

The Body Tells the Truth

Marion Rosen and Bodywork: An Interview

By Joseph Roberts

"Common Ground Magazine" March 1998 Reprinted with permission.

For forty years Marion Rosen has practiced and developed a bodywork system. Her devotion to letting people experience their inner emotions through the deep relaxation of their muscles can be seen in her hands. She has literally worn her fingerprints away.

Her method begins with the body but also engages the mind. As her subjects relax, Rosen tells them what she sees in their muscles. For many of the people she treats the gentle relaxation of the body lets the emotion and the pain float to the surface. Her patients speak and, sometimes, they cry.

Marion Rosen understands the body as a repository for all the person's experiences, conscious and unconscious; using a special kind of touch, unique to the Rosen Method, as well as simple, direct communication, Rosen and her students look to release the body's truths.

Joseph Roberts spoke with the 84 year old Rosen recently. German, by birth, Rosen spoke movingly of the truths the body has to tell.

JR: How did you first start doing this work?

MR: When I was twenty-two years old I was in Germany attending classes with a woman who was doing massage breathing in connection with a Jungian psychiatrist who was treating people. They found that when people had bodywork accompanying their treatment it was easier for them to access feelings and their treatments were shorter. Thirty years later, a young woman in America asked me about that work and if I could teach it to her. During my teaching, very exciting things began to happen with the people we treated. This is really how the whole method developed. We watched what happened to people when we treated them. We got quite a lot of information about what is happening when you treat people, when you let them be relaxed in a way that you don't intrude: it allows them to get in touch with their feelings. Often we accessed their unconscious where they get in touch with experiences, thoughts and feelings they had totally forgotten about. All of a sudden these experiences were available to them again. With that great changes would take place in people.

JR: What is the theoretical basis of your work?

MR. The theoretical basis is that the body doesn't lie. The body retains thoughts, experiences what really happened. It doesn't change it in any way. So some times when we are asked a question and we answer with our thinking we can influence our thinking, but the breath especially cannot be influenced. Something very spontaneous occurs which we can feel with our hands. We can gain access to experiences and feelings that otherwise are not accessible.

JR: Describe how you see the body when you work on someone.

MR. When I look at a body I get the picture of how this body would look if it was showing itself in the best working order and then I look and see what has happened, how it has deviated from its perfection. I believe there have been some experiences that could not be handled at the time we experienced them, and so we put them in our unconscious with the help of muscles. The muscles suppress the feelings or the knowledge about what has happened to us, and, as a consequence, the muscles working on that experience appear different in the body.

JR: How does movement relate to the Rosen Method?

MR. Movement shows where a person is not free. For example a child usually moves very freely. But if a child grows up with experiences that are frightening or hurtful or if they have feelings that were

suppressed, things that could not be said that want to be expressed, then all kinds of muscles will constantly hold and form a barrier to free movement. So when we see a person move we see where they allow themselves to move freely or where they don't allow themselves to move.

JR: *In this process, what does the client and the practitioner experience when these emotions surface?*

MR. The practitioner feels the breath increase, feels or sees the color in the face change and sees a movement – a rapid eye movement – sometimes hears a sound in people's breathing. What the client feels is really the feeling – the authentic feelings – that they felt at the time when a trauma or difficulty happened. It is not something they think about but something they really feel.

JR: *How does this connection between body and consciousness happen?*

MR. Well when you relax and you allow these feelings to come up, the body feels differently because it is not under pressure and the feelings, whatever they are, can be expressed through crying or laughing or saying it. Whatever is all right for the person to have happen or whatever just will happen. I don't think they think about it. They cry because they need to cry, when they bury it under there, they will cry. And they will cry for a while or they will be just talking for a while about how painful it is. But they go through their experience very, very quickly. And after they have gone through it very soon they feel a great relief. Like a pressure cooker, let off some steam. When it comes out there is no more whistling. And it is similar to when we work on somebody who is getting in touch with an experience that has been suppressed for a long time.

JR. *Could you recall an actual story of this awareness coming into consciousness, with one of the people you worked with.*

MR. I treated a psychiatrist for a very short time, maybe just twenty-five minutes. He had a large protruding stomach, which was caused by a very tight diaphragm. As I worked on him he told me his father had died when he was nine years old. He had worked on this for seven years in analysis while he was in training. But while I was working on him he started to cry and said he never felt how it was for him as a nine year old boy to be told that "now you are the head of the family, now you have to look after your mother and your small brother and sister." And then I said, "But I am only nine years old. I cannot do that I can never be like my father. I can never do that." In his real life he was very successful but he always felt he was never good enough. But after his experience of feeling how it was, not by knowing, but just by feeling it, he felt very, very different. He felt very good. And when he got up he was very surprised to see that his stomach, his protruding stomach, had disappeared. His diaphragm had relaxed and instead of pushing the stomach out it now allowed the stomach to go into its original position so the diaphragm could move up and down the way it's supposed to. He said he just could not believe that within twenty minutes he could access his feelings while it took seven years of working on it and never really feeling the way he had felt as a nine year old.

JR: *Explain how talking works in the Rosen Method.*

MR. As I touch the person I will state what I feel – which place in the body is very tight – which does not move and where the breath does not move into because when the muscles are tight there is no movement of the breath there. So we can feel it with our hands and see it with our eyes. And then there is a lot of listening that I do. If people will say something or look differently. But I do not ask many questions.

JR: *What do you say?*

MR. I say more statements. For instance I say there is a lot of tightness between the shoulder blades and that means that the muscles that move the shoulder blades hold them in place so if you want to reach out when you try to do something there is always a barrier; the barrier to reaching out and the barrier to do what you really like to do.

Then I let that sit. And sometimes people will pick it up. So if it is important to them they will say something about it or sometimes they just, you know, they just start breathing in a much more – in a deeper way. It is noted by us that they have contacted some feelings. And sometimes we'll say "well

your breath is going to the shoulders now so it seems like we have touched something." I may say that or I may not say that, but that is how the dialogue would be: stating changes, stating the location of the holding, that there is a holding around the legs – then hold the legs in place. It keeps the leg to really step out – take big steps, hold them in ...

JR: *When pain and anger come up in a Rosen session, what do you do?*

MR. It is just allowed to be there. Pain sometimes happens when a muscle releases that has been tight for a long time. Because when it is tight a long time it seems numb, as if it was not alive any more. When it becomes alive again it first seems to hurt. But when you are aware of the holding and of your own emotional pain that's when the pain will leave.

JR: *How does fatigue and tiredness develop?*

MR. Fatigue has a lot to do with tension because tension is work. You constantly are working your muscles. If you have many areas in your body where you have to do that it takes away your energy. But when you relax you don't have to hold. You do not spend energy working against yourself. Normally the body alternates between relaxing and tensing, tensing and relaxing is. When that happens, the body does not get tired. But on the other hand if you tense and tense and tense and tense and tense and tense without moments of letting go this is where tiredness comes from.

JR: *If people are not breathing properly what happens?*

MR. It creates a lot of problems such as a shortage of oxygen, as a holding – you know in parts of the body – if the diaphragm is not allowed to do its work it can not properly massage the inside of the trunk many thousand times a day. So correct breathing is really a factor in keeping the body fit. If we do not allow that to occur because of tensions, we do not get the benefits.

JR: *There are other breathing techniques such as yoga or meditation where the breath itself becomes a method to get back in touch with who one really is.*

MR. We think so too but we think that by allowing the automatic breath to fully function again that it is a much better way than thinking about how you breathe and what you are doing. We just help the body to relax and remove the barriers that make us not breathe right in the first place. You see we can think about breathing right but when we sleep or when we work and don't think about it, then we don't breathe as well. But if the barrier to holding and not breathing well is removed, then we breathe in a different and more auspicious way. It really helps the body to function well.

JR: *There have been times in my life where I have felt totally supported in an intimate loving relationship. When you talk about the Rosen Method it seems to be very close to that space where one is held and supported in a subtle totally accepting loving space.*

MR. Exactly. In a relationship of course we hope for that but very often when we have a lot of baggage around ourselves we do not – we are not able to fully give of ourselves nor are we fully able to receive what the other person gives us. That has a lot to do with being yourself, with not having to hide your feelings, with not having to hide your potential, with allowing yourself to be touched by another person and not having to be afraid.

JR: *What are your thoughts on acceptance and spirituality?*

MR. I feel it is a lot reflected by our breathing tool the diaphragm. For the diaphragm has to contract, you know, the inhalation phase and then when you breathe out it has to totally relax and let go. That only can happen, or it comes in conjunction with, trust being created. The person feels OK with themselves or with the practitioners or with the world. Then comes the next stage, which I think is the most important one, which is the stage of surrender. When you really feel it is quite all right, whatever happens. You can allow your breath to course through you. You can allow your body to be open. You give yourself up to what is and in that moment you give yourself up to something beyond yourself. Some people experience that as universe – the higher power - or as God, whatever they might call it. All people are really impacted by this process and contact something beyond. Some people say, "I feel so at

peace. I feel so good. I feel as nothing can hurt me any more." This is what happens in a body that is totally letting, when the letting go happens. And this, I feel, is our link to what we call spirituality.