

Rolfing: The Vertical—Experimental Side to Human Potential

Like so many teachers, some of them very close to home, I complain that people do not seem to understand my basic goals, the fundamental purpose for which Rolfing has been developed. In an effort to lessen this type of frustration, I offer the following summary of Rolfing developments, purposes, and ideas.

First, let me reiterate what I have often said before: I as an individual, am not primarily interested in the relief of symptoms, either physical or mental. To hear Rolfees tell of their “wonderful,” “unbelievable” symptom alleviation, it is hard not to accept this assessment as a goal. **However, I am interested in human potential, and human potential per se neither includes or excludes the palliation of symptoms.**

As of today, Rolfing is accepted as being one of the most basic; one of the most reliable means of developing whatever potential is latent in any given human, psychological as well as physical. By what route did Rolfing reach this particular eminence? **We assume that human beings are, as a species, evolving toward verticality. What are the intellectual considerations which can speed us on our way toward understanding the value of this verticality?**

There can be no argument that the bony structure is less subject to capricious change than soft tissue. Rolfers have heard me say over and over that the bones, per se, however, are not the basic determinants of body structure. Bones are where they are and as they are to separate and stabilize the softer tissues which, in point of fact, play the more significant role in physical organization. Nevertheless, bones are fundamental, relatively stable elements of structure. As we observe the blueprint of the bones, it becomes increasingly apparent that the softer tissues need to be in certain patterned relations to each other for the bones to perform their role most effectively as separating and relating elements.

Now, the \$64,000 question which I asked many years ago, and to which I am still seeking the answer, is this: **What kind of organism will develop if these body parts are appropriately related?** What happens when the soft tissue and related bone structure actually function in the positions in space which their architectural design suggests as most appropriate and which contributes most effectively to establishing the vertical? The vertical in man’s structure is the outcome of his proprioceptive, sensory appreciation of the gravity pull of the earth. Whether consciously or unconsciously, he feels this pull and responds to it. This is the subtle concept: the intellectual formulation arises out of the sensory awareness. **Man’s appreciation of the vertical evolves from his sense of the gravity pull of the earth.**

We as a generation have begun to take this touchstone into all parts of the world of ideas, evaluating the validity of a concept in sensory terms, in the light of information from our senses as well from our intellects.

Up to this point in time, humans have always developed and still live within the gravity pull of the earth. They must make their peace with this energy field, whatever it really is. To the extent that they fail to make peace and mistakenly carry on a war, gravity wins every time. The energy of this field can enhance or dissipate the energy of the individual man. **You cannot change the energy field, but you can change the man.**

The question remains; to what extent could Rolfers create a small population able to live within the gravity field without an ongoing, everlasting war, without the constant expenditure of precious human energy merely to carry to life within the gravity field? If we could create such a population, what would be its characteristics? I am not interested solely in physical structure, although that is really of basic importance especially in terms of physiological well-being. **What will be the psychological characteristics, the behavior both of the individual and of a group composed of such individuals?** How would these more vertical individuals compare with the random, less conscious humans who tread the surface of the earth today?

Is it perhaps too far-fetched to wonder whether one of the tap-roots of human aggression and its underlying fear may be the continuous sense of insecurity which random humans unconsciously feel with reference to their environment-the gravity field? This emotional response is called forth very early in life, probably with the first attempt at verticality (standing), and certainly with the first walking steps. Many psychological and behavioral aberrations arise from causes less basic than this.

Be that as it may, I see no means of gaining an answer to this suggestive and really important question in the abstract. The answer will come when we can create such a population and observe it through a long-term period. At this point, we are justified only in looking with satisfaction at the reports coming in from people who have experienced some approach to the integrating vertical. **The appropriate integration of the bodies of man in the gravity field is a long-term evolutionary project.** Not even the first page has been turned yet. It is possible that we are seeing the first conscious attempt at evolution that any species has ever evidenced.

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