



THE POWER OF *Touch*

Actress Annabelle Apsion has notched up a string of acting credits and established the Rosen Method Bodywork School in the UK after a profound experience of this gentle hands-on form of bodywork. Dawn Mellowship explores the Rosen Method and spirituality with Annabelle.

Talking to actress Annabelle Apsion it's hard to believe that this compassionate and cognisant individual is the same woman who plays the bawdy, boisterous and materialistic Monica in the television drama, *Shameless*. Many celebrities flirt with complementary therapies but I can think of few who embrace an alternative modality as passionately as Annabelle Apsion. In fact, her initial experience of the Rosen Method (which was developed by pioneering German physiotherapist Marion Rosen) was so profound that in 2004, after participating in a series of courses, Annabelle set up the Rosen Method Bodywork School in the UK. The school offers both Rosen sessions and three levels of training.

The Rosen Method is a hands-on form of bodywork based on the premise that the muscular tension in our bodies occurs as a response to stress and the physical and emotional adjustments we make in order to fit our circumstances and environment,

ultimately causing us to lose touch with our true selves. The tension in our muscles encapsulates our emotional traumas, masking who we really are. The Rosen method, using gentle touch, talking and connection, is said to help release the unconscious muscle tension and constricting habits or patterns of behaviour. Rosen doesn't offer a treatment or cure for any physical or emotional problem, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the results can be quite profound on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. Annabelle says,

"The Rosen Method is about going very deeply into the unconscious, using touch as a way of identifying what is going on for us, what is holding us back and what is important to us and helping us re-connect with that. Both touch and words are used."

The general idea is that our breath, movement and expression are inhibited by our repression of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are considered to be unacceptable.

Muscular constriction results in a restrict-

ed breath, which forces vital organs to work harder and weakens the immune system. Rosen practitioners learn to interpret the body looking for subtle changes in breathing patterns and muscle tension, and use gentle touch in order to bring awareness to the tense muscles and instigate deep relaxation. The practitioner's focus is on listening rather than manipulating hands. This state of relaxation allows the client to experience a transformative shift in their state of being and awareness, often releasing emotional traumas and attitudes from the past and experiencing a sense of peace, such that,

"Sometimes we call it peaceful touch because even though it can energise people and they can get very creative and motivated, they start to act in a different way and view things differently. It has a profound impact on people. When you work with the muscle tension, naturally their diaphragm starts to work more freely and they are able to take more natural breaths, which has a positive affect on the immune system and therefore the whole body."

There are a myriad of different therapies available so what is it that Annabelle loves so much about this particular method?

"It was love at first sight. When I went along I thought it was massage. I was primarily interested in bodywork because I used to have a bad back, which would always cause me pain when I was stressed but through the sessions I became aware that my back was an

expression of a lot of other things that were going on for me.

When I first experienced the Rosen Method I had a profound spiritual experience. I felt my soul in my body and I felt myself as a little girl and as a teenager. It was like there were Russian dolls inside me of all different ages and it gave me a lot of insight into how those different ages had affected me in the past and were still affecting me in the present. I was absolutely fascinated and I loved it when I touched other people, because touch is such a natural thing for us as human beings to do, yet we don't use touch in our culture. I think when you touch somebody in a very respectful way and really listen to them, it does something profound to you as well and I like that. I can feel it does me good to give sessions as well as receive them."

The Rosen Method acknowledges the importance of being in touch with our own bodies and treating our bodies with respect and reverence.

"Many people know that there is a lot more to their bodies than they have ever dared to explore. They know that they are treating their body like a car which gets them from A to B. In our culture we do terrible things to our poor old bodies, crouching over computers, eating junk food and then dieting. We are not really listening to what the body wants. I think there is so much joy to be had from being in connection with your body, with the thoughts and the feelings and this whole spiritual element. When people experience the Rosen Method they often realise how much hidden potential they have, which is a very uplifting experience."

The founder Marion has very much focused on the physical and psychological side of the Rosen Method, but Annabelle suggests that there is also a spiritual aspect, through embodying spirituality rather than teaching the method as a spiritual practice.

"We do talk about it," says Annabelle, "but Marion always kept it very practical, she always just said that we work with muscle tension. She has never made any extravagant claims. Of course, there is this spiritual side. Often for the recipient it is a very spiritual experience because they feel their spiritual nature and I suppose a con-

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nection with our shared spiritual human nature. Marion thinks that when the diaphragm really releases people experience what feels like a spiritual state of surrender and they often say, "I feel at peace" or "I feel at one with God."

Through learning and practicing the Rosen Method Annabelle has grown herself spiritually and believes there is some kind of universal force at work, although she does not subscribe to a particular religion.

"I actually always believed there was more to us than the sum of our parts. As a teenager, at these wild parties I used to go outside, lie on the grass and look up at the stars and I always felt very much part of a universal energy. I was brought up in the Christian church and I remember longing to have something I could believe in. I went to all the different churches and they had different elements of things that I liked but ultimately they didn't ring true to me. I've come to find the Rosen Method as a very real form of what I would call spiritual practice. It is always coming back to being human, to being compassionate, listening to another human being and really accepting them. It doesn't impose anything. It is just about being more human, loving and being loved and not being ashamed of our human nature. I see it as my spiritual practice, my spiritual path. This more than anything affects me, grounds me and nourishes me."

After completing her training in the Rosen Method, Annabelle experienced an increasing sense of being in touch with her intuition, and a feeling that the universe was perhaps offering a helping hand.

"When you think about the big bang and that the universe is still expanding. I really don't think that I can understand that

with my mind, so I don't try. I just follow it with my heart and I don't know what it is but I know there is something very powerful there that is loving and creative and belongs to us all. It is funny because when Ingrid-Maria and I decided to set up the training here and bring teachers over from Scandinavia and America to teach weekend workshops, we set up a company and after I did *Soldier, Soldier* about 20 years ago, I hadn't really done a television series since then. I did films, plays and so on, but as soon as we started the company I got a series every year which meant I could work for six months of the year on the series and then I didn't have to worry about looking for any acting work. I lived off that and gave my time to setting up the Rosen for free. So, I really felt that we were being helped because that made it so much easier for me.

It feels like there is a natural flow the more you get in touch with your intuition and I trust more and more. Somebody once said to me 'Don't push the river' and there seems to be a kind of natural force that helps you to do things, when you are able to drop in a bit and feel what your intuition is telling you."

So, is there a spiritual side to Annabelle's character Monica in *Shameless* buried down in the depths of her soul that the Rosen Method could draw out?

"I suppose to discover that side of herself Monica would need to be in the conditions where she had the opportunity to explore her spirituality, and in her current situation there is not really that kind of opportunity for her. In the series we are filming now, some very different things happen and she does go more deeply into herself than she has done in the past, but she is just so used to reacting in a certain way that it would be very challenging for her. I sometimes think to really change you have to change who you mix with, otherwise the momentum of past habitual behaviour overwhelms you and you go back to what is familiar. I don't think being with Frank is really going to aid her spiritual adventure!"

For more information on Rosen Method Bodywork UK see rosenmethod.co.uk, see www.rosenmethod.co.uk or telephone 020 7063 0683.

Annabelle Apsion - A Snapshot

Star sign: Virgo.

Favourite things: Bread and cheese, my nephews, Marion Rosen, lovely beaches, Hampstead Heath.

Pet Hates: I don't like aggressive drivers or bullies and I hate the way tragic news stories are reported in such a breathless manner. They only think it's news if it's horrific, they never report anything good.

Inspiration: Marion Rosen, Nelson Mandela, all my friends and my lover.

Meaning of Life: Love and be loved.

