Rosen and the Treatment of Breast Cancer

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Many Rosen practitioners may have clients going through cancer treatment. The intense nature of most cancer treatments may cause some clients to be tempted to "take a break" from Rosen during this time. My experience tells me that many clients would benefit from continuing to come for Rosen sessions while they are being treated for cancer.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in April of 2001. I finished chemotherapy in December. The cancer is gone for now, but as I move into the next phase of living with cancer—whatever that may bring—I can see how important it was for me to actively stay in touch with my body during the treatment of a life-threatening illness.

During my cancer treatment I received a Rosen session almost every week. In addition, for the past five years I have been working with a group of women in a peer-led Authentic Movement group that meets once a week for two hours. These sessions, and the wonderful family and friends who love me, were the bulwarks of support for me during my treatment.

Both Rosen and Authentic Movement invite us to use the body as a resource, to be aware of what we feel or what motivates us to move, to allow us to be seen in a non-judgmental way, and to utilize the relationship—or the connection with the witness—to provide support for being deeply inside one's experience. This process of going inside has helped me come out into my life again and again—renewed, connected to my inner strength, and knowing more about the part of me that transcends death.

When dealing with cancer, it is obviously important to focus on the body and the trials through which it is being put. Many books on cancer focus on the spiritual and emotional trials and transformation during cancer diagnosis and treatment, but don't often speak about the importance of utilizing the body as a way to access this emotional and spiritual guidance. Given the toxic, painful and "physical" focus of conventional cancer treatment—whether it is surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or all three—it may not be easy to stay connected to the body as a source of the healing that takes place on many different levels at the same time. The emotional and spiritual healing can thus become almost a form of "retreat" from the body's experience during this difficult time, leading people to see these as journeys—the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual —as separate from each other. They are not.

During my treatment for cancer I wanted to be fully present in my experience, so I needed places to stay in contact with my body. While cancer support groups can be important parts of treatment for

many, I felt worse after going to them. Rosen and Authentic Movement, in contrast, allowed me space where I could feel and literally move with anger, fear, grief, and loss. It also allowed space to express and honor my love, gratitude, and surrender. This surely was not a part of the treatment options encouraged or allowed in the cancer clinic I went to.

Cancer has provided me a huge lesson in the importance of having limits. Taking care of basic needs was essential during cancer treatment, and I had many feelings about how to let others help me with those things. I couldn't do as much for myself, let alone do what I would have wanted to do for others. I had to receive more than I was used to. This brought up incredible feelings of vulnerability and, sometimes, shame. I was not able to respond to everyone who contacted me during this time, and I struggled with how I would have liked to respond as I had before—promptly, of course Could I believe they would know I loved them if I didn't respond? People wanted to be able to do things for me during this time—Bless them —*and* it sometimes was not what I wanted or could take in. I had to choose what to receive without worrying so much about how others felt. (I hear echos of what I was told during my Rosen training: "Marjorie, don't take things so personally ") Cancer triggered an old wound, abandonment. Cancer gave me yet another opportunity to work with it on a deeper level. Rosen was there to help me.

The chemotherapy drugs distanced me from my body, and so I made efforts to feel how they were interacting with me. I felt the drug Adriamycin was connected to my anger and arrogance, the drug Taxol to my grief, the drug Gemzar to my avoidance. No matter what the outcome of having cancer is, each of these "anti-cancer" drugs ferreted out and brought forth these other aspects that needed to be moved in me to keep me more alive. I did other things— journaling, making collages, receiving "energy" work, going to a therapist, attending retreats—but what continued to be invaluable was the exploration and information available to me through my body during the cancer treatment. Having awareness of my body before cancer was helpful, but it can always be encouraged to develop anytime.

Events in life should change one, shouldn't they? I am now struggling with how to live life with the wild card of cancer, how to use it as a reminder to live more fully. Life is not the same and it never will be—just as it is not the same when a parent or child dies. This is what I want, to be open to life. This is what Rosen asks of us—to be moved by life's events and allow them to change us. You might think *that* would be a given after such a tough experience, but it is amazing to me how tempting it is to deny my feelings, to deny life.

Cancer can be very silent and one doesn't know if it's there or not. So I want to keep remembering to live with the unknown, to remember that death is not too far away. I want to live with love for myself, and for others. As I struggle to live well, I want to keep the process of transformation close at hand. So I continue to receive Rosen, to go to my Authentic Movement group and, as I can, to let my love come out.