

The Benefits of Having a Structurally Integrated Body

by Jean Louise Green, Certified Advanced Rolf Practitioner and CMT

“I want somebody like YOU to work for me,” my friend Joe King said to me as he surveyed my body structure appreciatively. I was in the kitchen of my dear friend Willow, during the first gathering of our Bon Tempo potluck group for the winter season. Joe was sitting in front of me with his back to the window in a somewhat crouched, twisted manner as he leaned on his knees with an elbow holding his head in his hand. He tilted his head as he looked up at me. Light filtering through the lace-trimmed windows, was illuminating my body. It was the beginning of the Christmas Season. I was wearing a lavender-colored floral print corduroy shirt that had just arrived in the mail from L.L. Bean. It was soft and pretty. I noticed that I was standing in front of Joe with a sense of presence, ease, grounding, and yet with lift through my body from my feet to the top of my head. I was feeling good.

That morning I had gotten up early and tended first thing to my body by doing the Five Tibetan Rites. They are a group of exercises that were developed in Tibet by Tibetan monks who likened these exercises to a “fountain of youth.” The English colonel who brought the Five Tibetan Rites to the West at the turn of 20th century said that these exercises had the ability to activate the movement of the life force through the energy centers of the body and stimulate the production of hormones through the endocrine system. He claimed that some of the monks who did these exercises regularly were hundreds of years old and that by doing these rites, their bodies had continued to produce hormones, which slowed their aging process. After doing these rites intermittently for several months, I made the decision to start doing them regularly to experience their full benefit, but that very morning I realized that I also needed to change my attitude in how I approached doing the exercises. Instead of hurrying through them to get them done, it became clear to me that the attitude I held while doing them was just as important as the doing of the exercises. I needed to shift my focus into paying loving, respectful attention to how my body responded with each and every one of the Five Rites as I did my repetitions of 21 each, as recommended. Everything that I do, I realized in a glimmer of wisdom gleaned during my rites that morning, I needed to do with an attention of love and respect.

Joe’s broad round face held a grin from ear to ear. “People like you, he said, can outlast any big guy in a hard day’s work.” He was referring to the men he had been hiring to help him do the heavy, hard work required in moving lots of river rock to secure river banks with cabled netting in an effort to prevent erosion and flooding. He had been going through a lot of guys whose bodies were just not able to do the work that was needed. They were dropping off like flies. I chuckled, knowing that he was referring to my petite, 115-pound female frame in front of him. “Yeh, he said, wiry strong people like you have it way over some of those big guys I’ve hired. They just don’t last under hard work. Their backs give out. But you know,” he said, “I’ve hired John Kelty, and he’s working out just fine. He appreciates having the work and he can do it. He’s built a lot like you,” he said, as he pointed a finger at me, “little, lean, wiry, and strong.” Joe didn’t know this, but I realized later that John Kelty had a “Rolfed®” body too.

I smiled at him and contemplatively thought for a moment before I spoke. I wanted to choose just the right words to describe my relationship with my body. “Joe, I said, “I *cherish* my structure. And...I pay a lot of attention to it. Let me show you something,” I said, “Take a look at this. Notice what my hips are doing.” I turned sideways so he could see the exaggerated forward tilt that I was doing with my hips to produce a pronounced swayback curve in the lumbar spine of my lower back. In the medical world, this posture is referred to as lordosis.

“When my hips are tilted forward like this with my butt sticking out,” I said, “I can’t distribute a line of force through my body back down to the earth. If I were lifting a heavy rock with a body structure that had a curve in my lower back like this, the pressure of lifting something heavy would get stuck right here in my lower back,” I said, as I pointed to the place in my lower back where the last lumbar vertebra meets the sacral bone at an area referred to as L5. This is the place in the body where many people have disc problems due to disorganization from lifting/twisting injuries. “But if my body segments are lined up properly over each other with the centers of gravity of each major segment over each other, lines of force can move through my body without getting stuck and causing problems.” I was referring to body structure where if a plumb line were dropped through the center sideline of the body, the ear would line up over the shoulder, the shoulder over the bony projection known as the trochanter, where the leg bone enters into the hip socket, the knee would line up under the trochanter, and the outer ankle bone would be directly under the knee.

“When the body segments are lined up properly,” I said, “and the physiological, mental, and emotional blocks are removed, gravity can flow through and actually be an energizing, beneficial force for a person. Heavy lifting can be done correctly without disorganizing oneself and getting in trouble. That’s what having a structurally integrated body is about. And yes, I can work for long periods of time without fatiguing significantly, but I pay a LOT of attention to my body mechanics and posture while I am doing any hard work. Otherwise, I could end up with pain in my body and that’s a drag when I’m used to feeling good.”