

The Energetic Foundations of SI

An Origin Story

By Bob Schrei, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

... Is 'balancing' actually the placing of the body of flesh upon an energy pattern that activates it. The pattern of this fine energy would not be as easily disrupted and might well survive, relatively intact, traumatic episodes that distort the flesh.

Ida Rolf (1977, 205)

Introduction

My original training was as an architect and builder. There I learned that the foundation a structure is built upon is what determines the success or failure of its ability to survive the forces of gravity – to exist in this material world. In the quote above, Dr. Rolf is suggesting that there is an energetic foundation or pattern that activates the body of flesh; she implies that perhaps all that we are doing as practitioners of structural integration (SI) is facilitating the body's alignment with this pattern or foundation. She also referred to this pattern as the Platonic "blueprint for structure" (Rolf 1977, 16).

We could say the concept Dr. Rolf puts forth here is the foundation not only of the "body of flesh" but also other work. To understand this better, it might be helpful to take a closer look at the origins of these ideas.

In the summer of 2015, a memorial event was held at Dr. Rolf's gravesite. Several people, including myself, were asked to participate with tributes. I wrote the following piece as my contribution with some hesitancy, and shared it on the Private Page for Structural Integrators on Facebook. I was aware that the perspective of the piece was potentially controversial and at odds with the prevailing stories that we have told ourselves and the public about the origins of our work.

To my surprise, the words were very well received, both in comments that were posted to the Facebook group, and in personal emails. I received confirmation from original teachers of Dr. Rolf's method of SI, as well as thanks for having made the comments. I did not receive a single denial or question of veracity. In addition, I also received further information that

expanded on what was shared. By request, I am sharing this tribute again here, with some minor editing.

An Origin Story

Today [Sunday, June 7, 2015] is the Ida Rolf Memorial Virtual Event at her final resting place, though I doubt she is resting there. More likely continuing her enquiry.

I was asked to be a part of this event and lead a meditation, but for personal reasons, was not available in person today.

I would like this to be my contribution to the unfolding vision of this work. It is interesting to me that despite all the discussions I have heard over the years about the nature of this work, what Dr. Rolf wanted, and how to heal this community, there is one aspect that has completely been overlooked. Whether intentionally or accidentally I am not sure. To me it is the key to the difficulties we have had as a community in understanding the nature of this work and how it originated. It has been hinted at – but not spoken about openly.

Several months ago, Liz Stewart posted a document from Peter Melchior on this Facebook page. In her post she called attention to the note at the bottom of the document, in which Peter said, "Ida Rolf once remarked, in a class in which I was present, that 'This work is at least 3,000 years old.'"

The implication of this, of course, is that this work did not originate with Dr. Rolf. So rather than feeling this day as a tribute to the founder of this work, I see it as a tribute to the woman with a flower in her hair who reconnected us with a much, much older tradition of which we are a part.

What is that tradition? I would like to share a story that walked into my life five or six years ago, which may shed some light on this quote of Peter's. I think this is important for understanding the story that we are within.

This story challenges the narratives that have been put forward about what our work is and where it came from, or more hopefully expands and augments the prevailing view, perhaps providing a key to understanding why there are so many views and perspectives on what it is that is at the heart of this work.

Briefly stated, the accepted narrative is that the work emerged from Dr. Rolf's background in the sciences, her interests in yoga, friendships within the osteopathic community, interests in Swedenborg¹, general system theory², Korzybski³, and Buckminster Fuller⁴. Carole LaRochelle has written beautifully about this narrative on her very useful blog⁵, and Sam Johnson wrote a very thorough overview of this perspective⁶, as have several others. This story has become the public face of the work, as evidenced most recently in an article in *The Telegraph*, which stated, "How did it start? It was developed by Dr. Ida Rolf, a physicist, in the 1930s when she applied the principles of physics and mathematics to the body."⁷ As always, the emphasis is on her science background [although the article incorrectly labeled her as a physicist; she was in fact a biochemist].

Clearly these were all influences on her life and work. And it is not the full story.

The story that I am going to share is not meant to discredit or dismiss these narratives, but to complement what has become the accepted narrative, to bring forth a forgotten aspect of that narrative. I am sharing it with a group of people who have come together under her name, not with the general public. This is as much our heritage as the biomechanical, scientific lens that has been adopted for public consumption and which many of us have accepted as gospel. As will become clear here, Dr. Rolf was quite open about the more esoteric origins of this work. Maybe it is time for all of us to listen for moment to this facet of the gem.

Five or six years ago, a new client walked into my office for Rolfin[®] SI. I asked her if she had ever experienced Rolfin sessions before. She replied that, yes, she had had thirty or forty sessions. I asked her who her Rolfer was, and she said Dr. Rolf! I realized I had a great opportunity standing in front of me and asked her if she remembered anything about the sessions.

She said "Yes, I remember a lot." I asked her if she would be willing to share those memories. She laughed and said immediately that the sessions were painful. Beyond that she told me that the main thing she remembered were the stories that Dr. Rolf told her. So, of course, I asked her what the stories were. She said that Dr. Rolf talked at great length about how the work she was doing was channeled information from ancient Egypt – that it did not come from her work as a scientist. Subsequently, my client asked her mother and her mother's friends, who were also Dr. Rolf's clients, what Dr. Rolf had told them about the work. Dr. Rolf had told everyone the exact same stories.

I thought this was extremely pertinent. Dr. Rolf was risking a great deal of her reputation and being put in jail by telling these stories. It was a time when chiropractors and osteopaths and people like Dr. Wilhelm Reich⁸ were being arrested and prosecuted for unorthodox practices. Reich had been arrested and had much of his work destroyed as recently as 1956. Chiropractors and osteopaths were being arrested for using Radionics instruments and other more energetically oriented devices, including Reich's orgone machine. In the face of this, Dr. Rolf could have easily said: "This is work I have developed from my background as a scientist studying fascia," and she would have been justified in doing so. She chose to tell another aspect, a riskier story. She did not remain silent to her clients or those around her about this. Why?

A few months later in 2010, I was giving a presentation at the International Association of Structural Integrators (IASI) conference in Denver. An Advanced Rolfin Instructor was the keynote speaker. I asked him out one night after everyone had gone to bed and told him this story to see what he would say. He laughed and said, "She told all of us that story! She would tell that to anyone who would listen!" And then he said what I think is very telling: "We all just laughed at her!"

Two years ago, I was asked to give a presentation and demo at a Rolf Institute[®] faculty meeting on the energetic taxonomy. During the course of this seminar, the same story emerged, and three different faculty members said that they had been in classes with Dr. Rolf where she told it.

So, it is a story I have heard many references to in my thirty years as a Rolfer. I think there is more than adequate evidence that this story has at least some truth to it, as much as the more public narratives that have also become the context that many practitioners work within.

Imagine for a moment that you are Dr. Rolf telling your clients that this work was channeled information from ancient Egypt. How does that feel in your body? Are you comfortable? Can you feel the degree of courage and conviction and lack of fear that it took for her to say that?

Back to the quote from Peter, which points in the same direction. If this work is 3,000 years old, how did Dr. Rolf come to be in possession of the information? It is clear from what she was telling some of her clients and students where the work came from. This has huge implications for me, as I think it should for all of us. First, it means her students have basically created an alternative story of this work contained in the narratives referred to above. It also means that

as a community we are ignoring or are ignorant of a part of our own family history, something that there are always rumors about, spoken in hushed voices. In terms of family constellations, it is the piece that we are hiding, and as such, is what is keeping us from moving forward as a discipline, as a community, as a family.

It also means that we have been asking the wrong questions. We should be asking things like: Who 'channeled' or 'downloaded' the information? What was the content – was it the Ten Series, was it the way of working deeply in the body? Does it matter if we change things? What was the full content of that information? Is this why, as Peter Melchior stated (on that same class handout), the Ten Series is a work of genius – "elegant to a fault"?

What have we lost by conveniently eliminating what Dr. Rolf freely told many people? Most important, though, is that if it were 'revelatory' information, it means that this work is first and foremost a gift from Spirit. If gifts from Spirit are not acknowledged, there are many problems that ensue, which is what we have witnessed in our community. Maybe on this memorial day, it is time to acknowledge the gift and where it came from, as well as the messenger and her story.

As a community, we have become very dualistic. The underlying concern is that this knowledge will destroy any scientific credibility. (And there is no doubt that Dr. Rolf wanted her work researched and validated in that world.) But is this really true? I think not. Many of the old osteopaths talked regularly about the 'Master Mechanic', God, spirit, love. Why do we feel that we must hide the spiritual origins of the work?

I have chosen to share this, not in the spirit of revealing family secrets, but out of a feeling that the gift needs to be acknowledged, with the hope that the acknowledgement will begin to shift some deeper currents. On this memorial day, I acknowledge that gift.

What was this gift of Spirit? It was about a process to help assist the unfolding of the full potential of the human being – our 'uprightness', our human potential. That is the ancient 3,000-year-old story. This potential contains the ability for humans to relate within a field of mutual cooperation, sharing, compassion, and love rather than the gravitational forces that pull us 'down', such as anger, arrogance, revenge, egotism, addiction, lack of cooperation, poor communication, and lack of respect for each other. Maybe, this day, it is time to take a moment to reflect on Dr. Rolf's desire to see a new human being on the planet someday.

We often wonder as a community why this work hasn't reached into our culture in a deeper way. Perhaps the fact that we have ignored the very roots of the work, the gift of Spirit, has contributed to that. A while ago I was having a conversation with my son, who is a yoga teacher. He said to me, "Our culture has a way of taking Spirit out of everything." It has happened in the yoga world and it has happened in our community. Perhaps it is time to bring it back, front and center, and acknowledge this day the full range of who Dr. Rolf was.

I would like to close this with a quote that one of the original students of Dr. Rolf shared with me.

One of the older Rolfers said Ida would always say that Rolfing [SI] should be described as an educational process, and she didn't want Rolfing [SI] to be destroyed by crossing swords with medical and physical therapies. And my friend said, "Education, what do you mean?," and Ida said, "Well, actually, if I had to say what Rolfing [SI] is really, where it really falls, I'd say it falls under shamanism."

So we have to ask, is it possible that this work has been positioned in the wrong domain of manual therapy? That Dr. Rolf may have been correct about where it really falls? And that we have willy nilly moved into a position of crossing swords with medical and physical therapies?

It is my wish this day that the full range of who Dr. Rolf was and the full range of the nature of the work blossom. I wish everyone well.

Conclusion

In the days following, as I mentioned above, I received comments and correspondence in response to the tribute. One of the original Rolfing teachers expanded on these stories and said that Dr. Rolf had also told him that not only was the work 'channeled' information but also that the Ten Series, which is still the foundation of our work, had been an initiation process in an Egyptian mystery school.

What is the relevance of all this in relationship to the theme of 'Energy' or 'Nonphysical Reality' that is the focus of this issue? In the quote at the beginning of this article, Dr. Rolf points to an important aspect of this underlying energy: pattern. A pattern that organizes our soma, that is stable and unaffected by trauma. This is similar to what Goethe referred to as *ur-phenomenon*⁹ or Rudolf Steiner referred to as 'etheric formative forces' (energetic patterns that gives rise to form). Dr. Rolf

also said, "A joyous radiance of health is attained only as the body conforms more nearly to its inherent pattern, this form, this Platonic Idea, is the blueprint for structure" (Rolf 1977, 16). "Platonic Idea" implies a pattern that is not yet physical, that exists in a consciousness/energy field prior to manifesting into physical form.

I would like to suggest there is an energetic perspective that is the foundation of this work, and that the answer to this lies clearly in the 'origin story' I have recounted and in Dr. Rolf's continued reference to an underlying energetic pattern that the body organizes around, the 'blueprint of perfection'. Dr. Karl Humiston, a student of Dr. Rolf's, said that she used this term over and over in classes. [He wrote about this in an article for the IASI yearbook entitled, "The Mysteries of the Blueprint" (Humiston 2010, 46-48)], and in that article references the Standards of Practice document of the Rolf Institute[®], which states:

"Equally fundamental is the recognition that each human being has an inherent internal pattern for optimal organization of form and function, which pattern is essentially self-organizing."

and

"The intent of Structural Integration is to identify and address that which keeps each person's pattern from manifesting as a higher level of order and function."

In other words, the Rolfing series helps to identify the blockages that are keeping the pattern, energy, and information of the 'blueprint of perfection' from manifesting more fully within each person's embodied being.

When I attended my auditing phase of the training with Jan Sultan, he compared the Ten Series to ritual. Other teachers also used this analogy. This is consistent with the energetic signature of the work. It can be seen as a ritual to prepare individuals for the unfolding of their full potential. I repeat that Dr. Rolf's desire was to see a new human being on this planet. Without this part of her vision, the work devolves into yet one more modality for physical health. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong or inherently negative about this; I do my own fair share of 'fix it' work. What I am suggesting here, though, is that for this work to unfold more fully in this world, it needs to find a way to be congruent with its foundation, the 3,000-year-old tradition of which we are a part.

I can imagine that Dr. Rolf might feel that her work was designed for the times in which we now live. I think if Rolfers open themselves to the energetic and spiritual aspect that is inherent in the work, without discounting their important biomechanical and other skills, they will find they have a potent mix to offer people. And that in these times, many people are looking for exactly that range of experience – encompassing all of the five Rolfing taxonomies.

Bob Schrei has four decades of experience as a student, apprentice, practitioner, and teacher of energy medicine. He is a Certified Advanced Rolfer and Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapist. He is co-originator of SourcePoint Therapy[®] with his wife and partner in healing work, Donna Thomson. This energetic and hands-on healing system evolved from his thirty-plus years' experience in bodywork, as well as extensive personal study in vibrational medicine, sacred geometry, shamanic healing, and Zen meditation. With a BA in architecture and an MFA, Bob also incorporated his lifelong interest in structure and pattern into SourcePoint Therapy, which he developed, refined and tested for ten years before beginning to teach in the United States and Europe. This process of refinement and development continues as SourcePoint Therapy evolves.

From 1970-1985 Bob was a student and teacher at the Rochester Zen Meditation Center. As a former Zen teacher, Bob brings a unique perspective to the field of energetic healing and manual therapy, helping his students develop sensitivity to the subtleties of working with energy and bringing a heightened awareness to their healing work.

Bob currently resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he maintains an active private practice of SourcePoint Therapy in addition to teaching it worldwide.

Endnotes

1. Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1773) "was a Swedish scientist, philosopher, theologian, revelator, and mystic. He is best known for his book on the afterlife, *Heaven and Hell* (1758). Swedenborg had a prolific career as an inventor and scientist" (Wikipedia).
2. General system theory is based in the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, an Austrian biologist.
3. Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950) "was a Polish-American independent scholar who developed a field called general semantics, which he viewed as both distinct from and more encompassing than the field of semantics" (Wikipedia).

4. Buckminster Fuller “was an American architect, systems theorist, author, designer, and inventor. Fuller published more than thirty books, coining or popularizing items such as ‘Spaceship Earth’, ephemeralization, and synergetic” (Wikipedia).

5. See <http://redwoodempirerolfing.com/blog/> – particularly the following posts: <http://tinyurl.com/Rolf-and-Yoga> and <http://tinyurl.com/swedenborg1> and <http://tinyurl.com/swedenborg2> (retrieved 5/9/2017).

6. See www.samjohnsonrolfing.com/reading/ida-rolf-and-the-two-paradigms/.

7. See “Alternative Health: What is the Rolf Method,” by Anna Murphy, November 21, 2014. Available at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/alternative-medicine/11243535/Alternative-health-what-is-the-Rolf-Method.html (retrieved 5/9/2017).

8. Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) “was an Austrian psychoanalyst of the second generation of analysts after Sigmund Freud . . . Reich became known as one of the most radical figures in the history of psychiatry” (Wikipedia).

9. *Ur-phenomenon* – meaning ‘earliest’, ‘original’, used in words denoting the primal stage of a historical or cultural entity.

Bibliography

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