

Ask the Faculty

Rolfing® SI After the Ten Series

Q: I saw an old class handout that quoted Ida Rolf as saying: “Continuous Rolfing [Structural Integration (SI)] on advanced bodies may make them grow shorter and certainly does little good unless the Rolfer™: 1) manages to reach a deeper level than in previous [sessions]; 2) works at a higher level of integration; or 3) finds the place that has never been touched before.” Could you please discuss this from your own experience, as guidance towards goals for post-ten work, and as it applies to both traditional fascial work and also the possible inclusion of things like cranial, visceral, and neural considerations for overall structural integration?

A: No matter how effective an initial Rolfing Ten Series, what is the measure of our work for the long haul? What is it that makes a Rolfer a valued member of his/her community, a resource that people turn to over and over to help them live life more fully and less expensively? How do we offer care, and maintain integrity? After a Ten Series (or post-ten work) has been lived into, worked with, how can a practitioner and client continue to deepen the work?

There are many domains of body therapy that can keep a practice busy – cranial approach, visceral approach, nerve approach, counter-strain, to name a few. All these have potential benefit, and embodied Rolfing practitioners bring added dimensions to these allied therapies. If we limit the discussion to more traditional domains of SI – to the ways we can support postural evolution and capacity to meet daily challenges with elongation, whether the demand is physical or psychological – how might we think about and act on Dr. Rolf’s exhortation to find a deeper level of integration? This question leads to another question: what is integration? It’s part of our job title, and Rolf advises us to find more of it, but what is it?

Let’s consider integration through the lens of developmental process. A child learns to locomote, first through small submovements such as grasping, elongating, contracting, reaching and pushing, squirming and twisting. Then, as the child begins to crawl, we could say she has integrated the pieces into a new functional whole. Similarly, clients are invited to regain flow in submovements and then allow them to join together into something that supports functionality. Integration brings the sense of well-being that comes from a body in better flow, which can be defined as the ease that follows from more optimized patterns of motor activity.

Given the generic title of our work – structural integration – and given Rolf’s

advice to continue to take integration deeper, it’s worth drilling further into the integration idea. An individual who has given considerable attention to the question is Daniel Siegel, a neuroscience-based psychiatrist at UCLA, faculty member of the Center for Culture, Brain, and Development, and the Co-Director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center. Siegel’s work has many parallels to our own. His recent book, *The Mindful Therapist*, offers practical and scientifically based approaches to therapeutic holism. In the “Mindsight” portion of his website (<http://drdaniel.siegel.com/about/mindsight>), Siegel writes:

Defined as the linkage of differentiated components of a system, *integration* [emphasis added] is viewed as the core mechanism in the cultivation of well-being. In an individual’s mind, integration involves the linkage of separate aspects of mental processes to each other, such as thought with feeling, bodily sensation with logic. In a relationship, integration entails each person’s being respected for his or her autonomy and differentiated self while at the same time being linked to others in empathic communication.

Siegel proposes that for any system (such as a human body), parts can be differentiated – given clear separateness from each other – and then linked with one another. The greater the proliferation of connections within a system (in which individual components have been differentiated), the greater the well-being, the greater the integration. This model lends itself well to SI, and to a model of SI that values discovery and education as much as repeated release of tissue fixations, something about which Rolf cautioned.

Our goal is, ultimately, educational. That’s another way to say that our work is “third paradigm,” a holistic paradigm, as opposed

to repair or palliative. We posit a holistic shift in the client as a mark of our success. When we work with a client past the Ten Series, or on a regular basis, we are responsible for guiding and supporting an evolution, an evolution that awakens holistic changes for meeting real-world problems.

We do this in many ways. In terms of augmenting a client’s capacity to meet demand, pre-movement serves to make the point. ‘Pre-movement’ is a term that refers to the preparation for movement that occurs in anticipation of action. Once the body prepares to move, the motor pattern is mostly determined for the anticipated movement. If we want to evoke lasting change in posture and movement, pre-movement is a pivotal moment. Coaching a client to change pre-movement is a fascinating and productive way to work, limited mostly by the client’s motivation and interest, which, in turn, is mostly limited by our capacity to make it interesting. Were we to only frame our work as the study and improvement of pre-movement, how many sessions we do with a client would not be an issue. Using all our skills of tissue mobilization, sensory tracking, perception, meeting simple and complex movement demand, quiet presence, and capacity to educate and explain all these phenomena, there is no limit to the depth of integration that can occur. And as we investigate pre-movement, we find that there is pre-movement and pre-pre-movement and pre-pre-pre-movement and so on. We solve one level of pre-movement only to encounter a deeper one. Eventually the pre-movement we are bringing attention to is going to be subtle, perhaps at a level of inherent motion or stillness.

How might you ground this idea in felt sense? An example of pre-movement is the set of actions that precede raising your arm to any particular height. Try it out. While seated, raise your arm. Now notice what you do to get ready. And raise your arm again. Now repeat observation of preparation and raise your arm again. If you pay attention you will find there are nested levels of orientation, perception, stabilization, and body satisfaction. Conscious pre-movement might include simply noticing where you tighten to move, and awareness might refine itself to notice where you feel the sense of weight, or what dimensions of the space you feel around you, or some of the bony articulations – the spaces between bones – or some of the sense of your internal volume and density, or noticing an imagined shape to

the anticipated or remembered movement of your arm. If you are being tracked by a partner, you might find many nested levels of sensory awareness within all of these places of awareness. A partner's presence may also help us pause to sustain the many levels of awareness. Sustained awareness, in turn, allows organismic intelligence, or an emergent form, to reveal itself in a non-cortical way. For each quality of awareness there is a shift in posture and stabilization that precedes the arm movement.

Is this part of what we call integration? Let's check. Does this involve differentiation of the sensory map, at a conscious and non-conscious level? Yes, the map model is broadly accepted, and we can watch as the sensory skills of the client improve. Are we linking aspects of this map in ever new and ever more complex ways such that motor maps are continuously differentiated and linked to each other? It is highly likely. The client can learn to notice and then express such improvements. Do we find that these newly formed connections and details show up in daily life? Experience suggests they do. Does examination of pre-movement continue to release the body into greater verticality and elongation under demand? Experiences suggest that it does so as effectively as any of the other tools in our toolbox. Does this manner of work tend to produce a self-referential experience of body satisfaction? Find out! Maybe you have had the opportunity to feel nested layers of pre-movement and to feel how just the awareness precipitates a holistic shift. Then what do you feel in your body? Where do you notice that? How is it to feel it?

A peer-reviewed case study further illustrates the potency of pre-movement (Cottingham and Maitland 1997). This ground-breaking but under-appreciated article defines holism and integration in refreshingly concrete terms. The patient did respond to skillful fascial mobilization but only partially and without lasting changes in symptoms and clinical measures of performance. Additionally, vagal tone, a measure of nervous system integration, did not change. After the client was coached in pre-movement in the movement of sit to stand, all measures including vagal tone improved dramatically, and the change persisted over time. The pre-movement intervention appears, in this instance, as key to an integrative outcome. It's not the only intervention that does so, of course – it is offered to clarify the point that we have at least one.

The case study illustrates the integrative potential of our work. Rolf asked us to aim for deeper integration. We are, as a community, repeatedly challenged to interpret the apparent ambiguities of her teachings. We are in a position, now, to more concretely define integration. We are able to point to neurological measures (fMRI, vagal tone, and motion-capture technology are some examples) that can verify integration, albeit with expensive equipment. However, without expensive equipment, we know what integration looks like, and feels like. We are able to define and feel how to accomplish integration no matter how many sessions a client has already had. In fact, we can build on what the client has learned previously, if we stay curious and stay present to his or her dynamic process. And we can demonstrate how integration brings greater satisfaction, subjectively and objectively, to function in daily life. As we embody exploration into integration, we offer our community ongoing support that, at the same time, maintains alignment with core Rolfing values.

Kevin Frank
Rolf Movement® Instructor

A: It is interesting to think about how at this point, over forty years since the founding of the Rolf Institute®, there are many practitioners who have been giving and receiving Rolfing sessions for longer than Ida was able to in the twenty-five or so years she was teaching her work. Not that we would know the work better than its founder would, but we benefit from a larger accumulated body of experience about the long-term applications of the work than she was ever able to. This means we have the potential to gain some wisdom about what sustainable and ongoing change can mean, even when the novelty and drama of the first SI experiences has worn off.

With my practice being in Boulder, it is rare for me to have a client who has not already received a Ten Series and more; some of my clients have been receiving Rolfing sessions for longer than the Rolf Institute has been around. I think about Ida's "deeper, higher, or newer" dictum frequently. But entering my own thirty-first year of SI practice, her words mean something very different to me than they did when I first heard them in training. Each of those terms – deeper, higher, newer – has a richer and more nuanced definition than it did for me when I had been working for five, ten, or fifteen years. "Depth," naturally, means less about

pressure that it once did (though direct pressure is still a trusted and comfortable tool). My work towards effecting a "higher level of integration" these days involves inviting a higher level of engagement from my client (and from myself). And "a place that has never been touched before"? If I free "place" from the constraints of being purely anatomical, what a range of new possibilities opens up!

Like many of Ida's pearls that we still carry, this one continues to yield new levels of learning and meaning, the longer I work with it.

Til Luchau
Rolfing Instructor

A: Having a practice for twenty-six years means I have repeat clients who love the work and want the so-called "maintenance" work. The question mentions "traditional" fascia work as if it is outdated or something. I always work in the fascial planes and sheaths. If someone has gone through the Ten Series and is coming in for post-ten Rolfing [sessions], I use the basic ideas and principles of our work as guidelines. I am still looking at finer and finer fascial relationships. My eyes now are looking at where the 'Line' and two directions – ground and space or support and adaptability – could use a bit of a spark from working with the fascial connections.

With post-ten work, I can address a more sophisticated language of the body's communication in relationship and function than perhaps we could in the original ten. Does cranial, visceral, and neural training show up in my hands? Of course. These approaches refine my touch but I am still working in the framework of fascia. The old default patterns, as we know, show up in various moments of our life and the post-ten work can help reinforce the new patterns getting incorporated as the new default.

Jeff Maitland once said "If it feels like expensive massage, you are done." It is true that even if I have worked on someone for a long time, suddenly we both light up and think, "Have we ever been here before?" Sometimes the client gets a bit dependent and passive, comes in and says, "Oh, I'm fine just do your thing." I do not allow this approach or it begins to feel like "expensive massage." The questions for the client are always: 1) what is working; and 2) what needs to work better in function or integration of the whole body? I have