

# How to Use Generous Movement in Your Rolwing Practice<sup>1</sup>

## Part I

by Roger Pierce

*Rolwing is not a manipulative technique. It is a system of education.*

—Ida Rolf

**E**very Rolfer is familiar with a story like Edna's. Ever since a car accident she had suffered chronic back pain. She had "tried everything." She was finding her piano teaching increasingly difficult.

Before launching into work on the table, I asked her to describe what she did in an ordinary day, and suggested that we experiment with finding better pelvic support in sitting. She was surprised and encouraged that the pain was somewhat eased, and quickly recognized how pelvic support made possible a more relaxed balance of her spine and head. I had her focus on the experience of rocking slowly between balance and two extremes of imbalance, shifting her weight back toward the tail bone and then forward until her back was arched. Next we set this pelvic rocking motion to music, using the first piece on the cassette tape that accompanies *Generous Movement*. The voice on the tape calls out the sequence of movements we had just been exploring.<sup>2</sup> I asked Edna to take about a minute every day to do this SITTING

BALANCE process and then to experiment off and on, while she was giving piano lessons, with what she had just learned. I also asked her to read the introductory chapter and the SITTING BALANCE chapter in *Generous Movement*.

All this had taken about 20 minutes. We went on then to what Edna had come to me for, the hands-on work on the table. Meanwhile, without quite realizing it, she had learned that there was something she could do *for herself* in this healing process—that she was coming not so much to be fixed (by me) as to explore possibilities for change in her movement behavior. As I worked with her on the table, I spoke about what we were doing—in the session and in the whole series—in relation to the learning that had gone before, evoking awareness of structure and movement now in a quite different way.

### *Using Generous Movement in Rolwing Sessions*

Because *Generous Movement* was written to be used without any other teacher than itself, you can, if you do no direct teaching at all in your sessions, simply make it available to your clients. What they learn about their movement will harmonize with what you are doing as a Rolfer and help them to understand that work, and it

will allow them to exercise their sense of responsibility.

If you don't know very much about movement teaching and don't feel very confident with it, but do feel that it is important, Alexandra and I hope that *Generous Movement* can help you shape your teaching and learn more about the possibilities. The book offers a step-by-step procedure.

If you already have an approach to teaching—are a movement teacher or have worked out procedures of your own—the book can be a useful support, particularly in giving clients a program to practice at home. It systematically discusses the ideas underlying Rolwing, and it handles details of movement teaching that there is not time for in a Rolwing session—or even, for that matter, in a full movement session. (Our earlier book, *Expressive Movement*, is a more expansive discussion of the theory behind gravity-related work.)

An hour-and-a-half session is standard for me, with about an hour for work on the table and a half-hour for movement teaching. With a clearly focused movement lesson, this is a comfortable amount of time. But a great deal can be done with less time, even five or ten minutes if a total session longer than an hour is not practical for you. You can at a minimum let the book give the instruc-

<sup>1</sup> *Rolf Lines*, Summer 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The "Sitting" chapter of *Generous Movement* contains an extended description of these teaching steps.

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tions and yourself provide encouragement and suggest changes if clients get off course.

A session is filled with occasions for dealing with movement: Jim walks in, stands and talks with you for a moment, sits, reaches down to take off his shoes—and you have already run the gamut of most of the “processes” in Generous Movement. For you and your client to develop a shared awareness of those actions, and to see them against the background of your own working principles, can be a tremendous enrichment of your time together.

### *Focus on Activity*

*Generous Movement* is organized around basic activities such as sitting, standing, walking, and reaching. The sequence of the book and the tape has a logic to it, an interweaving of teaching motives.

(1) It begins with balance, which is fundamental. Everything else we do, including the work on the table, revolves around it, so this “truing around the vertical” is an appropriate first order of business.

(2) It moves from simplicity to complexity.

(3) It starts from what is relevant to most clients’ needs.

SITTING BALANCE, the first process, best combines all three of these motives, but if a particular client has a different need, I start somewhere else. A grocery checkout clerk needs STANDING BALANCE. People who move very little, and people who have a long history of pain, may be better off starting with stretching (SIX SPINAL MOVEMENTS).

Whether or not you follow the sequence of chapters and processes in *Generous Movement*, breaking movement down into focal points of activity allows learning to take place in easy stages. Session by session, clients

go home with something specific to explore, in a format that seems simple and manageable to them. If one new activity is added at a time, they need not be overwhelmed by the complexity of change which is implicit in a series of Rolfing sessions.

Each activity in *Generous Movement* is focused by a “process,” a simple, idealized or abstracted movement that can then be translated into the myriad corresponding real-life situations. The cassette tape sets the sequence of processes to music, which paces and articulates. There are spoken cues for the movements. The processes vary in length from 30 seconds to about 3 minutes. The whole sequence (9 processes) takes about 13 minutes.

If you teach the processes frequently, you will want each piece of music on a separate tape so that you don’t have to fumble around in search of the one you need. We grant you the right to copy the tape for this specific purpose.

### *Regular Practice*

The processes build a bridge between theoretical understanding and the buzzing world where movement is mainly unconscious and functional—not an end in itself. I encourage clients to do daily as much of the sequence as they have learned. There are decided advantages to this ritualizing. Repetition is essential, and “forgetting” (perhaps the greatest single block to movement learning) is reduced when a day includes a brief time dedicated only to “remembering.”

Doing the processes regularly gives people a chance to take their movement work seriously. The sequence is itself a quieting experience. Clients not only learn improved ways to move, but they also open to their own sources of kinesthetic information. The music for the processes is

chosen (or composed), and is performed, with this in mind.

### *Demonstrating and Teaching Sensory Focus*

One of the most helpful steps when introducing a process is to demonstrate it—not just its outward shape but more importantly the focusing of awareness. The form of ARM LIFTS, for example, is utterly simple: you slowly lift your arms up and out to the sides, and then slowly lower them again. However, the focus of attention is internal, proprioceptive, on the weight of the arms gently drawing the shoulders downward—loosening, or drawing length into, the tops of the shoulders as the arms reach. You cannot really show this without directing your attention inward, and that may seem difficult because you must “leave” the client momentarily, go inside yourself, and focus as pointedly as you can on the sensation. The signs of proprioception are observable and distinctive, though your client may not register them quite consciously: the eyes have a certain absorbed look which perhaps signals a shift in brain wave pattern. A client who is shown only the outer shape will think that the process is simply a movement pattern, and the important part of the teaching, change through sensory focus, will be lost.

You will, by the same signs, recognize whether or not your client has gotten the point, and can then improvise the appropriate coaching. For example, place your hands on the tops of the client’s shoulders to monitor any tightening that occurs as arms go up and go down. “Feel the bunching of this muscle? . . . Slow down, and let that muscle release and lengthen as your arms go up. Yes, that’s it. . . Feel the weight of your arms.” Your teaching points inward, as your demonstration has done.

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Referring each process to its corresponding practical activity ("application," or "embodiment") is one of the important functions of an on-the-scene teacher, who can uncover the particular circumstances of an individual's life. *Generous Movement* will assist you with a fictional movement class at the end of each chapter. Here a group of students with a variety of ages, temperaments, and occupations, voice the most common misunderstandings, and with their teacher explore some of the psychological and aesthetic implications of the work. This is also a place where Alexandra and I share methods with you by showing the teacher in action, now and then reading his mind as he chooses one pedagogic path over another.

### *The Overall Sequence of Processes*

The processes fall into three main sections:

1. *balance and weight release*: sitting, standing, walking, and shoulder girdle release.
2. *stretching*.
3. *spinal flexibility, core support, and reaching*.

The processes of the first two sections are relatively simple to learn, and their relevance to life activities is apparent to most people. The third section, freeing the spine and integrating limb movement with trunk and head movement, depends on some prior mastery of the first. It is usually more challenging, and though it is quite "practical" -in relief of pain, increased efficiency, enhancement of both the strength and the delicacy of nearly every action-there will be some clients who never get so far in their movement learning.

It usually seems best not to introduce a new topic until the previous week's material has been absorbed. If a client has neglected it or not understood it well, I will usually go back and try to find the source of difficulty or look for another way to get the ball rolling. There are many slow starters in this kind of endeavor. I have learned not to give up on people too soon, but to limit their exposure rather than swamping them with more suggestions than they are mastering.

If a client turns out to be someone who cannot or will not do a regular formalized routine, then you can set up the situation so they explore the processes informally, probably without using the taped music. You can teach with music in the sessions as a way of slowing down the movements and focusing attention, and then help them choose specific life occasions when they will practice. I have had clients who regularly-and with great pleasure-gave their attention to walking when they exercised the dog. The checkout line at the grocery store may be a good opportunity to experience standing balance. Build a bridge especially to the activities that are sustained (for example, sitting at the computer all day), to those that create the most stress (lifting heavy boxes), and to those that are important to your client, for whatever reason (floor hockey, playing the flute).

Edna was one who took enthusiastically to the processes. She did them daily and was inventively self-reliant in applying them to life situations. When, over the weeks, she had learned balance, weight release, spinal flexibility, and integrated reaching, she found that she was free from

pain nearly all the time and was making new strides in her piano playing. Neither of us could have said what portion of her gains was attributable to movement learning and what portion to the work on the table. When I asked her what had been most important for her, she said that she didn't feel helpless any more. If her spine got into trouble, she now knew how to take care of herself.

### *Stay Tuned for Part II*

I will continue this discussion in the next issue of *Rolf Lines* in order to take up individual processes in more detail and to give some case histories of clients with diverse aptitudes and attitudes toward reshaping their movement behavior. You might in the meantime want to be exploring the processes yourself, and with your clients.

### *Ordering and Discount*

*Generous Movement* is available from the Boulder office of the Rolf Institute or directly from The Center of Balance Press, 126 East Fern Avenue, Redlands CA 92373.

For orders to the Center of Balance Press, send \$18 (includes tape), plus \$2 shipping (for any number of books). If you live in California, add 7-1/2% for sales tax (\$1.35 per book unless discounted). You can also order our earlier book, *Expressive Movement* for \$20. (California sales tax is \$1.50.)

To encourage you to use the books with clients, we offer a 15% discount on orders that total 4 or more books.

Our telephone number is (714) 792-8134. Please feel free to call. □