~Rolfing® Movement Integration~



~An Introduction

by Heather Wing~

ROLFING® MOVEMENT INTEGRATION
Movement Education for Everyday Life

A secretary who suffered from chronic severe headaches learned how to sit, phone and type more efficiently, and her headaches disappeared.

A large man received feedback that he was overpowering. During the course of a Rolfing Movement class he learned a softer self-presentation, more true to his warm-hearted nature, and also found relief for the chronic lower back pain that had resulted from his former stance.

A woman in her seventies used cane and brace to help her walk with a dysfunctional right leg. She was tense from the effort of walking, tired easily, and had pain in the left side of her back. In her Movement sessions she learned new ways of balancing and swinging her right leg that eased the pain in her left side and relieved much of the stress of walking.





A tall young man, coming out of an upbringing that "humbled" him and taught him to carry his head down, couldn't get a job. It took a number of Movement sessions before he was comfortable carrying his head on top of his tall body, eyes level. The change in the angle of his head greatly altered his appearance as well as his self-confidence; and in the next week he got an excellent job, far better than he had previously hoped or reached for.

A two-month-old baby turned his head only to the left and reached out only with his left hand. A Movement Teacher played with him and gave his mother some guidelines for carrying and relating to him, and he soon gained balanced movement in head and arms.

With the help of a Movement Teacher, a computer technician who got backaches while working analyzed how he related physically to his computer. He found, in the process, that he did not want to relate to it at all, and changed jobs.

A therapist learned ways of sitting that helped him be more available to his clients.

A woman in her forties had a tense strained face that made her look older than her years. Her Movement Teacher helped her become aware of her tensions, and showed her ways to ease them, particularly around her eyes and jaw. Not only her face, but her whole body softened, and she now moves more easily, has more energy, and looks younger.

The director of a private elementary school realized in the course of her Movement sessions that the way the children in her school were sitting as they learned to write was hampering their learning. She invited her Movement Teacher to the school and together they evaluated furniture, reviewed some basic principles of sitting, and created a supportive environment for the children's writing classes.

A massage therapist felt her identity blurring with that of her clients. Following a day's work she often felt confused and fatigued. During her Movement sessions she came to have a clearer sense of her own center and how to work from it without giving it away. Her sense of herself was greatly enhanced, her relationship with her clients clarified, and she found she had far more energy for her work.

A handyman discovered efficient ways of lifting heavy objects that took the strain off his lower back.

These are some experiences of people who have studied Rolfing Movement Integration.

®The word **Rolfing** is a Service Mark of the ROLF INSTITUTE of Structural Integration.

Rolfing Movement Integration is a system of movement education for everyday life based on principles developed by Dr. Ida P. Rolf, the creator of Rolfing. Its applications are as various as human activities and problems. Its goal is to assist people to move easily and gracefully through their daily lives.

Dr. Rolf based her work on several insights important to our understanding of movement. The first is that we all live and grow in the gravitational field. Gravity is one of the strongest and most reliable forces in incarnate existence. We have the option of learning to move harmoniously with gravity, thus allowing it to become a unifying and energizing force for us. Or we may live in resistance to it, and find in the end that gravity is stronger, and tears us down and apart.

Secondly, Dr. Rolf realized that we are segmented creatures, each a whole made up of many parts, balancing vertically in the gravitational field. She emphasized the importance of connective tissue, or fascia, in this segmented vertical body. Our connective tissue forms a three-dimensional net or web that goes all around the body under the skin; all through the body wrapping and connecting every bone, organ, vessel, nerve and muscle. Just as the whole spider web moves and changes when an insect lands in one corner, so our whole fascial net responds to influence upon any part of it. As we balance more or less imperfectly, it is the connective tissue which holds us together and takes the stress of our imbalance. The condition of the fascia, whether and where it is free or tight, scarred or responsive, shapes us and determines the relationship of our parts to each other and to the gravitational field. Further, the whole pattern of relationships becomes a physical statement of our emotional realities and the way we express ourselves in our lives.

Dr. Rolf also learned that these patterns can change, that traumatized connective tissue can be softened and released, that stressful movement patterns can be eased, and that the whole person can live more comfortably and healthfully as he comes into greater harmony with gravity.

The work that developed from her vision has two modalities. Rolfing is the manipulation of the connective tissue focused on evoking a balanced structure, and Rolfing Movement Integration re-educates movement habits with the focus of evoking balanced function.

In both disciplines we play continually between two foci. We look at the individual before us. What are this person's limitations, activities, goals? A woman who has sight in only one eye may need to balance her head differently than a person with sight in two eyes. A student of meditation may need assistance in sitting comfortably crosslegged for long hours and also some guidance in how to balance his pelvis when he gets up to move about in the world again. A man doing heavy work needs information about how to lift efficiently.



Dr. Ida P. Rolf

People come to us from many walks of life, wearing bodies of many shapes and moving in various ways. Sometimes body shapes and movement patterns obscure the people within and frustrate them in the pursuit of their goals. We seek to help each one find a body and a way of moving that will serve well in the life that he or she chooses, and express who she or he really is.

Unique as we are; we are, at least physically, more alike than we are different. We each have two arms, two legs, and a segmented spine with a head on top. We all move about vertically in the gravitational field. Dr. Rolf found that certain arrangements of body parts give maximum support, and that organizing the structure around a central axis allows the body a lift that reverses gravity's usual downward pull. Over the years, she developed these practical discoveries into a system of principles that form the basis of Rolfing and Rolfing Movement Integration.

So we consider both the individual's unique patterns, needs, and goals and those basic principles that affect all human structures.

MOVEMENT PATTERNS

One of the ways we most clearly express our uniqueness is in our movement patterns. Each of us has our own way of breathing, bending, reaching, walking. How we move is a vital expression of our histories, our personalities, our very selves.

We develop our movement patterns from conception, the moment we enter the gravitational field. As we grow in the womb, we adapt to our mothers' structure and activities. Birth shapes us strongly; and from then on physical and emotional influences, and our reponse to them, continue to shape our bodies, our movements and our ways of being in the world.

A baby may learn to turn his head to only one side because his crib is placed in certain relationship to light and interesting objects in the room and he is always laid with his head at the same end. A little girl begins ballet at an early age, and for years models herself after her teacher and learns the ballet patterns. Even if she later decides to become a policewoman, she may for the rest of her life turn her feet out and arch her back like a ballet dancer. A child who is continually bullied, either emotionally or physically, may develop an attitude of cringing which stays with him into adulthood. Another child may develop asthma in response to the stress of her life, and even after stress and asthma have passed, retain a pattern of shallow, panicky breathing that affects her posture, her activities and her general health. A boy may fall on his roller skates and twist his coccyx. As he grows older his walk may change as a result, his legs and upper body compensate, creating a system of tensions and countertensions that may cause him pain and limit his movement for the rest of his life. We each have our own unique story, our own combination of events and responses.

Movement patterns affect our degree of physical comfort, our ways of relating to other people and objects in our environment, even our feelings about ourselves. They express us intimately and powerfully. As we come to understand them and find new options for patterns which frustrate or defeat us, we are transforming not only the way we might carry our head or pick up a wastebasket, but our whole way of being in the world.

Let us now look at some of the basic principles underlying Rolfing Movement, for it is to them that we turn as we seek new options for stressful movement patterns.

SEVEN BASIC PRINCIPLES

These principles are very much interwoven, not so much separate ideas as different aspects of one idea -- seven facets of one jewel, or seven different colored threads woven into one tapestry.

Core

We use the word "core to talk about the central axis that is so vital to Dr. Rolf's vision of a body organized harmoniously with gravity. It is also sometimes called the "Rolf line". We visualize it running through the center of the body from the crown of the head, down just in front of the spine, through the insides of the legs and the arches of the feet.

Physically the core is composed of a network of deep muscles lying close to the central axis. As we learn to move more from these deep muscles, often unused in the uneducated body, we are able to release tension in external muscles whose line of pull is not as well oriented to do the jobs we ask of them. Our movement, and we ourselves, become literally, physically more centered.

The experience of the core can be explored through a number of images. It can be seen as a channel for the force of gravity which moves through us both downward and upward, grounding us through the soles of our feet and at the same time giving us lift and lightness.



The core lifting and the outer body resting down

We may visualize a fountain, a single jet of liquid light, rising from the center of the earth, upward through the core, bubbling out the top of the head, and falling down all around us. So we may touch in to the experience of the core lifting and the outer body resting down, relieved at last of the strain of holding us up.

We may feel the core as part of a great circle, the circle so great that our tiny portion of it seems almost, but not quite, straight - for nothing in nature is truly straight. This great circle also passes through the center of the earth connecting us strongly to the source of our gravitational field.

Somtimes the experience of the core is found first in the lying position as we imagine the breath moving like a gentle wave up and down the front of the spine and into the head.

Some of us come to know the core as the source of our inner strength and/or as the channel which connects us to sources of light and strength beyond ourselves.

Whatever the image used, bringing awareness to the core gives us more physical ease and a new sense of strength and quiet power. We begin the transition from defending ourselves with external muscle tension to trusting for our strength in centeredness and balance.

Dynamic Balance

Dynamic balance point is that point in space where the vertical body feels lightest. It is the moment of maximum lift and maximum potential to move with equal ease in any direction and into any kind of action. We become like an upwardly-poised pendulum with the possibility of three-dimensional swing, containing its power in its very lightness.

Paradoxically, dynamic balance is both a point in space that can be found and felt with a certain ping! and not a point at all, but a process. As we find the support of gravity, tension releases, structure changes, and when structure changes so does the point of dynamic balance. For example, when a young woman with a deeply arched lower back finds her lightest place, she will be leaning slightly forward to balance the backward swing of her pelvis. A boy with his pelvis tucked down and under him will find his lightest place leaning slightly back. (The more nearly the pelvis is horizontal and the weight blocks aligned one over the other, the more vertical and the lighter the lightest place will be.) The young woman with the arched back, when she comes to her lightest place, may be able to let go of some of her lower back tension and then find her balance a little further back. The boy may feel a lift that allows his pelvis to come more under him and moves him slightly forward. We play with balancing, subtly adjusting our alignment, until ping! we are there! then more release, more adjustment and we are there again.

The experience of dynamic balance has many facets. In the feeling of being lifted and at the same time letting go, there is a sense of peace, of coming to rest; hence, we sometimes call it "home space." At times there comes a simultaneous release of both physical holding patterns and the emotional patterns attached to them. With this release may come an experience of clarity, detachment, of being available to respond in new ways on all levels, so sometimes we call it "clear space." It is not always clear space. Other times it is the moment in which held emotion is set free to flow and so it may be "sorrow space" or "anger space" or "joy space" until the flow has passed through.

The quality of dynamic balance can be carried into action. A martial artist speaks of the calm at the center of the cyclone which he feels in the midst of a four-man attack. A massage therapist has an experience of channeling energy. A mother of several pre-school children rests in a quiet centeredness that maintains her through the late-afternoon chaos. All connect, in their own way, to the vital poise, containing both ease and power, which is the essence of dynamic balance.

Support

Underlying dynamic balance is the principle of support. The more nearly our body parts are aligned one over the other, the lighter dynamic balance point becomes.

Our logo is a metaphor comparing the segments of the body (head, thorax, pelvis, legs) with a pile of blocks. When these blocks are piled securely over each other, the structure is stable, the weight of each part carried through the parts below to the earth. When one block is pushed forward, another back, a third one twisted, the structure becomes unstable in direct proportion to the amount of displacement of the blocks. We need to add to the image the fascial net going around and through all the blocks, and then we can see clearly how an unstable structure torques and strains our connective tissue, and how encouraging the blocks to rest one over the other can ease that stress.



The pile of blocks is a static image, but as we move into action we find the essential principle is the same: the weight of each body part must be carried through to the earth, or we feel the lack of support for that part as tension in the connective tissue.

We use what we call the "rocker principle" to teach support for action. We create a rocker, like the rocker on a rocking chair, at our base of support. The rocker may be from one foot to the other, from the hips if we are sitting, or from one knee to the other foot. Action is initiated with a rocking movement from the rocker. Without a rocking movement from the base of support, some part of the body must move away from the action to counterbalance it, thus breaking the flow of support through to the ground. With a rocker, the major weight blocks of head, thorax, and pelvis are allowed to remain in supportive alignment.





So a man leans over to pick up a heavy object with his feet side by side. His lower body does not participate in the action; he has no rocker. His pelvis goes back for counterbalance, leaving his shoulders hanging out in space and the muscles of his lower back holding not only his body weight but the weight of the object he is lifting. If he puts one foot forward as he lifts, that foot is under the shoulders and carries the weight downward, the legs lever to assist the action of lifting, and no single part is overworked.

When the body comes into balance, the whole person feels more secure. The feeling of being "left hanging" is both physically and psychologically diminished. Support becomes a reality on many levels.







The Rocker Principle -- Without a rocking movement from the base of support, some part of the body must move away from the action to counterbalance it, thus breaking the flow of support through to the ground. With a rocker, the major weight blocks are allowed to remain in supportive alignment.

















Sitting -- When the head, thorax, and pelvis are out of alignment, the weight of the head is unsupported, neck and shoulders are stressed, and breathing restricted. Better alignment results in increased ease throughout the body.







Responsiveness

When the body is well supported, then the fascial net is free to respond. Movement flows through it like ripples on water, circling outward from the place of impluse. So the movement of the breath, beginning in the diaphragm and the muscles between the ribs, can be felt throughout the body. The shoulders float out and away from the expanding lungs, the head moves slightly, the pelvis widens and the sacrum drops. Dr. Rolf said, "The arches breathe." It is not that there are lungs in the feet, but that the fascial net knows the breathing movement even as far away as the feet.

Life is movement. Once we've experienced the lightness of dynamic balance, we discover we are never completely still even when sitting quietly. There is always subtle intrinsic movement, the inner dance of breath flow, blood beat, digestive swirl, and the continuous delicate fine-tuning of our relationship with gravity.

We are only still when we hold ourselves still, and unfortunately most of us are all too adept at that. We still ourselves when emotion overwhelms us in moments when we feel it is not appropriate to express emotion. Who will release his jaw when tears threaten in a competitive situation? If we have been taught, as most of us have, that it is rarely appropriate to express emotion, our self-imposed stillness becomes a rigorous part of our daily pattern. Such emotional holding stresses the fascial net, eventually contributing to imbalance. The more imbalance we feel physically, the more insecure we feel psychologically, the more we hold, and so it spirals.

We also still ourselves with effort. We furrow the brow with mental concentration; lock the jaw, tense the abdomen, or hold the breath with physical exertion. If our lifestyle is one of effort, such patterns may be so deeply set in us that we are no longer aware of other options.

Holding, however it originates, interrupts the flow of movement which then impacts in much the same way a wave breaks against a cliff. A child may hold his head down and tight against the upward expansion of his inhalation (impact at the neck), a student may hold her whole body still except her arm when writing (impact at the shoulder), or a runner may hold his upper body back and down against the upward flow of movement from his legs (impact in the lower back). Tension and awkwardness result.

Rolfing Movement focuses on bringing such holding patterns to consciousness and introducing new options. Our goal is to free the fascial net to respond without interruption to movements both internal and external, large and small -- the almost imperceptible breath of the mediator or the swing of an ax. Such a responsive attitude in the flesh teaches us also how to be more responsive to the changing conditions of our lives.

Lengthening

We soar by grounding. Within the core we feel the creative tension between the downward pull and the upward lift of gravity. As we open into our length, we gain a feeling of spaciousness, of more fullness in all dimensions.

Activity in the uneducated body almost always results in shortening. We contract the same muscles again and again, never fully releasing them until we feel tense and fatigued. Sometimes we instinctively stretch to regain the comfort of length, but then go back again to moving in the same shortening ways.

In Rolfing Movement, one of our goals is to learn to lengthen rather than shorten with each movement. We learn to ease tension in our joints so our limbs can swing freely. We learn to lengthen the core, opening the lower spine with each step of our walking, extending the core as we reach forward. We allow the spine to make long open arcs as we bend down to pick up an object or reach up to a high shelf. Even with the breath the core grows longer as the head floats up and the sacrum drops. The more we learn to carry out our daily life activities with length, the more energy we have, since lengthening continually refreshes us.

When we move with length, we allow a healthier environment for our insides. An open spine permits better circulation and innervation throughout the body. Internal organs function better when not impinged upon by surrounding structures. Dr. Rolf spoke of the "peace of length". In a very physical sense, the pressure is off, and the whole person feels the relief.

Integrity of Movement

The whole body participates in the direction of intention.

We often pull ourselves in opposite directions. A man reaches out to shake hands, and pulls his chest back. A young girl walks forward, swinging her right knee sideward and her left shoulder back. A housewife reaches up, pulling her chest down against her upward reach. Such contradiction of direction within the body creates/expresses a contradiction of intention which is confusing both to the person moving in opposite directions, and to any with whom he might relate. Contradiction of direction in movement also creates physical stress and sometimes pain.

As we learn to bring our whole body to focus on an action, whether routine or of special significance, our intention clarifies and all of our energies are available to fullfill that intention. Quite literally, we no longer fight ourselves. Focusing the whole body on an action almost always involves bringing the whole self to it. We suddenly find ourselves present in a startlingly total way. A deep sense of peace, order and strength results. We come into harmony with ourselves.

Harmony with Gravity

We use gravity in all our actions, moving through dynamic balance point into that relationship with gravity which will most assist us with our task. Weight, leverage, and momentum become daily life tools. We no longer have to accomplish everything out of our limited personal strength.



So a Rolfer rocks his body forward over his hands; his falling weight supplies the force he needs, his shoulders stay open and relaxed, and his touch is gentle and penetrating. A gardener rocks her body weight over her shovel to dig in and swings from one foot to the other as she throws manure into her newly turned plot. A dancer discovers that his leg is lighter and swings higher when his thorax is well balanced over his pelvis. All receive help from gravity in various ways.

We learn how gravity functions and how to avoid resisting it. We lean forward to climb stairs or hills, so we are not pushing our body weight directly up. (Gravity comes directly down). We roll to one side to get out of bed, instead of sitting up against gravity's pressure on the whole length of our body. When we bend over, we let our heads fall, instead of unnecessarily holding that weight against gravity's pull. It is resistance to gravity that causes awkwardness. Harmony results in ease, flow and grace.

Learning how to harmonize with gravity teaches us gradually how to live more harmoniously in other aspects of our lives. Tools for dealing with the world change from clenched determination and combat to balanced centeredness and quiet intention. As we give up fighting everything around us, we find we have more energy for work, play, relationships, and creative pursuits.

LEARNING ROLFING MOVEMENT

Learning Rolfing Movement involves three basic processes. The first is awareness, discovering how we actually move, breathe, work, play and handle stress. The second step is that of letting go: of tension, comfortingly familiar but uncomfortable ways of moving, stereotyped body images, physical defenses, attitudes. The third step is exploring new options. These steps rarely happen in linear sequence. Sometimes their occurrence is almost simultaneous; often there is a spiral effect. New options lead to new awarenesses, to more releasing, to still more new options.

Private Sessions

One way to learn Rolfing Movement is in a series of private sessions. These sessions begin with client and teacher together exploring the present movement patterns of the client. They talk, reviewing the client's history of injuries and illnesses, his feelings about his body, his ways of expressing stress, his activities, and his expectations for the series of sessions. Various techniques may be used to record the client's patterns at the beginning: poloroid photographs, video, and/or drawings that the client makes of his own body (a surprisingly accurate index of body image). These are studied by the client and teacher together to increase their understanding of the client's patterns. The client walks and becomes aware of how each individual part of his body moves in relation to others, how his weight is carried, what parts are held still as he moves, what parts unsupported. This experience can be related back to the client's history and to the pictures studied earlier.

Once client and teacher have a clear understanding of the client's present movement patterns, activities, and feelings about his body, they begin to explore new movement possibilities for him. During the series of sessions, usually eight or ten in number, the client explores individual parts of his body and certain basic activities in depth. A series of sessions usually covers breathing, sitting, pelvis, head and face, legs and feet, shoulders and arms, and any special activities the client is involved in. The teacher is sensitve to the activities, needs and personality of the client and arranges these phases of the work to best suit that individual's unfolding.

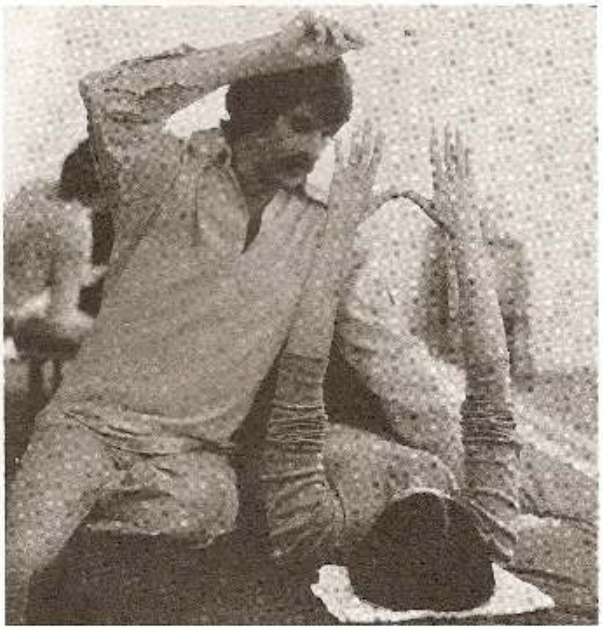
In each session the client experiences the processes of awareness, letting go, and new options. Awareness is usually gained by simply walking or breathing or doing a familiar movement to see what happens with a particular body part. Letting go is guided with breath, imagery, firm gentle touches from the teacher, and simple movements that, when repeated, encourage the releasing of specific muscle groups. New options are gained through movements designed to re-educate a part of the body into more efficient use, and a continued awareness of supporting that part in relation to other parts and to the field of gravity. Throughout, freer and more balanced possibilities are explored for the basic human movements of walking, breathing, standing, and sitting. These movements are also used as ways of integrating individual parts into the whole.

Out of this experience the client learns a gentle simple series of centering movements that can be used at home to ease stress, restore balance after injury, and continue movement re-education initiated in the sessions.



Exploring new movement possibilities for individual body parts.









Classes

Although private sessions provide the most sheltered and focused situation for learning Rolfing Movement, classes are also available, kept small so students can receive individual attention. Students learn the same basic material they would in private sessions, as well as having the opportunity to see how Rolfing principles apply in the movement habits of their classmates. The class environment is warm and supportive, and students help each other as part of their own learning process.



Special Interest Workshops bring Rolfing principles into practical application to a wide range of activities. They are offered for runners, yoga students, musicians, carpenters, mothers with small babies, office workers, massage therapists, or any other group that might wish to join together to find ways to make their common activity easier and more enjoyable.



Rolfing Rhythms -- a series of lively yet relaxing exercises



Rolfing Rhythms is a series of lively yet relaxing exercises developed by Rolfing Movement Teachers and designed to evoke awareness of Rolfing principles at the same time that they strengthen, improve muscle tone and co-ordination, deepen breathing and extend flexibility. Rolfing Rhythms is usually taught in a class situation, and designed for individual practice.



Rolfing and Rolfing Movement

Rolfing Movement can be learned by itself or in conjuction with a series of Rolfing sessions. The two disciplines are at once independent and complementary.

Rolfing can enhance Rolfing Movement by freeing the structure so the client has more possibilities to work with. Rolfing Movement can enrich Rolfing by allowing time and focus to enlarge upon the educational process begun in Rolfing sessions. Through Movement, the client is assisted in actually manifesting the changes of Rolfing in day-to-day life.

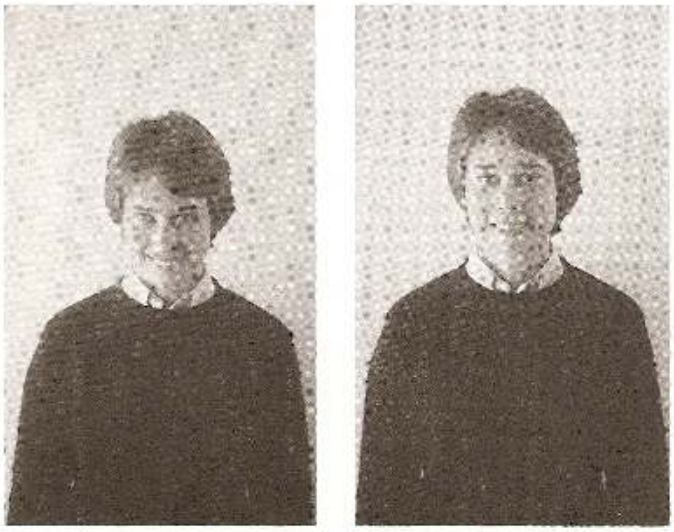
A client deciding to enter into both processes may do them either in sequence or concurrently. If Movement comes first, the client enters into her Rolfing process an informed and enthusiastic co-worker, well acquainted with her patterns, her restrictions, and the possibilities of better balance. When her Rolfer comes to a difficult place in her structure she is less likely to shrink back feeling "Oh, no!", more likely to respond, "Thank goodness! I am finally going to get help with that!" If Rolfing comes first, the client comes to his Movement sessions with a far freer structure, more options available. Perhaps most ideal is alternating sessions of Rolfing Movement and Rolfing. This arrangement gives the Rolfer, client and Movement Teacher an opportunity to work closely together, and Movement sessions can prepare for or follow up on Rolfing sessions with effective immediacy.

SOME RESULTS OF ROLFING MOVEMENT

Most clients find that Rolfing Movement gives them new ways to handle and diminish stress. Often the first step is for the client to realize she is under stress. One young woman wrote at the end of her series of private sessions, "Looking back, I never realized the pain I was in until I acknowledged its presence and location and it started to leave." For many clients chronic, even acute, pain is eliminated as they learn how to support their actions physically. Others discover that Rolfing Movement helps most with emotional stress, as they find in their more stable relationship to gravity a new sense of inner strength and self-acceptance. The core breath is a practice many use, like a gentle physical meditation, to regain perspective and handle strong flows of emotion.

Rolfing Movement clients often start fo feel better about how they look. Even without weight loss, a person looks slimmer when a tipped pelvis is balanced and the abdomen no longer spills out unsupported. Lines of stress and tautness in the face, tight jaws, straining eyes can all be eased as the client learns to balance the head and release the muscles of the face. Tense, awkward or heavy movement can be replaced by elegance and grace.

Coming to understand the connection between attitude and carriage is another powerful effect of Rolfing Movement. Clients learn that how they move affects how they feel, and that they have options. They can choose, by altering their body stance, to withdraw or reach out. They begin to understand how their bodies communicate and make choices about what they want to say. They discover that considering a problem in a slumped-down position can make it seem overwhelming, whereas considering the same problem in the vitality of dynamic balance can open new and hopeful possibilities.



Exploring more mature options
of self presentation.

Changes in self-presentation occur. One of our goals is to bring the outer presentation into harmony with the inner being. Often, outmoded patterns of movement confuse and inhibit true expression of a person's present self. A competant professional woman may still hold her head low, look up out of the tops of her eyes and speak in a high voice like a little girl. Attitudes of childhood defiance (lower back arched, knees locked, head thrown back) which might have been an absolutely essential and vital statement of "I am!" from a small person in a big, overpowering world, may have quite the opposite effect when they linger on in a man thirty-five, causing him physical pain and limiting his personal effectiveness. Exploring options for mature self-presentation frees the client to be and express who he presently is , and increases his credibility and self-confidence.

Changes in jobs and personal relationships may sometimes occur as a result of the Rolfing Movement process. As clients get more in touch with the sources of their stress and come into a more powerful and accepting sense of themselves, they become less tolerant of painful or frustrating situations, more confident that they can change them.

Jocelyn's Experience

Jocelyn is a graduate student at the University and works as a housekeeper. She is a slender, quiet, competent woman in her early thirties with large sparkling brown eyes, a wide warm smile and a slightly off-beat sense of humor. She had had twenty sessions of Rolfing, had practiced meditation and Tai Chi for several years, and had made some radical changes in her diet before she came to work with me. All of these activities had dramatically improved her well-being, and she still had some difficulties she wanted help with.

In her first sessions, as we sat together to learn about her movement patterns, she reported being uncomfortable standing, having pain in her lower back and tension and discomfort in her shoulders, especially when vacuuming or studying. She was unable to study for long periods. Severe bronchial problems since childhood and recent sinus surgery had left her with considerable fear about being able to breathe. Her health, though much improved, was still unreliable. Under stress her breathing tightened, tension spiraled, she had nightmares and headaches, and often became sick.

As we walked together, we found that she leaned back from the waist leaving her chest unsupported. Her lower back was short and tight and she tended to pull her shoulders up and forward around her chest. She usually carried her head and eyes down.

Once we had a sense of her patterns, we began by focusing on her breath. We worked together, I using gentle hand pressure on her chest, simple instructions and imagery to guide awareness, she allowing breath into new places in her upper chest and releasing some of the fear that had accumulated there when she gasped for air as a child. I adjusted her head which was, even in the lying position, bent toward her chest, creating a still, cramped place in the front of her neck. At first she felt uncomfortable and somewhat exposed with her chin higher, but soon discovered that her breath opened up even more, given the extra space, and that her neck was able to respond with a slight internal movement. Finally I guided her breath to her core, using the image of a wave of liquid light flowing up and down the front of her spine. Throughout the process her breathing deepened and slowed and her color heightened.

After a brief review of the steps we had taken to come to an easier, fuller breath, I guided her to sitting. Her usual sitting pattern involved leaning back slightly, so we balanced back and forth between that position and dynamic balance point to see how her angle in gravity affected her breath. She found that in her leaning-back position her chest was unsupported and she had to tighten it to hold herself up. This left little freedom to breathe in the chest. In dynamic balance, however, her breath flowed easily into the new spaces she had opened while lying down.

Standing and walking she again explored dynamic balance point, contrasting it with her familiar patterns and discovering how the breath moved in each position. Her experience of her core while lying down and breathing assisted her in feeling supported in the newness of verticality. We ended by finding ways she could support her shoulders while vacuuming. She walked out in her new-found balance, her color high.

In the following week she was very conscious of her leaning-back pattern and how it affected her breathing. On several occasions, when she was tense or fatigued, she lay down and practiced her core breath and found that the deeper, slower breath calmed and refreshed her.

In her second session she reviewed and deepened her experience of her breath and discovered that the way she carried her head and eyes affected not only her breathing, but her sense of openness to connnect to other people. Finding dynamic balance point now gave her support for her head to be up and her eyes straight ahead. She could still choose the option of lowering them when she did not wish to connect. We explored these contrasts, walking toward each other across the room and feeling what it was like to meet in each of these ways.

In her third session, which was focused on sitting, Jocelyn gained a much clearer understanding of dynamic balance point. She discovered how allowing her whole body to be balanced and responsive to the movement of writing alleviated stress in her shoulders and allowed her to breathe more fully while she studied.

As the weeks went by she found she could study longer periods without fatigue. She would often find herself hunched up in her familiar way, chest drooped and shoulders taut; but once she noticed, she could adjust her chair, rediscover her balance, breathe deeply and begin again refreshed. Vacuuming no longer hurt her back.

Her fourth session focused on her head and pelvis. She learned to breathe very gently into her sinuses. This was difficult at first because of the trauma left by her sinus surgery; but as she gained more control of it, she found she could use it to open her sinuses when she became congested and avert a sinus headache. The pelvic work gave her more length in her spine and a gentle pelvic movement she could use to ease tightness in her lower back.

In the sessions that followed she gained greater understanding of how the joints of her toes, ankles, knees, and hips could work together for an easier swing to her step and discovered that being well-grounded through the feet helped support her shoulders and head. She learned a series of gentle movements to open and rebalance her shoulders, explored some new options for her tennis swing, and all the different reachings that were so much a part of her job as a housekeeper. In her last session she reviewed all the movements she had learned to assist her in her opening process, and we wove them together into a sequence she could use on her own.

I talked to Jocelyn recently, eight months after her last session. She seems taller than before her movement work, breathes more freely, carries her head up most of the time, and feels more open to other people. Although from the very beginning she found dynamic balance more comfortable, at first it was difficult to maintain because of its strangeness. Now she spends most of her time well supported without thinking much about it. She still ocasionally slips into an old pattern, but soon feels the stress of it and adjusts easily to regain support, the path between those two options now easy and familiar.

Just recently she is realizing that she has a brand new way of dealing with stress. Her breath is still the first thing to go when she gets upset, but now she notices it right away and doesn't have to have an asthma attack to call it to her attention. Her old way of handling stress, which she is just now becoming aware of, was to stop breathing, make herself very small, withdraw, and get sick. All of these actions combined to make her incapable of dealing with the source of the difficulty. Now, when angered or threatened, she consciously takes a breath, which makes her feel bigger and better able to cope with the situation. She is sick less frequently and feels stronger under stress. She feels that her new stance and her new breathing patterns are important parts of her more powerful way of being in the world.

EVOLUTION OF ROLFING MOVEMENT INTEGRATION

Although Rolfing Movement is a recent development in its present name and form, movement education associated with Rolfing has a long history.

Dr. Rolf began to develop Rolfing in the early 1940's, working in the beginning as much with movement as with manipulation. Always, as Rolfing evolved, she insisted that it was an educational process. When she began to train Rolfers formally, she defined the goals of each Rolfing session primarily in terms of movement. She developed a series of balancing exercises to be done after Rolfing to continue and maintain the changes made, and taught these exercises to all her graduating Rolfing practitioners.

Dorothy Nolte, coming out of a background of nursing and human relations, trained as a Rolfer in the late fifties. She soon saw that her clients wanted to do something for themselves after their Rolfing sessions. Working closely with Dr. Rolf, she developed Dr. Rolf's movements into an independent educational system called Structural Awareness. She began teaching Structural Awareness in 1962 in both classes and private sessions; and during the past twenty years has taken Structural Awareness into a wide variety of educational settings. Her work is carried on by Rachel Harris, who trained extensively with Dorothy and has recently developed research evaluating the effectiveness of Structural Awareness and a self-study program composed of casette tapes and booklets.[1]

Judith Aston, a dancer, teacher and movement facilitator for Gestalt Therapy, trained as a Rolfer in the late sixties. Working with Dr. Rolf, Dorothy Nolte, and then independently, she created a system of movement education called Rolf/Aston Structural Patterning. She began training teachers of Structural Patterning (called Patterners) in late 1971. For several years Judith worked closely with the Rolf Institute developing patterning workshops for Rolfers and Rolfing students, as well as training Patterners. However, by the mid-seventies, her work began to take a direction which she felt was not compatible with Rolfing, and in 1977 she resigned from the Rolf Institute and renamed her work Aston-Patterning.[2]

Rolfing Movement Integration began in 1978 when two former Patterners, Gael Switzer and I, collaborated with Rolfing Teachers Peter Melchior and Emmett Hutchins to create a movement curriculum for Rolfing students. In the fall of 1978 five other former Patterners gathered with Gael and me to share work and sort from all our varied approaches those concepts and techniques which would best evolve Rolfing in the movement modality.

By June 1979, we had formed the Movement Commitee. Our group had grown, as other former Patterners joined us. We had been teaching classes for Rolfing students for more than a year, had created a place for ourselves in the political structure of the Rolf Institute, designed a training program for new Movement Teachers. That fall we launched our first training program. Membership in the Rolf Institute was granted to nine Movement Teachers on Jan. 1, 1980 and to nine others within the next year, six of whom were graduates of our first Training Program.

We presently offer, as well as the services to the public described earlier in this article, a number of professional programs within the Rolf Institute. These include movement classes for Rolfing students in their basic training, workshops for certified Rolfers, a full training program for the certification of new Movement Teachers, and Movement Exchange Workshops and an Annual Conference for certified Movement Teachers.

Rolfing Movement is an alive and growing art. It is nourished by all three of the forms that preceeded it. Dr. Rolf's vision is the root and source of work. Dorothy Nolte was the first to develop an independent system of Rolfing-based movement education that could be taught to people new to Rolfing as well as those who had been Rolfed. We are indebted to Judith Aston for her rich development of the concept of responsiveness, for her work in helping Rolfers use their bodies more effectively, and for her application of Rolfing principles to daily life activities.

Our work continues to develop as we gain more understanding of human movement in the gravitational field. As individual teachers, we continue to explore Rolfing concepts in our own bodies and activities. We dialogue and exchange work with each other, our Rolfer colleagues, and teachers in related body-work and movement disciplines. Most of all we listen to the teaching, in whatever form it comes, of each client who comes through our doors.[3]

Heather Wing
Certified Rolfing Movement Teacher
Rolf Institute Movement Instructor

1. For more information about Structural Awareness contact Dr. Rachel Harris, Suite 214, 1550 S. Dixie Hwy., Coral Gables, Florida, 33146.

2. For more information about Aston-Patterning contact Aston-Patterning Consultants, Inc., P.O. Box 114, Tiburon, CA 94920.

3. For more information about Rolfing Movement Integration contact The Rolf Institute, P.O. Box 1868, Boulder, CO 80302.