

# notes along the path

It is now ten years since I have completed the Rolf training and I appreciate this opportunity to share some of the thoughts that I've gathered along the way since I began on this journey of being a Rolfer. It's like walking along a path and writing down personal truths on scraps of paper and match book covers and stuffing them in my pockets. So, this is an opportunity to empty my pockets. Because, no matter how important an idea has become or how true it seems, I think it's important to continually let go of them to make room for new and fresh ideas.

The experience of being a Rolfer has been an experience of letting go. Of going from a closed fist to an open hand. When I first began my Rolfling training, I still had a lot of rigidity remaining from being a left-brained science and dental student. I found that I began to hold onto the Rolfling techniques with much the same attitude.

When we approach a session holding onto a thought system so tightly, it's a contradiction in terms. Helping someone to let go while we hold on to our techniques and thought systems so tightly, is like squeezing our body

and holding our breath while trying to teach someone to let go, to move gracefully through life.

I think it was A.T. Still, the founder of modern osteopathy, who described techniques as "a means to distract and amuse the patient so that healing can take place."

There's a term I think of when we hold onto anything too much. That term is constipation! If we hold onto things, no matter how good they may be, whether it be technique, love, an idea, or anything, they can begin to rot and putrefy; it's not how much we can hold, but how much we let flow through ourselves. Depak Chopra said that every cell of our body keeps changing, even our atoms constantly change, why should our attitudes remain constant?

I've spent many years of my adult life gathering techniques; and every day I've been faced with the limitation of these methods as well as their power to heal. For all of us, there are always numerous courses, seminars and books on techniques that we feel compelled to take. What most techniques offer is a vehicle to deliver a

very basic, potent form of healing. After a while, it occurred to me that there must be elements of healing that go beyond technique. That led me to put together a book that came out last year called *Healers on Healing* where friend and fellow Rolfer Richard Carlson and I asked about 40 of our heroes of the healing world to talk about not so much their techniques, but rather what they feel is the common denominator, or golden thread, that unites all healers and healing methods of ancient, current and future times.

Part, if not all of our work consists of letting the healing in: not to presuppose it, not to have a model of it, but simply to let it in. It is a process of just being there with that person; without doing something to that person, without judging that person, without changing that person.

It consists of creating an environment in which another person can heal themselves. A space where, as Jack Kornfield and Robert Hall speak of, they can experience: awareness, forgiveness and clarity.

In his book *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* Gary Zukau writes:

By Benjamin Shield

*the Wu Li Master dances with his student*

*the Wu Li Master does not teach, but the student learns*

*the Wu Li Master always begins at the center, at the heart of the matter*

*whatever he does, he does with the enthusiasm of doing it for the first time*

*this is the source of his unlimited energy*

*every lesson that he teaches or learns, is a first lesson*

*every dance that he dances, he dances for the first time*

*it is always new, personal and alive.*

He goes on to say that most therapists do not fit this description. Most therapists are technicians. A technician is a trained person whose job it is to apply known techniques and principles. He or she deals with the known. A true therapist deals with the unknown. Therapists discover, technicians apply. Approach this work as a therapist, much as a poet would approach a poem.

In her contribution to *Healers on Healing*, Rachel Naomi Remen, a pediatrician in the San Francisco Bay area writes: "my very presence facilitates something. I sit with you, and you don't have to be alone in this small, dark, fearful place in yourself. You sense that you can trust me. I, too, am wounded, so I can understand. I know how to find you and be there with you, not to fix anything because nothing may be broken—but simply to be there with you in that place where you thought you could only be alone. If we do that, something happens. The woundedness in each of us connects us in trust. My woundedness evokes your healer, and your woundedness evokes my healer. Then the two healers can collaborate together. My pres-

ence with you allows things to change, to evolve towards wholeness."

Dr. Remen continues that "It's almost like there's a knot of energy in the room and we just keep talking together and working and dancing and singing until the knot begins to loosen, and we are free."

Perhaps the very primary need of an individual is to be heard. This is true of every aspect of the individual. The primary element of healing is simply to be present and to dialogue rather than to monologue between the client and therapist at all levels of their beings. In doing so, evaluation becomes treatment, and listening becomes healing.

In approaching this work, let yourself come from a place of openness, humility, presence and unknowing. Come from a place of "I don't know." When we approach a session with a set agenda of techniques, it's like being in a conversation with someone and pretending to know the beginning, middle and end of the conversation before it takes place. So many techniques involve monologuing rather than dialoguing with the whole person.

When in doubt as to where to begin or how to proceed, simply clear your mind and open your heart. If you come to another speed bump, again... clear your mind and open your heart. Openness, humility, presence and unknowing.

Long before you place your hands on a person, the conversation has begun. As you listen, some communication from the person directs where you place your hands, what you say, and so on. Your input then affects the person's response which in turn affects your response. It is a dance of the most profound order. This is communication at the molecular or cellular level. It is this listening, dialoguing and presence that allows healing to be completed, rather than curing to take place.

Two persons come together in a dance to heal. First to heal ourselves or to heal another. Then to heal both patient and therapist. Then, by the very nature of this union, they come together to heal the collective body.

I like what Stephen Levine says about healing: "The process of healing is to touch with love that which we so often touch with anger and fear."

The space for healing is created when we are able to remove ourselves and our clients from a sense of time and space. This space exists for us every day when we are meditating, loving, listening, absorbed in a story, being with nature, singing, dancing and so on. But it exists for us most of all when we are child-like. When doing a session, be sure to hang out a sign on the door that reads: "No Adults Present! "

The space for healing is also created when we are able to dissolve our ego boundaries. When we are able to just be there, without the thought of doing. As when we are in love; as when we clear our minds and open our hearts. This is not so much losing our egos or ourselves, but merging with another person so that one plus one is much greater than two.

I think that it is a person's innate desire to step out of time and space and to lose our ego boundaries; that it is a person's innate desire to be healed and to heal. I feel that burnout can only happen when we don't allow ourselves to be out of time and space. This does not so much mean being away, but rather being completely present. Not absentness of thought, but of attentiveness of mind. This is achieved not by effort, but by letting go. All things that help bring our minds into attentiveness guide us on the path of healing.

The book *Healers on Healing* was dedicated to John Upledger, who, as you may know, is an extraordinary cranial osteopath and teacher. The dedication read: "This book is dedicated to Dr. John Upledger, who taught me that the shortest distance between two points is an intention." I told John that if I had that to write again, I would have written "This book is dedicated to Dr. John Upledger, who taught me that the shortest distance between two points is attention."

As we know, illness is not always a random event. It may be a message that we have deviated from our true

path. Rachel Naomi Remen says that illness is the Western form of meditation. In the East, they often take time out of their day to remove themselves from a sense of time and space, by meditating, prayer and so on. I've always wanted to make a line of greeting cards that say something like "Congratulations on your illness ... I hope that you and your inner-physician spend some quality time together!"

Wholeness is our natural state, and the nature of healing involves removing the obstructions to this natural state. We can be thought of like a river: sometimes rocks, mud and branches will choke off the flow and divert the direction and power of the river. What we want is to help remove these boulders and debris out of the way and let the river be as it is meant to be: to help our clients free their river...with its full inherent power and direction. No more, but no less. Robert Frost said "Something we were withholding made us weak until we found it was ourselves."

We take birth as an opportunity to work through the issues that develop in our lives; to make peace with and come to terms with who we are. Our lives are vehicles to connect with the childlike qualities we are born with, which are uninjured, innocent and whole.

There is little boundary between healing and spirituality. Our experience of both healing and spirituality are both a process of continual unfolding. We are like a generator, daily recreating our experience of healing as well as our relationship with God with our faith and in our actions. It is a process of allowing ourselves to be clear, and seeing God and healing reflected in all the experiences of life and its creations. For some of us, a single event acts as the catalyst and major source of insight for our views of healing and of spirituality. For others, a more gradual awakening takes place over a lifetime. We may embrace healing as we embrace God in much the same ways: through presence, kindness, work, love, compassion, humility, prayer, community and gratitude. Ultimately, healing and spirituality

should be simple. And just as we create space for healing to enter, so too, we make room for God to enter.

Just as there is no less of God's presence in a single flower than in a church or a synagogue; there is no less of healing that happens in all of our contacts with our clients, not just what happens on the treatment table.

Recently, Richard Carlson and I completed the book *For the Love of God*. It was born of the same process of discovery and unfolding that began with my work with Rolfing. It was written with the premise that a spiritual foundation is the basis on which all the elements of our lives rest. In it, we asked about 30 of the world's spiritual leaders to talk about not their religion, but their personal relationship with God ... their day-to-day, moment-to-moment experience.

I'd like to read selections that His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa wrote for the book. They speak about spirituality, but as you listen with soft focus, you can imagine that they are speaking of healing as well.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama writes that *"The essence of all religion is love, compassion and tolerance. Kindness is my true religion. No matter whether you are learned or not, whether you believe in the next life or not, whether you believe in God or Buddha or some other religion or not, in day-to-day life you must be a kind person. When you are motivated by kindness, it doesn't matter whether you are a practitioner, a lawyer, a politician, an administrator, a worker, or an engineer: whatever your profession or field, deep down you are a kind person. Love, compassion, and tolerance are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. If you have a particular faith or religion, that is good. But you can survive without it if you have love, compassion, and tolerance. The clear proof of a person's love of God is if that person genuinely shows love to fellow human beings."*

Mother Teresa writes that *"To me, God and compassion are one and the same ... Compassion means trying to share and understand the suffering of people ... One's religion has nothing to*

*do with compassion. It's our love of God that is the main thing."*

What we do can't be taught. It can't be intellectualized. It is something that must be felt, internalized. It is something that is constantly changing. Learned in the heart and, as Ram Dass speaks of, can only be passed along to others from heart to heart.

It is funny how my goals for myself as a therapist have changed over these years. If I have a goal as a therapist, it would be to be ordinary, to come with my cup empty, and to come from a place of not knowing.

When we treat, we are looking for the mental health and the wholeness in our clients, not the pathology. One of the most positive things we can do for our clients is to assist them in what I feel is one of the most important aspects of mental health which is: to be grateful during the good times and grateful during the low.

Our view of healing might encompass more than what happens in our treatment rooms. It is important to balance our perspective from the intimate to the global; looking into the telescope as well as the microscope. We might save the patient and lose the planet.

As more healing techniques are developed each year, it will become increasingly important to come back to the fundamental basis of healing. In other words, by not getting lost in individual techniques, we can discover, or perhaps rediscover, what healing is really about. Effective healing does not necessarily stem from an increased education or mastery of technique. Rather, healing can take place when one or more persons open their hearts and spirits to the gifts they already possess.

I would like to end with a quote from Teilhard de Chardin:

*"The day will come when, after harnessing the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love.*

*And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." □*