

A CONVERSATION WITH MARION ROSEN AND GLORIA HESSELLUND:

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF ROSEN METHOD BODYWORK

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"As it is not proper to cure the eyes without
the head, nor the head with the body; so
neither is it proper to cure the body without the soul."

-- Socrates

Marion Rosen began her training in bodywork therapies in the 1930's in Munich, Germany, working with Lucy Heyer, who had trained in breath and relaxation work with Elsa Gindler, a respected innovator of body therapies. Although raised Christian, Marion's family was of Jewish origins; fortunately she was able to escape from Nazi Germany at the beginning of World War II. After a year in Sweden studying physical therapy, she was able to arrange a passage by train across Russia and then by ship to the United States. She settled in Berkeley, California; and then received a second license in physical therapy from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. She has been in private practice for fifty years.

While doing physical therapy, Marion observed that if clients talked with her about their life, they seemed to recover more quickly. She watched for the interconnections between the physical posture and the emotional state of the person, and learned how the body is often "making a statement" about how a person is feeling. She realized that it is important to address both aspects of the individual at the same time.

Mara: Marion, I've heard you say that it isn't necessary for us to talk about spirituality to people. Why is this?

Marion: The first thing about this is that it is something that has to come from the person's own experience. And when this happens, then it is valid, and we can talk about it. It has to come out of the person's experience and then you can take it further. But to say it from the outside, it's not something that means anything to anyone. It's like when they preach at you in church, and you don't get it...unless you come with the experience of God and listen from that place. Then you hear it. It's the same with our work.

Mara: Sometimes when you are working with people, they say they feel they are being touched by the hands of God.

Marion: That's what they say. And the nicest thing was when a

person who said that to me told me that she worked on a client a few days later and her client said the same thing to her. And that was really something, for all of a sudden it made her understand that this work is way beyond just her doing or me doing...there was something more coming through, when you surrender.

Mara: People sometimes feel this surrendering like a surrendering to God?

Marion: That's what I have experienced. Then of course, when you surrender, you have to surrender to something, you don't really surrender to yourself.

Gloria: This surrendering could be to God; or to that sense of connection to the larger whole; to something beyond self.

It means surrendering the feeling that it's all up to me, that I have to do it all. It means giving that over to something other than the self.

It means coming to a place of connectedness and peace, where whatever happens is okay. It means somehow knowing, no matter what may happen, at some deep level, I'll be okay.

It's knowing that I'm in the hands of God; knowing that I am a part of the universe.

Mara: I'm gradually beginning to understand what you mean by this letting go and trusting the universe to provide the strength or the insight or the possibilities that will be beneficial for me.

Gloria: That's an important part of Rosen Method, the trust; the trust that comes with surrender...

Marion: The trust is what comes first, actually. When you have the trust, then you can also surrender.

Gloria: My own experience has been that these come at the same time, hand-in-hand. It's an experience that can't be thought out. Surrender cannot be planned.

Marion: Nor can trust...

And that definitely has something to do with the movement of the diaphragm. When the diaphragm lets go, then that feeling of trust very often comes in. At that point worries, considerations and insecurities no longer matter; another space is opening up. The diaphragm swings and we are at peace with our aliveness.

Mara: How did you come to focus so much on the diaphragm and breathing in your bodywork?

Marion: It came from a very physical point. This other thing came as a secondary benefit, the spirituality experience.

I had asthma as a child and people told me to learn how to breathe, and so I had a lot of involvement with this. I learned

about the diaphragm and its movement and started looking at it in a different way than the books all talked about it. I saw that in the body, when the diaphragm would let go, then something would happen in a person.

I had an experience in Munich one time, when I was first learning to do body therapy work. The woman who was with me had an anxiety attack. As I worked on her diaphragm, it let go, it released, and her anxiety disappeared, and she felt strong, she felt okay, she felt at peace at that moment.

And from then on, there were many similar experiences that people had when this physical release happened in the diaphragm. There was very definitely a connection between the diaphragm and that particular state, that I could see in the expression in their faces. And they would say, "I'm at peace." One person said, "I didn't know something like this was available." But what really, really got to me was in the first Teachers Training. When people were asked, "What did you get from this training?", they talked about the diaphragm and how it moved; that they felt a release, they felt happiness. And they all said they felt a connection to God. Irrespective of what religion they were (professing to), or if they were atheists, (like some of them were), that came up. That was very interesting to me.

So I will talk about this after people have had an experience like this.

Mara: When I have experienced your work, your touch is so gentle, there is so much warmth and comfort and help in it. It reminds me of the ancient practice called "the laying on of hands", where there is a deep physical and spiritual healing that comes with faith, or that comes with the touch of a faithful person. This is a long-standing tradition that goes back even long before Christianity.

Would you tell us some more about what happens to a client when you put your hands on them?

Marion: For me? It's like caressing someone, maybe. There is the feeling of caress. And then there is a feeling of this person entrusting himself or herself to me; and I feel glad. This is how I start out, putting the hands on them.

And then, I think it's like when you have children, when you caress them, and you put your hand on them, too, to tell them something with the touch, to tell them, "I'm here," "I'm with you," maybe, "I love you."

It could be something like that. Even before I know that I love them; for sometimes I don't love them when I first put my hand on them. But basically I think the lovingness is maybe there, if I am allowed to work on someone.

I feel it is a privilege to be allowed to put my hand on someone, that they have the trust to allow you to do that.

And I also feel something, some kind of connection, when I have my hand on someone. It's like this animal connection of closeness. I just feel very close to a person when I can do that.

Mara: But do you think of your work as loving touch? Do you think that is a good way to describe Rosen Method?

Marion: I would hate to have that in print!

Mara: And why is that?

Marion: Because the same thing is true as with the spirituality; it only holds true when you have the experience of it. If you say to somebody, "I feel love when I touch somebody", it sounds very, very corny. But if that person experiences what I experience or Gloria experiences or you experience, when we touch someone--there is that feeling that is released in us that brings forth a sympathy for that other person. Sympathy... that's not quite as corny...

Mara: Do you use the word compassion?

Marion: No. It's not compassion. That's not what it is. I feel awed by the other person. Respect.

Gloria: Appreciation.

Marion: Appreciation, yes. That's more like it. Appreciation for that being, that is Gloria, that is Mara, that is whomever I touch.

Mara: It reminds me of Albert Schweitzer's term, "reverence for life."

Marion: That's right. Reverence. That word I could accept.

Mara: How did you come to look at people like this? You know, this is not exactly normal!

Marion: You know what, I have no idea! I don't even know if it's normal or not. When a person comes in the room, and I think I have to work with them, I don't feel loving at all. They are just other people. But the moment I put my hand on them, something happens. It happens when my hand is on them. Something shifts in me. I couldn't tell you what it is. But I know that whatever it is transmits itself. I know it.

Gloria: Here is this process that you learned, a process that is now in the teaching we do, so that we really take in the person as they are.

And this requires an open-ended touching, a non-manipulative touch. And that open-ended hand already communicates to the person that they are all right just the way they are.

There is the quality of curiosity, too, that we bring into the touch. We wonder, "How is this person? What is really happening with this person?" And this communicates something of appreciation and love...

Marion: ...and involvement.

Gloria: It communicates, "You don't have to be different. How are you, really?"

Isn't that how it is when we are first in love, when we go to each other? We really just want to know who it is they are.

Mara: I'm curious now about your background and motivations. Was there any specific religious training that brought you to this way of relating to people with curiosity and respect and reverence?

Marion: No, not at all.

Mara: Is there any religious practice now that you find helpful?

Marion: No. Except that I know somehow that God exists... and that I feel a connection, to whatever it is, whoever it is, something beyond me...

Mara: Has it been this way for you for a long time now, or has this come in more recent years?

Marion: I think it has been with me for a long time. I think it happened during that time--the Hitler time in Germany.

Mara: What happened then?

Marion: I had this experience of seeing a woman's face up in the sky. I don't know if it was a dream, or a half-dream. And the whole sky was this face, and it said, "I will take care of you, don't worry." That was all. And the feeling that I got at that time from it was like... I had the feeling of being taken care of, ever since that time. Maybe I had it before, but I wasn't so aware of it. I don't know who the woman was. I don't know what it meant. I cannot tell you anything about it. I can just tell you that it was an experience where the feeling of it lasted. The knowing of it.

Mara: Gloria, do you have a spiritual practice that helps you with the work?

Gloria: I do have a spiritual practice. And it does help me with the work.

But the work also helps me with my spiritual practice, in the way we have of being with another person: just relaxing, without thinking about how it should be, without all of the usual rationales that get put on a relationship; just being with the person and embracing the reality as it is; and then feeling this connection that is beyond self.

In my experience, when I am working, there is something of spirit that comes through, when one has the space just to be with their suffering...when one can be in connection with another

person, and show all those parts that we don't usually show. Just to be telling the truth, as it is, gives room for more of who that person really is.

We get a sense of the person's spirit, that is beyond the personality...that is beyond all other considerations.

Marion: The inner truth of the person.

But see, if we would start with that, they would think, "What is all this nonsense?" There has to be a way to let people go this way, to let them find the way to it themselves.

Gloria: Another way to look at spirituality is to see it as living with the unknown. I like to think of it as the unformed reality, the potential that we walk into as human beings.

I know for myself, I never could have planned who I turned out to be. Everything that I thought I was going to be, is not really it. I am much more pleased with how my life is turning out than I would have been if I had tried to control it to be the way I had planned it.

If we go in with an already pre-disposed agenda about how a person should be; or if we try to tell them, "Listen, we're going to get you to your inner knowing, and to God"; then it's only a concept. Spirituality is more open-ended than anything we could put on it from the beginning.

And then, together, we're both in this realm of discovery.

To listen to stories of how people discover their own spirituality and God is just amazing. To stay open to discover where people will go with the work, with themselves.. nobody could have planned it better than the way it just occurs.

Mara: How did you come to Rosen Method, Gloria?

Gloria: I was a dance therapist and a masseuse. I had gone to massage, longing to touch people. But when I did massage, I was just stroking over the bodies, I wasn't really touching people.

So I started to ask, is there some work that really touches people? And I was directed to Marion's work. It had something I knew that did it for me. It was that quality of being in connection.

This, for me, is a very big part of the spirituality that is in Rosen Method. There is a longing--that I feel is in all of us--to realize our togetherness, to realize that we are connected, that we are all part of the same universe.

With this realization, there is a knowing that comes, a knowing that this feeling of connectedness is available, in reality. I think we all know this.

How does the spirituality arise in the work we do? I feel it is a natural outgrowth of our human nature--when we are not interfering with ourselves, when we are not putting limitations on ourselves with muscle tensions, muscle tensions which reflect the limitations we put in our thinking, our minds, our being--which in

turn are the limitations we put on our potential.

Mara: What you are saying, Gloria, reminds me of the saying from the Bible, that "the truth shall make you free." This is similar to the quotation that Marion uses so often:

"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

How does that guide your work, Marion?

Marion: It is about the holding and the unholding. What we hold back makes the tension, the holding, the set-nesses, that is what makes the body become rigid, to lose its life. And what we bring forth, that is the aliveness in us.

Jesus believed this. And I believe it too!

Mara: And the tensions are what make our spirits go astray?

Marion: Holding back is what makes the body and the soul go astray. And the opening to the truth is what allows the soul to be free, which will save us from destruction.