to their optimal location and then required to move in that less energy-demanding position. The body, unless too severely traumatized, responds quickly and "gladly" to this demand for normalization. The elementary series of Rolfing consist of ten sessions of individual work at intervals convenient to both Rolfer and Rolfee. Each session requires approximately one hour, though this may differ considerably in response to the physical size and condition of the Rolfee. Rolfing has been designed to raise the general level of functioning and competence of the person. It is basically not designed as a therapy, nor as a system to relieve symptoms. However, as the human experiences the predictable and reliable improvement in his general well being, symptoms are apt to disappear. This, however, a Rolfer regards as the work of the Great Therapist, Gravity. He sees himself merely as a teacher, a teacher invoking the responsibility of his student to understand patterns of body movement and their effect on his own well being to invoke the energy of the Great Mother Earth to enhance his total potential.

Further information and a list of Certified Rolfers may be obtained from the ROLF INSTITUTE, Post Office Box 1868, Boulder, Colorado 80306.

References

1. Hunt, V.V., *Electromyographic Evaluation of Structural Integration Techniques*. University of California, Los Angeles.
Hunt, V.V., *A Study of Structural Integration from Neuro-muscular, Energy Field, and Emotional Approaches*, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974.
2. Silverman, J., *Stress, Stimulus Intensity Control, and the Structural Integration Technique*. Switzerland, 1973.
3. *Ibid.*

