

Non-Directed Body Movement

by Marilyn Beech

Non-Directed Body Movement (NDBM) is a method developed by Dr. Marvin Solit for unwinding defense and control patterns that have accumulated in the body's tissues.(1) This is basically the same thing we're doing with Rolfing. (Dr. Solit was one of the earliest Rolfers trained and, in fact, Dr. Rolf had hoped he would take over bringing her work into public awareness), except that there is no special technique involved, nor is the direct intervention of a therapist required. It is based on an idea that is diametrically opposed to the common sense dictates of our culture - that pain, illness, negative emotions and injury are not bad things to be avoided or fixed. It takes very seriously Dr. Rolf's assertions that Rolfing is not about fixing problems, rather returning structure to normal, and in so doing jolts us out of any standard theory we may have about what "normal" actually is.

Dr. Rolf was explicit in telling us that "average" is not "normal" and we have assimilated that as a sound idea. However, she did leave us with the "block" model as a way of looking at structure, and other methods of structural diagnosis have developed since then. We still look at structures and make judgement calls as to what looks "wrong", unbalanced, lacks movement, has rotations, torques and twists, and then we begin our interventions. All this implies that we still have a preconceived idea of what "normal" should look or move like.

After working with Non-Directed Body Movement for some time now, I have come to understand that "normal" may not look very balanced for a lot of people. The optimal structure for each individual may not be anything either the client or the Rolfer could predict. Above all, the idea that there is a structural placement that is optimal for the duration of a life may also be erroneous. Life is a process that involves internal and external stimuli, actions and reactions, and when this process is allowed to be felt in the body's tissues, it can then change and reshape them throughout the whole of a person's life. The idea that there is a bodily perfection (or any type of perfection) to be reached focuses our attention on a hoped-for result that implies pure stasis.

Stasis is the antithesis of evolution. There are, certainly, many species that have remained fixed through millions of years of environmental changes. They would seem to be well-adapted and perhaps they are, but they have not evolved. Humans, more than any other specie, seem to have an inner drive to potentiate, which means we must leave behind our fairy tale endings of "happily ever after" and go ahead and change.

Our drive to potentiate is matched only by our fear of insecurity, pain, illness and death. But I would like to suggest that these things we fear may actually be doors to evolution and as such, are not things to eradicate from our lives. In a recent issue of Discover magazine, George Benz is quoted as saying, "Disease is a dialogue between living things. It allows two organisms to

exchange ideas and move forward..."(2) I am not suggesting that we need to invite painful experiences or that we need to "love our illnesses"; I am just saying that when damage does occur, instead of pulling away from it, controlling it or defending ourselves against further damage, we accept that it has happened and focus on feeling its effects. By doing this, the body's repair mechanisms are mobilized to find some way to return the system to adequate functioning. It may or may not return the damaged structures themselves to what they were, but there is always an attempt to return function, and this is where evolution occurs. The attempt to repair damage pushes the body to drive the phenotype to the limits of its expression. (3)

How does Non-Directed Body Movement work? What does it feel like? It's fairly simple to describe, although not always easy to do. You stand and focus on what you feel in your body without any intention to understand, change or fix anything. At this point, experiences vary widely. Some people feel pain as the body tires of the control patterns it uses to hold itself upright. Some people feel an emotion like annoyance, anxiety, fidgetiness. Some have direct commands from their brain to move, stretch, lay down, stop this in some way. These reactions are all different sorts of defense mechanisms we have put together to keep us from experiencing the effects of earlier damage. They are the conscious artifacts of control patterns we use to control the symptoms of earlier injury or to conform our structures to some cultural norm.

When these feelings, emotions and thoughts arise, it is important not to act on them, but just to continue to pay attention to them, most particularly attending to what they feel like as a physical sensation. Then, just track the sensations, where they go, how they change, how your body responds. Those who have studied with Peter Levine will be familiar with this concept through his use of the "felt sense".

For many people, non-directed movements start happening at some point, and they do just happen. They are usually slow and subtle, taking a part or the whole of the body into a rotation, a bend, lifting up or pulling down. This is the tissue itself unwinding out of a control pattern, and it appears to involve more systems than just the nervous system. Sometimes it has an anti-gravity feel to it, as if the limb has little weight and a mind of its own. Again, these motions need to be allowed to take whatever form and direction occurs. To determine whether these are true non-directed movements you can return your body to its starting point, and if the movement occurs again of its own accord, you have the real thing. Often you get messages that it would be a good idea to stretch, turn, move in some way, but be aware that these may be directed movements and again, ways you have of staying in control. As such, they are interesting and you can act on them if you wish, but unwinding may be delayed - instead, you will only invest more fully in established control patterns. The idea is to stop controlling symptoms like pain and stop defending yourself from potential damage. I have found that by feeling pain instead of trying to get away from it, it doesn't actually get any worse. By staying with it long enough, it eventually releases and the pattern that was under it, which I was defending myself against, comes to consciousness in some way.

RESULTS

My own experience with this leads me to believe that we have no idea of what normal is. I have one leg that has been shorter than the other for some reason. At age 8 I began ballet training and studied intensively for the next 22 years. It was not acceptable to have an uneven pelvis and unconsciously I put together a system of patterns that control the pelvic rotations and asymmetry so that I looked absolutely aligned. I didn't even realize that I have had uneven legs; I just thought I had tendonitis and a tight solar plexus. With Rolfing I began to understand that I had uneven legs, but because Rolfing theory at the time saw a competent structure as one you could draw horizontal and vertical lines through, there was no reason to see my pelvic structure as abnormal. And I felt much better, too, so this had to be okay. When I started practising Non-Directed Body Movement, the first thing my body did was to start playing around with how I was standing. Later I went into extreme pelvic rotations, which got quite tiresome. After a few months I found that, for the first time, I was standing with my weight evenly distributed over both feet and feeling very comfortable about it, but there was now a considerable asymmetry and rotation in my pelvis. It looked very odd. As I continued with this, many of the holding patterns I had put together to control this rotation came to light (and provided very interesting information and unpleasant sensations). After a couple more months and an odd assortment of symptoms, the tissue in my right hip began to stretch and unwind, so that now I have two legs that are nearly the same length. The way I stand and walk and move has changed, and I suspect will continue to change.

Now, it hasn't been all fun and games. There have been times when I spent weeks feeling nauseous as an old solar plexus pattern unwound. Sometimes the experience of standing gets more tedious and painful than I'd like to put up with. As these control patterns release I keep finding that those underneath tend to surface and unwind. Some of these are from childhood which means feeling like a young child again while simultaneously trying to deal with life as an adult. Interesting mix! But the more we unwind these patterns from the past, the more freely we move into the future, creating something new rather than rehashing what has already been done. NDBM is a way to explore what is normal for you without any preestablished theories of what that might be. It is a method of really letting your body define your structure and allow it to change as needed, and to keep changing for as long as you have a life.

ROLFING AND NDBM

How do I blend these two processes? I still do the ten-series and I still have a lot of clients coming in to get an old injury fixed. What has changed is my focus. What I keep uppermost in my mind is that neither of us, client or Rolfer, knows at this point what this structure is going to look like when function has returned itself to normal. Neither do we know how long this process will take nor what potentially odd convolutions and patterns it will go through. My focus is more to just find constricted patterns in the tissue, help them unwind and let them take whatever course they will.

Everyone has a unique process when it comes to unwinding. Where they go

and how they get there cannot be predetermined. All my experience and that of my clients can be compiled to form a general guideline as to the process, but cannot be used to direct, predict, or interpret what will happen with each individual. Used in that manner, guidelines will thwart and stymie change rather than pave the way. I encourage my clients to learn to focus attention on whatever becomes annoying, whether it is emotional or physical, whether it is the recurrence of an old trauma, or pain from a recent one. The attention needs to be devoid of intention and this is a difficult concept for many people to accept. We are programmed to feel we must do something about it! I also encourage clients to continue the process of change that Rolfing has initiated by practising NDBM as often as possible. To that end I keep my Wednesday evenings open for anyone to come over and get some help in learning to focus and attend to what their control patterns are. It is unknown territory that I am asking people to explore and the unknown can be confusing, perplexing and frightening. It helps to have company. Dr. Solit and his group of friends are great company. They have been working with this process for 31 years and have a plethora of experiences and results available for us to learn from. The more I understand and experience how a human body connects itself, the more respect I have for Dr. Rolf's vision of human potential. I have found that NDBM can take us directly to the heart of her vision.

REFERENCES

1. Foundation for New Directions, 93 Belmont St. Cambridge, MA 02138
2. Wheeler, Mark. "In the Nose of Jaws". Discover, March 1998 Pg. 38
3. Wesson, Robert. "Beyond Natural Selection", MIT Press, Cambridge. 1994, Pg. 146