Alchemical Order: The Inherent Logic of the Ten Series

An Interview with Ray McCall

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ABSTRACT *Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) instructor Ray McCall explains the way sessions of the Ten Series interrelate in a harmonic fashion, giving the series an inherent order on many levels. When we bring this conceptualization into our practices, our work is enriched in many ways.*

Anne Hoff:

Some years ago you mentioned to me the idea that there are 'octaves' or related groupings in the Ten Series, so I wanted to see if you would share with us about that.

Ray McCall:

Usually when I lecture on this in class, I'll refer to it as the 'inherent logic of the Ten Series'. I now call it Alchemical Order: The Inherent Logic of Dr. Rolf's Ten Series. Certainly beginners, and sometimes those experienced, tend to get a little myopic when they're doing the Ten Series; they get focused down in the specific session they're doing and lose track of how it relates to the rest of the sessions of the Series. I'm not sure when I was first introduced to the idea of the 'triplets', probably when I did my Basic Rolfing Training with Emmett [Hutchins], but I've been fascinated with it over the years, so I've spent a lot of time exploring and refining the concept.

AH: Is this something most instructors talk about? I don't remember it from my training.

RM: I don't know. I teach primarily Phase III, and with Phase II students from other teachers some come in familiar with the concept and some don't, so I don't think so.

AH: It's not part of the curriculum for everyone.

RM: Its not part of the official curriculum, syllabus for Phase II and Phase III.

AH: Okay, so there's a way of seeing inherent order within the Series through what you are calling triplets.

RM: We're all familiar with the three boxes, so to speak, of the Ten Series: sessions one though three, sleeve; four through seven, core; eight through ten, integration. There's also an alternation of upper body, lower body. In session one it's more upper body, even though you do work on hamstrings and around the head of the trochanter, so the odd-numbered sessions are uppers. The

even-numbered sessions are lowers. But there's another element that, as I said, I've been working on refining for a long time, the triplets. You key into the sequential triplets by asking three questions about any given session in the series: 1) what am I starting, 2) what am I continuing, and 3) what am I completing in this session? So you're looking at the session before the one you're doing, and you're looking at the session after the one you're doing, since you need to have done at least three for those three questions to make sense.

In session three, you're completing defining the body in three-dimensional space. So, what are you continuing? What you started in session two was bilateral functional support, but Dr. Rolf also said if she could give people one thing, it would be more heel, so in addition to left/right support, you're also starting the A/P [anterior/posterior] depth dimension in session two. You continue that in three, with getting A/P depth along the sideline, so that's on the sleeve. Then in four, you're coming up the inside line and you complete that triplet of A/P depth by getting span in the pelvic floor that allows the leg to extend and to drop out of the pelvis.

In session four, you're starting A/P depth span of the pelvic floor, in five you continue that with the psoas work, which is the A/P depth of the torso, and in six, you're freeing the sacrum, getting the bilateral support keystone of the pelvis (last vertebrae of the axial complex). Four, five, and six are all dealing with, in Rolfing vernacular, 'disappearing the pelvis' so it is a transmitter rather than a block. Session five is completion of the three/four/five triplet with A/P depth through the torso. Then in six, you free up the sacrum, the lower pole of the axial complex, because in seven you complete the A/P depth in the body by getting differentiation between the viscerocranium and neurocranium.

In order to utilize this idea of triplets – what are you starting, what are you completing, what are you finishing – you need to know the goals of each session, you need to know the anatomical territory, you need to know the positional strategy, and you need to know the diagnostics to test for those relationships relative to the goal of the session so you'll know whether what you did created more order or not.

I used to teach the Ten Series the way it was taught to me, by Emmett, who tried to be more like Ida [Rolf] than Ida. She tended to teach each session as it came along sequentially, because she was apparently somewhat paranoid about people stealing her work; so if she threw someone out of the training, which she did apparently sometimes, when they quit, they wouldn't have the whole Ten Series to go off and start their own school. Well, we know how that all turned out, but that's another story. But I realized that pedagogically it made much more sense to figure out where we were going and have that as a reference as we went through each of the sessions. You know, 'If you don't know where you're going, you may end up someplace else'. As a result of Hubert Godard's work and that whole influence, what we want at session ten is sometimes talked about in terms of 'uniform brilliance', integration, and a hallmark of integration is contralateral movement.

AH: I have not heard the term 'uniform brilliance'.

RM: Okay, maybe you've seen the symbol [starts drawing]. In one of my early faculty meetings we were discussing, "How do you know when you're done?" Much to my amazement, Jan Sultan said, "Well, actually, I know I'm done when there's uniform brilliance." I practically fell out of my chair because Jan tends to want, à la Korzybski, a concrete reference for any terms you're using. Here's the symbol for uniform brilliance (see Figure 1), which is the axial complex free from kinetic drag and then the energetic field being uniform.

AH: Ah yes, I know that image.

RM: Contralateral movement is not something that we inject, create, in the body. It's inherent, and when we free the inhibitions, the restrictions, it automatically manifests. If what we're wanting to do is have a body that manifests contralateral movement, we can go back down and say, "Okay, how does each session we're doing contribute to contralateral movement?" In session one, you're making it easier to breathe. You're freeing the girdles from the torso. In session two, for there to be contralateral movement, you need to have toe hinge, you need to have differentiation of medial and lateral arch, you have to have a calcaneus that extends, you have to have talar glide, flexors that flex and extensors that extend, and there needs to be adaptability

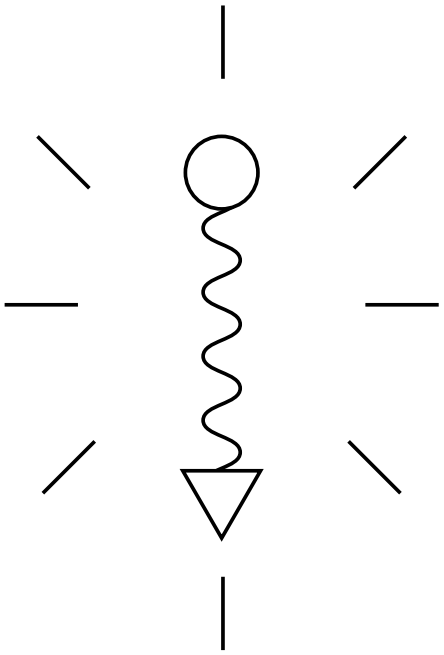

Figure 1: 'Uniform brilliance' at the end of session ten.

in the interosseous membrane, that whole shock-absorber effect.

Any one of those not being there can have a detrimental effect on contralateral movement. In session three, if you don't get A/P depth in the sleeve, then you won't be able to get A/P depth in the core in session five. If you don't have A/P depth in the sleeve and core you're not going to get rotational movement of the whole axial complex, the organs, all of that. In four, if you don't have span on the pelvic floor, so that the leg can extend and drop out of the pelvis, you won't have contralateral movement. In five, if you don't have a functioning psoas (the psoas dropping back under flexion), again that will impede contralateral movement. In six, if you don't have the dual function of the sacrum as the keystone of the pelvis and as the last vertebrae of the spine, you won't get the conversion of the ilium (innominates). That has to be there. Then in seven, if you don't have that A/P depth differentiation, viscerocranium and neurocranium, then the contralateral movement can't transmit all the way up through the neck and out the top of the head. When that [transmission] happens, we start to see that undulate movement of the head responding to the walk.

Then we get into eight, nine, and ten, and as Peter Melchior once said, "After seven, the trail thins out a bit." For the purpose of

clarity and ease, I would say that you can easily map the triplets up through session seven. I think it also holds if you assume theoretically that eight is a lower session and nine is an upper session. Then you have the even-numbered triplets, two, four, six, eight, so what you started in four, span of the pelvic floor, you continue in six with the sacrum, and then you complete that in a lower eight by having the lower girdle free from the lumbodorsal hinge (LDH) and the movement initiated expressing from there. In the same way, you'd have the odd-numbered triplets, one, three, five, seven, nine, where in the ninth session you want to free the upper girdle from the LDH and have it initiate movement from the LDH. Then in ten, you're establishing horizontals so that the core can express through the sleeve without being dampened or diminished, and also the sleeve can interact with the world and communicate into the core.

AH: So these triplets are a way that you can look at three sessions that are in a row, or you can look at three of the even-numbered sessions that are sequential or three of the odd-numbered sessions that are sequential. The triplets reveal how the sessions interact with each other and build upon each other.

RM: Correct.

AH: So it's like harmonics within harmonics within harmonics.

RM: Yeah. That's pretty much it.

AH: So calling the Ten Series a 'recipe' is a bit of a misnomer in that recipes don't necessarily have this level of intricacy. They are more just step by step. You put the flour in. You put the sugar in. You beat the eggs. This level of complexity is quite different.

RM: Yet each ingredient affects the other ingredients, so this is a way of looking how each ingredient, i.e. session, is affected by and affects other sessions. We also say that the Ten Series is one session that you do in ten segments (for obvious reasons). And that you don't know how to do a first session until you've done a tenth session.

What I find working with this over the years is that it really enriches, enhances, each session. For instance, in a fifth session, instead of just getting fixated on psoas function, you start with, "Why are you doing it?" It's a completion of three. It's a preparation for seven. It keeps you from getting tunnel vision, myopic.

AH: I guess a better way to describe what I said about recipes is that we are talking about the difference between a cook and a chef. Anybody can buy a cookbook and attempt to follow it, while a chef will understand how one ingredient or one preparation is necessary for the next thing to happen, and why they happen in the order they happen in.

RM: And what you can do if you don't have one of the ingredients to still make it work. Ida had a quote about cooks and chefs, something to the effect of the 'Recipe' works, but when people become chefs rather than cooks, what we want to do is address, relate to, people's radical individuality. Oftentimes the Ten-Series 'Recipe' is talked about as if Rolf just created it as a teaching tool. It does that, and it's quite effective, but I think it has an existence, a reality – a magic if you will – on its own. I look at the Ten Series more as a mandala, which is a kind of map, but also has inherent strength or vibrancy. There's another diagram you can do, a matrix [draws; see Figure 2].

Look, for example, at session three. In the first triad, it's completing. In the second triad, it has a continuation function, and in the last one, it has a beginning. Unless you consider that, you don't think about the quality of the session. There's an initiatory aspect. There's a continuity, continuing aspect. There's a completion aspect, closure. It's pretty cool.

AH: Yeah. It invites the metaphysician in me to wonder what are the unseen elements that would make triplets that include session one and session ten? What would come before and what would come after? Is there some organic or other process that you would connect up to? In other words, if we look at Rolfing SI as something that is evolutionary, which Ida Rolf liked to point at, what is the 'before' that is initiating the Rolfing series and what is the 'after'? What are we heading towards by having universal brilliance? What happens before session one that one is a continuation of? What is ten a start of?

RM: Classically, what ten is the start of, the standard comment is that it's actually a twelve-session series and only the client can do sessions eleven and twelve. Session eleven is assimilation and session twelve is manifestation, so what can the client gather from this experience, this wave of input/information and then how does that manifest in his/her life? Then if the person chooses to come back for post-ten work, you can see what needs to be done next. Which is why, although clients may want you to keep working after session ten, it doesn't really serve the process. It's like continually stirring a glass of muddy water. It never settles and clears. The client needs that gestation/percolation time to see what is assimilated and then what manifests that he or she maintains in their world.

AH: Is that your idea, the twelve sessions, or where did that come from?

RM: That was definitely from Emmett, and therefore I assume from Dr. Rolf.

AH: Now do you ever talk about this level of meaning in organization with clients?

RM: I talk about assimilation and manifestation. I don't talk about the triplets, the inherent logic, of the Series.

Although, I encourage students to do this for their classroom clients. When I was trained, when you were doing the seventh hour, you would be putting on your gloves and saying, "Well, we're going to do some work in the mouth and nose now," and clients would have whatever response they had. To students I say it's much better to have informed consent, so I like to, in session five, say, "You know, in session seven, we're going to be working in the mouth and nose, and that is a continuation, a completion of what we're doing today." That way you can give a little more rationale. You can inform them so they can give informed consent, rather than not.

AH: There's a lot of intricacy to track.

RM: Just be aware of the essence, the three questions. Ask those three questions of whatever session you're doing, and then reference the one before and the one after to answer it. If you work with that, more interesting things happen in the Ten Series.

AM: Would you bring any elements of that into post-ten work or advanced work? If somebody came in and you were going to design three or five sessions, would you try to apply any of this framework or conceptualize it similarly? Or do you just work with Principles of Intervention and other things?

RM: More working with the principles and with the five structural elements. Let me backtrack a moment. One time Peter Melchior said that someone asked him, "What's the Advanced Series about? What

SEQUENTIAL TRIPLETS

1	2	3							
	2	3	4						
		3	4	5					
			4	5	6				
				5	6	7			
					6	7	8		
						7	8	9	
							8	9	10

ODD-NUMBERED TRIPLETS

1	3	5		
	3	5	7	
		5	7	9 (upper)

EVEN-NUMBERED TRIPLETS

2	4	6	
	4	6	8 (lower)

Figure 2: Matrix of the 'triplets' within the Ten Series. When doing a session, ask yourself the following **three** questions:

What is being **completed**? (dark grey) What is being **continued**? (light grey) What is being **started**? (grey)

do you do?" Peter's response was, "You do what's next for the person." How do you determine what's next for a person? There the Principles of Intervention are useful. Does the person lack support? Or palintonicity? Or adaptability? (You don't worry about closure until the end.) Which of those is needed and which of the five structural elements needs to be addressed from the lens or the flavor of that principle? Is it shoulder girdle, pelvic girdle, axial, core, or sleeve? If you're doing a three series, then you would pick three of the five structural elements. A five series, you might do all of them. There's always the question of if and when you'd do neck and head, probably not the last session. You can do a 'slinky test' to determine the core/sleeve relationship. You also have to be aware of which taxonomy (working in that taxonomy) will be most beneficial for what is 'next' for the client.

AH: I don't think I've heard the term 'slinky test'.

RM: I think I made it up. You have the person sit on the bench. You put your hands on the sternum and back, and then you have them curl forward (flexion) and back (extension). It gives you information as to whether the restriction is the axial complex, the core, or the sleeve. You can feel whether the restriction is between the inside of the sleeve and the outside of the core (in the front or the back) or if it's in the axial complex. Again, it's one of those things that may not have exact, specific anatomical references but you can feel the relationships. The great thing about the test Is that when you are doing an upper session in a post-ten series you can determine whether to focus on the core/sleeve interface in the front or back or to focus on the axial complex. I also do the Seated Wall Test à la Hubert Godard / Kevin Frank to get information about these relationships and their function (Frank and McCall 2016). My mantra is always test, intervene, retest. When you retest (post session) you feel the whole difference, and someplace in your brain, you know what you did, so you start to build up an experiential inventory of "When I feel x, I'm going to try these things." By retesting at the end, you continue to build an experiential inventory.

AH: Related, but a little different, is how much do you do the Ten Series in your practice? You clearly are very involved in teaching it, but as someone who's been in practice decades, when do you do it?

RM: I haven't been doing much private practice these last two and a half years because I've been building a house in Crestone, which is a four-hour drive from Boulder. I still like to do the Ten Series. Jim Asher talked about in the Ten Series, there is some moment when something happens; it pops. His comment was, "I don't see that happening if you just do nonformulaic work." In that sense, I tend to be more conservative. I like to do the Ten Series. It's like tilling the garden. Then you can plant whatever you want.

An interesting anecdote. The mother of a student in one of my classes had a friend in Crestone. That friend's partner needed work, so she made a session for him – which always makes me a little leery. The guy showed up at the door, and he was the first person who had worked on my house down there, he was the excavator who did the driveway in, the house pad, the septic system, all of that. Turned out he has been receiving Rolfing sessions for years. About three-fourths of the way through the session, I said, "Have you just always gotten work on where things hurt? Have you had the Ten Series?" He said, "No, just where things hurt." Then a little later he says, "Well, what's this Ten Series?" I did a very brief explanation. He got off the table, stood up, and said, "Wow. This was different." He didn't have the words for it, but he made a motion that he felt a sense of integration (my interpretation) that he hadn't experienced previously, apparently. He said, "You know, I'd like to do that Ten Series." We haven't yet been able to work out the timing or the logistics. So I always have been and continue to be a big fan of the Ten Series. As I say, it's more than just a teaching tool.

AH: Yeah. The risk with trying to help somebody with a particular problem is that we fall into the 'second paradigm', fix-it, getting too particular. What you're describing with the triplets really exemplifies holism. While there can be anatomical detail, like getting more heel or relationship between the arches in the second session, the Ten Series itself, and also the triplets within it, keep the anatomical details in relationship to something bigger and overarching that you're trying to accomplish, that transverses between sessions. So the triplets really speak to how holism works, and it seems that working with them in mind also safeguards the holism.

RM: The guy in Crestone, I could work on this fellow's shoulder, which tends to be problematic, but then when I did seated back work at the end of the session, I could see/feel how there was a lack of psoas function that if addressed would give the shoulder more support, more stability. So working with the triplets makes it easier, obvious, to see, "Oh, yes, there's a problem here," but you're already cued into the relationships that contribute to that, because you're looking at those larger relationships all the way through as you've been doing the Ten Series.

AH: Anything else to add?

RM: I feel surprisingly complete with it.

AH: Thanks so much, Ray.

Ray McCall has a master's degree in structural linguistics. He completed his basic Rolfing certification in 1978 and his advanced certification in 1981. He joined the Rolf Institute® faculty in 1997. He teaches Basic and Advanced trainings and continuing education workshops both in the US and overseas. He has also trained to instructor level in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy. He is interested in how change happens, and how form manifests out of the formless.

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