

Opening the Bodymind to Spirit Through Rolfing

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HOW FREELY AND ecstatically can we praise the Divine or "sing the dharma" with a tightly held neck and hardened jaw muscles? How deeply can we surrender to Spirit with thickened fascial armor? How much inspiration can we incarnate when our ribcage is contracted by a tight corset of connective tissue?

For 30 years, Rolfing® has been highly regarded as a powerful agent for physical alignment, bodily ease, and relief from pain. But can Rolfing affect even our spiritual lives?

Yes and no. Rolfing doesn't directly act upon our spirituality, but it does impact the vessel--our body and mind. Thus, Rolfing influences our availability to Spirit. Rolfing creates openness, space, and flexibility in our body, which, in turn, can create openness, space, and flexibility in our personality. Without this openness in the bodymind, what is "greater" than the bodymind is obstructed. A less restricted bodymind resonates more freely with the Divine. That's why, for those inclined toward spirituality, unfolding a basic level of freedom in both our body and our psyche is the first order of business.

But how does Rolfing's effect on the body help our psychology? Imagine the cartoon caricatures that come to mind when you think of traits such as "pompous," "uptight," "cowardly," or "heroic." They may be grossly simplified and exaggerated, but there is something true behind them: Personality is expressed through our very bodily shape and structure.

Our psyche is in our shape

For example, a sunken upper ribcage, when considered amidst other patterns, may imply an emotional gesture of resignation, lack of buoyancy or inspiration. Another person might come in with the highly inflated, expanded ribcage. Again, depending on a wide array of other factors, this individual might have trouble letting down; their pattern may imply an emotional gesture of self-inflation and a tendency to stay up in self-imagery, perhaps even grandiosity.

Of course, these are extremely simplistic examples. Rolfing goes far beyond pat, formulaic assessments. Any particular aspect of a person's structure could derive from psychological traits, but it could also derive from a thousand other variables, including genetics, childhood traumas, and countless others. The interplay of these variables is infinite, complex, and often subtle. The point is that our psychological realities do manifest somehow, somewhere in our physical shape. The body does not lie.

Not only will the body display psychology, it can also perpetuate it. The soft-tissue arrays usually become fixed, even fibrosed over time, into their patterns. Any attempt to change using purely psychological means will be an uphill battle against a bodily "gesture" which is constantly reinforcing the old way.

The good news in all this is probably obvious; not only does our psyche influence our shape and structure, but altering our shape and structure can impact our psyche as well. It is a two-way street. In our collapsed ribcage example--again, assuming it had the psychological significance I postulated--if their structure gained more lift, spaciousness, and support, this would have an emotional affect as well, opening the way to feel into a new mode, a new gesture. This creates a crossroads where the individual can either collapse their body back as it was or feel and think and behave in new ways.

However, as Rolfers, we do not try to change our clients' characters, or their availability to Spirit, even if they ask us to. Most of us are not psychologists or priests. If you observed a session, you would see me carefully manipulating, lengthening, and re-educating the soft tissues of a person's body, maybe even chatting about movies or the weather if the client wants to. Yet, oddly enough, the whole person is being affected.

Evoking psycho-spiritual change

I never forget that with every touch, with every subtle change in the miraculous plasticity of the person's form, I am impacting all levels of their being. Simply knowing that this is so mysteriously affects how I work and affects my quality of touch. It informs my energetic presence in each moment, so that I always resonate that possibility, that openness to psycho-spiritual change through the shifts in that client's embodiment. I don't have to furrow my brows to make this happen. I merely hold that sacred space, the open invitation to any transformation their infinitely wise "life process" wishes to engage. Meanwhile, I go about merrily lengthening and balancing their structure, doing my part to help free up energy and attention, greater availability for their vessel to receive.

For many, a more balanced, light, lengthened, energized body, more free of pain, is all that is desired. And that's perfectly swell. Others, of course, come to Roling also hoping for inner growth. Such growth depends on the client's ripeness for such transformation, where they are on their life journey, my strengths and limitations as a Rolfer, and many other factors. All healing is ultimately a deep and humbling mystery. But when consciousness, responsibility, and authentic resort to Grace are the context of our lives, Roling takes on a whole different dimension of potency, creating shifts into new ways of being in the world and new levels of opening to Spirit.