

Interview: **Von: Sabine Becker / European Rolfing® Association e.V. | MARCH 2025**
Conversation with Maya -Matthea van Staden

Introduction

Maya-Matthea van Staden began her Rolfing education two years ago after completing the full 10-series of Rolfing with Miquel de Jong at his practice in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Currently she is in the second year following the training with Nicola Carofiglio. She is a Tai Chi Chuan teacher at ITCCA and studies under her Master teacher, Andreas Heyden in Cologne and their Master Chu King Hun. From the start of her first Rolfing session with Miquel, she has enjoyed the blend of both traditions and regards them as mutually reinforcing and inspiring. “Rolfing and Tai Chi chuan is about nature at work. Its to be touched by nature”.

What initially drew you to Rolfing?

My first encounter with Rolfing was at the age of 15 in Amsterdam, during the time when Eduard Maupin, one of the first generations of Rolfing practitioners, was teaching there. I even went with my nephew to San Diego to visit the training at Eduards institute. When I ascribed for my sessions with Miquel de Jong, 35 years have passed. That’s a long time to eventually circle back to something.

Looking back into the past it more easy to see a logic or a golden thread. But things weren’t that clear to me at that time. I just remember that my first experiences with Structural Integration, coincided with an increasing urge to travel. With this I mean physically, seeing different parts in the world. I abandoned my plans for the art academy .I had been painting and drawing since a young age; it was a realm where I could discover personal freedom and hide away, without needing to engage with others, but I gradually experienced it as a limitation. Around the same time, I also became immersed in Indonesian Martial Arts.

My travels to Indonesia eventually, led me to study Anthropology, which again brought me to Mongolia. Mongolia has remained an environment with which I’ve felt closely connected ever since and impressions have settled in my whole being. Its present in everything inspiring me today. When I arrived in Mongolia, prepared with research questions and interviews on music and dance, the first thing I was told was, “Wait with those questions, live through all season with us first, and then you’ll have your answers.” And that turned out to be true. It was the early 90s, not long after Mongolia became more accessible to Western European countries, and many academic questions about cultural changes were strongly politically charged. In daily life, however, I had completely different experiences. In a world where dream and reality are less distinguishable from one another, where words were carefully chosen for their impact on the body and well-being. In that environment, and in the countryside, it was inevitable to experience this as well—the attention to sounds, the spatiality, and the feeling of insignificance at the end of Winter when the ice melts, revealing bare sandy plains. I lived in an environment where pure reason was not a concept, and “book sickness” was recognized as a diagnosis for people who had become too estranged from their bodies and senses. When I reread my research questions a year later, it was as if a stranger had written them. After that, I could no longer connect with academic language. I experienced the objectification of the culture and the environment in written texts as something unjust, and I felt ashamed even trying. I did not have the tools and emotional calmed to find words for an academic writing.

"Maybe the question should have actually been, 'What brought you back to Rolwing?'"

On the one hand, a coincidental opportunity and on the other, the right timing. I was walking down the street and recognized the familiar Rolwing logo figure by the door of Miquel de Jong's practice in Rotterdam. When I read about Miquel and his background in movement, I immediately signed up for a first session, without really knowing why. Over the years, I have tried various forms of bodywork, even while traveling. Sometimes it was for something specific, other times it was for temporary relaxation, but I never encountered that quality that had become my reference when I was 15. Deep down, I knew this was something worth pursuing. At the time, I was living with chronic pain returning on days without Tai Chi Chuan practice, but I didn't tell Miquel about it, nor did I form a concrete question. It had become something I didn't want to identify with. Within the family, there are issues with EDS, hypermobility, and neuropathy, and I had also gone through a program at a rehabilitation center due to severe pain attacks. But this all didn't explain the origin of my inflammations. Through the practice of Tai Chi Chuan, I had found a way with it over the course of 15 years, but I still missed that uninhibitedness, as if I was always on guard. The lessons from my Tai Chi instructors gradually helped me realize that I had the tendency to position myself in a management role where I was always planning and in charge, with business plans and by focusing on guiding others to present and stage themselves. Instead of constantly pursuing things, Tai Chi Chuan began to awaken an exploration of a more sensitive, attuned being. This was also around the time when I walked past Miguel's practice.

Your Experience with Rolwing® and Tai Chi

I experience one as continuous with the other. The concept of Zhong Ding, might illustrate the reason for this, its an ancient practice in Mongol-Chinese culture. In Tai Chi Chuan, it refers to the idea of finding equilibrium and effortless alignment in posture, supported by an even distribution of weight (both in standing and in movement). Zhong Ding practitioners cultivate and improve a sense of inner peace and calm. Mechanically, it's simple to say: stand aligned and distribute your weight evenly without effort. But in practice, the idea often collides with a person's whole being—holding patterns, current physical potential, emotions, and spatial awareness.

In Tai Chi Chuan, we have many deepening disciplines and exercises, both in choreographies and partner work, to explore this concept and its potential. There are many exercises designed to help you learn to do nothing, to un-do. But you easily end up in a paradox, doing to undo. Rolwing uses similar imagery, but the circumstances of discovery are different, providing an alternative environment in which to allow this "not-doing" and to trust the system to tell you, guided by the gestures of the Rolfer. For me, it was essential to experience this in the sessions, to recognize it in the quality of my practice.

This "not-doing" is not the same as being asleep or in a relaxation massage to unwind. In Rolwing, it's more of a dialogue between systems in interplay—a meditative presence as well, resonating long after. This presence, in sensing, is what I understand as one of the specific qualities Rolwing brings compared to massage. The interaction as part of the sessions in Rolwing is of extra value since we, as people, are in continuous interaction and it as such provides for alternative experiences. Sitting isolated on a meditation pillow for hours doesn't always bring you into the space where you can learn about your personal embodied habits in sensory connection with others and in relation with the environment. For the same reason,

it's limited to learn Tai Chi Chuan without partner exercises. The Rolfing sessions helped me better recognize the quality—Tai Chi Chuan provides an environment to interact... and play.

Miquel de Jong, aside from working with physical and postural restrictions, recognized my conflicting pattern of "go, not go" and "stay, not stay," and invited me to fall into emptiness, to be more spatial oriented and less focussed and concerned with managing the system, enjoying the spontaneous.

Once at the end of the session when I was sitting on the edge of the table, experiencing a deep, soft calm, without the pain that had once defined the contours of my body, no conflict. I said with a desire to maintain, "There's nothing more to do now," and Miquel responded, "No, its not "it", move freely, play."

That same evening, during class, we did a partner exercise where we tested the quality of posture and movement in each other. Like we always do. I demonstrated the intent of the exercise to one of my students. She stood, sensed, and then said, "And then there is silence"... after a moment, followed by her question: "Is this what we are looking for? The moment when all voices are silent?" My actions in testing were no different from usual, but my own presence had shifted by not holding on to "it".

I consider the sessions received as a start of my training in Rolfing. It helped me realize how deeply physical transmission reaches. Later during the Rolfing training in the classes with Nicola Carofiglio this became all the more clear as an important aspect of the approach in Rolfing. The necessity to be aware of your blind spots, and to recognize the potential in your own body to be able to transmit a certain quality in giving a session. And in teaching

How has your Rolfing training influenced your Tai Chi practice and teaching? (What changes have your students noticed in your teaching?)

In Tai Chi Chuan, we have a very strong tradition and an extensive curriculum. This can sometimes be blinding. You can get too caught up in the thought of how to pass all of this on to your students or next generation. Yet, the principles are often hidden in the small details. In this regard, the Rolfing training has helped me. Of course, it's fantastic to have students who are eager to make Tai Chi Chuan their life's path and want to learn everything over time. That curiosity and the joy of discovering all the new doors that open is a great gift to experience and share with others. But most students come because they're physically stuck, or mentally exhausted, often on a doctor's recommendation. They find the cultural dimension interesting, but in their movements, they're less reachable with all the flying cranes, tigers being ridden, and the bow and arrow techniques we practice. Often, they don't know where to begin and are passive and uncertain, waiting to be guided.

With Rolfing, you learn to focus on the individual and what helps them in daily life. Now, I can translate the movements and principles from Tai Chi Chuan into the everyday movements with more confidence, using what I've learned from Rolfing. Even when physical issues arise, I now have seemingly less complex exercises that directly reach people and ultimately provide them with freedom and confidence in their Tai Chi Chuan practice. It helped me to see -again- that in small progress the large resonates.

In general, I have become softer in my presence and touch, and more in dialogue with the situation and the person. Touch in teaching is essential, and before, it was captured by thoughts on what I wanted to make clear. Being heard, in other words. This has completely

changed, as I now still have a clear image of what we are working on, but the contact has become less technical and more intuitive with care for the person. My colleagues say something has changed but can't quite name it, and maybe better to not be able to name it, I can feel it, and see other things happening with the students.

How do Rolfing principles align with or differ from Tai Chi principles?

In both Tai Chi Chuan and Rolfing its about sensing not performing, its about humanity, and its about trusting nature. Nothing is more perfect than nature my teacher Andreas recalled when Spring showed itself in the first hesitant opening of small flowers.

But let me recall first this.

When I started my Rolfing education, I was by various Rolfing teachers reminded that Rolfing is not the same as Tai Chi Chuan. It irritated me to hear this from people who had no real experience with Tai Chi Chuan or notion of how its incorporated in me and my whole life. But I trust their intention was to give me an open, free mind, or entrance to the material. Similarly, my Tai Chi Chuan teacher, with some concern, kindly looked at me and felt the need to advise me not to let the Rolfing Education distract me from my Tai Chi Chuan training and its principles. Then there was my personal Rolfer, Miquel, who, after hearing all my reflections on recognition of Tai Chi Chuan principles in Rolfing, said he hadn't realized before how many similarities there were. But, he added, "These connections you make are also something you do yourself; you relate them this way." And I guess his words summarizes the concern of the others, the blending, but also the beauty of it. We as people relate from our experience.

I guess the concern is that with an eclectic approach, we risk losing the integrated, cohesive unity within the disciplines. Both Tai Chi Chuan and Rolfing require embodied experience, and this process can't be fully understood through theory alone. Embodied learning is a long-term, 'ritualized' process where you gradually recognize the principles by applying the techniques and finally let go of the techniques. During this process, it's often counterproductive to explore other traditions and approaches without first grounding yourself in the principles you seek to learn. Once the principles are clear, the '10,000 variations' will reveal themselves, as they say in the Tai Chi Chuan tradition.

Aware of this, and perhaps because there are also significant differences in practice, I continued my explorations in Rolfing Structural Integration. Initially, I was drawn to the similarities, as it's natural to connect with what feels familiar. But over time, I've come to realize that the differences are perhaps more interesting in shaping my own perspective. But let's start with the similarities.

Humanity

Although Rolfing, in contrast to Tai Chi Chuan, may appear to focus more on the individual—addressing their physical and emotional issues, as well as their personal experiences—both practices are actually centered around universality and what makes us human. We don't focus on expressing ourselves through individuality or imposing fixed ideas of correctness and posture on the body. Instead, the self will emerge when we are compassionate and sensitive to our embodied experiences, without the need to prove anything.

We've already discussed the significance of balance and alignment, which in both practices evoke the imagery of a sky orientation and a ground orientation. In Rolfing, this is reflected in the 'sky' (upper) and 'ground' (lower) sessions, while in Tai Chi Chuan, the form practice is

divided into three parts: 'ground,' 'sky,' and 'human.' Both disciplines, in this context, recall images of human evolution, from quadrupedal movement in an evolutionary context, to the transformation of a newborn into a standing person. This shift in uprightness changes the direction of respiration from horizontal (from tail to crown of the head) to vertical, potentially creating strain on the thoracic space required for breathing. With regard to gaining engagement with diaphragmatic breathing, both practices share a special focus and recognize, in a similar way, the importance of the functional involvement of the big toe and the potential quality of an energetic upward lift and support, that rises from the ground to the crown of the head. It sounds funny and mystifying maybe but it is ancient know-how.

When we say its about humanity, it can sound like a big serious thing, but don't forget humor is part of it as well...my first experience with something in the direction of Body Posture Reading, or as I prefer to call it "body sensing", occurred during my time as a student, among herders at the countryside in Mongolia. It was a playful game where people would compare each other to animals based on body features, behavior, or attitude—always with lots of laughter and songs.

Nature at work

In Roling and Tai Chi Chuan we like to see nature at work. We work with an image, integrate techniques and follow a systematics structure, to find time and space to observe sense and allow things to evolve. Indeed nothing is more perfect than nature. And being natural implies we are always all equal.

There's a striking resemblance when joining both classes that of Roling and of Tai Chi Chuan. In our Tai Chi Chuan class, for example, people explore each other's posture by gently applying pressure to the shoulder, pelvis, hands, or head. What do they learn? Sometimes, the simple act of touching can feel unfamiliar—when do you "hang" with weight on someone? How do you apply light pressure, and how does the other person respond? Do they move away or stiffen to stay grounded? In Tai Chi, you learn to stay rooted and absorb without becoming rigid (rigid is like a car that's parked with the engine off). It requires trust, whether standing with straight legs, bent knees, or balancing on one leg. **"Sinking is the answer to 10,000 questions,"** as our Tai Chi Chuan tradition teaches. Then, in a Roling class: as a student, I placed my hand below one shoulder and above the other, struggling with a technique. The discomfort grew, knowing someone was lying there receiving it. The result felt mechanical. I tried, but it didn't feel pleasant. **"Gravity is the therapist,"** I'm reminded by the teacher. This applies to both the client on the table and myself as the practitioner: your presence matters. How do you enter a space? How do you physically respond when someone enters a room? What does that communicate to others? Is it situational, or is it colored by past experiences and expectations? The common thread between Tai Chi Chuan and Roling lies in these shared insights, leading to similar realizations in both practices.

Structure is form in motion

Another similarity lies in the importance of structure. In Roling, this is often visualized through the Tensegrity model, while in Tai Chi Chuan, we use the bow and arrow from archery as image. There is a adaptable structure that holds the system together, ensuring we don't collapse—also not with our exhale.

In Tai Chi Chuan, the emphasis isn't on stretching for the sake of stretching, nor on stabilizing to be able to move or stretch. Stability is seen as the natural result of a process of continuous movement between polarities and interrelationship. If the string of the bow is pulled too much and often, it weakens the entire structure, system or form. There needs to be a basic

resilience in the bowstring. Traditional muscle-tendon change, inner force, and silk-reeling exercises align closely with what we now understand as the fascial network.

Another shared image are the 3-circles, formed in a three-dimensional shape (in anatomy referred to as sagittal, transverse, frontal and in Tai Chi Chuan flat, forward, sideways). We see this graphically in many disciplines as it reflects also the globe we all live at. But apart from a physical structure, in Tai Chi Chuan, these circles as mental structure indicate a potential direction in movement. When a circle moves forward, somewhere on the wheel a movement moves back as well. This is the polarity of yin and yang.

Moreover, the sense of form creates a distinction between inner and outer space, recognizing a center in interaction with the inner and outer world. Only through this recognition can one merge (interact) with the world resulting in the sense of sinking mentioned above. Similarly, Rolfing distinguishes between sleeve (the first three sessions) and core sessions. In sleeve sessions, we learn to recognize up and down, front and back, and our sides. Without this understanding, it's difficult to recognize the "self" and be receptive and expressive from your core-self.

Tai Chi Chuan is grounded in the principles of continuous transformation between the polarities of Yin and Yang. Where there is a front, there is a back; a left and a right; an up and a down; an inside and an outside. In movement, one arises from the other in a non-linear fashion. The one cannot exist without the other, and the simultaneous forces generate each other. It requires engagement and an awareness to recognize that when structures are free to move support manifests itself.

Not - knowing

This brings us to another important as I perceive it, shared notion and vision on internalized learning. Its distinct from acting according to what we think we know or believe we are inclined to express. Its not about performing but about sensing. I once read that Ida Rolf also emphasized that words are meant to help us remember internalized experiences. We can write and talk about the principles, but it requires embodied experience to truly recognize those principles in a situation, especially in the bodies of others. When we navigate by sensing, we need to accept the not-knowing. When we think we know we might stop to sense. But sensing without guideline is also senseless.

To organize, Tai Chi uses the image of yin and yang, and the circle of transformation and repetition. Energy flows between the polarities of yin and yang, soft and hard, inhale and exhale, as a model its a means to give order to that what is changeless and recognizes that everything is always in motion and in transformation. If you have an image, internalize the techniques, the principles of these transformations are spontaneously understood.

The importance of having 'an image' is emphasized in both Rolfing and Tai Chi Chuan. Maybe the image is not directly the same but the notion of "image" reflects a similar process of learning based on sensing and not-knowing. In Tai Chi Chuan, an image (Xiang) is an unfinished beginning formed layer by layer over time by experience, by incorporating a technique, in various situations and time, its stored in the mind-hearth (body). With the sensory; visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory experience the image gains its colors, and can present itself every time as a fresh new inside. A simple instruction to stand shoulder width apart, can be tested on unrestrained balance, its not something to measure in centimeters. After training for a year the structures above the feet might have changed and possibly some adjustment is needed in the width of stance to find the same relaxed balance. A beginners mind is always needed.

The image is the embodied history, manifesting in the here and now. The mind and body are one. Some will call this the mastering of an art, others compare it to artistry skills but this are conceptual ideas, basically its about humanity.

I have the impression that this idea aligns with the 'recipe' in Rolfing. It's a ritualized process, modeled with a clear vision, in which you learn to recognize the principles. In Rolfing, there's the 10-series recipe; in Tai Chi Chuan, fixed sets for solo and partner movements. Once the principles are recognized, all variations called for in specific situations are endless. As such, I don't consider the recipe a set of rules meant to control, but as guides enabling you to have a beginner's mind: accepting not to know, whilst trusting on the resources built so far. This is true for each session in Rolfing or whether walking the clouds with the Tai Chi Chuan form or in the Tai Chi Chuan partner exercises. No one day is the same as the next, and not one client, or knee for that matter, is ever the same as another.

In martial arts traditions, there are often mystifying discussions about secrets. To whom will the master reveal his secrets? But I believe the secrets from tradition are actually about this whole process of self-discovery and revealing a specific depth of learning. A friend recently mentioned having a conversation with a shepherd in Kyrgyzstan. The shepherd said that what's missing in modernity is the Secret—the unrevealed, the unknown. Everything is explained, and there's no room for private discovery anymore. When he touched a woman for the first time, he had to discover everything on his own, without any external help. Now, you just push a button, and the ready-made answer is there for you. 'Be ready, not to know', could be a call sounded in both the Rolfing tradition and in Tai Chi Chuan tradition alike.

And the differences ?

Let's return to the image of the bow and arrow. In Mongolia, my family and I had the opportunity, through a friend, to receive an introduction to archery from a famous bow maker. He crafted laminated professional bows and arrows and demonstrated their use. In an open field, he held the bow first below the waist in front of him, grounded with feet straight forward and parallel, he mentioned the importance of staying upright, oriented toward the blue sky. Then he pulled the bow, turning it from a horizontal to a vertical position and while inhaling we saw his thorax expanding. As he aimed, he allowed his belly to relax and expand before releasing the arrow. Afterward, the actual exhale followed, and his posture remained upright as he sensed the distance between him and the arrow. Before having us try, he explained that we should never draw and release the bow without an arrow. If we did, it would cause the bow to break. We listened that day, but at home, in an unaware moment, we played with the bow without an arrow, and sure enough, releasing the string caused the bow to crack. The bow needs an arrow is a principle that mirrors what Tai Chi Chuan recognizes about how the human body is in a constant force relationship with others and the environment, especially through the hands and arms that reach outward into the world - Tai Chi Chuan also has been called long boxing (it reaches far to the moon). Like the bow needs the arrow, humans need to be in touch, meaning in a spatial orientation, directed both inward and outward. Without clear direction the structure gets under pressure. It involves the whole body, the hands and arms are an integral part of the bow. Compared to Rolfing, Tai Chi Chuan brings much earlier, from the very beginning in awareness the influence of the hands and arms on posture and energetic balance,—just as much as the feet and legs. Its deals with the relation of a persons with the world and with the other person, the arrow.

Anatomy

In my Tai Chi Chuan environment practical anatomy isn't given much attention. In anatomy, it's about differentiation, and in Rolfing, we talk about freeing structures that are glued together. However, in Tai Chi Chuan, we always approach movement from a perspective of wholeness. While we may tune into specific areas, it's always in the context of spatial and timing relationships. We sense relationships and dynamics which anatomically maybe do not exist or are impossible. We can also speak of the subjective experience of release in certain areas of the body. Yet, with physical anatomical structures, it's somewhat odd to talk about 'release'—I don't think we want to go too far with that, like ending up with someone else's leg in your handbag.

Rolfing does offer, a way of organizing interrelationships, which can be communicated to the person on the table and result in a subjective experience of release, a sense of wholeness, or provoke personal images of space or indirect relationships. But the language of anatomy, doesn't always align with someone's experience and is sometimes ambiguous. For instance, the experience of lengthening of the back might be referred to as a contraction of specific muscles in anatomy. Or another illustration: when using in Tai Chi Chuan the word 'support' actively, like 'which leg is supporting more,' the language provokes something that contradicts with what we aim for in Tai Chi Chuan—non-action and non-containment.

In the beginning I had difficulty to relate with the anatomy, but nowadays I have a skeleton in the class room and it gives also a new dimension, in class. It shows another universality, which can help people distance from a problem pattern that feels very personal and therefore confusing. It contributes to the realization of the complexity of it all - and the body functioning, fostering respect for the nature at work. When we arrogantly think to be able to control the body it brings more awareness that this is impossible. As our Tai Chi master Chu King Hun would express it "Nature didn't ask for your opinion". Its humbling.

Science and ethics

By being positioned in the middle of science and presented as a therapy with a specific recipe and a client-practitioner relationship, the Rolfing tradition has placed itself in a potentially dualistic and challenging environment. Subject to discussions about ethics, as well as the recognition of science. We don't face that problem in Tai Chi Chuan. We embrace subjectivity as proof of concept. Concepts that we cannot integrate, apply, or feel are mere phantoms within our Tai Chi Chuan tradition. The techniques are tools, our hands make gestures and are part of our sensory body (Our hands are never tools as they instrumentally seem to be called in the education of Rolfing). I do not intend to suggest that I have anything against science. As long as it is about wanting to learn from science or if it helps support observations from practice and contributes to rediscoveries, and there are related to the field of impressive new scientific discoveries, it is highly enriching. Keep questioning. But if the motivation behind it is to legitimize and validate your methodical non-scientific tradition and philosophy, it makes the tradition potentially vulnerable.

In the past century, China, in its quest for recognition and to join the Western scientific community, had to focus on tangible structures in an attempt to prove the physical existence of Qi energy and the meridians. Without proof in the form of measurable, visual evidence, it was difficult to assimilate this into scientific medical research. However, as concepts in training and notions of health, ideas about Qi and the meridians are much more deeply rooted in a multi-sensory environment, coming from a different cultural context. Incorporating the concepts in science changes the concepts.

Similar to the scientific environment, the ethics required in the therapeutic relationship, has an influence on the language we use to express ourselves. Where the quality in a Rolfing session lies in the "meet, touch, melt," the ethics of a medical therapeutic relationship emphasize professional distance. Meanwhile, the perception of intimacy in Rolfing ideally remains distinct from the ordinary clinical medical relationship we encounter in hospitals and with our family doctor. Objectification will negatively affect the quality of touch and our presence. There is a difference in meeting a person with "knowledge" compared to meeting a person as a human being. The tradition requires, as I understand it, to be in touch on a human level. The language in the sessions built on trust, the language of ethics and science built on potential threat.

In Tai Chi Chuan, there is a teacher-trainee relationship, but it is also based on the notion of humanity and friendships. I experience a similar quality in the Rolfing tradition—an equality based on universality. But I also sense a restless conflict in acknowledging this, due to the defined therapeutic, scientified context, which brings in images from another—objectifying—environment. But that said, this is me, not everyone experiences this as conflicting.

Can you say something about the concept of “Space” in teaching ?

The concept of space in teaching is closely tied to the notion of intentionality. In the Rolfing environment, I've observed that the term 'intend' or 'intentionality' is used in various ways when working with someone. When 'intend' is understood as a purpose, it can feel somewhat intrusive. On the other hand, when 'intend' is seen merely as thinking about something without using voluntary force, it can come across as almost magical—implying that new techniques can be embodied simply by thinking about them. However, some Rolfers—particularly those with experience in movement or Zen meditation—use the term in a way similar to its application in Tai Chi Chuan practice. In this context, 'intend' relates to being attuned to the environment and aware of one's emotional state. This requires training to develop.

To illustrate, let's return to the archer from Mongolia. Even a technically skilled archer, in his desire to shoot a bird from the sky, cannot actually plan the shot—he would always be too late. Instead, the archer must be attuned to his own well-being and strength in that very moment, as well as to the weather, the wind direction, the speed of the bird, and its possible twists and turns in flight. He needs to have a deep sense of space, distance, and time. His observations will trigger a physical response, and the arrow will be released with clear aim. In this, there is harmony between the archer's body, being, and surroundings. In a way, everything becomes united as if they are one. The form and space needed to identify the situation are no longer separate entities in that moment. This is what clear intention is about in Tai Chi Chuan practice. When incorporated, we train ourselves to sense, be aware, directed and remain attuned. Allowing even a millisecond of hesitation can cause the arrow to miss the target.

Same in Rolfing. When you planned to do more deep work or a session requires this according the recipe and someone enters your practice very emotional about something, the situation will require you to reorient how you enter the system to get eventually maybe into the deep work. I often hear people who join Tai Chi Chuan classes say they feel scattered in their attention, lacking focus, and hope that the training will help them. When we approach this from the perspective of space and form, however, it's often the opposite that's at play. The problem isn't necessarily a lack of focus, but rather a lack of open sensory and spatial

awareness, often coupled with too much fixations. This creates a form of stress and anxiety in trying to control processes that cannot be controlled, resulting in ineffective outcomes, self-doubt, you becoming “a maybe” with sense of directionlessness. Without a clear sense of space, there is no clear body, no sense of the environment, no notion of direction, and no awareness of time. Without these, where would we be? Isn't space one of the fundamental elements of being?

Sense of space can also be evoked through images—whether mythological, metaphorical, or based on personal experience—and by verbalizing direction or specific principles in each movement. The nervous system doesn't distinguish between imagination and tangible reality. In our training with the sword form, for example, the sword becomes a prolongation of the body. By extending the body through the sword, we create an energetically larger body. This larger body imprint is registered in the brain, shaping the way we perceive, absorb, and express ourselves. Once internalized, this expanded sense of body remains present, even without the sword.

Working on the fascia is essentially working on the nervous system and the sense of space within a person. This process opens up new possibilities for movement patterns, allowing the body to expand beyond its usual boundaries and function more fluidly.

What does “giving more space” mean to you as a teacher and practitioner?

Creating circumstances in which the student can allow themselves to explore is key. The idea of 'giving' comes from a good place, but it starts to become paradoxical and demanding if the student isn't ready to accept the space you're offering. Does the person truly desire to explore alternatives? What's holding them back, and is it the right time? Honoring a person's being means honoring their current space and their potential to explore new environments. In the Tai Chi classics, it's said, 'When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.' I understand this much more clearly now. Its not moralistic. Its wisdom.

How has this understanding evolved with Rolfing training?

During a session: Miquel placed his fingers on a spot on my back, and asked, "Do you teach from here?" Then he mimicked my posture. At that moment, I thought, and was a bit annoyed, "What is this man talking about?" But later that same evening, as I stood before the Qi Gong class, I suddenly again felt the spot were he had placed his fingers... that's when I understood what he meant. I felt how I was protecting the area around my stomach and heart, slightly hunched, searching for strength in my back. I immediately relaxed my back and felt a sinking sensation that traveled down to my lower back and legs, noticing how much space it created and how my peripheral vision opened up. I started to look with this more open view to my class as well - stepping back more often. A precious moment.....

Practically in teaching in a group, I started to allow more moments of silence. I think I have become better aware of how much information to provide and when some cues are constructive and supportive to the learning process or works against it. Sometimes I walk out of the room, to have a look at the plants outside, they still can see me through the window, so I am not gone, but it can help to let people settle in their movement without having the eagles eyes staring at them at times when I sense they are too much concerned with my appreciation. Actually, our Master does this as well during the private classes and examinations but I had never reflected on it this way.

How has Rolfing training deepened your understanding of the body and movement?

I am not sure if I would call it deepened.

In the Rolfing training, all movement exercises and embodiment practices exist beyond a defined movement discipline and are designed to reflect the daily use of the body in standing and walking. This creates room to engage more openly with particular principles in my Tai Chi Chuan and in teaching.

Nicola Carofiglio's starts his classes always with embodiment exercises. To make us aware of the area we will work with and also to arrive in the space were we are and will work together. This care, in a sense, effortlessly flows into the Tai Chi Chuan classroom.

In the pushing hands exercises, also known as listening hands, students often focus heavily on their hands and restrain them. Its in a way misleading to call it pushing hands.

These days, I hear myself say, "We listen with our hands and see with our ears," and I stand behind them and say, "Here, it's you, as well." With a big smile, you see them straighten up, looking around, whereas before, they had done this more rigidly and dutifully, following the instruction, "Stay upright." My words aren't literally from Rolfing, but. I do feel Nicola is with me in the room at such a moment.

In teaching beginners I play more with ways to have them step away from the idea of moving correctly, inviting and challenging them to use the space and room freely with an image they consider to be typical for Tai Chi Chuan in relation to the movements they learned. It helps them to move with their body memory and away from right or wrong. It's nice because this is when they start transferring movement images they've seen and liked. It tells me something about the aspect of Tai Chi Chuan they connect with. It provides insight into whether they are exploring space more inwardly, outwardly, or seeking a balance between both. It presents itself as a question to me with which I can work, together with them to bring them in the end in the clearly defined quality and principles of the movements and Tai Chi Practice.

Conclusion

Why would you recommend Rolfing Training to other movement or bodywork professionals, and especially Tai Chi Practitioners?

I can only share my personal experience and enthusiasm as I have, and it's up to others to observe and decide if there is something that resonates and is worth exploring. We are all different, like the 10,000 Buddhas, each with our unique faces. Likewise, not all Rolfers or Tai Chi Chuan practitioners are the same. But I can say, try it, and get some first taste and than see what it will bring you.