

Rosen Method Heals From the Outside In

by Emily West, *The Santa Barbara Independent*

Honestly, who doesn't love getting a massage? There is something miraculous about the way a skilled masseuse can manipulate the muscles in our bodies until they become malleable and loose, leaving their client feeling refreshed. An undeniable serenity comes along with a body that is bereft of tension and stress — a serenity that most of us experience far too infrequently. Rosen Method bodyworkers would say that we are victims of our own creation, and that finding the aforementioned peace and calm within is really only a matter of opening up to our emotions and allowing ourselves to breathe, which doesn't necessarily require a massage or a masseuse.

Bodywork is the umbrella term for everything from massage to Rolfing to general touch therapy; the Rosen Method falls somewhere in the middle of these practices, albeit with its own distinct characteristics. It is rooted in the connections between the body and emotions, and practitioners explore these connections through gentle touch and verbal dialogue. Meg Butler, a licensed massage therapist who has been a Rosen Method practitioner in Santa Barbara since 2001, explains, "People use their musculature to express their emotions. When those emotions are not accepted, or when those feelings are not allowed, we also use our musculature to repress or hold ourselves away from our feelings. Muscular holding over time becomes an unconscious habit and can cause chronic pain. The muscles have 'forgotten' how to relax."

Central to the Rosen Method is the idea that muscles can be reminded of how to loosen, and that people can help themselves relax by feeling their emotions instead of repressing them. The rationale behind the method is that many of us suppress our emotions unconsciously: a

These words accurately describe my experience as Butler's client. My Rosen Method experience was not quite what I expected. I thought it was going to be more like a massage, and was at first baffled by her seemingly random poking and prodding and pausing. Sometimes, Butler would simply place her hands on one part of my back and leave them there, completely still. When I finally let go of my expectations, I began to understand what Rosen Method was all about.

Depending on where Butler touched me, I could sense my muscle tightness. I then paid attention to that particular location and tried to breathe deeply to release the tension that I felt. I was aggravated to find that I couldn't loosen all of the affected areas. In my frustration, I began talking and was surprised by the things I was saying, which seemed arbitrary and unrelated to anything I was thinking about prior to the session. I was even more surprised to then feel the tension release as I spoke; Butler was not. She said, "Rosen brings awareness to how a person has managed their life, and it's an awareness on different levels. It can be a physical awareness of 'Oh, that's very tight,' or an awareness of why the tension is there in the first place. It frequently starts on a physical level and then moves more deeply."

I definitely had this "outside in" experience, and because of that, it makes perfect sense to me that the founder of the method, Marion Rosen, trained and worked as a physical therapist before becoming interested in the emotional aspect of bodywork. Clients of the Rosen Method and bodyworkers agree that there is power in touch. One Rosen Method client said, "The body and my emotions — all parts of me have been affected by this work. It's a major healing modality and I'm really glad I've received exposure to it. It's made a huge difference in my life." The purported benefits of Rosen Method are far-reaching:

practitioner's primary goal is to make their client aware of their emotions; it is the first step toward healing.

Rosen Method practitioner Meg Butler uses "listening" hands — i.e., hands placed gently on different areas of the body — rather than manipulating one to search out muscle tension.

As a practitioner, it is with "listening" hands (i.e., hands placed gently on different areas on the body to feel where tension lies) rather than manipulating ones that Butler touches her clients. She holds her hands still and notices changes in the client's muscular tension or breathing. Depending on the client, she may share with him what she is noticing to help him build awareness of the changes occurring within his body, or, if the client seems to be in a quiet, contemplative space, she may remain silent until the end of the session.

"I believe everything we need to heal ourselves is within each of us. Sometimes we need help to see ourselves," Butler said. Though she is not a doctor, Butler does consider herself a facilitator of healing: "What I do is really about allowing what hasn't been allowed [i.e., feeling emotions] by helping my clients feel safe."

increased flexibility, greater intuition, pain relief, deepening self-acceptance. It can complement psychotherapy and spiritual practices and allow us to access our most creative selves.

While Rosen Method practitioners don't consider themselves counselors, they do help you help yourself; by listening to what your body tells them and to what you say to them they assist you in moving into a more relaxed physical and emotional state. "We want people to be able to come to their own truth," Butler said. This happens when people learn to more fully experience themselves by acknowledging and expressing their feelings. Sheri Fram, a Los Angeles-based practitioner explains, "The body is designed for emotions — we have tears and we do have flashes of anger. We suppress our emotions and are taught to suppress them, and the suppression can feel like holding back. If you feel like crying or expressing rage and you don't, where does it go? Into your muscles. But if you allow emotion to pass, it does pass."

After my first session I can truthfully say that my body felt different and my spirits were uplifted. I felt refreshed and rejuvenated, but it wasn't because my muscles had been massaged, but rather that I had relaxed from within. I felt physically comfortable and at ease, and, more significantly, I sensed an emotional tranquility that stayed with me for weeks.

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