

NEW MEXICO ACADEMY

of Healing Arts

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Rolfing: Aligning Emotional and Physical Health

by James Beach

Some haziness surrounds the term Rolfing. For those with no clue, it may conjure images of modern dance, international travel, or sports activities. For others, it seems to be a generic word for any kind of deep tissue massage.

Actually, Rolfing® is a science taught exclusively at the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration in Boulder, Colorado. It works by bringing the bones and soft tissues of the client into balance through hands-on technique. Clients frequently report reduced or eliminated chronic pain, improved coordination, larger range of motion, and a greater sense of well-being.

"Having knowledge of the body, knowing trick and techniques, all that is important," explains Certified Advanced Rolfer Til Luchau. "But for a bodywork experience to stay with you-that is, for it to be truly transformative-it has to touch your actual experience of yourself."

Luchau discovered Rolfing gave unparalleled tools for facilitating change after being trained as a Gestalt therapist at the Esalen Institute in California. This interest in the relationship between physical and psychological processes led to a life-long devotion to bodywork; he runs a private practice in the Boulder/Denver area, and teaches various somatic disciplines at locations in the states and abroad, including the New Mexico Academy of Healing Arts in Santa Fe.

"It is helpful for me to remember that it isn't me that does the healing," says Luchau, "but without me as a bodyworker being interested, present, and engaged, healing is much less likely to take place."

By massaging the body's soft tissues-muscles, fascia, tendons and ligaments-the skeleton is allowed to gradually realign, thereby creating a conduit to better accept naturally-occurring energy. This can provide a catalyst for healing if the practitioner is skillful, and if the client is willing to accept the improvements in body and spirit.

Rolfing goes a step beyond chiropractic because it's grounded in the belief that emotional and physical health are interrelated. Although clients occasionally experience the work as uncomfortable, today's Rolfers employ a range of soft tissue techniques to help ease the transition from unhealthy binding of tissues to better body balance.

How Rolfing Got its Name

In 1920 Ida Pauline Rolf received her PhD in biochemistry from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. She was driven to find solutions to her own health problems as well as those of her two sons, and furthered her knowledge of the body through research in organic chemistry at the Rockefeller Institute.

In her research and experiments Dr. Rolf explored alternative healing, including homeopathy, osteopathy, chiropractic and yoga. She soon discovered a correlation between muscular tension and pent-up emotions, and devoted herself to investigating how a person can achieve optimal functioning. The interrelation between gravity, proper body alignment, physiologic function and anatomical structure remains the basis of Rolfing today.

The Rolfing Institute for Structural Integration was established in 1971 and serves as an educational and research center to support and promote Rolfing. A nonprofit organization, it's headquartered in Boulder, Colorado, and boasts two auxiliary locations in Brazil and Germany. According to their website, more than 1200 Certified Rolfers are practicing Dr. Rolf's techniques in 27 countries around the world.

For more info: rolf.org or advanced-trainings.com.

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SIDEBAR:

Trained practitioners of Rolfing, chiropractic, physical therapy, neuro-muscular therapy, and other somatic disciplines may want to check out Til Luchau's Advanced Myofascial Classes at the New Mexico Academy of Healing Arts:

Shoulder Girdle & Arm: January 14-15, 2006

Spine & Low Back: April 22-23, 2006

Pelvic Girdle & Sacrum: August 12-13, 2006

Neck, Jaw & Head: November 18-19, 2006

Legs, Knees & Feet: January 20-21, 2007