

Rosen Method: A Tool for Profound Change

By Anais Salibian

Although there is a lot of talk these days about the mind-body connection, it seems to be an abstraction for most of us. With Rosen Method you experience how thoughts and feelings are embedded in our physical structure, and how working simultaneously with multiple aspects of a person produces healing.

Rosen Method is called a Psychospiritual Bodywork because there is no separation between a physical problem, the emotions or memories embedded in it, psychological states associated with it, and the opening to an experience of self. For this reason, clients come with a variety of presenting problems. Some have physical pain and dysfunction that doctors can't treat further because they find nothing wrong or because it isn't their job to deal with the psychosomatic components of their patient's complaints. Some people feel stuck in their lives (or in their psychotherapy) and need a way to connect to what's really going on and how to create authentic, meaningful lives. Some are working on specific issues such as recovery from abuse, addictions or eating disorders and are at a stage where bodywork is appropriate. Keep in mind, Rosen Method is not for people with serious mental illness or those in acute crisis who need to add structure in their lives rather than loosen it up.

Our bodies respond to whatever has happened to us and shape themselves according to our experiences. If you imagine yourself in a frightening or painful situation, you'll notice that you contract certain muscles and shorten your breath in order to fend off feelings. Over time, such responses shape us physically perhaps even more so than our genes.

A great number of our physical complaints stem from these chronic and unconscious contractions in muscle and

connective tissue. These problems get a variety of labels: bad posture, normal aches and pains, arthritis, nervous disorders, injuries and scar tissues, congenital distortions in structure, stress, and so on. It's not that illness and injury don't exist; instead it is that the unconscious contraction is such a big part of what limits function and causes pain that we don't realize we can free ourselves from this suffering.

The key to change is letting go of unconscious contractions. Have you ever had the experience of knowing your shoulders were tense, for instance, but no matter how much you told yourself to relax, your muscles wouldn't? We can't think our way into our unconscious, which lives in our bodies; we can only allow it to surface and notice what's there. This is where the hands of the practitioner play a crucial role. The primary function of the hands is to make contact and "listen," holding where you hold, perhaps suggesting where you might relax. By gently following your breath and your muscle tension as it relaxes, the practitioner's hands become both a container and a reflection to you of what is happening in your body. They communicate with your unconscious, which responds by opening up, both physically and through the surfacing of feelings, images, thoughts, insights, and sensations. Parts of the body that felt dead, to both client and practitioner, come alive.

Rosen Method includes talking, both as a way to delve deeper into the client's experience and to process what comes up. Physical and verbal contact are used to establish and respond to changes in the body, specifically changes in breathing patterns and muscle tension. The "mind" and body are so connected that if the client thinks or feels something that is part of the issue lodged in their body, the practitioner can feel it with their hands. The Rosen Method includes touching you silently

for a while, feeling a muscle soften or breath enter an area where it wasn't before. The practitioner may either give you a gentle verbal marker, for example, yes, or ask you what just happened. As one amazed client asked in such a moment, "You felt that?" He had just had an insight about an issue in his life. The truth immediately translates into a palpable change in the body.

Conversely, if you talk and you're just in your head, your body doesn't change. You can talk forever without healing. A Rosen practitioner does not engage in talk that is not connected to changes in tension, expansion of breath or a sensation of new life coming into the body. The body is a geiger counter for the truth about what really matters, what is distorting your posture or causing you pain. Beliefs, insights, awareness, feeling, that can come from talk therapy are limited in their ability to cause actual transformation in your life, unless they happen in your body as well as your brain.

No matter what part of your body the practitioner is working on, the attention is always on the breath. Because the diaphragm is innervated by both the voluntary and autonomic nervous systems, it's a meeting place for the conscious and the unconscious. Marion Rosen, the founder of this work, likes to call it the spiritual muscle. When the diaphragm relaxes and you allow it its full range of movement, you enter an experience of your own being. It's not often we experience ourselves independent of what we do, what we feel or think or sense—just pure being. It's blissful, spacious and connected.

You experience who you are, not who you thought you were or pretended to be to get along in the world. A side-effect of this is physical healing, but also a change in the shape your body, which inevitably leads to a change in the shape of your life. Rosen Method can be used to relieve a particular physical pain or to improve any aspect of your life.

Anais Salibian is a certified Rosen Method practitioner. For more information, please call her at 586-1590.