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The Co-emergence of Mind-Body-Spirit

Considerations for Practitioner, Client, and the Potential for Change

By Anne Hoff, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Teacher of the Diamond Approach®

In the province of the mind, what is believed to be true is true or becomes true, within limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the province of the mind there are no limits.

John Lilly, MD (Lilly 1972, xv-xvi)

Introduction

I first learned about Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) reading *The Center of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space*, John Lilly's account of his explorations with dolphins, LSD, isolation tanks, Esalen, Rolfing SI, Arica, etc. For me, Rolfing SI has always been part of a larger context of mind-body-spirit integration – or what I'm coming to recognize as mind-body-spirit *coemergence*. In this article I will share some of the tools and understandings that have been most beneficial to my understanding of the interplay of Rolfing SI and consciousness, both for my own growth and when working with clients.

A Discussion of Rolfing SI and Consciousness

We will begin with some broad strokes looking at Rolfing SI as a holistic, transformational process that fosters embodiment, at the implications of the 'Line', at Rolfing history, and at how Rolfing SI is a good opener of consciousness but not in itself a path with a map and a methodology to explore consciousness.

Embodiment

I didn't come to Rolfing SI as a client because of pain. I had poor posture, but that wasn't really in my awareness until I saw the comparison of my 'before' and 'after' photos. Rather, I sensed that my body was in some way disconnected, undeveloped. My mind was sharp, and I had begun opening more to my emotions, as well as pursuing longstanding interests in spirituality. But my body had not found its place in this journey, was not partaking of it and developing in the

same way. To use a word common to Rolfing SI and also known in spiritual work, I wasn't *embodied* despite being young, healthy, uninjured, and relatively fit.

Experiencing the Ten Series in 1987, I was fortunate to have a Rolfer, Richard Podolny, who was deeply cognizant of the mind-body-spirit connection and knew that he was in the business of transformation. None of this was particularly explicit – he was taking me through a classic Ten Series – but it was an underlying thread. With the Ten Series, I landed in my body in a new way – and that was a crucial element to other significant growth processes in my life.

A core premise of many spiritual paths is to be 'present', to be in the 'now'. As Ram Dass famously said, 'Be here now'. What is that directive but a set of coordinates on axes of time and space? *We can only grow and develop if we first locate ourselves in both the current moment (time) and in the body (space)*. This means freeing ourselves of ways that we live in the past, and ways we try to project ourselves into an idealized future.

On a mental level we can cling to the past by, for example, clinging to an old identity, like the role we had in our family as a child. We go to the future if our goals and ideals have implicit in them a rejection of where we are in the moment: we are not okay until we reach that idealized place. On an emotional level we can, for example, cling to old relationships, or again negate our present experience by feeling that we can't be happy unless certain things come to pass. Even if we are not projecting into the future, we can use fantasy and daydreaming in the present moment as a way to be other-than-present.

Being 'present' means being in the body. This supports being in the now if one is in touch with sensation. Yet there are many ways the past is held in the body. How often do you see a client whose structure (or part of it) looks childish? Or have a client tell you, "I have my father's feet"? And old

injuries, of course, are the imprints of past events; the physical deficit from the injury may be current, but there's often other layers of content from the past that overlay that objective limitation. So when we come into the body what we are often present to first are imprints from our past (and these may underpin a familiar sense of self, as will be discussed later). Note John Lilly's experience of Peter Melchior working on his foot, cut deeply by an axe in an old injury:

Suddenly I realized that I had blocked the pain in the original experience. This scar had held the potential of that pain ever since. It also had a basic traumatic memory... I had favored that foot, favored that region of the foot, and had not completed the hole that was left in my body image there. The Rolfing [SI] allowed this hole to fill in, allowed my posture to improve in respect to that foot and the realization of the pain passed away (Lilly 1972, 107).

As we explore the body of our history, we begin to unwind the old impressions and find that we can be *here* in a body of *now*. If this exploration is open to and aware of shifts in consciousness, another level of transformation opens, what I describe as *body as portal* – the possibility of experiencing with immediacy that the body is a vehicle of human consciousness, a doorway to other realms.

A Different Culture

Although Rolfing SI can open consciousness through the body, the client does not always run with this. This may be for any number of reasons to do with either practitioner or client, but I believe there is also a cultural factor at play. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Ida Rolf was at Esalen and establishing the Rolf Institute®, clients came to Rolfing SI wanting holistic transformation, and they were often engaged in other forms of transformational work such as therapy, encounter groups, meditation, etc. It was a grand experiment on all levels, with openness and curiosity and passion. In that environment, it was not strange for Rolf to be talking about the potential of her work to contribute to the evolution of a new human being.

Now? Not so much. A client comes to mind, a tech guy busy with work, family; not a 'seeker'. He did fix-it work with me, and the Ten Series. Throughout, his overriding

goal was to resolve an old ankle injury that periodically caused foot pain. He once said to me something along the lines of, "I wish I could put my foot in a box, send it to you to be worked on, and have you send it back." The *process* of receiving bodywork did not engage his curiosity. His motivation was 'second paradigm' (see the schema developed by Jeff Maitland; 1993).

I find that a large proportion of Rolfing clients are oriented primarily to the physical. Sometimes the intake interview reveals other layers, but there's often a reticence unless the person is engaged in other mental, emotional, or spiritual work (e.g., trauma therapy). It is important to meet the client where s/he is, and also to be open to seeing where the work goes as s/he is impacted by it.

What Rolfing SI Can and Cannot Do

What can open when we engage the fascia, or align the body in gravity? In my Unit 2, as Pedro Prado led an exercise on sensing the 'Line' while standing, I began to experience my body as an effulgence of energy; it was a bit frightening, and made me slightly nauseous. Moving slightly off the Line returned me to familiar experience. Rolf Will Johnson, who regularly speaks to and voluminously writes about Rolfing SI and consciousness, spoke to the power of the Line in his article "The Line As a Mudra of Transformation":

... The embodiment of the Line creates a mudra (a bodily gesture or posture) of transformation capable of generating a radical and profound shift in embodied consciousness... The shift in consciousness that I am referring to here takes one from an exclusive and isolated awareness of egoic self that experiences itself as separate from everything it perceives to exist outside of the body to an inclusive and palpable awareness of self that is profoundly embedded in, and deeply connected to, what has traditionally been referred to as the "ground of being." All the spiritual traditions speak of this dimension of experience (Johnson 1999, 33).

So Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement® work can elicit radical shifts in body experience related to consciousness. Rolf created a potent methodology, but she did not create a map for traversing the shifts in consciousness Johnson describes, where one

begins to enter nondual and nonconceptual terrain that challenges the egoic self. Thus, I do not believe that Rolfing SI alone is an adequate vehicle for consciousness work. An opener, yes. A path, no.

We know some things about psychology from our training (e.g., concepts of transference and countertransference), and we know about consciousness, particularly as it relates to the psychobiological and energetic taxonomies, so we are able to help our clients metabolize many of the shifts engendered by our work. But our Rolfing training does not give us the knowledge to effectively and ethically become spiritual teachers or consciousness guides any more than it prepares us to be psychologists. For either, specialized training – and personal experience of the terrain – is required.

Paths of Consciousness Work

In the past, many teachings on consciousness occurred in mystery schools, or required the full surrender of one's personal life to become a monastic. These days we live in a veritable spiritual supermarket – you can try on many teachings to find what suits you. And it can also lead you astray, as the 'seeker' can go from teaching to teaching, tasting but never deeply engaging inner work. It is the rare individual who finds realization without a path – the ego will always attempt to appropriate the spiritual journey for its own goals. Part of the function of a teacher and a path is help expose this 'spiritual materialism' (Trungpa 2002).

I was fortunate that openings of consciousness led me to find a spiritual teaching that I could 'harness myself to'. This may seem like a strange expression, but it expresses a level of engagement that allows one to effectively do inner work. As I've discussed elsewhere (Hoff and Knight 2017), my twenty-plus years engaged in Rolfing SI as a student and practitioner has overlapped almost exactly with my time in the Diamond Approach, again as a student and later a teacher. Each discipline has fed insight and development to the other, supporting my personal development and my work. Interestingly, Rolf also used this term 'harness' in a similar way: speaking about the need to study to attain a mastery of 'form' that would make the practice of Rolfing [SI] easy, she quoted Robert Frost's line "You have freedom when you're easy in your harness" (Rolf 1978, 182).

The Diamond Approach is particularly suited to those with an interest in the body and in psychology. It is a path of developing

presence that includes active exploration of the body through inner sensing and breath work, and the work of students and teachers over the decades has brought forth a detailed ‘map’ of how different states of consciousness typically bring forth certain types of issues or challenges for the psyche. In this sense, it deeply interrelates body mind-spirit.

Fortunately, there is a trend in other spiritual schools too to be more body-inclusive (rather than body-transcendent), with some Buddhist teachers bringing in body-based practices or, in the case of Johnson, bringing bodywork into meditation retreats (Johnson et al. 2013; Hoff 2015).

Three Gatekeepers to Consciousness

Now let’s look at three elements that I consider ‘gatekeepers’ to consciousness and how they can affect our consciousness as a practitioner, the client’s consciousness, and the potential for change in a Rolfing session. These are: 1) *body armor* as a manifestation of ego and self-image; 2) the *inner critic* as an inertial and repressive force; and 3) *not-knowing*.

Underlying all of these, and weaving between them, is the question of openness (receptivity). Nothing – body, mind (including emotions), or spirit – will change easily if we are not open. The epigraph that opens this article speaks to this. I’ll repeat it here with one adjustment, changing ‘mind’ to ‘individual consciousness’ to cover our broader and co-emergent territory of body-mind-spirit:

In the province of the [individual consciousness], what is believed to be true is true or becomes true, within limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the province of the [individual consciousness] there are no limits (Lilly 1972, xv-xvi).

Body Armor

Wilhelm Reich (1945/1972) developed the concepts of *character armor* and *body armor*. Reich was initially a student of Freud, but diverged to follow his own path that became much more body-based and was concerned with liberating life energy.

Reich called our habitual demeanor, stance and attitude character armor. Our dominant, submissive,

pleasing, withdrawn, petulant, stubborn styles, for example, become a uniform we wear in relationships – our suit of armor . . . As Reich’s work progressed scientifically, his focus turned to the body and the way it mirrors the character in all systems. He found that our bodies embody the template of our personalities and conform to those dictates . . . When we are armored . . . the energy flow throughout our body is impeded. We may experience this as a lack of sensation, aliveness, a stiffness or tension. Armor can develop into painful sensation if places in our body have chronic holding or are under-charged. So our physicality speaks as well as our voice. Our armoring reduces our creative capacity, our natural expression of our unique Self (Frisch 2013).

The structuring of mind (character) and body creates an ‘armor’ that maintains a bound body shape and the familiar defenses of our personality (Figure 1). We know from Rolf that fascia is the organ of structure; our familiar tensions and shape are part of how we know ourselves and each other, as noted by Heather Starsong (2009, 6), describing an experience with her husband during her Rolfing series:

. . . Each session was a difficult and extraordinary initiation. My sixth was particularly hard: I had one of those tight high butts, that are considered cute and sexy, but are very painful to live with . . . [My husband] was out of town when I had my sixth. We had a bedtime ritual of going to sleep on our bellies side by side; as we were settling, he would reach over and pat me on the bottom and say “Good night, honey.” The first night that he was home after my sixth session, he reached over to pat me as usual. Then the light went on, and Sam was sitting up in bed, throwing back the covers, exclaiming, “What happened to your ass?”

Similarly, our sense of identity is also based on an inner body-image and self-representations. As noted by A.H. Almaas, founder of the Diamond Approach: “According to psychoanalytic object relations theory, body-image actually forms the core of the self-image. The self-image forms as self-representations are gradually built around the experience of the body image” (Almaas 1986, 28). In Diamond Approach private sessions, the student explores any self-representations brought forth by the work. These may be images of oneself at a certain age (accurate or distorted); images or the felt sense of

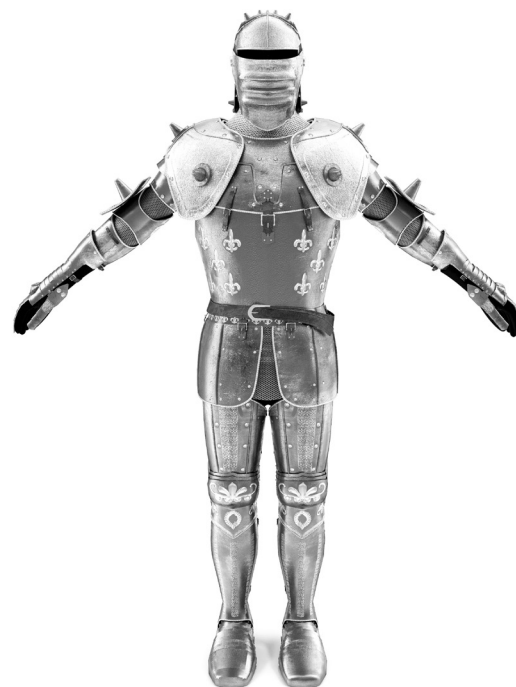


Figure 1: Body/character armor is akin to medieval armor. It defines our shape and self-image; limits sensation and mobility; restricts perception and energy; and is defensive in nature.

objects in the body (e.g., a metal shield over the heart, a robotic apparatus in the ocular segment; a sense of holes or wounds in areas of the body; a sense of various materials in the body or body segments (plastic, metal, wood, glass . . .); or a sense of colors or energies in the body or body segments. It is also possible for such material to arise when working with the body through Rolfing SI or another bodywork modality. I once was doing bodywork on a client's abdomen and asked her what she felt under my hands. I expected her to describe bodily sensation, such as 'tight' or 'sore', but she said 'there's a spikey machine in there'.

When body images and self images are dissolved at the level of the psyche or soul, a common experience is the arising of *space*:

“ . . . The more the rigid boundaries of the self are made porous and dissolved . . . the experience of one's self and one's mind as open, pure spaciousness, an empty clear space, becomes increasingly available . . . In the experience of spaciousness and openness, one experiences the absence of emotional heaviness and a release of the sense of burden. There is mental clarity and a lucidity of perception. All the senses become sharper, as if cleansed and rejuvenated. The body feels light, relaxed, agile, and buoyant. It is similar to the experience of being in a clear open space with fresh and crisp air – as if on the top of a high mountain on a clear day, or on a broad beach – but it is experienced inside. And *ultimately it becomes clear that we are not a subject experiencing this spaciousness – we are the spaciousness* (Almaas 1986, 22-23; italics added for emphasis).

Thus, working with either physical body boundaries (fascia, tension patterns) or self-images can dramatically shift both felt sense and identity. Touching fascia, we are directly engaging body armor, and therefore character armor. Going further, Johnson (1993, 41) believes we are engaging the ego itself: “Ego . . . is simply a function of bodily holding, of the particular pattern of chronic muscular tensing through which our bodies most familiarly resist gravity.”

Why do some clients experience more transformation – of structure, as well as of other elements of being – than others during Rolfing work? Perhaps it's a question of

what you are open to, how many layers of body-mind-spirit you are willing to be present with. I remember watching Liz Gaggini do visceral work with a client who had a long and medically challenging history with asthma, including emergency hospitalizations. As Liz worked with the pleura, the client, balked: “Oh, it's dark in there.” [Liz is a master at working many layers; there is much to be gleaned from my interview with her: “*SI on All Cylinders: An Interview with Liz Gaggini*” (Hoff and Gaggini 2015).]

Almaas (1986, 104) notes: “Inner change must involve a change in self-image. Otherwise the change is either temporary or it is no change at all, hidden behind a new form of the old.” A client resistant to a shift in identity will most likely resist change to the tension patterns that are part of the shaping of identity, or else will quickly reconstitute them. According to Rolf, “There comes a time . . . when you see that your [client] is able to align himself, but he doesn't want to do it . . . There is always a physical factor in him which doesn't want to do it; there is often a psychological factor involved as well. There is the problem of a self-image – the image that he is trying to project in the world . . . He will revert and try to project that image, even when he is able to project another image, until he sees a light and gets into his realization that there are other images that might be more desirable . . . Some people say that the minute you get the idea that another image might be more desirable you are changing 'karma'” (Rolf 1978, 85). Individuals with weak ego structures will also often need their tension patterns: they are challenged by a sense of inner fragmentation, so body tension may be important for their sense of coherence.

The Inner Critic

Our next gatekeeper to consciousness is the inner critic (what Freud called the 'superego'). The inner critic is a mental structure that forms in childhood from the edicts and messages of parents, teachers, and other authority figures. It served a role in childhood (we all had to learn not to run into the street, not to touch the hot stove, etc.), but it remains operative past childhood – until / unless you learn a way to disengage from it.

The inner critic shows up in all realms of life, including Rolfing sessions. As long as it's present – whether for Rolfer or client –



Figure 2: The inner critic limits the scope of our consciousness through its carrot-and-stick approach of (seemingly) positive and negative directives.

there will be a limitation on the openness, and therefore the transformative potential of the work. This limitation arises because the inner critic is the guardian of whatever status quo solidified out of the childhood relationship with the parents. In a sense, you as a child were like a wild horse that your parents had to domesticate. In doing that, they built a corral to contain you, and the bars of the corral are your parents' values and prohibitions. The inner critic's job is to keep you in that corral. Anything that questions its limits, that seeks to expand it, is threatening to the inner critic.

There are many ways a client's inner critic can show up, both (seemingly) positive and negative (see Figure 2). One vivid appearance was when I asked a client to feel into her body pattern of hunching forward. That posture could have come from computer work, or from holding young children, we didn't know. When I asked her to describe it, she said, “My father is behind me with a big stick and he's going to hit me.” More commonly, the inner critic shows up as the client's critique of his/her body (too fat, legs too short, etc.). (As taught in Rolfing and Rolf Movement training, it's important to speak to the client in ways that do not reinforce these messages, otherwise we are a stand-in for the inner critic.) The inner critic can also show up in blanket self-judgment: “I hate my body.” (No child is born feeling self-hatred (rejection of the self); it is learned behavior, an internalization of the inner critic.) Or the critic may show up as the client being overly skeptical of the Rolfing process

before giving it a chance, or critical of the results if they don't meet some very high bar.

On the Rolfer's side, your inner critic may give a running commentary in your head evaluating your work. The messages will be unique to you and your vulnerabilities (based on childhood themes), but for most people there will be messages around competency, knowledge, results, being a fake, etc. There are also manifestations of the critic that may seem positive; maybe it praises you when you've done something it considers good – but there's usually the implicit caveat of "you'd better keep up that behavior." Or it shows up in ideals – often unattainable – that you have to meet to be okay.

When the inner critic is in the Rolfing room, openness is stifled. Your inner critic (or the client's critic directed at you) is going to limit the potential for you to do your best work; on the client's side, the critic will limit his/her potential to be receptive and open to receiving the full benefits of the work and letting them ripple through his/her mind-body-spirit. Thus, we encourage positivity and ease during the body reading (prime time for the client's inner critic to arise), and speak and touch at all times in ways that "evoke" rather than "demand" (Rolf 1978, 94).

Defending against and disengaging from the inner critic is a big topic, beyond

the scope of this article. Ultimately, it is experiential work. For more guidance, please see the list of Inner Critic Resources at the end of this article.

Not-Knowing

Rolfing training has been described as a mystery school. There's so much to learn, with the paradox being that you have to do it to learn to do it. One of the greatest gifts of my Rolfing training was when the Unit 3 assistant said something like, "I didn't know what I was doing for the first nine years I was in practice. It still worked, and then I gradually came to understand why it worked."

Most people are challenged by not-knowing (Figure 3), which is our third gatekeeper. *But before we can know something, we have to not-know.* Not-knowing creates receptivity to learning, to direct knowing, and to guidance. Yet our culture places great value on knowing. Most of us have had some experience of being put on the spot about what we know – called on by the teacher when we weren't prepared, a pop quiz, etc.; such experiences leave a sense of deficiency or shame about not-knowing.

Once we are in practice, there's plenty of opportunity for more not-knowing. Clients walk through the door with all sorts of things we've never seen or heard about. Do we cling to rote application of the 'Recipe', do we stress over our anatomy books, do

we succumb to fear and inner-critic attack, or do we find the place that is curious and says, "hmmm, I'll put my hands on the body and see what I find"?

Taking payment ups the ante, as you may feel that you need to know definitively how to help someone if money is going to be exchanged. Rather, as with any wellness or healthcare activity, the payment is for your time (and the efforts you have put into training and practice). Your obligation, at its most basic, is to be present with all of yourself with all of the client, and to see what comes through based on both your learned and 'stored' knowledge and your in-the-moment experience through the trained palpatory instruments of your hands. Rolf said, "[The client] and I form one for at least the time that I'm working. Look and feel. A guy walks in displaying all kinds of things that talk to you. You don't need feedback – you need to look at what's there" (Rolf 1978, 96).

There is value to all that we have learned ('stored' knowledge), and all that we can learn ('future' knowledge) through research, consultation with peers, and continuing education, but when you are with the client the primary demand is to the *now* as that is the only place anything can happen. You want access to your knowledge of anatomy, but that map can rest in the background of your consciousness while you allow an open spaciousness in the forefront. That spaciousness will draw in any stored knowledge that is needed; it will give you guidance about what to study later; but, most importantly, it will put you in living contact with the client's being and allow an immediacy that will direct your work far more effectively than your conventional mind. In this immediacy there can be a direct knowing unmediated by our stored knowledge.

Not-knowing invokes guidance. Have you ever been working on one part of a client's body and had a thought arise, "I need to go to the left knee." Do you take heed? If you don't, what happens? And when you follow that guidance, what occurs? My most magical sessions tend to occur when I first consider all that I know about what the client brings in, and then go to work holding that lightly in an open field of waiting to discover what *this particular client* needs. That balance of knowing and not-knowing, allowing both, tends to create the space for both immediate knowing and guidance.



Figure 3: Before knowing, there is not-knowing. Allowing not-knowing creates the space for immediate knowing and guidance to arise, as well as the relaxation that allows access to 'stored' knowledge.

Ultimately, the body is a mystery. New information will come to be known through research and science, and we will also learn through our own experience. The unfolding of the mystery is greatly compounded when we open to the domain of 'body as portal' and begin to explore inner phenomena and spiritual mind-body states. What happens to your experience of your own body if you allow that you truly don't know what a body is? What happens in your Rolfing practice? This openness leads to an incredible journey.

Reprise on Openness

The theme of openness interweaves through these elements under discussion – body armor, inner critic, not-knowing – and how the three play into each other. To make that more explicit, here's a few examples:

- Body armor as fixed identity will help hold the inner critic in place, as ego is closely intertwined with inner critic (superego).
- Body armor creates a familiar sense of self, which includes a familiar mind and familiar ways of thinking. Body armor will resist opening and letting go into not-knowing, the doorway to new and immediate knowing.
- The inner critic is the guardian of the status quo, so its agenda is to keep body armor and identity in place, or else to set unattainable goals for transformation that effectively keep you stuck as you are.
- The inner critic is based on the values and thinking of your parents, so it only wants you to know what they knew, what they valued, and the lines in inquiry they endorsed. The inner critic will attack you or shame you when you do not know, so it will resist the space of not-knowing that opens new thoughts and guidance. Further, the inner critic does not want its role in guiding you to be supplanted by true guidance.
- Until one is comfortable with not-knowing and with opening (relaxing) into it, the experience may trigger body-armor tension patterns.
- Likewise, not-knowing may trigger an inner-critic attack.

Conclusion

Can your body be open and permeable to experience? Can areas of arrested

development (body, emotion, mind, spirit) become freed up? Can you be free of outside agenda and open to your own potential? Can you allow knowledge/guidance to arise independent of your conditioned mind? We are involved in a wonderful body of work that has the potential to ignite this exploration and guide us into transformative inner space.

In the Diamond Approach we use the expression 'open and open-ended'. That means that there's a fundamental posture of openness, and that we don't posit any particular goal. This view allows the inner journey to open to unexpected vistas. The same view can inform our Rolfing practices to open our work to increasing awareness of co-emergent mind-body-spirit.

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Author's note: Thanks to Szaja Gottlieb for reading an earlier version of this article and pointing me to Ida Rolf's parallel use of the word 'harness'.

Inner Critic Resources

- *Soul Without Shame* by Byron Brown (1999) goes deeply into the Diamond Approach understanding of and methodology for defense against the inner critic.
- I've written a number of posts on different aspects of the inner critic and successful defense on my Facebook page (www.facebook.com/AnneHoffDiamondApproach/).
- I teach a weekend workshop called "Free Yourself from the Inner Critic" that is a learning incubator for understanding and disengaging from the inner critic. Classes are always announced on my Facebook page.
- I and other Diamond Approach teachers work with students in person and by Skype. See www.diamondapproach.org/ teacher for a list of teachers.

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