

Notes on William Redpath's Trauma Work and New Book *Trauma for Beginners: Meditations and Commentaries*

By R. Kerrick Murray, Certified Advanced Rolfer®



Kerrick Murray

ABSTRACT Rolfer William Redpath introduced his *Trauma Energetics Held-Energy Systems*SM work in a 1995 book. He followed up on this in a second book in 2020. R. Kerrick Murray here discusses the work and particularly the contributions of the new book.

Twenty-six years ago, William M. Redpath, MEd, MFA, Certified Advanced Rolfer first published his seminal work, *Trauma Energetics: A Study of Held-Energy Systems* (1995). Redpath developed a method of working with trauma that he calls Trauma Energetics Held-Energy SystemsSM, and that first book, now in its sixth printing, contains his essential formulations about the nature of trauma, 'held-energy systems', and classical humanistic literature, addressing contemporary arts, media, societies, politics, religions, and spirituality. I had the privilege of reviewing that book for the *Rolf Lines* in 1996

(Murray). Now, with *Trauma for Beginners: Meditations and Commentaries* (Redpath 2020), Redpath has fulfilled the promise he made in his first book to provide an educational aid to assist readers further in understanding his insights.

What are these insights? In his original work, Redpath postulated that the experience of trauma and the resultant holding in the body is a curiously literal, energetic, and neurochemical event. He termed this event a 'held-energy system'. Shock is at the center of traumatic memory, and he theorizes that this shock manifests as a two-dimensional area of blackness

Redpath postulated that the experience of trauma and the resultant holding in the body is a curiously literal, energetic, and neurochemical event. He termed this event a ‘held-energy system’.

deep within our neurochemistry, creating a place devoid of movement and oxygen. This is not merely the black of achromatic color value, but rather the black of physics; the theoretical perfect absorber of all incident radiation (e.g., light, vibration, movement, etc.). If you’ve ever watched Peter Jackson’s film *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, think of Gandalf’s duel with the disembodied Sauron at Dol Guldur; Sauron manifests as a life-suffocating, enveloping swirl of blackness. Or, better still, sit down with a new copy of *Trauma Energetics*. The updated cover (see Figure 1) has an exceptional piece of artwork by Redpath that illustrates what he’s describing. In soft light, stare into the cover. The tunneling effect that this exercise produces gives one a glimpse of what we experience when triggered by a moment of overwhelming shock or trauma.

Redpath first worked with Peter Levine (among others), and he credits these experiences as inspirational in developing his current protocols. He uses the term ‘brain’ (not mind) to describe the process of ‘central intelligence’, of spirit to energy, energy to molecules, molecules into neurochemistry, into tissue, muscle, organ, and body. A *Trauma Energetics* session focuses on the self-healing powers of the brain, specifically those parts of its traumatically held and deoxygenated neurochemistry, in an indirect, non-intentional manner. A session involves a client and practitioner working together in a conjoint, meditational ambience, with minimal intrusion upon the natural ability of the brain to resolve a trauma and thereby obtain a renewed perception of its essence as ‘clear’ energy.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, *Trauma for Beginners* is not an instructional manual on how to hurt yourself or others! Redpath’s book reveals itself as a comprehensive treatise on the nature and historical origins of trauma, and how trauma is evoked and maintained in our personal and societal systems. In his initial chapters, he casts a wide net. Drawing from a lifetime of academic, therapeutic, and somatic experience, he shares his

views on the nature of enlightenment, liberty, history, being, and breath. He explores how our personal and societal histories are formed, and how trauma is evoked and maintained. He discusses the history of alchemy, its ancient connections to trauma resolution, and its quest for metaphysical gold. Building on his original theory of shock being at the center of traumatic memory, Redpath shares and guides his reader through his heartfelt insights about what a trauma resolution looks like: nothing less than the dissolution of shock into being and being into radiance. The excellent artwork on the new book’s cover visualizes this radiance existing within a crucifix of trauma, and serves as a counterpoint to the *Trauma Energetics* cover art (see Figure 1).

It is at the level of breath, Redpath writes, that the incarnation of spirit can be observed, the densification into matter witnessed, and places of toxicity and trauma shock addressed. He states that breath is our primary organ of perception and that shock is not limited to a postnatal event. Shock can register prior to active

breathing, during the prenatal experience. Postnatally, shock and trauma manifest in many forms – physical, verbal, and societal; it can result in changes of breath and movement throughout the body, causing restrictions we structural integrators are trained to notice. He poses the question: what if the oxygen we absorb is ‘zip coded’ for delivery to specific tissues? If so, then our alveolar sentinels, once compromised from shock, knock us off our centers and, in turn, compromise our sites of physiology and structure. Restricted breath links to specific trauma sites. He questions as to whether the residue of such a shocked system keeps us from experiencing an ultimate, nonverbal experience of Eden, or original nature.

Structural integrators are in the business of evoking structural integrity. What does integrity look like? And when it’s achieved, what comes next? These are refreshing questions, and Redpath makes a convincing case that real integrity involves a sense of being that evokes and nurtures an inner silence. Developing a capacity for

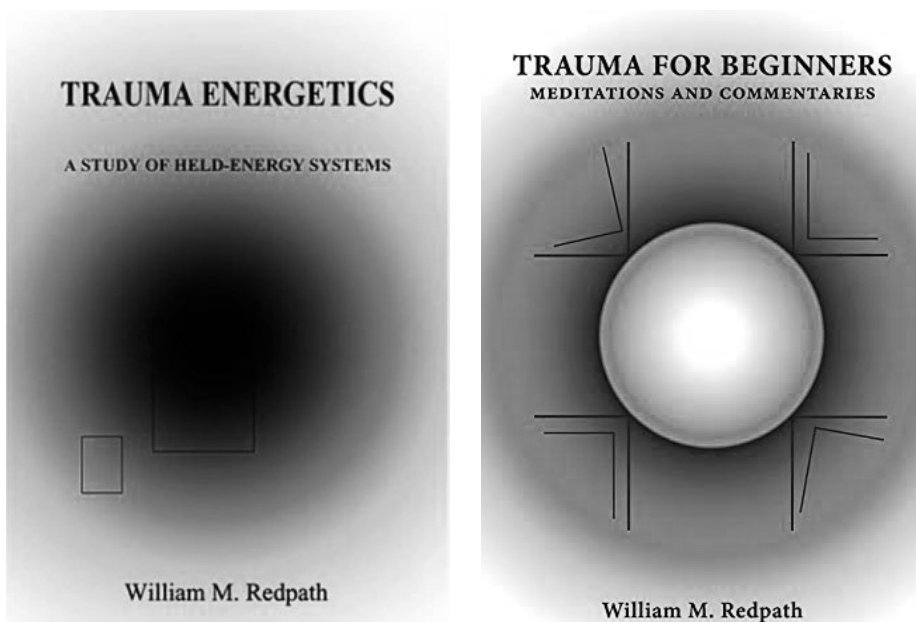


Figure 1: Redpath’s trauma books.

Redpath postulated that the experience of trauma and the resultant holding in the body is a curiously literal, energetic, and neurochemical event. He termed this event a ‘held-energy system’.

inner silence is a critical skill in structural integration as we hone our ability to ‘see’ our clients and be more present as we work with them. Redpath states that our world would benefit by changing the definition of the adjective *conscient* to include this inner silence and nonverbal alertness. As with his first book, he provides a transcript of a Trauma Energetics session with commentary. He then offers his views on energetics and Gestalt theory applied to a wide range of tragic literature and poetry, providing schematics with the latter. I found his commentary insightful on describing civilization as a collective of garnered trauma forms and proposing the American ideal as one of creating a shockless world (or at least one where shock’s power is integrated into invisibility). He uses Gestalt awareness to remind us of the most important aspect of myth and literature: transformation.

In his middle chapters, he examines the relationship of theological concepts with energy. He provides more examples of tragic themes in world literature, poetry, and their relationships to the Gestalt. He strongly advocates adopting a personal Gestalt strategy that remains spiritual in direction but not religious, one that takes us away from narratives to an energetic understanding of relationships. He explores the energetic nexus that we share with our parents and ancestors, and how we take on the graces and trauma patterns of our parents. In recognizing

the inability of parents to shed their own parents’ patterns as being at the heart of inherited trauma process, he identifies a critical challenge to personal growth: eventually we face generational trauma and self-perpetuating cycles of trauma held systems. His closing chapters draw from his professional life, and include a lengthy letter to a teenager on sexuality, a commencement speech given to a school for troubled youth, and a letter to an academic friend about how the energetic is acknowledged and addressed in traditional humanities studies.

Both of Redpath’s books are intended to be conversational in nature, and the reader is invited to browse and cherry-pick. The simple premise of his trauma work, while easy to grasp, is presented through an academic lens, and the result can prove to be chewy, dense reading; I found it necessary to keep a dictionary and reference material close at hand. I believe his insights make it worth the effort, and I would recommend *Trauma for Beginners* as an addition to our libraries, not just as a solid work on understanding the general nature and scope of trauma, but a work that inspires a quest for an inner experience that dissolves trauma into a true healing.

You can read more about Trauma Energetics Held-Energy Systems at <http://www.traumaenergetics.com>. For those interested to experience Redpath’s work, he is available for Skype and

Zoom sessions and can be reached at redpathw@tiac.net.

R. Kerrick Murray has had an active Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) practice in Montana since 1985. He has written articles and given presentations on the connections of general-semantics and SI for both the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® and the Institute of General Semantics.

References

- Redpath, W. M. 2020. *Trauma for beginners: meditations and commentaries*. Lexington, MA: Barberry Press.
- Redpath, W. M. 1995. *Trauma energetics, a study of held-energy systems*. Lexington, MA: Barberry Press.
- Murray, R. K. 1996. *Trauma energetics: A study of held-energy systems* by William M. Redpath: Review Essay. *Rolf Lines* 14(2):50-51.

It is at the level of breath, Redpath writes, that the incarnation of spirit can be observed, the densification into matter witnessed, and places of toxicity and trauma shock addressed.