

touching the innerlife

Actress **Annabelle Apsion** has co-founded the UK's first training school in the Rosen Method. She talks to **Jane Turney** about this powerful psychospiritual bodywork.



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AFTA-nominated actress Annabelle Apsion has explored many characters in a wide-ranging and successful career that has ranged from TV roles in *Coronation Street*, *Soldier Soldier* and *Shameless* to films such as *From Hell* with Johnny

Depp to classical theatre with the RSC and the National.

Her interest in character motivation and psychology has taken on a deeper dimension in recent years with a profound inner journey through the Rosen Method of bodywork – resulting in her co-founding the UK's first training school in this gentle 'listening touch' therapy.

Annabelle's first taste of Rosen on an introductory workshop was a revelation: 'I had the most amazing experience which was like feeling my soul through touch and feeling it in every atom of my body. It gave me a very clear connection as to what was going on

for me in my life.

'And I also thought it was amazing because of the deep love I felt for the people I worked on. You feel a profound connection, it is a pure way of relating to another human being that is not based on ego, where there is no judgement, no projection, no trying to fix, change or mend, just a real being with that person.'

That initial experience propelled Annabelle on a journey following Marion Rosen, the method's founder, around Europe and America, participating in a series of week-long intensive courses. The training was as much about her own personal and spiritual development, as it was about learning a technique.

'There is a lovely quote in Marion's book: "Through listening to the truth of the body, it is possible to discover what we can do, who we can be, what we can experience, how we can love," says Annabelle. 'And I certainly think with Rosen it is like I recognise myself at a very deep level and I certainly felt seen and heard in a way that I had never felt seen or heard before – and therefore I heard myself.'

Marion, now an 'extraordinary, ego-less' 92-year-old, still travels the world teaching her method. Her original training was with pioneers in breathwork, bodywork and psychoanalysis in Germany in the 1930s. Forced to flee from the Nazis, she then studied physiotherapy in Sweden and America, before going into private practice. Her therapy came out of the skills learned in her different trainings as well as her observations of the connection between breath, the emotions and physical health.

'People started being curious about what she was doing as some people recovered from chronic, long term pain who had not responded to any other form of treatment,' says Annabelle. 'And there was something about the way she met people, not only with her hands, but with her presence, that meant they felt listened to and seen. Often they would recover



from illnesses and pain and also they would feel happier and have more joy and clarity. Even though they had gone to her for a physical complaint, their lives would often change in very unexpected directions.'

Rosen is based on the premise that we limit our natural breath, movement and expression through 'holding back', 'holding in' and 'holding down' feelings, thoughts and behaviours that are 'not acceptable'

to ourselves or others. This contraction changes our body shape and our posture as well as our relationship to everything in our life: we take up less space in our inner and outer worlds and our quality of life diminishes so we feel tired, have aches and pains and other unexplained symptoms.

The Rosen Method says it is possible for each of us to move more freely, to breathe more easily and to express our creativity, pain, joy and love more openly. In other words, to be more fully alive.

It combines elements of bodywork and psychotherapy, using touch to elicit information suppressed in the unconscious.

However, unlike most forms of bodywork, Rosen is not about manipulating or fixing the body.

'People who have masses and masses of bodywork all say "I have never been touched like that in my life. It feels so natural," says Annabelle. "We use what we call "listening touch". So we are not trying to fix the body or manipulate it or do anything to the body to change it, but what we are trying to do with the way we touch is help the person feel themselves.

'I had a client and I touched his face and he found it almost unbearably intimate, so there was a quality of that touch and how I was touching him which allowed him to contact his fear of intimacy. Having a safe space to experience his fear of intimacy may then have a powerful impact on his awareness of how he is leading his life.'

Rosen practitioners touch their clients with sensitive, open hands that meet muscle tension with equal pressure. This, together with supportive words, helps clients become

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aware of chronic tension – the physical holding patterns they (and all of us) use to keep emotional dilemmas locked in the subconscious. ‘Marion says where people have most of their tension is often where they are keeping their most precious jewels,’ says Annabelle. ‘So when somebody has a lot of tension in a certain place it is often where you can contact them at a very deep level. You might think that is a stuck type of place, but it is a place full of potential.’

The Rosen practitioner looks for subtle shifts in breathing patterns and muscle quality. These shifts are windows to the unconscious from which buried feelings and memories can emerge. Material may emerge subtly or very forcefully. Rosen practitioner Ingrid-Maria Nordgren, who has set up the Rosen Method Bodywork (GB) School with Annabelle, received her first Rosen session in Turkey and thought she was experiencing an earthquake until she realised it was her own body trembling violently.

‘I know people who have done loads and loads of therapy who can talk about it [their issue] forever, but it is when you come into the body that there is no getting away from it. It is very quick and immediate,’ says Annabelle. ‘How Marion got into this originally was supporting clients who were going through psychoanalysis to reduce the length of treatment. They found that by accessing deep states of relaxation you could go much more deeply much more quickly with the subconscious.’

Unlike psychotherapy, Rosen does not use interpretation when material comes up, nor does it seek to change the client. The emphasis is on providing a safe environment through the loving, focused presence of the practitioner to

help the client relax into themselves. This is when ‘healing’ happens as people open to experience their truth and the possibility of choice. Acknowledgement and integration of subconscious material often also releases the need to maintain physical symptoms such as migraines and back pain.

‘Marion said she is not so much interested in “healing” people as in knowing who they are and when they know themselves that is when the healing seems to occur,’ says Annabelle. ‘Having said that, there is the difference between healing and curing, so it might be that you are healed but you die. For example Marion worked with a psychoanalyst who was dying of cancer. In the last three weeks he spent in hospital, he wanted her to go every day and he said “when you touch me, I know what to say.” She found out what a huge impact her touching him had made, because he healed all his relationships with his family members. They all came to her for sessions after he died.’

Alongside touch, awareness of the breath is vital in Rosen: ‘Breath has a huge impact on the emotions and I think nearly every spiritual tradition has some kind of breath-linked exercise, whether it is mantra, exercises, intoning, singing or whatever – it works the diaphragm,’ says Annabelle. ‘When your diaphragm is fully released and you are breathing a natural, uninhibited breath, you often experience a quality of peace which feels like surrender into safe hands.’

‘With some people it is almost like they had to be so quiet and hidden in their lives that they didn’t dare to take a full breath. So when you help people become aware that they are almost hiding and peeping out on life, that can help them show themselves a bit more and allow



Marion Rosen

themselves to feel a bit more. I had a client who said she likes people more. She is showing herself more, so other people like her more, too. I thought that was a fantastic comment.’

The Rosen Method of Bodywork (GB) school was set up in 2004 and has grown quickly attracting bodyworkers wanting to expand their knowledge and skills, executive coaches who want to learn to relate to their clients more effectively and people just interested in their own personal and spiritual development. It includes a course on emotional anatomy and six week-long intensives, spaced four to six months apart (which can be taken on an ad hoc basis), giving time for trainees to integrate their learning into their own being and their way of life. ‘If you haven’t gone into your own “dark rooms”,’ says Annabelle, ‘you can’t be a Rosen practitioner as you can’t ask a client to go somewhere you are not prepared to go yourself.’

Although acting and Rosen might seem quite different activities, Annabelle says they fit together well: ‘Acting is about what makes people behave the way they do and this is about what makes us the way we are – and who are we really? So I think it is a very natural way of exploring who we are, and how we live and what makes us happy. The nice thing is that with television you might make a series and it is not shown for a year, whereas with Rosen you see the result normally immediately and so it is very rewarding.’

‘I feel very privileged to be doing this work. One person I gave a session to in a workshop said “I feel like I have been born, this is my birth” and that was very important for her. Another person said I would like to have Rosen when I am dying. I thought that was such a compliment, that sense of straddling two worlds.’

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more information

- For information on the training and receiving Rosen sessions, contact Rosen Method Bodywork GB, PO Box 304, Kemp House, 152-160 City Road, London EC1V 2NX. Tel 020 7060 0683; www.rosenmethod.co.uk
- Next introductory workshop: 28/29 January, next intensive: 4-11 March.

