

What Is The Recipe?

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In three previous ROLF LINES' articles ("Rolfing By The Rules", "What Is Meta-physics?", and "The Palintonic Lines of Rolfing"), I set about asking and answering some fundamental questions about the nature of Rolfing. Part of my aim in these articles was to prepare the ground for the examination of one of the most pressing and central questions of our work: "What are the constitutive principles of Basic and Advanced Rolfing?" However, before we can properly answer this question, we first must examine our concept of the "recipe". Because our concept of the "recipe" is systematically ambiguous and because no coherent articulation of what we mean by "recipe" is available, we remain confused in every attempt to grasp the underlying principles of our work. Thus, the last preliminary question we must answer before stating the constitutive principles of Rolfing is: "What is the recipe?" or "What exactly are we talking about when we use the word 'recipe'?" The next article to appear in this series will be co-authored with Jan Sultan; in it we shall provide a preliminary statement of the constitutive principles of Rolfing.

As a way to bring our question into focus, I want to begin by relating an interesting story told by John Cage, a wild and wonderfully creative contemporary American composer who



Photo: Thom Droege

invented and explored aleatory music with a kind of Zen-like excess. Cage knew and studied with many of the great artists of our century. The following story comes from his time of study with Arnold Schoenberg, creator of the Twelve-Tone System of composition.

During a counterpoint class at UCLA, Schoenberg sent everybody to the blackboard. We were to solve a particular problem he had given and to turn around when finished so that he could check on the correctness of the solution. I did as directed. He

said, "That's good. Now find another solution." I did. He said, "Another." Again I found one. Again he said, "Another." And so on. Finally, I said, "There are no more solutions." He said, "What is the principle underlying all of the solutions?"¹

The solutions Cage produced for Schoenberg are analogous to all the different and individualized ways one might achieve, say, the palintonic line of the third session. The internally rotated, the externally rotated, and the great variety of mixed structural types each in their own way demand quite different and varying strategies for achieving the same palintonic line or constitutive principle. On the one hand, the constitutive principle is the same for any conceivable third session. On the other hand the strategies for achieving the palintonic line of the third session are as varied and individual as the great variety of bodypersons seeking our services.

The distinction between strategies and constitutive principles was first drawn in "Rolfing By The Rules". Permit me a quick review. Consider any game, for example. The constitutive principles are the rules that define the nature of the game and how to play it. Of constitutive rules, one can

¹*Silence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1966, p: 16.

say "always" and/or "never" do this or that when playing this game. Since the constitutive rules define the game, not abiding by any or all of these rules is tantamount to not playing the game.

In contrast, strategy rules are rules-of-thumb. They do not define the game. Rather, they state generalities based on experience. They are suggestions about how to best play the game when certain common situations arise. "Always" and "never" cannot under any circumstances apply to strategy rules. Strategy rules suggest, "Generally, when you find yourself in this or that situation, the best way to move is...." Breaking a strategy rule can indicate either the creativity of an experienced player or the ignorance of the beginner. Unlike breaking a constitutive rule, breaking a strategy rule does not imply that one is no longer playing the game.

As I have pointed out on any number of occasions, our everyday use of the concept of "recipe" blurs this important distinction between constitutive and strategy rules. Because the distinction is not recognized, our discussions about the nature of Rolfing often end in the same old conceptual blind alley.

In examining the latest round of emotionally charged, un-argued claims and counter claims about who supposedly is and who supposedly isn't respectful of and/or teaching "Ida's Recipe", I find it both peculiar and fascinating that the most fundamental, essential, and obvious question that any such discussion demands has not been asked, *viz.*, "What is the recipe?" Without an answer to this question, how can we hope to carry on anything like a reasonable and informed discussion? If we cannot state what the recipe is, how can we even know what we are arguing about or what our own or another's position is?

The concept of "recipe" as it is and has been employed by the community of Rolfers is

systematically ambiguous. At least three different unspoken concepts live completely undistinguished from each other within the confines of our unexamined concept of recipe. The great majority of discussions about the recipe are conducted as if these three concepts were one. Thus, we should not be surprised to discover our discussions often result in a confused or emotionally charged morass instead of an exciting, satisfying dialogue about the work.

The three concepts and levels of understanding embedded within the concept of "recipe" are: (1) the constitutive principles of Rolfing; (2) the strategies and techniques by which all the various structural types and mixed types are manipulated to bring about integration in gravity; and (3) formulistic patterns of Rolfing that tend to be followed without regard for the individual differences among clients.

The principles are foundational. They state fundamental requirements for the integration of the human body in gravity. Knowing the principles allows us to recognize when a body is or is not approaching integration in gravity.

Knowing the principles allows us to formulate a strategy or a plan for how to address the particular patterns of strain, twisting, and/or shortening in a client's body in order to bring about structural integration. Jan Sultan's internal/external typology, for example, is a brilliant and wonderful systematic compendium of strategies for addressing the many and varied structures we see everyday. A strategy becomes a *Rolfing* strategy when it is formulated in accordance with Rolfing principles.

The techniques are the means whereby we put our strategies to work in our effort to create a new level of order in our client's body. The means whereby include all of our myofascial manipulative techniques from direct to indirect as well as all of the educational techniques developed by our Movement Teachers. A technique becomes a *Rolfing* technique when it

becomes part of a strategy which is formulated in accordance with Rolfing principles.

Formulism is the excessive belief in, reliance upon, ritualistic following of, or (in some cases) addiction to formulas. A formulist, in this technical sense, is someone who makes decisions and regulates his behavior according to formulas rather than principles.

Often in the early stages of a basic Rolfing class, the recipe is taught as a set of formulas in order to offset the beginning student's faltering ability to see and understand how to Rolf according to principles.

Obviously, the appropriate and judicious use of formulas occupies an important place in the basic training of a Rolfer. It is difficult to imagine how any of us would have survived our first few years in practice without formulas. If formulas are taught along with clearly distinguished principles and strategies, then eventually the formulas will provide a bridge to understanding how to Rolf according to principles. If, however, formulas are taught without being clearly distinguished from principles and strategies, the beginning Rolfer will be forced to rely too heavily on formulas. The unfortunate, but predictable and necessary result is the graduation of a formulistic Rolfer who exhibits an excessive, ritualistic reliance on formulas at the expense of principles.

Formulas do have their place in the basic training and early stages of learning how to Rolf. However, I think we all can agree that making the transition from basic to advanced Rolfer requires giving up reliance on formulas in favor of Rolfing according to principles and, by implication, appropriate strategies and techniques. Clearly what is not required, desirable, or even possible at the level of advanced Rolfing is learning and following some new version of a more systematic, formulistic recipe. Formulism at the advanced level is not only a contradiction in terms, it is also potentially harmful to the client. For example, taking a client through

an advanced three-series that is based on the formula of opening the core will create havoc in a structure that needs sleeve work.

Obviously, the formulistic style of teaching and manipulation is part of our heritage. Indeed, formulism is part of the heritage of every school of manipulation and bodywork from osteopathy to physical therapy to acupuncture. We are not unique when it comes to formulism. Formulism is so deeply rooted in the way Rolfing has been taught over the years that the many schools of structural bodywork that derive from Rolfing have never been able to free themselves from teaching or manipulating from an outdated, old-style formulistic recipe. We are, in fact, the source of formulism in these other schools. They caught the virus from us and continue to infect their students with their own unique brand of mindless formulism.

As a school and a community, we are at a critical turning point in our own evolution, understanding, and development of Rolfing. We have arrived at a place where we can and must begin the exciting project of asking intelligent questions about what we are doing and why. The important question of whether it is possible for a particular practitioner or school of manipulation to creatively expand and evolve their work, turns on the ability to draw, clearly articulate, and act on the distinctions between formulas, principles, and strategies. Fortunately, we are at a point where we can begin to both state and organize our teaching around principles and strategies.

In order to undertake this project properly, we must begin with the recognition that Rolfing has been taught over the years according to an unexamined concept of "recipe" that blurs and confuses the important distinctions outlined above—and indeed, these confusions are still with us. Thus, when we use the word "recipe", we must remain attentive to what level of

our work we are referring. Are we talking about formulas, principles, or strategies? I am not making these points in the spirit of blame and fault-finding, but in the hope of creating a domain of inquiry within which we can engage in a fruitful exchange of ideas and a critical examination of our work.

Historically, because we have not had or made the distinction between strategy and principle, all too often strategy rules are stated as if they are principles. A good example of a strategy rule masquerading as a principle is, "The goal of the first session is to lengthen the front of the thorax." This "goal" is actually a strategy specifically designed to deal with the expiratory fixation of the internal thorax.

Often strategies are stated with "always" or "never" tagged on for emphasis. "Always start at the retinacula in the second session" is an example. "Never Rolf a client in a supine position until the sixth session" is another example. Strategies are not principles. For this reason, "always" and "never" have no place in strategy statements. The disputes over standards of practice, pelvic lifts, and using techniques from other systems of manipulation are all, for the most part, disputes over strategies, not principles.

In claiming that the above-mentioned disputes are about strategy and not principle, I do not mean to imply that they are not real disputes or disputes unworthy of our attention. Clearly, certain strategies are more important than others; and without a good structural reason, we should not violate these strategy rules.

The issue about which techniques (if any) from other systems of manipulation are permissible or legitimate within our system is really a question about whether these other techniques can implement properly our strategies and principles. Even a cursory glance at what is actually occurring when Rolfers Rolf will demonstrate that just about everyone, when they realize or not, is using some technique or other taken from

another system of manipulation. Even Dr. Rolf herself borrowed from other schools. Thus, the question about which techniques serve our strategies and principles and which do not is surely an open and permissible question worthy of discussion. What is the difference, for example, between a Jin Shin technique and, say, a cranial osteopathic technique, if each in its own way makes it possible to evoke the Line? I am not attempting to decide this issue here; I only wish to create a domain of inquiry within which we can ask the right questions.

Because the concept of "recipe" is systematically ambiguous, the dispute over whether some group is or is not following the recipe is confused. No Rolfer knowingly wants to practice our art free of the principles of Rolfing. Indeed, the very notion that a Rolfer could practice the art of Rolfing without adhering to the constitutive principles of Rolfing is a contradiction in terms. From the very meaning of the terms, a Rolfer is no longer Rolfing the moment he/she ceases to follow any or all of the principles of Rolfing.

Those Rolfers who are accused of no longer teaching or following "Ida's Recipe" or "The Recipe" (given our discussion to this point, what after all is *The Recipe*?) are not attempting the absurd, self-contradictory feat of Rolfing-without-Rolfing principles. If I may be permitted to re-state their position in the language and distinctions developed in this article, I would say they are only critical of a concept of "recipe" that is based in (1) formulism and (2) confusing and blurring the distinction between strategies and principles.

On the surface, formulism may seem rather innocuous. However, a closer inspection reveals it is insidiously opposed to many of our most important values. By its very nature, formulism cannot provide for any sort of rational, critical examination of our work. Therefore, it necessarily undercuts intelligent discussion about possible innovations and advancements to the work. The English words "reason" and "rationality" are related to

the Latin "ratio" and "ratiocination" which mean not only "to think connectedly and logically" or "to reckon the relation of one quantity to another" and so forth, but more importantly "to think in accordance with principles".

Formulism fosters the mindless repetition of patterns in place of well thought-out strategies based on principles. Because formulism is not based in principles, it cannot provide a clear understanding and rationale for what we are doing and why. Thus, it necessarily blocks all real discussion about the work. In contrast to science, which is, *in principle* a self-correcting method of inquiry, formulism cannot engage in the critical examination of itself. As a result, formulism is fundamentally incapable of self-correction. Like it or not, a Rolfer trained in formulism is a disempowered Rolfer. By being taught to follow patterns ritualistically, the formulistic Rolfer has been rendered incapable of asking critical questions and making informed strategy decisions.

Thus, to the extent our understanding of Rolfiging remains based in a formulistic approach, we will be left without any coherent way of making reasoned and appropriate decisions about which techniques, strategies, and innovations are legitimate and which ones are not.

Formulistic Rolfiging is also dangerous because it interferes with a Rolfer's need to learn how to see more effectively. Without a clear understanding and statement of the principles of Rolfiging, how can a Rolfer be expected to develop the necessary ability to see whether a body appropriately exhibits these principles? Without a well-developed ability to see based on principles, strategizing Rolfiging sessions for all of the individual structural needs of our clients becomes an all but impossible task. This difficulty becomes especially acute and obvious after the seventh session and in Advanced Rolfiging where the creative demands of the work require giving up all excessive reliance on formulas. Since formulism,

by its very nature, is opposed to and incompatible with Rolfiging with principles, it necessarily undercuts the very possibility of Advanced Rolfiging.

When all is said and done, the unexamined, blind adherence to a formulistic recipe at the expense of principles can only lead to dogmatism, fundamentalism, lack of accountability, and the constant appeal to authority in the place of reason (e.g., "Why do I do this? Because my respected teacher said so!"). It also leads to the ever-present and often unconscious sense of disempowerment that always results when a community is neither permitted nor taught how to think and ask intelligent questions about what it is doing and why.

In my experience, disempowered formulists often end up in one of two modes of being with respect to our work. One kind of disempowered formulist continually finds himself in the confusing role of disciple/student. To assuage his discomfort, he looks to an authoritarian figure or teacher for approval and justification, as well as for newer, more systematic and refined formulas by which to guide his work. The other kind of disempowered formulist finds himself incapable of tolerating the disguised authoritarianism, rigidity, and lack of creativity that formulism necessarily fosters. In an angry and disgruntled effort to free himself from the real oppression he feels, he often abandons the recipe, formulas as well as principles, "to do his own thing". Neither of these modes of being allow for creative work; neither resolve the deeply-felt, personal sense of disharmony and disempowerment; and each in its own way exemplifies the very opposite of what we all are hoping and working for: a healthy community of Rolfers who can own, intelligently discuss, and creatively evolve the work.

Because I spent many years as a student and professor of philosophy, I am all too familiar with the ungrounded rationality of the academic mind. When I use the words "rationality" and "reason", please

know I am not referring to the unhealthy rationality of the ungrounded intellect, standing in denial of the body, emotions, and intuition. Remember, in the strict sense specified above, a rational approach to Rolfiging only means thinking and working according to principles, not formulas. Clearly, much of the real art of Rolfiging demands a highly developed intuition. Yet, let us not forget intuition and reason are not opposed to one another. Indeed, they nurture and require each other. In a healthy, whole person, reason and intuition are two phases of an integrated process in much the same way that inhalation and exhalation are two phases of the unified process of breathing.

If I may be permitted to paraphrase Kant for my own purposes, I would say that intuition without principles is blind, and principles without intuition are empty. Because a formulistic Rolfer works on the basis of ritualized patterns and not principles, he is blind. His blindness will show up in many ways. For example, he will find it very difficult to determine whether or not he has achieved positive results with his clients, especially when the changes are subtle. As far as his intuition goes, if by chance he does produce positive results that he can recognize, his formulism will prevent him from forever clearly knowing in any given situation whether the positive results achieved were due to following a pattern that just happened to conform to the needs of the client or due to the power of his intuition.

The foregoing analysis has provided enough conceptual fodder to feed the project of laying out the constitutive principles of Basic and Advanced Rolfiging. It has also left us with a rather predictable conclusion, *viz.*, that the so-called dispute about the recipe is not any kind of a real dispute at all. No lines have been drawn; coherent positions on each side of an issue have not been articulated; and unarticulated half-truths and emotionalism have been substituted for logic and dialogue.

Who among us really wants to join the self-defeating, oxymoronic camp of Rolfers-against-Rolfing principles? On the other side of this pseudo-dispute, who among us really wants to adhere to a formulistic recipe that is incapable of recognizing the strategy/principle distinction? Rather than allowing ourselves to be embroiled in the kind of emotionalism that always surrounds such non-disputes, let us move ahead with our attempt to state the constitutive principles of Rolfing.

Constitutive Principles of Rolfing

A Preliminary Summary

As stated at the beginning of this article, the next in this series will attempt to lay out the constitutive principles of Rolfing and will be co-authored with Jan Sultan.

I am writing the last part of this article in the wake of just having concluded a workshop in which Jan and I taught a non-formula approach to designing Advanced three-series based on the principle/strategy distinction, Jan's internal/external typology, and a structure-specific definition of many of our key concepts such as core and sleeve.

As we each tried to understand and incorporate the other's concepts, definitions, and list of principles, we discovered that the constitutive principles of Rolfing, as we presently understand them, fall into two interdependent but distinct categories: first order principles and second order principles (also known as meta-principles).

First order principles express the fundamental requirements for structural integration in terms of establishing palintonic lines/planes in the myofasciae. Thus, the key palintonic lines/planes are: (1) the lateral planes of the core (the focus of the second session of the basic ten-series), (2) the

front of the core (the focus of the fourth session), (3) the back of the core (the focus of the sixth session), and (4) the lines of horizontality (typically, the focus of the tenth session). At first I wanted to classify the palintonic line/plane that is the focus of the third session as first order principle; however, closer inspection revealed it is actually a meta-principle.

Meta-principles state how the first order principles are to be applied and in what order. The meta-principles are:

- **Decomposition of the periphery precedes establishing any level of order.** Jan also states this principle as appendicular precedes axial and as the principle of radial decompression or radial decompression. This is the principle of the first session of the ten-series and of any first session of any advanced series. "If the kitchen ain't clean, it's gonna be real tough to do any serious cooking."
- **Front/back balance precedes side/side balance.** This principle is the focus of the third session and must also be considered in advanced work.
- **The legs must be capable of sustaining and/or integrating order elsewhere in the body.**
- **Mobility precedes position.** Before order can be established, major motion restrictions must be freed.
- **Differentiation precedes integration.** Structural changes introduced in any aspect of the body must be integrated into the whole. Release precedes organization. This principle governs the balancing of core and sleeve which is part of the focus of the fifth session.
- **Motility precedes mobility.** Thus, for example, a cranial shut-down (a situation in which the cranial bones do not express the cranial rhythm) will inhibit the body's ability to accept the order that Rolfing manipulation attempts to introduce.
- **Congruence of segments precedes order.** In a structure that is in conflict with its basic type (e.g., an external structure with internally rotated lower legs and flat feet), the resolution of conflicts between segments precedes bringing the structure to integration in gravity.

The use of the word "precede" needs some clarification. "To precede" can be used in a temporal and/or logical sense. Since much of what these principles state actually occurs simultaneously as we work (e.g., differentiation and integration often occur at the same time), we mean "precede" in the logical sense. Thus, for example, we can say that differentiation is logically prior, not necessarily temporally prior, to integration.

Since many Rolfers have expressed a great deal of interest in seeing the statement of these principles, we felt this summary might go some way toward meeting this desire. Please remember that this is still work-in-progress and that we intend a more detailed explanation in the next article. □