

Dynamic Process Integrity

Introducing Postural Integration

by Dr. Ida P. Rolf

Ed. Jeff Linn

(An essay on the theory and principles of structural integration, circa 1954.)

Modern workers, struggling to find that physiological balance called "health," have been coming to the realization that they must abandon the notion of a specific "remedy" to correct a specific "disease." Many workers have accepted the idea that by the nature of a complex universe, no one school of therapy is adequate to deal with the complicated pattern ordinarily labelled "disease," "ill health" etc. Nevertheless most therapists tend to give their loyalty to some one method of approach — chemical, mechanical, physiological, etc., and while they render lip service to the notion that other schools have their "cures," nevertheless their one particular "brand" is "best."

As an attitude this is readily understandable. It is after all our emotional drive, our enthusiasm, on which we have to depend when the going gets rough. For thousands of years our ancestors have operated on "good-bad," "right-wrong" dichotomies. As children we as a generation learned our loyalties in these terms — linear ideas — at one end God, the Sheep, and the Right (and of course, we were with the sheep and Clarence Day's father at this end), and at the other end the Devil, the Goats, and the Wrong.

[Editor's note: Reference to Clarence Day most likely refers to the U.S. biographer and essayist (1874-1935) whose autobiography Life with Father was, at that time, the longest running play in the U.S., 1940 to 1950.]

Looking at the known world in the second half of the twentieth century, we find with a shock that this simple two-dimensional linear approach conveys no adequate representation of our universe. The science of

our century is disclosing our world as a multi-dimensional manifold. Pulling a thread from a many-colored complex tapestry gives us no guide to indicate beauty of the design, nor does the simplicity of the linear two-dimensional "either-or," "right-wrong" approach of Aristotle enable us to recognize the universe in which we live, move and have our being.

Now this complex which we call "the universe," "the world" or "man," as the occasion warrants, is to be understood at this period of our race history — apparently not in terms of a one-cause one-effect sequence but as an extraordinarily complicated interplay of balancing forces. To the modern mind, the notion of this type of interplay can be evoked best perhaps, by the words "process" or "integration." There may be other terms, but to me these are the two verbal symbols effectively suggesting the interplay of energies, which are not merely never-static, but are also so interrelated that a shift in the balance at any one point results in a changed relationship at all other points, or in words having a mechanical flavor, the application of energy at any given point results in changing stresses throughout the continuum.

We can profit by examining the world we call "man" or "a man" by the assumptions implicit in this symbolism. As appreciation of its interplays constitutes a very practical asset in the process of educating (in the sense of "e-ducere," to lead out) — or stimulating, the personal evolution in a given individual. A "man," then may be thought of as the embodiment, the manifestation, of a "level" of activity, and these levels differ from time to time, for this is a "process" world.

This idea of course, when called "homeostasis" has had wide acceptance in the bio-

chemical area. But actually the notion is useful over a much wider field, including relationships existing mechanical manifestations of a body, as well as the interplay which apparently exists between psychological, chemical, mechanical, etc., aspects of body energy.

On these assumptions it becomes apparent that no one level can be called "Health" without further differentiation. All too many lay men are willing to label "Health" a state that, according to their previous experience, is merely "symptom free." Actually this level to which they are happy to be returned, and for which service they are happy to pay, apparently may be an extremely low level, characterized by an indefinite number of chemical, mechanical, or psychological imbalances, each imbalance existing to compensate for other stresses imposed by yet other imbalances. But this is what they are accustomed to — this is "Health" to them. This is the level at which an adjustment "fixes" the "something-that-went-wrong-with-my-back-when-I-woke-up-the-other-morning," or when a dose of penicillin makes a throat pain-free. And it does restore them to this level of yesterday or of last month, without a doubt.

The 64-dollar question remains to be answered however. How does one get people to understand that there can be and is another level of functioning? What terms can be used to express that which is essentially non-verbal — that which is experiential? What words does one use to convey that there is a state of dynamic well-being that springs from operation on a dynamic level, where energy interchange can occur on the physical and muscular level without literally being blocked by the compensations which have occurred to keep the original distortions from destroying the body?

This level of functioning does exist and can be reached — on the whole with amazing ease — or so I would name a process of 10 or 20 hours that changes patterns of a lifetime. It is true — there is a chemical, nutritional factor involved for which there is no substitute. This is basic. But there is also a mechanical factor involved that up to this point has not been understood in terms that permitted fundamental improvement. The word "posture" is among the more aligned vocables of our culture. This one word means so many things to so many people. To most humans, however, it connotes a

body, forcing the shoulders back, drawing the abdomen in, holding the head up — and in general adding mightily to the tension already present as an index of the strains within that organism. Personally I understand posture as the dynamic balance of the parts of the body, in space, in relation to the force of gravity, at any given moment, and for any given position. In other words, the posture at any given moment marks an equilibrium. This latter exists by virtue of the necessity with which the organism is faced, of moving its body masses and adapting them to the pull of the Earth, which can be regarded as a constant. By the above description you will note that as I see it, there are many “postures,” posture 1, posture 2, etc. determined wholly by the relationships which exist between muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones, etc. — all the parts of the body which we regard as structural. There is however one set of relationships between these structural parts, approach to which permits greatest ease of movement and maximum effectiveness of functioning. This pattern includes effectiveness of reflex function, as well as the more direct lift, which comes by removing interference with the movement of the viscera, etc. This might be called the point of “least effort.” It may also be called “Dynamic Posture,” or “Integrated Posture.”

Dynamic posture and its attendant well-being, is the outward and visible evidence that certain relationships in terms of length and position of muscles, tendons, ligaments, etc. have been established. It is also incontrovertible evidence that in body movement, the fundamental functional design of the body is adhered to — specifically, the extensor muscles are lengthening, and the flexor muscles are contracting. This in turn permits extension of the spine, and consequent rehabilitation of the spinal structure, reconstruction of discs, etc. This is of course, another way of saying that it permits the elimination of the “chronic” “recurrent” lesion, which is chronic and recurrent of necessity by virtue of the inadequacies of the supporting muscular structure.

This level which we have chosen to call “dynamic posture,” in which the greater degree of energy exchange becomes so apparent — can be established by various methods. It occurs as the result of the establishment of a body movement more appropriate to the body structure (not to be confused with calisthenics). However, such

training can be a long drawn out process. A quicker and simpler method starts with the manual manipulation, which removes the interfering restrictions, followed by a more positive training in body movement. It is to be noted that these changes made possible by manipulation, are made permanent only by the pattern of formulated, not random, body movement, which often occur spontaneously, as the restrictions to movement are released. Actually these are the patterns of movement which occur naturally, spontaneously and unconsciously which restrictions are removed. The individual being processed merely “lets it happen.” A noteworthy time relationship may also be observed in this connection. In practically all bodies that have not been subjected to drastic trauma, automobile accidents, polio, etc. — the tenth hour of processing shows a fundamental change in the muscle tone of the body. This seems to be associated with reestablishing the tone of the extensor muscles. This in turn gives the person a sense of freedom and adequacy, which is both lasting and far-reaching in its effects on the personality as a whole. For this reason it is advisable to have it understood that a ten-hour processing is essential for the real success of the method. Fortunately this ten-hour sequence may be spaced in any convenient fashion — completed in two weeks or two years. The latter arrangement is not particularly satisfactory — but only because humans apparently are unable to remember the level from which they have emerged, for anything more than a very short period. Therefore, when this sequence is dragged out over too long a period, the processee fails to realize how drastic a change has been made in his functioning.

Little has been said in the foregoing to indicate any “working conditions” or working “Manual” for attaining the “integrity” we are talking about. A worker in Chiropractic or Osteopathy may be justified in wondering at this point, whether the technique for postural integration that is being advocated differs from the older methods in use in this country.

Actually, it does differ — and fundamentally — in the following basic particulars: (It is to be noted that the following discussion applies to the chronic and recurrent case) 1. Older techniques rely on specific local correction — even though such correction may be at the base of the spine, designed for (and effective in) lessening rota-

tion. Postural Integration posits that through the adequate “stacking” in space of the gross weight units of the body, the head, thorax, pelvis, legs, rather than by placing of individual vertebrae; the tensions of the muscular and ligamentous structures are relieved; the muscles and ligaments are permitted to reconstruct, in accordance with the demands of the body. Thus the malalignment of the individual parts of the spine is automatically relieved without outside interference or specific correction. 2. The method of inducing the personal physical integrity known as Postural Integration claims that its results are permanent in the same sense that the process level of the individual is changed so fundamentally that reversion to the old level does not occur.

This change is self-perpetuating and self-generating when patterns of movement are established which are in accord with body structure. Specifically this means that feet must move on ankles “truly” — that is in accord with the structure of the ankle joint. Similarly knees, hips, wrists, elbows, shoulders, and all spinal vertebrae have their own requirements before “true” functional movement is established. Essentially this requires that the muscles controlling the movement about the joint be balanced in length, position and tonicity. In most instances it also necessitates lengthening the body structure slightly thus permitting the joint greater freedom of movement. In effecting this, the body itself reconstructs and rehabilitates the cartilaginous structures, discs, etc. The improvement in metabolism started here quickly finds a reflection in improved tone of viscera, glands, etc.

The methodology known as postural integration can be summed up in one sentence: to get the muscle group nearer to where it “belongs” — that is, nearer to the position required for efficiency in the particular movement, which is its basic function — and to demand that the muscle group move in that position. Once this pattern is established it does not regress.

Unfortunately, specific “how-to-do-it” directions for attaining this end can not be given verbally. Like many of the richer and more rewarding aspects of life, this technique is essentially non-verbal and requires experiencing. Fortunately, the “experiencing” does not involve the sacrifice of too much time. Ten or twenty hours of processing is sufficient to establish the new muscle pattern and the changed metabolic patterns

which maintain it indefinitely. Fortunately too, in experiencing the change in himself, a worker skilled in body processing, suddenly finds himself realizing the deviations of the body with which he is dealing, and its needs suddenly seem simple and obvious. At this point the term "dynamic process integrity" ceases to be a verbalism. Instead he realizes that no "correction" will ever again satisfy him — that only by establishing an integrity of structure and functioning in the fellow human whom he serves, can his own goal be reached.

A POSTURE QUIZ

What does the word "posture" mean to you?

To what extent does this formulation of yours differ from that of your lay associates?

What do the terms "DYNAMIC POSTURE" or "POSTURE OF MOVEMENT" imply to you?

In your opinion is POSTURE, either STATIC or DYNAMIC, a function of the external body structure, skeletal structure, muscle structure only?

What are your assumptions concerning a relationship between POSTURE and PHYSICAL TENSION or MENTAL TENSION?

To what extent can a posture be induced which will lessen physical tension? Do you know how to do this?

Would you consider the expression "a state of permanent physical tension" a significant description of inadequate posture?

What do you understand by the term "MUSCULAR EQUILIBRIUM" — "MUSCULAR BALANCE"?

How can one induce a closer approach to "equilibrium" between muscle groups?

What subjective sensations characterize MUSCULAR EQUILIBRIUM?

What areas of human functioning are related by the term POSTURAL INTEGRATION?

These will be the subjects of discussion at the meetings to be held at Cedar Rapids, Iowa — April 26th to May 10th, 1954.

*"And out of darkness came
the hands that reach thro'
nature, moulding men."
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson*