

Healing Through ROSEN METHOD BODYWORK

by Paula McGuire

Rosen Method bodywork is a process of self-awakening which can lead to healing and life transformation. It involves non-intrusive touch with accompanying verbal interaction between practitioner and client. This combination creates a space in which a client can safely release physical tension as well as any emotion that may be held underneath.

The purpose of Rosen work is to help people live more fully in the present. Anything that is blocking or restricting vitality can come up for healing during a session. For example, incomplete experiences, from ungrieved losses to uncelebrated joys, may have made their presence felt through stiff muscles, fatigue, chronic aches and pains, illness, or perhaps a vague sense that life is not all it could be. Rosen work makes a space for those issues to be completed so people can experience their full vitality.

The aim of the work is to help people live with boundaries rather than walls, to live as autonomous beings in relationship, no longer needing either isolation or merging. It helps people live in the world by giving them a reference point—their *own truth*. A full range of feelings arises from this place of self-awareness and self-trust, along with the capacity for genuine intimacy, integrity, love and compassion.

Rosen Method bodywork grew out of the experience of Marion Rosen, who has a background in physical therapy and fifty years of practice in healing touch. She noticed that when people talked about their injuries, their memories and their lives, they healed more quickly, and they did not have recurring problems.

How Can Rosen Method Help?

People come to bodywork when they want greater access to what they hold in their bodies.

Rosen work is appropriate for those who want to deepen their inner knowing. It is helpful for those who experience alienation from their bodies and their life experiences. It has also benefited those with chronic aches and pains such as back pain or migraine headaches, as well as chronic illnesses such as asthma and chronic fatigue, which involve an emotional component.

Rosen Method bodywork can also be supportive for those with eating disorders, because it provides a way for the body to be nurtured other than with food. And it tends to help one's body image become less distorted, as one gains a sense of boundaries, of where one stops and where others start.

The work is incredibly healing for survivors of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Abuse leaves an imprint on the body which can be altered, eased and even erased through healing touch. The gentleness of the Rosen Method approach allows memories of trauma to emerge in a safe space. It helps survivors become more able to track the dissociation they often experience—to find out what causes them to leave the present moment, and what helps them come back to themselves. Rosen Method opens avenues for renewed self-trust.

Generally, it is not recommended that anyone begin bodywork in the midst of an emotional crisis, such as the loss of a family member, when they are struggling to hold themselves together. The work can dismantle boundaries and protection. However, on-going clients may benefit from having sessions when they are in crisis, if the focus of the work is shifted to provide soothing support and to maintain the healing connection with the practitioner.

In Rosen Method bodywork the practitioner provides verbal support, validation and encouragement while meeting the holding or muscle tension with gentle touch. The practitioner follows the path of the breath in the body. Where there is breath, or movement, there is life and vitality.

Where there is no breath, there is generally little awareness of that area, except perhaps an awareness of pain. In these areas of no breath, the practitioner works to help the client become aware of what is being held. Sometimes the awareness of a particular pattern is enough to allow its release. Other times, the awareness opens a new way of being with what has been denied. Very often the client senses that there could be a different way of being in the body—a way of experiencing more freedom.

Because feelings arise in the body, restricting movement of a body part can restrict feelings in that part. Let yourself feel what it is like when you are sad and want to cry but cannot or will not. You may tighten your face, jaw, neck, chest, or all of these. If you hold these areas tight long enough, your body may continue holding even though you're not aware of it. You've not only suppressed your tears, you've suppressed your feeling of sadness. Then if something happens to release those muscles, you may begin to weep and recall what caused the sadness. Allowing movement releases feelings and the memories associated with them.

And it is even more complex than that, because all the parts of our bodies are interconnected. Holding even one muscle tight restricts the vitality in the entire body. Try tightening one finger, one toe, or one eyebrow. Hold the muscle tight and notice what else happens in your body. Can you feel that you tighten other places as well? To be able to hold one finger tight, for example, you end up tightening your hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, and stomach, and your breathing becomes shallower. You hold your breath just to keep the muscles in one finger tight. And holding your breath restricts movement in all your muscles. If you hold your finger or toe tight long enough, you will notice that all sensation leaves the area—it grows numb. Now let it start to relax. It may be uncomfortable because your finger or toe has temporarily forgotten how to relax. It cannot move instantly and comfortably into a place of ease. It feels frozen in the tight position, yet that is not comfortable either. The degree of discomfort in letting go depends on how long and how strongly the tightness was held.

When there is no holding, the breath comes in like a wave and flows through the entire body. When any muscles are held, the fullness of the

breath is inhibited and the body is deprived of what it needs for optimum health. When this occurs, all feelings, pleasant and unpleasant, are dampened. You cannot restrict sadness, for example, without also limiting your capacity for joy, hope and love.

- We are shaped by our experiences. Literally. Our bodies take on postures that reflect our attitudes in life. Often our postures say what we cannot let our words speak. Our postures become the structures in which we live, and over time we come to believe that these structures are who we are. By challenging these postures, our fixed ideas, attitudes and beliefs are challenged also. We become less identified with the things that happen to us and others' reflections of who we are. We come to know that *how* we are is not *who* we are.

People do not come to this work to be fixed. They are already whole. But perhaps they don't see or experience themselves that way because they have forgotten. Perhaps no one has ever reflected their wholeness back to them. It's the practitioner's job to facilitate the seeing, experiencing and releasing that allows each person to experience her or himself as whole. It's our natural impulse to move toward wholeness and healing.

Healing Stories

I do not believe every physical pain has to have an emotional underpinning. Sometimes someone hurts and it's purely a body experience. But providing some release of the physical pain will probably also provide a greater sense of overall well-being.

I also do not believe that certain emotions reside only in certain areas. It's my experience that any area of the body may hold and express any feeling. For example, I was working with someone whose hand hurt. I wondered if she was angry, since her fist was clenched. I asked her what her hand was telling her. She responded, "It's sad. That feels stupid. How can a hand feel sad?" When I asked her to stay with it a little longer and see what her hand was sad about, she realized that her hand was holding the grief of her brother's death nine years earlier. Her hand was very literally "holding onto" her grief and the memory of her brother. She was afraid that if she let go of her

grief, she would let go of the connection to her brother. She cried as she began to feel the sadness, and her hand stopped hurting. She is now exploring other ways to hold her brother's memory and honor his importance in her life.

My client's statement, "That feels stupid," was a crucial key for me. I listen for those remarks: "This is dumb" or "This doesn't make sense." These statements often cover vulnerable places and distract from their importance. When I encourage clients to go deeper, these comments can become preludes to important discoveries.

Sometimes the feelings or statements that a client makes arise spontaneously, with no prompting on my part. Once I was working on the diaphragm of a man who had grown up in an abusive home. In anticipation of further hurt, he held back from life, and often held his breath. As he relaxed during the session, he shouted, "I'm breathing now and no one is ever going to stop me again!" With that awakening, he began to participate in his work and his relationships more fully.

Memories may arise during bodywork. As chronic muscular tension is released, memories, images, feelings, physical sensations that have been contained can also be released. Clients may feel uncomfortable, angry, sad, confined, enraged, terrified. They may also feel joyful, delighted and happy. The allowing in and experiencing of suppressed feelings and forgotten events is the path to their healing.

Rosen Method bodywork is based on trust—trust in the basic wisdom and knowledge that each individual carries. We are bigger than what has happened to us. We are bigger than our memories or our feelings. But when things happen that are too much for us to bear, we shut our memories and feelings down. We are basically intrinsically healthy, holy organisms with incredible ability to endure, to survive and to heal. We never throw anything away—all things not fully experienced lodge in our bodies, our minds, our psyches, waiting for the time when we are strong enough and have enough support to handle them.

Several years ago, when I had just started receiving bodywork, the practitioner commented on how I was protecting a particular area of my body. And I, wanting to be a good client and convinced that all protection was bad and had to be destroyed on the spot, asked her what was I sup-

posed to do about that. "Be with it" was her ever-so-gentle reply. My response to that comment was not so gentle. It started at my toes, rolled up my feet, legs, hips, torso, throat and came to my mouth where I forced it to stop. NO! I wanted to yell at her. NO! NO! NO! I will do anything but that! I will do anything but be with it. I was surprised at the strength of my reaction, surprised and amused at my great resistance to being with what was in my body. I wanted to be at the next place, done with this. Looking back, I can see that that session was an important turning point for me.

So now I have people who come into my office and say, "I want to be more open." And I listen. I welcome them to the exploration of their lives. I remember my own session and feel that I too want to be more open. And I know that life is even more than that. It's about being open when being open is appropriate and being closed when that is appropriate, and not being stuck in either position. It's about knowing ourselves and our limits and knowing what is right for us at any given time. Our bodies show us how to do this. Just as our lungs cannot always be full, they cannot always be empty. It is the filling and the emptying that is the breath, that gives us life. So too, it is the opening and the closing that give us vitality and let us express who we are. In a word, it's about freedom.

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The training to become a Rosen Method practitioner is generally three to four years, two years of class and practicum, followed by an internship. Training is offered in Berkeley, New Mexico, the Northeast, Europe and Russia. There will be a lecture-demonstration of Rosen Method bodywork on Friday, November 3 and an introductory weekend training on Saturday and Sunday, November 4 and 5. For more information see the ad under Schools and Career Trainings, or contact the Berkeley Center at (510) 845-6606. To find a Rosen Method practitioner, see the ads under Bodywork.