

Ida Rolf on Sutherland and Swedenborg

Excerpts from a transcript of Ida Rolf's Advanced Training in Big Sur, CA, 1973

Submitted by Ed Toal, Certified Rolfer

“...they would not admit me to a class because I wasn't an Osteopath. Well, you all know me. I rented myself out as a secretary (laughter), so I got my first observation and information about what goes on in the head through that trip.

Now I am not belittling Cranio-Osteopathy. It was a very great insight, in fact it was so great an insight that there is a very well-founded belief, started by people whose integrity I completely respect, that it wasn't the insight of Sutherland at all. It was the insight of Swedenborg and what Sutherland was proposing and what seemingly did come from Swedenborg, was not merely that there were reflex points on the head, but that the head was part of the respiratory system. That respiration was not a movement of the lungs, except secondarily, but that it was a movement of the head which was by its movement pumping spinal fluid through the entire spinal column.

Now this was unbelievable to the scientist, and this is the reason why I think it was Swedenborg's insight. Swedenborg wrote a book called *The Brain* and there were only three copies published, and Sutherland somehow had one of those three copies. And when somebody noticed that he had one, and mentioned it, that book disappeared and has never since appeared. And all of you, as you grow up tall and big enough and know enough and are mature enough... we may somehow sometime suggest to some of you seniors that you look into that book. I'm talking not about *The Animal Kingdom*, I'm talking about *The Brain*. Many, many copies of *The Anatomy of the Animal Kingdom*, but of *The Brain* there were only three copies. But as I said before, you know me. We have two copies.

Anyway, this is a revolutionary idea which I suggest you look at. When you look at this you are moving, you see, from the mesoderm to the ectoderm. This is the connection.

This is the connection between mesoderm and ectoderm; we see it at the end of every sixth hour session. We see respiration accompanied by the movement of the sacrum: inspiration and the sacrum falls back, expiration and the sacrum falls forward. This acts as a pump for the spinal fluid, the entire spinal mechanism, and presumably for the brain, which is a part of the spinal mechanism. In cranial work, controlling the meningeal system (mesoderm) gives an ectodermal response; it's simple to control the mesoderm, it's anything but simple to control the ectodermal system.

When I came to go into the head, I did know what Sutherland's system was and I rejected it. Not his understanding. His system is very sweet, gives nobody any pain. It works but you have to repeat it for a long time. It is pretty therapeutic with respect to certain situations, for example spinal curvatures, cerebral palsy – why I don't know. But this must also be said: if you expect to treat a child with cerebral palsy with Sutherland's system, you have to face the music that you are going to have to get that kid to an osteopath for over a year or two years. You see, it's a slow system, it's a very good system. In no sense does it ever frighten the child. They use the movement of the skull to do the therapy and they very likely hold the skull in that position and then get the youngster... breathing and they expect that through that they will alter function. Now don't hear me say they don't. They do. They do it slowly. The compensations are still in the body, so that is another thing to fix.

Ida P. Rolf

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