

Rolfing and the Structure-Gravity Connection in the Information Age

by Austin McElroy



In the late 1960's, a Ph.D. named Ida P. Rolf started training a group of bodyworkers that she felt would someday revolutionize the field of healthcare. These were to be practitioners of the Rolf Method of Structural

Integration, a technique for teaching people how to let gravity work for them. Rolfing, as it became known, was to be the ultimate preventive medicine since it utilized techniques of a variety of successful disciplines.

These disciplines stressed mobilizing the joints of the human body as a path to increasing vitality and well-being. Along with mobilizing and creating flexibility in her subjects with her bodywork techniques, Dr. Rolf focused on the importance of gravity as a factor affecting the health and well-being of a person. According to her, optimal human health and well-being could only be achieved through having a conscious relation to the field of gravity. By placing the emphasis of her technique equally upon the shoulders of gravity and good structure, she had founded a totally new discipline for achieving vitality. She was solidly connecting the potential of the human being to the field of gravity for the first time.

Ida Rolf simply was not satisfied with the traditional medical model of the human body which implies that gravity always made the structure crush down on itself. This did not happen after her bodywork technique was applied to her subjects. In fact, she saw quite the opposite phenomenon occur. The spine and upper body seemed to actually lift and have a sense of lightness. Her patients reported that they felt taller and moved more easily. There were psychological benefits also. Rolfees felt more autonomy, centeredness, and a deeper appreciation of life.

The entire body, or structure is worked on and the method used to achieve these results

took ten sessions. It was a very western idea indeed because it was short and to the point. Perhaps Dr. Rolf had taken Albert Einstein at his word when he stated that the only thing that he couldn't attribute to the pull of gravity was falling in love.

By seeing the human body from the vantage point of the Rolfer, the interface between gravity and structure might become clearer. The Rolfer can be thought of as a combination of seemingly unrelated professions. On the one hand he or she is an elementary education teacher demonstrating the effects of gravity upon proper structure to his students. On the other hand, she is a garage mechanic trying to straighten all the twists, turns, rotations, and other physical flaws that have become patterned into the human chassis.

Then she must find a way to access her patient so that she can then have her patient focus on as deep a spot as possible to move correctly from. By accessing his client, the Rolfer motivates him to push through the resistances that were formerly too painful for him to push through. As this is accomplished, immediate and positive changes occur in the Rolfing subject.

To a Rolfer himself, the bipedal nature of the human structure takes on yet more meaning as his own relationship with gravity increases. The lower body (the body from the waist down) is seen as a grounding mechanism for all of the electrical potential of the brain, a foundation for support, and as a means of supremely efficient locomotion. The upper body appears to want to float upwards in the opposite direction due to the lifting action of the chest and the head.

The overall picture of the human body is that we get to where we're going with the lower half, and we do what only humans can do with the upper half. In other words, the interaction of gravity with the human body is paradoxical as seen by the Rolfer: it both grounds the person and lifts her up

simultaneously. What seems to validate Rolfing is that in no other discipline is this phenomenon seen so consistently and with such lasting effects.

During the Rolfing process the mobility of the person increases, and gravity starts to activate the core of the body instead of just pulling it down in a destructive manner. Rolfees start to regain control of parts of their body they could only sense were uncontrollably tight before. Each part of the body becomes freer to do its prescribed duty in supporting the humanness of the individual.

The point is that the structure that has gained adequate mobility in its joints behaves differently in the field of gravity. Yet it requires an even broader view of the body in order for gravity to become a positive factor. Consider, for example, the responsibility of the foot alone toward proper structure. In a good structure, the foot is an intricate suspension system by itself. Correctly functioning feet are crucial to the vitality and well-being of the individual. Because the feet contact the earth's surface in our bipedal manner of movement, the rest of the structure must organize itself according to how mobile the joints of the feet are.

When most people come to Rolfing, support for the weight of their structures has migrated to the lateral arch and to the front of the foot. This has caused their upper bodies to collapse and to have to struggle to hold itself up. Tight shoulders, necks, and back muscles result when the weight of the person is not distributed evenly over the bottom surface of the foot. People appear to be going through life being continually "on their toes". This tends to rob the person of strength and energy over the long term.

It is equally important that a person be able to settle down and this is the job of the heel. After loosening and mobilizing the foot, the Rolfer typically will see that the heel is now doing more of its supportive duty. In fact, with the heel extending properly into the earth, the head and neck are set free to lift skyward in their characteristic manner.

Contrary to accepted belief, the pelvis doesn't really hold the spine up. It's function actually

is to hold it down much like a hand holding the string on a helium balloon works. In fact, the massiveness of the pelvic bones provide great stability and direction to all the rest of the bones of the structure. Again, the lower body tends to work to ground the person and the upper body wants to lift and float upward in a structure that is correct.

Looking still broader into how good structure functions, it is no coincidence that the head and the pelvis are at opposite ends of the spine. These two parts of body are constantly struggling for supremacy. In a healthy structure, the lower body with it's basic yet primitive urges battles incessantly with the reasoning that wants to prevail in the head of the upper structure. The lower body demands spontaneity; it's all the upper body can do to keep control and make sense of it all.

The Information Age presents a new challenge in the course of human evolution. Information is creating change and it is affecting everyone. Unfortunately, it's not exactly clear just how people should prepare themselves for the demanding future that we seem to be in store for. This is where Dr. Rolf's work bears strong consideration. Perhaps we need to open up to a previously unexplored factor. Perhaps this new factor is gravity.

If the Structure/ Gravity Connection is actually one of man's most fundamental relationships with nature, then it may be time to take a serious look at it. Furthermore, if human beings are at a turning point in their evolution as suggested by the Information Age, perhaps gravity needs to be considered as the reality that it is. To a Rolfer, it seems to be a teacher of endless magnitude.

The technology to investigate the human body and gravity already exist but we haven't yet examined them together. This means that those who venture into Rolfing are either subjects in an on-going study by Dr. Rolf, or they are prototypical human beings in the making. The Structure/ Gravity Connection could be the next understanding that saves us from being overwhelmed by the future. Accepting this connection can provide us with new strength, vitality, and efficiency of movement.