

# **Commentary on Alan Fogel's Three States of Embodied Self-Awareness in Rosen Method Bodywork: Part 1: Practitioner Observation of their Clients; Part 2: Practitioner Observations of their Own Experiences; Part 3: Practitioner Post-Session Notes**

*(Rosen Method International Journal, Vol 13, Issue 2, 2020)*

Anette Kögler, M.A.

Rosen Method Bodywork Intern (Berkeley Center),  
Stress Reduction and Relaxation Coach, Restorative Yoga Teacher

E-mail: [sonnenblau2@gmail.com](mailto:sonnenblau2@gmail.com)

As a RM bodywork intern in the early stages of my internship I found Alan Fogel's article on the threefold Embodied Self-Awareness model a real treasure trove of information. I would like to share some reflections on what I noticed, physically, emotionally and cognitively, while reading the articles and why I think the materials are a wonderful and practical resource for the learning process of Rosen Method.

## **Types of ESA as tracking tool**

For me the most obvious application of the model is to use it as a tracking tool during sessions. Being familiar with the pendulation between the different states gives me more direction about what might be happening in the client's and my nervous system. It provides me with clues in a process where we mostly deal with what is yet-to-be-known. Knowledge of ESA states can be used directly by observing the client's body and words, and indirectly by using resonance to pick up signals in my own body and thoughts. I appreciate the many examples that have been extracted from the session notes which demonstrate the wide range of possibilities for specific states.

## **Arc of ESA states in longer term work**

While our states fluctuate frequently within a session, there is also the larger arc of the development of the nervous system over a longer time. The author describes the steps in the client's process as gradually moving from dysregulated to restorative ESA. Even though every client is different and there will be countless variations, the description of the stages gave me more clarity about the general process: helping clients to become aware of their current dysregulation, name it, learn to stay, feel and tolerate feelings and eventually discover the "true" and authentic feelings underneath. Using a process like this does set an agenda for the practitioner, but we do the work for a purpose. It's such an art to hold an intention lightly in the background (or in the heart) while working without expectation of how quickly the client moves along or "gets there". A fine line to walk, a dance that I am just starting to learn.

## Modulated ESA as pause and space of possibilities

While reading about the modulated state I felt a sense of relief and encouragement. It was eye-opening that most clients start out as dysregulated, and I realized that I have often expected my clients to jump to restorative states right away, thus expecting too much of them and of myself. Knowing about the modulated state in the middle actually gives both the client and me more space, like a pause, full of possibilities. There is pendulation happening in the client which creates the space to gradually move into a restorative direction, in their own time. And there is pendulation within myself, which creates space and time for learning the work. What a relief!

I enjoyed reading the text passage that talks about helping clients who are already mostly in modulated ESA to move into a more restorative state. Here the author points to the importance of developing body awareness, learning to tolerate dysregulated states and to employ resources for re-grounding and self-regulation in daily life. As a stress reduction trainer, I have helped people in modulated states to grow more resourced and resilient. A technique that might be useful at this particular stage is an active cultivation of self-compassion for our struggling parts, since in my experience true self-acceptance often naturally leads to relaxation.

### Cultivation of practitioner restorative ESA to work on client

I was surprised at how often my own system went into resonance with both the clients and the practitioners while reading the case studies. The clients' ups and downs clearly informed my own nervous system and I noticed my unease and hypervigilance, or sighs of relaxation while following along. I also noticed my Buddhist mind-training kick in over and over while reading about clients' struggles: the immediate reflex to breathe in their pain, hold it for them and show them that ultimately it might not be necessary.

Reading the article, I got inspired to explore the quality of my own thoughts during sessions. The author shows how the practitioners' thoughts can reflect the clients' fight, flight and freeze states. Recognizing these can help to meet dysregulated clients more easily and help them move into modulated and restorative states. Am I spacing out and not really wanting to meet the client? Do my thoughts form repetitive loops? Am I trying to figure out and fix the client? Or, additionally, are there words or images that arise spontaneously from deep within? I am wondering if "thoughts" in restorative states might be better described as "expressions of truth or inner knowing", since they are non-conceptual.

Much has already been written about how clients' feelings can be mirrored in the practitioners' body and mind and about the importance of relational somatic presence. In the present article the author emphasizes the importance of cultivating the practitioners' own restorative ESA as much as possible. If we are familiar with the signs of being in restorative states, like feelings of relaxation, connection, open-heartedness and ease, we can foster and embody them increasingly in ourselves. Not only will this lead to a sense of empowerment, but due to the power of resonance we can use our own capacity to stay in restorative ESA to "work on" our clients' nervous systems. During bodywork training, my teachers have often referred to words as our "third hand". Consciously training and employing our own nervous system to influence our clients' state is almost like having a "fourth hand!"

## Learning skills to increase practitioner ESA

The author lists four learning skills all of which I believe are crucial for students of RM: Learning to recognize the client's state of ESA, learning to recognize one's own state of ESA during everyday life, learning how one's own ESA is related to the client's ESA and learning to remain in one's own restorative ESA while working on clients (p.51). Included is a list of practical tips for practitioners to develop and deepen their own restorative capacities.

What has been most helpful for me in this regard is my longtime practice of Tibetan Yoga (Kum Nye), Tibetan meditation and Vipassana. Kum Nye consists of slow and sometimes quite intense movement exercises that are followed by long periods of sitting during which internal sensations are observed while keeping the senses wide open. Feeling sensations deeply and relaxing into them fosters interoception and leads to a state of relaxed whole-body awareness. I also find regular Vipassana meditation to be an excellent resource for developing restorative states because one learns to just observe body sensations without reactivity, allowing them to arise and pass away by themselves. In my experience this can lead to a relaxed and allowing state that can go beyond the physical body.

Tibetan Buddhism uses many techniques that can lead to restorative states, including visualization, chanting and tonglen meditation which loosens the rigid boundaries between "self" and "other" leading to a more open and inclusive space of being. I find that regular practice of any of these techniques increases awareness of one's states in daily life that will translate into being with clients, thus turning a session into an "awareness meditation-in-relationship".

## Sustained Restorative ESA

The focus on the cultivation of restorative ESA in both the client and the practitioner shows that Rosen work goes beyond a regular therapy session that merely aims at bringing a client back to effectively self-modulate. Both clients and practitioners can get in touch with a space that's greater and more inclusive than the self which can have a deeply spiritual quality.

In addition, the author mentions the possibility of fostering repeated shorter moments of restorative ESA into "sustained Restorative ESA as the entry point for a permanent and lasting change in one's being" (p.32). There are many accounts in Tibetan literature of meditators resting for sustained periods in a similar place that's effortless, non-conceptual, deeply relaxed but fully aware. An example is the meditation master Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, who relates "I still lose presence of mind in the moment of falling asleep. It lasts no more than a couple of seconds... Apart from that, this mind no longer gets distracted any time, day or night. The view is wide open and continuous and there is no parting from it" (Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, 2005). Personally, I feel that the topic of Sustained Restorative ESA deserves more research and exploration.

## Practitioner notes as resource

Finally, I feel grateful for the inclusion of the extensive practitioner notes. They are a wonderful resource for students because they include internal observations that are not usually voiced during demo sessions. Knowing about the practitioners' internal thoughts and feelings adds another level to the multi-faceted dialogue between practitioner and client and helps me understand better what happens inside the practitioner during a session.

Also, it was good to read that even very experienced practitioners doubt themselves about reaching the client and about staying with not-knowing. Knowing that we continue to self-regulate and work with our triggers as we become more seasoned practitioners puts my learning process in perspective and leaves me with a feeling of encouragement and possibility.

## Reference

Rinpoche, Tulku Ugyen. *Blazing Splendor. The Memoirs of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche*. Boudhanath: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2005.