

# Reflections

## A Conversation with Fritz Smith on Zero Balancing

WITH DAVID LAUTERSTEIN AND FRITZ SMITH

**T**he founder of Zero Balancing, Dr. Fritz Smith, is celebrating his 80th birthday this year. An osteopath since 1960 and one of the earliest Rolfers, Smith continues to teach Zero Balancing around the world and is far from finished when it comes to exploring the human body and mind. I had a chance to speak with Fritz recently about his work and life. I hope practitioners from every modality, and from every level of experience, can find value in his insights.

DAVID LAUTERSTEIN: How did your work get the name Zero Balancing?

FRITZ SMITH: For a while, people called it “Fritzing,” which I did not want. Many systems, like Rolfing and Feldenkrais, were named after founders—for me that didn’t feel appropriate. We actually spent a few years searching for a name. Then a client of mine, Rosemary Feitis, who was Ida Rolf’s secretary, came up off the table and said, “I feel so good, I feel balanced. I feel like I’m zero balanced.” When I heard that, I took it. The name came from her experience. Later we realized that it had an esoteric side in terms of expanded states of consciousness and bringing the person to the zero point of physical and psycho-spiritual balance.

DL: When you think back to its origins, what do you think contributed to the beginnings of Zero Balancing?

FS: My dad was a very skilled chiropractor who practiced until his 90s. I think much of what I know comes subconsciously from the way I was handled in my early years. I was never physically punished in any way. My dad conveyed with his hands how to touch in a way that is quite pure.

Also, I used to work with him in the garden or in the garage doing projects. I had a tendency to show him a better, easier way to do things that aimed at clarity and simplicity, rather than complexity. That sort of underlying thinking influenced me when I began to teach—wanting to simplify and get to the essence of things.

DL: Who were your most influential teachers?

FS: First, my dad. The next person who comes to mind is J.R. Worsley, the great English acupuncturist and teacher. I

studied with him in England beginning in 1970 and received my master’s in acupuncture from his College of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture. I learned how to be a good teacher from him. He was a master teacher. I enjoyed him as a man who dedicated his energy to his work, so that his lessons became mine. We were very good friends. Of course, I’ve been very influenced by the whole realm of Chinese philosophy and the five elements.

DL: Anyone else?

FS: My grandfather taught me billiards when I was in my early teens, and I began to understand the energy of movement and impact and ways it could be influenced. I began to learn to see energy and its patterns.

I studied with Ida Rolf in 1971 and of course she comes to mind. Jack Schwartz, who was a metaphysician in Santa Cruz, was also an early teacher of mine. I lived and practiced near the Esalen Institute, so I studied there with many different people, none of whom became primary teachers, but I listened and learned from each of them, particularly the body-centered psychotherapists. Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos come to mind.

DL: How would you explain Zero Balancing?

FS: The answer to that depends on how much time I have to talk with the person and the depth of their understanding of bodywork, energy, and so on. The simplest way is to define it. It’s a hands-on, body-mind system of therapy that integrates body structure and body energy. From the energy standpoint, Zero Balancing’s main, but not exclusive focus, is on the deepest energy in the body that flows through the skeletal system. From the structural standpoint, our focus is on the overall function and structure of the bones, foundation-level joints,



Along with Ida Rolf, Fritz Smith (shown here in 1970) credits his father and grandfather as his early teachers.

and soft tissues that connect, balance, and support our basic structure.

DL: When you talk about energy and Zero Balancing, what exactly are you referring to?

FS: One main departure from my medical training and thinking is that we’ve come to understand that energy is consciousness, that vibration holds information, and that energy is a basic building block of our bodies. It is real, it does exist, it is palpable in the body, and it can be influenced through touch. In a basic definition of energy, I consider the wave, and hence vibration, to be synonymous. Vibration exists throughout the body in many forms and levels. Some examples include the actual cellular vibration and the vibration of the cellular components, the meridian system of acupuncture, and the organized fields of vibration that permeate the body and extend beyond its borders as the auric field.

Zero Balancing can affect all levels of vibration, but its primary focus deals with the deep currents of energy

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“Zero Balancing helps create a clearer relationship between energy and structure and an enhanced opportunity for optimal function by using clearer, stronger fields of energy created through touch.”

Fritz Smith, founder, Zero Balancing

that flow through the skeletal system and the fields that permeate the bones and the soft tissues of the body.

DL: So how does Zero Balancing look at the relationship of energy and structure?

FS: Energy moves throughout the body and somewhere it meets and relates to structure. I really like to talk about sailboats—where the boat's sail is the structure and the wind is the energy. Somewhere the wind meets the sail. If a person's body structure and energy are not well tacked into each other, they are not interfacing optimally and the person is, to some extent, compromised in function. Zero Balancing helps create a clearer relationship between energy and structure and an enhanced opportunity for optimal function by using clearer, stronger fields of energy created through touch.



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In the early 1970s, Smith took his work to China. Shown here working on a Chinese doctor, Smith has been an osteopath since 1960.

DL: What then are some of the unique benefits of Zero Balancing?

FS: It is our belief and experience that there is tissue-held memory. As you bring in a clearer, stronger field of energy through tissue, you can alter or release the tissue-held vibration from the body. You release held memory, you release old trauma. Freed from these tensions of past history, the client is less programmed or influenced by these events in the here and now. A person becomes more congruent with the moment.

Memory can be held in any tissue or organ. One of the unique features of Zero Balancing is that we focus on memory and holding patterns within bone. Information held in bone represents our earliest conditioning and teaching. Releasing nonfunctional information from this level can be life-changing.

DL: How exactly does Zero Balancing create these clearer, stronger energy fields?

FS: Our working tool is the fulcrum. A fulcrum is a specific field of tension that we create in our client's body through touch. Any held field could act as a fulcrum regardless of whether we create it through lifting, bending, twisting, compressing, pulling, sliding, and so on. If this held-tension field is clearer and stronger than the old, less organized tension pattern, it overrides, releases, or alters the old tension. A fulcrum acts as a catalyst to promote change.

DL: In what ways can you work with fields of energy?

FS: When I view an energy field in my mind's eye, I see an expanse of vibratory movement. A number of years ago, I asked myself the question of whether we could work within heightened vibratory fields and what would happen. I thought of water being brought to boil and how much faster contents cooked. I devised fulcrums to heighten the intensity of the vibration in the body and found that change did happen faster and that old traumas and memories

that seemed resistant to the standard fulcrum, altered in the heightened environment. At the same time, I was aware of the body signals reflecting the heightened vibration and used them to avoid heightening the vibration too much. This led to creating an advanced Zero Balancing class, *Alchemy of Touch*, where I teach this material.

Several years later after having worked with Deepak Chopra and his material, I became fascinated with his idea of "the gap" and the implications of this experience. The gap represented an area of total potential, free of time, space, and information. I explored working with fulcrums and have created several that seem to me to take a person into the gap space, wherein experiences of oneness occur. This led to the creation of an advanced class, *The Geometry of Healing*.

DL: How does Zero Balancing facilitate expanded states?

FS: In my books *Inner Bridges* and *Alchemy of Touch*, I discuss in detail different ways of using touch to facilitate expanded states. Suffice it to say, here we can use touch to override or interfere with the on-off mechanism of neuro-transmission, which leads to altered or expanded states of consciousness.

What currently intrigues me is left-right brain functioning. Do you know the presentations of Jill Bolte-Taylor, the scientist who had a stroke, lost much of her left-brain function, and documented her experience? In reading some of her experiences, what struck me was the similarity of these with the expanded states in Zero Balancing. In particular, the feelings of oneness, belonging, unity and lack of duality, peace, expanded boundaries, extending out into space; and of normal experience disappearing. These are very commonly reported, almost predictably, during and/or following Zero Balancing sessions. I am wondering whether our



fulcrums may be enhancing the right-brain function of our clients, while damping the left-brain. I am curious what brain wave studies would show.

DL: What are some of the physical benefits of Zero Balancing?

FS: Some claim that stress is related to 90 percent of people's symptoms. Zero Balancing helps release this tension of stress held in the body. Therefore, symptoms of stress such as backaches, headaches, thoracic outlet syndrome, upset stomach, and musculo-skeletal tensions held anywhere in the body can be improved through Zero Balancing.

Almost more important is Zero Balancing's effect on stress in the long run. Fulcrums organize and clarify the energy fields in the body so that vibration can flow and move through tissue in a less obstructive manner. This means that a person can be in a stressful environment and be less affected by it. Not only can Zero Balancing relieve symptoms of stress, but it also can be preventative medicine against its effects.

DL: How is Zero Balancing different from other therapies which address structure or energy, such as Rolfing or acupuncture?

FS: There are a number of theoretical and practical differences among various therapies. Even though we are all working with the same body, as it were, our focus is different. For instance, Rolfing focuses on the fascia and the effects of gravity; acupuncture [focuses] on body chi and its relationship to meridian flow, the five elements, and to heat and cold; reiki [focuses] on cosmic energy flowing through the body; medicine [focuses] on symptomatology; and Zero Balancing [focuses] on the relationship of energy to structure. Interestingly, there are many problems that will respond favorably to any of these therapies; there are others that would



Smith (left) says he learned to be a good teacher from his mentor J.R. Worsley.

especially benefit from one much more than from another. It is an individual matter. No one therapy can address all problems. A client may need to search to find what works best for them.

DL: And how does Zero Balancing differ from medical therapy?

FS: Zero Balancing is not medical therapy; it is complementary to medicine and looks at the body from different perspectives. Zero Balancing is a non-diagnostic system of body-mind therapy that focuses on exploring and amplifying health, not on pathology or symptomatology, but rather on energy and its relationship to structure, and balance within the body-mind. We're looking at the person as a whole being and not as a group of symptoms. Health is viewed as optimum function rather than lack of symptoms. This allows us great freedom. It allows us to work toward actualization of the person—to work toward their future, not just solving their present or past problems.

I am a doctor and still have strong positive relationships with medicine. I have personally benefited from the wonders and miracles of medicine. It is because medicine is so

effective in dealing with illness that it allows the alternative healthcare systems to explore wellness and be as helpful as they are. In the best of all worlds, I believe that a person benefits by having a foot in both the medical and alternative camps.

DL: How does one learn to feel the energy in the body?

FS: First, one needs to have a definition of energy. What is it? What am I looking for? What helped me the most was to find words that meant or were manifestations of energy—such words as tension, vibration, pressure, looseness, laxity, softness. As you palpate a person's tissues or actually palpate or explore any animate or inanimate object in nature, describe your findings to yourself as a manifestation of energy. Little by little, a series of images, experiences, and understandings occur so that energy becomes less mysterious and has tangibility for you.

In Zero Balancing, we emphasize the idea of touching energy and structure simultaneously and consciously. If we say tension is a manifestation of held energy in the tissues, then when you feel tension, it opens the door to your palpatory understanding of energy. I've experienced some people who do bodywork, and when they touch me, they touch my structure, but really don't touch my energy. I feel like I've been touched but not really engaged.

As an acupuncturist, sometimes I would insert a needle and I know I'm in tissue, but find there is no resistance, no interaction with the needle. I'm not touching energy. When I feel the tension at the end of the needle, I know I've engaged the energy body and that the session will most likely be successful.

DL: How does doing Zero Balancing affect the practitioner?



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FS: One thing we have noticed over the years is that people seem to get healthier from performing Zero Balancing. When the practitioner puts in a fulcrum and holds it stationary for some seconds, part of the practitioner's body-mind goes into a state of stillness or quiet because they are holding that point in stillness. A still, quiet body-mind is one goal of meditation. In a sense, the Zero Balancing practitioner is going in and out of a meditative state many times every session. Over time, the Zero Balancer's mind is quieter, their fields become clearer and more harmonic, and they become more internally peaceful. They become healthier.

They're also healthier because they begin to experience the world from an alternative energetic perspective that

allows a more intimate connection with nature. We can all easily feel the energy of the wind as it blows. And as energy becomes more real, we can also feel the energy of a grove of trees or see the energy around a flying bird. Our relationship with nature becomes continually deeper and more personal because we begin to appreciate its energy, not just its physical form. This enriches everything.

DL: Who can practice Zero Balancing and how many of you are there currently?

FS: Zero Balancing is an advanced studies program for the healthcare practitioner. Up until this time, people practice Zero Balancing under some umbrella license or certificate from another of the healing arts. We have

taught people from most of the healing arts, including physiotherapists, massage therapists and bodyworkers of all sorts, psychologists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, osteopaths, and medical doctors to mention some examples. Zero Balancing has grown in a very natural way. We've never had a five-year goal; we've never pushed ourselves through advertising. The world is kind of discovering us. Zero Balancing has been around since the early 1970s. There are now more than 500 practitioners worldwide, with about another 500 actively engaged in the certification process. Most are in the United States and England, but there are certified Zero Balancers in Canada, Mexico, Switzerland, Spain, Morocco, Belgium, Italy, New Zealand, and

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DL: You know that massage is often defined narrowly as soft-tissue manipulation. We know that Zero Balancing works with the whole person and affects their soft tissues, their bones, their mind, and spirit. So how would you answer people who want to know how Zero Balancing relates to the various other systems?

FS: We overlap with all the other massage and bodywork systems while retaining our clarity of focus of relating energy to structure. We can give continuing education credits to massage therapists because we're dealing with the musculo-skeletal system. We can give continuing education credits to acupuncturists because we're dealing with energy. We can give continuing education credits to physiotherapists because we also deal with joints in the body. We can give continuing education credits to psychologists because it's mind-body therapy. So we have a foot in a lot of different camps and I wouldn't define us in a narrow sense. We're a body-mind system of therapy.

DL: What are some of the lessons you would say Zero Balancing has for massage therapists?

FS: I would say some massage practitioners need to be aware that there is an energy body as well as a physical body, and to engage both in their massage strokes. I'd also recommend practitioners add pauses into their sessions. When you're getting a massage, it feels wonderful. Yet, sometimes it can heighten the experience to stop for a short moment and let the client experience themselves. The pause in therapy can be a very important working tool.

Also, a massage can be more meaningful if the client articulates what they'd like to accomplish from

**“Massage practitioners need to be aware that there is an energy body as well as a physical body, and to engage both in their massage strokes.”**

Fritz Smith

the session, or what they'd like to see happen, or what they'd like to release. When one or more intentions are framed before a session, the desired result is much more likely to happen. So, rather than just having a general massage, the frame gives it an intentionality, a higher purpose. This changes the energetic field in which the massage is given and will make it even more beneficial.

DL: Many massage therapists are hard workers and in the busyness of their day, it can turn more into difficult than pleasurable work. What things do you think of that can sustain inspiration?

FS: I think in a massage or bodywork session, it is useful for the therapist to clearly define a beginning, middle, and end to the session. At the end of

the massage, take a moment to feel empowered from what you have done. Feel uplifted because you've connected with another person in a meaningful, helpful way; experience internally the success and fulfillment of what you've done. Then when you start the next massage, you'll be starting from a higher point, not a lower one.

Most importantly, follow your heart. Follow your heart.

DL: How would you describe a healthy person?

FS: A healthy person is basically happy, and is functional, and is loving. Physical health is free of aches and pain but is also radiant from within. Inner health is what's so important—the inner attitudinal health, the inner view of the world, these things are where health lies. The Dalai Lama says our natural state is to be happy, and I think as we approach our naturalness and our happiness emerges, we know we're moving in the right direction.

DL: Are you a happy man?

FS: I am a happy man, thank you very much. Thanks for asking. **m&b**

**6** *David Lauterstein is an international teacher of Zero Balancing and deep massage, cofounder of Lauterstein-Conway Massage School in Austin, Texas, and author of Putting the Soul Back in the Body and "What is Zero Balancing?" For more information, contact him at [DavidL@TLCschool.com](mailto:DavidL@TLCschool.com) or visit [www.TLCschool.com](http://www.TLCschool.com).*

**6** *Dr. Fritz Smith, the founder of Zero Balancing, has been an osteopath since 1960, was one of the first generation of Rolfers, and also has a master's degree in acupuncture. Smith continues a busy teaching schedule around the world. He is the author of Inner Bridges: A Guide to Energy Movement and Body Structure and The Alchemy of Touch: Moving Towards Mastery Through the Lens of Zero Balancing.*