

How Love Heals

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Abstract

For eons spiritual masters have been teaching that we are all part of one indivisible whole. Now scientific research reveals that what we carry in our hearts and minds influences the world around us. It has been discovered that cultivating inner qualities like peace, compassion and appreciation is not only good for our own physical and mental/emotional health but also for the health of those around us. As Rosen Method practitioners it is of utmost importance that we better understand our interconnectedness so that we can become more mindful of what we bring to the table

On the second day of attending my first Rosen Method bodywork class in Stockholm in 1988, I noticed a burning sensation in and around my heart. I asked one of our teachers, Sara Webb, what was going on with me. She responded that she was familiar with the sensation even if she could not explain in physical terms what was going on in my chest. "I have a sense it is related to your heart opening through this work," she said. Her answer resonated with my own intuitive hunch, and just knowing that other people also had this feeling helped me be more at ease.

During my childhood, I sometimes felt that I was too sensitive for this world and, like many of us, built an insulating layer around my heart. But being around people in this workshop (several who were vulnerable enough to share their feelings much more openly than me) activated my compassion and awakened something deep and forgotten that now burned within my chest. In a way, it felt similar to what I had experienced in my body at other times in my life when someone had been exceptionally kind to me or when I had been touched by a magnificent landscape. Beauty, kindness and gentleness can often burn away defensive layers that no pushing, forcing or analyzing ever could.

Besides the powerful combination of truth seeking and compassion I found in the Rosen Method, it was also the strong emphasis on relationship that beckoned me to want to take the training and become a Rosen Method practitioner. Rosen Method helps a client, over time, to connect deeply with his or her own truth and capacity for love and creativity and to find ways to share that with others. In my worldview, everything is about relationship: to self, to others, to nature, community, creativity and to the energy that connects us all.

About seven years ago, I became very interested in quantum physics and quantum mechanics and learned that even the smallest building blocks of the universe form "relationships" with one another. The Danish physicist, Niels Bohr, claimed back in 1928 that when two subatomic particles (such as electrons or photons) connected, they remained cognizant of and influenced by each other forever. For instance, when one of the particles changed magnetic orientation, it influenced the other in the same or the opposite direction, regardless of how far they are separated geographically or how much time has elapsed since they were in physical contact. Erwin Schrodinger, who named this engagement "entanglement," felt that non-locality was the central property and premise of quantum physics. Once particles had been intimately connected they remained so even from a distance. Non-locality was considered proven in 1982 by Alain Aspect (Aspect, Granger, & Roger, 1982). Rosen Method Bodywork is intimate work. Touch and truth in combination

makes it so. I often tell new clients that this can be extremely intimate work with therapeutic boundaries. Clients often hear themselves share things they have never told anyone. They encounter unconscious material they may not have had the courage to look at alone before. Since English is my second language, I sometimes hear things differently and more literally than my American friends. When I hear the word "intimacy," I actually hear "Into me you see." I hold the space for the client so that we both can see into ourselves. I make it clear, however, that because of the therapeutic boundary, it will be more of a one-way street than if it was a regular friendship. The focus is on the client. Still, at times, it is obvious that the client also "reads" me.

I suspect I am not alone in having had experiences with Rosen clients where we at times seem to have tapped into the body-mind of each other. On many occasions, it has been as if our individual spheres of consciousness overlapped. For instance, the client may share something unusual that I just had on the tip of my tongue to ask about. Or I may use a metaphor in regard to what I sense under my hands and the client chuckles in surprise and says that an image, very similar to that metaphor, had been on his or her mind right then.

One of the strongest experiences I have had of this kind was with a client who I was seeing twice a week. We were doing some rather intense work. As she was driving home from work one day, she had insistent images in her head of me being badly burned. She could not figure out why on earth she would conjure up such horrible images about a person she really cared about. She berated herself and thought she must be a "sick puppy." Imagine how startled she was to get a phone call from me wherein I told her I had to reschedule our appointment because I had burned my hand quite badly (2nd and 3rd degree burns) on exactly that day. We talked about it at our next visit and I said I hoped she did not hold any fears that she had somehow "caused" my accident. "No," she said. "I may be troubled, but I am not deluded. I know I am not that powerful. I take it more as a sign that I have been really tuned in to you because of our work the last few weeks and therefore picked up on what was happening with your hand."

Many people would just shake their head hearing an account like this; but, there is scientific evidence confirming that signals in the electromagnetic field of one person's heart (ECG) can be picked up in the brain waves (EEG) of another who is in close proximity. While the signal is strongest when people actually touch, the effect is still detectable, and has been measurable when the two people are up to three feet away from each other. There is speculation that the signal transferred is electromagnetic in origin and that some component of it is radiated. Perhaps this could explain a portion of what happens when we, as caring bodyworkers, put our hands on a client and they instantly feel better (Institute of Hearthmath, 2010)

There have been a number of studies showing that it is possible for a person seated alone in a room to register in his or her nervous system what happens to a partner in another room. One of the earliest studies of this kind was conducted in a rather brutal way by Charles Tart. He administered shocks to himself while a volunteer isolated in another room was being monitored to see if he picked up on Tart's reaction. Each time Tart got jolted, the volunteer registered an unconscious empathic response in decreased blood volume and increased heart rate as if he were also getting the shocks (Mc Taggart, 2007).

In a more recent study done in 2005, a group of researchers from Bastyr University and The University of Washington gathered 30 couples with strong emotional and psychological connections. Some also had a great deal of experience in meditation. The couples were split up and put in different rooms 10 meters away from each other with an EEG amplifier wired up to the occipital (visual) lobe of the brain of each participant. The moment each sender was exposed to a flickering light they were asked to "transmit" an image or thought of this light to the partner. They found that the pairs who had a high degree of experience with meditation showed the highest correlation between sender and receiver. The Bastyr Study represents a major breakthrough in research on direct mental influence. It demonstrated that the brain wave response of the sender to the stimulus is mirrored in the receiver and that the stimulus in the receiver is in an identical place in the brain of the sender. The receiver's brain reacts as though he or she is seeing the same image at the same time (Radin, 2006).

When we speak of the intuitive mind, we should not only associate that with the brain but also with the heart. In 2004, Rollin McCraty and his colleagues reported on an experiment involving presentiment where people were seated in front of a computer screen and hooked up to instruments measuring the skin-conductance, heart rate variability and EEG, as they were shown random images. Some images were calm and neutral, others more disturbing and/or evocative in nature. What they learned was that the heart responded to these images before the brain did. Before the brain could respond, the heart rate tended to slow down when seeing the emotional pictures as compared to the calm pictures with odds against chance of 1,000 to 1. McCraty summarized, "There is evidence that the heart is directly involved in the processing of information about future emotional stimulus seconds before the body actually experiences the stimulus. . ." The study also revealed that women had a stronger response in this regard than men (Radin, 2006).

When I read this study, it made me think of how we, as Rosen Method practitioners, sometimes see in the breath and the body of the client the indications and movement of an emotion about to emerge before it reaches the consciousness of the client. There may be a change in the rhythm of breathing, skin color, fluttering of eyelids, or muscle spasms moments before the client seems to know what is about to bubble up. It appears, in those moments, as if the heart of the client knew something that had not yet reached his or her brain.

The heart generates an electrical field 60 times stronger than that of the brain and a magnetic field 5,000 times stronger than that of the brain. This electromagnetic field surrounds the body in a kind of donut shape and can be measured 5-8 feet in diameter around a person. Although the heart field is not the same as the body's aura, or the *Prana* as described by ancient Sanskrit scriptures, it may well be an expression of the energy that begins in this area (Braden, 2007).

For eons, spiritual masters have been teaching that the heart is the seat of the soul and have stressed the importance of cultivating compassion. Yogis and shamans of various indigenous cultures have always sensed intuitively that we all are, in essence, part of one great big indivisible whole. That is terrific. I am all for intuition. But for people like me who have been ridiculed and scorned for believing in the mystical traditions, it is both comforting and very exciting to partake in the interface that is now happening between ancient spiritual teachings and modern, cutting edge, scientific research. If we wish to see a positive shift in human interactions in the future we need to use both our hearts *and* our minds wisely. Or as Joan Borysenko, author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* once said in a lecture at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island: "Keep your mind open, but don't let your brain fall out."

I know many Rosen Method practitioners who feel they are working toward a more peaceful world one person at the time. When it comes to the hope of bringing more peace into the world via our own emotional systems, a demonstration study conducted in 1993 is very encouraging. 4,000 participants in Transcendental Meditation (TM) – Siddhi programs, gathered in Washington, DC from June 7 to July 30th. They wanted to demonstrate scientifically that focusing on feeling peace and love would create greater coherence in the collective consciousness of the district. They felt confident in doing so, since they had already witnessed this phenomenon take place in 24 US cities in 1972. The only difference was that they now had a 27 member Project Review Board comprising independent scientists and leading citizens who approved the research protocol and monitored the research process. The effect is called the *Maharishi effect* in honor of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who stated that when 1 percent of a population practiced the techniques of meditation he offered, there would be a reduction in violence and crime for that population. Even though the police had laughed at this experiment and said it would take a major snowstorm in July to lower the violent crime rate in Washington, DC, the results were clear: homicides, rapes and assaults (HRA) dropped significantly -- just as the meditation group had predicted. They learned that the effect of the experiment was cumulative. During the final week, there was a 23.3 percent fall of HRA in Washington, DC, and it persisted even after the project ended. There were predictions that a permanent group of 4,000 "coherence experts" would have a long-term effect (Hegelin, 1999).

It seems to me that it is of the highest importance that we, as bodywork practitioners, therapists or healthcare professionals, become as conscious as possible of how we regard our clients and patients. If we do not trust that they can come to greater wholeness, if we cannot hold the slightest possibility that they can find their way and transform in a beautiful way in their own time, we are not the right person to work with them. It will affect the electromagnetic field around our hearts and it will hinder, rather than help, the person's progress. In that case, the kindest thing we can do is refer that person to someone else who may feel more hopeful about their healing.

Marion Rosen, the founder of the Rosen Method, once said that when meeting a new client she often does not always like them right away, but as soon as she puts her hands on them, she feels a love for them. Rosen work connects client and practitioner through touch, compassion and an unconditional presence. It is a profound human-to-human meeting, beyond personalities, and because of this, it is important that there is a bond of mutual caring and respect. Even though we do use words in this work, so much is communicated silently.

At a 2009 conference in Boston with Bruce Lipton, Gregg Braden and Alberto Villoldo, I was introduced to The Heart Math Institute which was founded by Doc Childre. (www.heartmath.org) Childre and his team have been researching how emotional states and feelings affect the physiology of the body, brain function, hormonal balance, immune function and interpersonal relationships. One of the concepts they have spent a great deal of time on is *coherence*. What exactly is *coherence*? In physics, the term is used to describe two or more waves that are frequency locked to produce a constructive waveform. When waves of any kind are not working together, it is as if all the musicians in an orchestra ran off in different directions playing their own tunes, thusly creating total chaos. *Coherence*, on the other hand, is as if those same musicians listened to each other and focused their energy towards one composition and all moved in one direction together creating beautiful music.

At Heartmath Institute, it has been discovered that emotions like compassion, caring, love, appreciation and gratitude not only strengthen the immune system but synchronize all the systems of the body to work together more efficiently. When the physiological coherence mode is driven by a positive emotional state it is called *psychophysiological coherence*. This state is associated with sustained positive emotion and a high degree of mental and emotional stability leading to reduced stress, anxiety and depression, decreased burn-out, hormonal balance, improved cognitive performance, enhanced learning and improved health. Some of the findings show that when a person is under stress or experiencing emotions like anger, frustration or anxiety, heart rhythms become less coherent and more erratic, indicating less synchronization between the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the nervous system, which if sustained, creates a lot of wear and tear on the bodily organs. The two branches of the nervous system fight each other and it is similar to when you drive a car with the emergency brakes on. It causes premature aging and breaks down the flow of information between all the systems of the body (McCraty et al., 1995).

Between 1992 and 1995, Glen Rein and Rollin McCraty of the Heartmath Institute conducted several studies that revealed that people can intentionally get into the mindframe of coherent emotions and thereby have a measurable effect on DNA samples in a glass beaker. By using specially designed mental and emotional self-management techniques, the person would shift the focus to the heart and intentionally generate positive emotions. Without touching it or doing anything other than creating precise feelings in their bodies, the participants were able to influence these isolated DNA molecules in the beaker. And various intentions of making the DNA wind or unwind produced these different results. The results were unmistakable: human emotions can change the shape of DNA! (McCraty et al., 1995; Rein, 2004).

We all know that we feel good in the presence of some people and not so good when we are around others. There seems to be evidence suggesting that this, at least in part, depends on what level of coherence we sense in that person's heart field. Sometimes, I have wondered how healthy it may be for me, a sensitive person to begin with, to expose myself to unhappy and troubled people day after day. What cumulative ef-

fect on my health could that have? I believe that my best protection against negative influences is to take care of myself and make sure I get enough rest and enough exposure to the light and beautiful side of life to balance things out, and then to set an intention to generate as much compassion as possible for the people I take on as clients.

In the book *The Field*, Lynn McTaggart mentions a study in Mexico that showed that when two people in separate rooms were asked to feel each other's presence, their brainwaves began to synchronize as measured by EEG. At the same time, electrical activity within each hemisphere of the brain of each participant also synchronized--a phenomenon which usually only occurs in meditation. Nevertheless, it was the participant with *the most cohesive brain patterns who influenced the other*. The most ordered and coherent brain pattern always prevailed (Grinberg-Zylberbaum & Ramos, 1987; Grinberg-Zylberbaum et al., 1992).

As Rosen Method bodyworkers, we not only connect with the client's body with our hands; we touch with our whole being. We touch with curiosity, empathy and an intention to meet the client no matter what comes up for them. Rosen touch is a loving touch and loving touch is powerful. Researcher Robert Nerem found this out by chance in the late 1970's. He was not really interested in love, but was simply focused on finding out to what extent high cholesterol diets cause arterial blockage around the heart. He took a large group of genetically similar rabbits and put them in cages one by one along a wall. After feeding them the same high fat, toxic diet he confirmed upon autopsy that most of the rabbits had what he expected--a significant amount of blockage (Poor bunnies!). However, one particular group of rabbits showed virtually no blockage. What made it more puzzling to Nerem was that all the rabbits who had very little blockage were in the bottom cages.

Upon further investigation, he discovered that his lab assistant, a short woman, loved rabbits and would pet and cuddle the ones in the lower cages when she was feeding them because those were the cages she could reach easily. When she fed the rabbits in the top cages she could only reach high enough to give them their food and water so the rabbits in those cages were isolated and relatively ignored.

Nerem was skeptical about the supposed cause of the difference in disease so he repeated the study, this time making sure the only difference between the groups was touch. He reproduced the same results and reported in the journal, *Science*, that there was more than 60% less blockage and significantly less arterial damage in the rabbits that were touched and cuddled compared to those that were not (Lefavi, 1999).

So if we can strengthen the immune systems of rabbits by stroking them, it should not come as a huge surprise that the immune systems of humans also are influenced in a favorable way through receiving compassionate, respectful touch. Many studies at the Touch Research Institute (TRI) in Florida have confirmed this same thing. But touch is a two way street and the people who do the touching also benefit. In one study at TRI, half a group of retired volunteers were offered 3 weeks of massage therapy 3 times a week. The other half of the group were instructed on how to give infants a massage and were taken to a shelter for infants who had been physically and sexually abused and massaged these infants 3 times a week. After that they switched so that both groups got to enjoy the two different activities. This study was designed to measure anxiety and depression levels, stress levels (saliva cortisol), levels of being sociable, visits to doctors, self-esteem, etc., in the volunteers. At the end of the study, it was evident that although the elderly volunteers had benefitted from both activities they showed the greatest improvement from having given massages to the infants. The researchers guessed it might be because they had been so happy to massage and spend time with the children and may have felt a bit embarrassed and awkward about getting massages for themselves. Although these infants had experienced inappropriate and abusive touch prior to being placed in the shelter, they too showed lowered stress levels, more alertness and more sociability after being massaged by these "grand parent volunteers" (Field, 1993).

It appears that people are not really meant to be independent of each other, but are wired for connection and interdependence. A Swedish study found that women who lived alone, had very few friends, and no one to call on if they needed help, tended to have heart rates that varied little over the course of the day.

Less isolated individuals who enjoyed more fulfilling lifestyles and had more support from other people showed a much greater heart rate variability. A low variation in heart rate is correlated with heart disease susceptibility and premature death (Mc Craty et al., 1995).

In 1991, a scientist named Andrew Armour, discovered that the heart has its own nervous system with neurons, neurotransmitters and proteins just like the brain. It has an independent ability to learn, feel, sense and remember; and being part of the neuroendocrine system, it can produce as much oxytocin as the brain. Oxytocin has been commonly referred to as the “love hormone.” Beyond its well-known function in bonding mother and child and the high amount of this hormone found in lactating mothers, there is recent evidence indicating that this hormone is also involved in cognition, tolerance, adaptation, complex sexual and maternal behaviors as well as learning and social cues and the establishment of enduring pair bonds (Institute of Heartmath, 2010).

Dorothea Hrossowyc (2009), a fellow Rosen Method Bodywork practitioner, wrote an excellent article related to this topic. She writes: “Science is just beginning to explore the physiological importance of human connection and how Rosen work has been indirectly involved in some scientific research into the human connection system.” Kerstin Uvnas-Moberg, a researcher from Sweden, has published a book called *The Oxytocin Factor: Tapping the hormone of calm, love and healing*. Knowing that oxytocin was stimulated by touch, she used massage practitioners in her research. Some of those were also trained as Rosen Method Bodywork practitioners even though they did not practice Rosen Method, *per se*, in the studies that were used in the research. Uvnas-Moberg’s research shows that oxytocin is elevated after only one session of touch therapy, but then goes back down. After four sessions, it tends to go up and stay elevated. After seven sessions, it tends to stay elevated for longer periods of time. The research also shows that oxytocin is best stimulated by gentle touch, not heavy, deep tissue work, and especially by stroking on the belly.

I find this fascinating. It has also been my experience, in both giving and receiving Rosen Method Bodywork, that there is a cumulative effect of coming to peace and acceptance within, that we eventually can hold onto for increasingly longer periods after a session is over. Eventually, we can take this inner freedom with us out of the treatment room and into our other relationships and out into the world.

Hrossowyc concludes that, “Relationship, through the healing cascade of the human connection system, regulates and revises our neurological health and our physiological functioning. In loving and caring, in connecting through touch and otherwise, we modulate each other’s emotions, neurophysiology, hormonal status, immune function, sleep rhythms, and stability. Through touch, and also through the connection that is the essence of Rosen work, we are stimulating a whole physiological system in the body, the physiological system of trust and human connection, facilitating the evolution of the human species toward more and deeper intimacy, connection and safety” (Hrossowyc, 2009).

There is something very grounding about conscious touch for both the giver and the receiver. Seeing the very real person that emerges when a client is willing to take time out to look at him or herself deeply and work through the difficult parts is immensely rewarding. We live in an era where many people get caught up in the appearance of things and run at top speed much of the time to the point that there is no time for our human emotions. We humans do not know what we feel until we slow down and inquire into the deeper layers of our being and take time to listen to the language and melody of the body.

I always set an intention to be as present and welcoming as I can when I greet my clients and think I do a pretty decent job at that. Still, when I wash my hands after a session and look in the mirror, I can often tell that something shifted in me as well. In order to do the work, I have to be focused and fully present myself. There is more color in my face. I feel more “landed” within my own body. How precious it is to be part of the moment when the client finds the courage to face and move through something that was held in for a long time and very hard to express. The wave of free breath in the body afterwards, the spaciousness and a lightness of being under my hands feels sacred. It feels like grace.

As I sit with clients, I remind myself that I am not there to “fix” anyone. All I need to do is love the men and women who find their way to my door. For those of my clients who struggle to accept themselves, I do my

best to communicate with my hands and my presence that they are loveable and also worthy of having their boundaries honored. I hold this possibility for them until they are ready to claim that for themselves. That is my main intention. If I got too caught up in other results my clients would feel my unspoken impatience and silent expectancy and Rosen work is not about them performing well for me or for anybody else. The most healing moments tend to take place when we manage to go beyond any rigid grips on our own egos and flawed personalities and give ourselves space to just be people together. Then we enter that wonderful space of connection where we are like tuning forks for each other.

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