

The ongoing legacy of Structural Integration

Having practiced SI since 1978, I have had the opportunity and privilege of facilitating thousands of people through the series of SI sessions, and of studying with many of the great SI teachers.

As one of the very first practitioners who were trained by Joseph Heller, founder of Hellerwork Structural Integration (SI), I have never felt that our school of SI has actually come to the SI community and explained what Hellerwork really is. In an effort to dispel rumors, misunderstandings, and to instill clarity and understanding, I would like to share Hellerwork with you.

The various schools of Structural Integration

The field of Structural Integration began with the genius of Dr. Ida P. Rolf, whose students have both maintained and evolved the essence of her work, as was her expressed desire in her later years. Through that evolutionary process, several SI schools came into being, including the school she founded—the Rolf Institute—and others created by her students and followers, such as the Guild for Structural Integration, Hellerwork Structural Integration, Aston Patterning, Soma, IPSB, and KMI, to name a few.

The TEN-SESSION ‘recipe’

All of these schools differ to some degree in perspective and technique, but all are based on Dr. Rolf's revolutionary understanding of the human being and their body. Most schools have maintained the basic and fundamental methodology— ‘the recipe’, as we like to say in our profession. These schools make excellent training available, and continue the lineage of Ida Rolf's concepts of SI.

It is important to begin with some understanding of Rolf's formulating insights and influences:

Rolf's eclectic influences

Rolf was surrounded by a wide array of fascinating and creative people, ranging from noted psychologists of the day to physicians, mystics and hippies. Although she was described as a deeply spiritual person, she always presented the work in a straightforward way, teaching the science while acknowledging the human factors. Even when Rolf was approached about energy, mysticism, and psychology, she would always come back to the fact that we are slow moving, three-dimensional objects living in the field of gravity. Rolf had a profound understanding about the way human bodies deviate from their design. She said, ‘There is a pattern that the body knows. When the body and the pattern are made to coincide, the body understands this.’ That understanding guided Rolf to develop a way of helping the body get back to its optimal pattern of structure and function.

There were many talented and highly intelligent students who studied with Ida Rolf in the early years; Joseph Heller was one of them.

Joseph Heller

Joseph Heller, a Cal Tech graduate and former NASA aerospace engineer who was also deeply interested in the body/mind realm, left his career in the early 1970's to train with Ida Rolf. In addition to combining Movement Integration directly into the SI sessions, Joseph was also influenced by his exposure to ‘consciousness work’, and its effects on the body, which he brought in as an additional component of his evolving approach to SI. That aspect of what became Hellerwork included influences from Brough Joy MD and Carolyn Conger PhD — teachers of energy and consciousness work — and from Hal Stone MD and Sidra Stone's Voice Dialogue method, an offshoot of Gestalt therapy. It is important to understand the times in which Dr. Rolf's work grew in popularity. Rolfing was birthed a little earlier, but it was really launched in the throws of the human potential movement of the 1970's. This was a time of encounter groups, tough love, the sexual revolution, bioenergetics, the Esalen Institute, Werner Erhard's EST, and many other branches of the human potential tree. Joseph studied and worked on himself using many of these methods. Instead of being confined to one modality, his field of vision extended across many. His understanding of how all of the parts of us

come together was progressive, and his commitment to assisting people ‘to become who they really are’ was, and is, the driving force of his work.

‘Coming home to your body’

Joseph’s early understanding was that SI is more effective and life changing when combined with ‘movement education’ and ‘personal processing work’—that this unified approach allows people to experience SI processes more completely. His vision of combining what he learned from Rolf with those other elements has empowered thousands of people by bringing his broadened vision and version of SI into their daily lives. ‘Coming home to your body’ is a principle that Joseph teaches with great passion.

Bodywork, Movement, and Self-Awareness Dialogue

The three major components of Hellerwork SI are Bodywork, Movement Work, and Self Awareness Dialogue. In my own journey to better understand and practice SI, I had the pleasure of studying with Dorothy Nolte, and both Peter Melchoir and Emmett Hutchins, two of Rolf’s appointed teachers of the work. I pursued this study to improve my skills and also to find out what Heller did and didn’t teach us. I had always heard Joseph Heller’s statement that he taught us everything that he learned from Ida, and that with only a few small deviations; the series and the recipe were virtually unchanged (as far as the bodywork was concerned). Although my studies with Dorothy, Peter and Emmett were some of the most impressive and valuable studies of my career, I am happy to report that Joseph’s statement was absolutely correct. Due to the similarities and small differences, I will not be focusing this article on the bodywork part of Hellerwork, but instead on the movement and dialogue aspects.

Heller’s integration of Movement Integration with the SI sessions

The Movement Integration work to which I refer is educational in nature, and takes place both on and off the table. Dr. Rolf recognized the influence that our patterns of movement have on our bodies, and that without changing the movement patterns, the work was not as lasting or integrated.

Heller’s recognition that movement work is essential to the longevity of SI results fostered the union of these two powerful modalities. To better understand the Hellerwork movement model, here is a little more history about its development:

As a Rolfer, Joseph Heller noticed that in spite of working so diligently and thoroughly with his clients that they would sometimes return months or years later with the same kind of problems or patterns, which had led them to see him in the first place. This was a source of frustration for many rolfers at that time, and apparently Dr. Rolf as well. One of Rolf’s early practitioners, nurse and noted poet, Dorothy Nolte, worked with Ida to develop methods to enhance the placement of her principles into the actions of daily living. This got underway to a certain extent until Dorothy Nolte had to attend to personal matters and had to discontinue her efforts. Around this time, in the late 1960’s Judith Aston, who suffered a serious auto accident, sought out Dr. Rolf for treatment. Judith Aston was a trained dancer and a former dance department head at Long Beach State University, California. As their relationship developed Rolf asked Judith to develop a movement education counterpart to follow the myofascial work of rolfing. This meant that clients could better maintain the gains achieved through Rolfing. In order to truly understand SI, Aston trained with Ida and became a Rolfer. Judith worked with Ida to create Structural Patterning. It was a separate series delivered to the clients of SI by Rolfers or non-Rolfers who were trained to deliver it. It was a compliment to SI because it acquainted clients with their structural patterns so that they would be better able to shift their understanding into a more integrated awareness and balance. Joseph Heller trained with Judith in Structural Patterning and found it to be of great benefit to his clients.

The style of the day was that a Rolfer would deliver the ten sessions and then would send their client to a different person to receive the Structural Patterning work. Joseph really believed that the Rolfer who knew the client so intimately would be the ideal person to deliver this whole movement education idea, so when he eventually left the institute, and started teaching he not only included the movement education as part of the basic client series and practitioner training process, but declared that movement be the context for this emerging work which would eventually be called “the Heller Method” and later Hellerwork Structural Integration.

Along with his early training with Judith, Joseph was very immersed in the energetic world of Bioenergetics, and Brough Joy, who was also favored by Ida Rolf at that time. This gave Joseph a deep understanding of seeing the body as an energetic process, and therefore, energetics not only became part of the way of working with the tissue, but also became a way of perceiving and evaluating a client’s pattern of movement.

Joseph was also influenced by his dear friend Hal Stone, who was particularly active with Joseph when he first opened the school. Hal Stone, the developer of Voice Dialogue, illustrated how psycho-dynamics and the body dynamics really come together and influence each other. Hal Stone's contribution of Embodied Voice Dialogue made the Hellerwork Movement model more than just a functional movement system, as it broadened its scope to include the personality (which is what Rolf really believed the body to be), and the spirit.

There are many more influences on our movement work from Alexander to Yoga principles. It is wonderful to be able to participate in the evolutionary stages of this work, and be a part of its history. Those of us who are practitioners at this time, are still true pioneers of this work.

In Hellerwork SI we want to manifest 'the body's natural alignment, openness and motion'. The movement work focuses on the way we use our bodies in the course of our daily lives. We explore and identify our movement patterns, learn 'how to release' them, and develop 'new efficient, economic, and graceful patterns'—those that make it a pleasure to move and flow with our movement. Again, we focus on the movements of daily life—sitting, standing, walking, lifting, reaching, etc.

WHAT'S IN A THEME

The aspect of Hellerwork SI that is widely known as the Themes is otherwise known as Dialogue or Personal processing work, or Self-Awareness Dialogue.

It is important to understand that this element of Hellerwork SI is an exploration and not a procedure. It is a study of mindfulness and used to assist individuals in improving the interaction between their body and their mind and personality. Apparently Dr Rolf was known to make statements like, "there is no such thing as psychology, just perverted physiology". When asked what she thought about psychology, she was quoted as saying, "psychology is alright, but I prefer something I can sink my elbow into". We must remember that some of Rolf's chief supporters were some of the major figures in the modern psychology movement of the day, and I believe that she wanted to make it clear that we work with the body. She did believe that by working with the body, there was the potential to free the psyche and the individual of past trauma. Any practitioner of SI who has been around for a while or who works with lots of clients understands how the beliefs, stored emotions, held trauma, un-expressed emotions and communications, etc, can effect the body and its integration. Heller, understanding that we are not in the psychology business, do have a capacity to profoundly help our clients free themselves of the past, in order to create freedom and full self expression. In Hellerwork, we address these elements in a range of ways, by creating a space for this aspect of the healing process. In the case of this author, I am convinced that my scoliosis would not have cleared up, had Heller himself not helped me explore my relationship with my anger and fear of expressing it. It was from that exploration of my body's response to my anger state that allowed me to heal so much of my past traumas and create an amazing life.

Rolf pointed out that we begin our life, infolded and curled. As we are born and develop, we unfold and evolve. There are situations, environments and traumas that cause this natural evolutionary process to halt or divert, causing incomplete development and therefore interruption to the flow of our bodies and our lives. It is the job of the SI practitioner to release these blockages and allow the flow of gravity and energy to come through.

It is our personal evolution that allows us to take our place and be the best of who we are. As practitioners, we use our hands to help open and restore this flow. We use our movement facilitation skills to assist our clients in moving through life's challenges in a graceful and expanding way...and we use the Dialogue process to help facilitate the freedom of the being within the body.

A fuller understanding of the creation of this part of the work may be established by reading Joseph Heller's book, entitled *Bodywise*.

Here is the context for the Dialogue process that accompanies the Bodywork and the movement work of Hellerwork:

'Become the change you want to see'

The laws of inertia state that an object in motion remains in motion—or an object at rest remains at rest—until it is influenced by an outside force. In order to change something that has been operating in a particular way, we need to add or subtract influences or energies that affect its status. Desire or need will work, but to change the habitual ways we live in our bodies, this desire or need must include a ‘mindful willingness to invest in the changes we wish and need to make’. Gandhi was quoted as saying, ‘Become the change you want to see.’ That injunction includes that requirement that we put energy into that change if we are to create a ‘shift in the energy’ that is already there.

Self-awareness dialog

‘Self awareness dialogue’ involves ‘awareness, release and integration’ of old emotions, beliefs, body image issues and energy patterns that have become stuck in the body and the mind. This work also involves an inquiry into one’s general self-awareness. The SI process is aimed toward personal evolution—becoming a more evolved being in your newly evolving body. Joseph Heller found that without this type of personal work, results of the series are not as long lasting, and that with the inclusion of ‘self awareness dialog’, SI can become personally evolutionary and revolutionary. Using a rough analogy to computers, we could say that SI work changes the hardware—the body—while the movement and personal procession work change the software—the mind—from which our bodies receive instructions.

Cultivating fluidity

A chronic emotional response, an activation of an old trauma, a habitual tightening, or a repetitive strain from a job or hobby—these kinds of influences can gradually degrade the benefits of SI and cause the body to return towards old patterns. Beginning to notice how we ‘compress, distort, and tighten up’ in life’s most simple and most complex situations—that kind of awareness is our entrée into ‘continuously releasing those negative patterns’ and living with fluidity and grace. Ida Rolf was quoted as saying, ‘True grace cannot be purchased; it can only be obtained through the systematic removal of the barriers which prevent it.’ Here she is affirming that grace is inherent, and can and must be secured through ‘awareness and the release of prevailing old patterns’. She had very specific designs to place SI in the category of an educational model, not a medical or treatment model. Therefore, the more we learn about ourselves and how to release old, worn out patterns—and to replace them with new positive patterns that optimally fit our lives—the more we will evolve to our highest potentials. Knowing ourselves in all aspects of who we are, including our bodies is essential for personal evolution.

Hellerwork dialogue process is used to clear out old programs, scripts and tension patterns out of your body. In a relatively short period of time, our bodies will collect all of the expressions of life. Love and joy, and feelings such as this will usually not get stuck in the body, for they are generally able to be experienced fully (at the time of the event) and therefore released as complete. This idea is predicated on the postulate that when we experience something fully, it disappears, there is nothing left to do with it, no energy on it, no leftovers, no emotional charge.

It is the emotions that are more difficult and often more painful to fully experience (feel) that tend to get stuck within. So, yes, I am saying that within our bodies are contained a lifetime of stuck, unprocessed, incomplete experiences. Rolf was quoted as calling this old debris, “one’s Garbage”. There is an energy that is created during an event or experience that is generated, both, out of the individual’s reaction, and or just from the event or experience itself. This energy will naturally produce a reaction in emotion, behavior and movement that is spontaneous and authentic. Just look at a young child who has not yet been socialized. Have you been to a supermarket lately? The grand mal fit of a child who wants to touch, or has his or her mind determined to knock down the whole line of Campbell’s Soup cans represents an authentic response, although not appropriate. The energy of such emotion, when left unexpressed will become tomorrow’s tension and storage in the body. Releasing this old baggage is what this work is all about.

What to do about that? Well, release it, make room for more experiences. We are so full of the old ‘Stuff’ that we hardly have space for new experiences. Somehow, technologically we understand that when our computers accumulate too any programs, they get slow, stuck and even fail to allow new data to be entered. Purging old files, deleting old programs and even upgrading to newer and faster means are our solutions with our computers. Well, computers were created in the image of man. But when it came to our minds and bodies, we were never told how to purge or delete old files to make space for more.

Being fully present is an ideal that is only obtainable if we are able to view the world through a clear lens, not one that is stained with yesterday’s news. Being fully present is only possible if we can release the past that plagues us, that jades us,

that is stuck in our body/mind. The many voices of our mind, the old traumas and victimizations, the old “bad back” are all yesterday’s news and must be released in order to live in the present. Are you convinced?

This is how it works:

Releasing old “debris can be instantaneous if there is no longer an attachment to it. If this debris is still in active status (unprocessed and in need of healing), then the process usually requires more focus. The three main components of releasing old material involve breath, sound, and movement. These are all energetic tools to move our process along, and are even more powerful when accompanied by the healing touch of the practitioner:

BREATH

As the conscious breath enters an area, it allows expansion, and this allows space for change and shift. Making or opening up space is the first step in releasing the past. Bringing the breath to any part of the body is an important skill to gain access to every part of the body. It may involve using your imagination, as many people will not feel the breath expand into the target area on the first try. In the early stages clients may need to “fake it till they make it”, in order to bring the breath into certain areas of the body. The power of pretend can be of great value here.

SOUND

Sound is the second essential tool. This can involve a release of the voice from the body area, or into the area. It may involve releasing involuntary sounds, including screaming, swear words, crying, laughter, moaning etc. It may involve speaking from that part of the body, to allow the psyche’s messages to be heard. There is a story that your body is living, and this story needs to be told in order for the body to free itself. Clients may be asked to release their thoughts in the form of sounds or words. The resonance of one’s voice from that speaking or sounding part of the body allows that area to clear itself.

MOVEMENT

Movement is the third essential. This can involve gross or subtle movement of an area, ranging from shaking it, to allowing it to move without conscious controls. Non-linear movement is a way of letting the body break free of it’s ordinary sanctioned, willed and habituated movements and directions. We are all robots in that our movement patterns are wired for continuity of function. To break free of these old forms, these healing movements may be gross or subtle, fast or slow, or any combination that naturally occurs during the process. Breaking up the neuro-motor associations that occur with the patterns is essential for freeing- up old patterns.

Breath, sound and movement assist the body/mind to release an old pattern from which new possibilities can emerge. New messages can be added into the new spaces to create amazing healing.

THEMES

Hellerwork SI is often known for its themes. Joseph tells the story about how this came to be:

As a Rolfer, he found that as he worked on different parts of the body, his clients would often begin talking about the same kind of themes, themes that are a general concern for most people. For example:

In session one, we are working on freeing up respiration, and balancing the rib cage over the pelvis. In opening up the facility for breathing, we explore issues around inspiration, both literally and figuratively. We might explore how this particular client allows or affords inspiration in their life. Are they inspired about their job? If not, how could they get to a state of inspiration, or find a job that allows them to live in a state of inspiration....Otherwise, all of our good work to open up the chest will probably not last. A person cannot stay inspired if they can’t get to a place of inspiration about their work, life, wife, etc. It is really about spirit, the Latin root of the term inspiration. One can create inspiration throughout their life if they are connected to spirit. So, how can you lead a life that is more connected to your spirit? These are the kind of things we might explore during that first hour (session). What you will see is that we have a great deal of flexibility in this inquiry, and often times the dialogue about this will simply emerge from the body, as this is not about putting a message in, but about letting the old and tired messages come out and transform. So, Joseph Heller simply created themes as a spring board into self awareness.

Other themes from the Hellerwork SI series are:

Second session- Standing on your own two feet.

Third session- Reaching out.

Fourth session- Control and surrender.

Fifth session- The Guts.

Sixth session- Holding Back.

Seventh session- Losing your head.

Eighth session-The Feminine.

Ninth session- The Masculine.

Tenth session- Integration.

Eleventh session- Coming out; Empowerment, Completion, Full self expression

It is important to note that, although Hellerwork Practitioners may use the themes as a springboard to help connect a client to their body and the healing of such pertinent issues that the themes draw out, it is never assumed or required that these themes be explored. The client's needs always come first, and sometimes there is little or no dialogue. This depends on the circumstances. For a practitioner to dialogue successfully, he or she must walk a delicate line in order to avoid placing an agenda on the client, or taking the client out of the experience of being in their body and sending them into their head. This art is one that requires great sensitivity and training on the part of the practitioner.

The more masterful a Hellerwork practitioner becomes, the more inseparable the movement work, the bodywork, and the dialogue process. This trio of modalities creates movement in ones body, life, and process. After all, movement is energy, it is the psyche and the spirit, and it is what the body is made of. Movement seems to be the interpreter of the mind and body's different dialects. It speaks the language of the soul. What else is the body her for, but to move it, express ourselves through it, and feel all of life. As we learn to live in our bodies, to feel our world more intimately, more sensorially, we experience our ecstatic nature. This includes feeling all of life. As the body returns to it's fully experiential nature, we become more and more able to let go of the past, to experience more of the here and now, and to really be present in and to our lives. This is what our work is really all about.

I am honored to have taken this opportunity to write about and inform the SI community of Hellerwork, which I continue to love and practice.

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Some of this article contains excerpts from Dan Bienenfeld's new book entitled *Align for Life, Journey to Structural Integration*, available at his website www.journeytostructuralintegration.com or Amazon.com.