

Jack Lee Rosenberg and Beverly Kitaen Morse

Drs. Jack Lee Rosenberg and Beverly Morse are internationally renowned therapists and teachers of somatic psychotherapy. As co-directors of the Integrative Body Psychotherapy Institute (IBP), they have led seminars and trained mental health professionals throughout the world.

Beverly: When Jack and I first became a couple we were determined not to let anything dampen our love and passion. As experienced IBP practitioners we used all our mind/body skills to sustain our own wellbeing and clarity. Every evening we cleared even slight upsets. Still, we began to notice that old destructive undermining themes from previous marriages began to creep into our idealized hopes. Because we had made a commitment to face our own habitual relational patterns as they showed up, seeing our own part we could no longer blame the other or our former spouses for certain past hurts.

We wanted to be as emotionally close as possible so we did as much as we could together. We cooked, shopped, played, worked with groups, couples and. We led workshops, taught at and ran our institute and wrote books together. In such close quarters we were bound to step on each other's toes. Trust became imperative. Since I truly believed that that Jack was not out to get me, and he felt the same, we decided that no matter how injured and sure we were at the time of an upset we would assume a misunderstanding and a positive intention from and toward our partner. Our insistence on assuming good will allowed us to a deep sense of attunement and intimacy. This has been a primary cornerstone in the foundation of our relationship.”

As potential struggles emerged in their relationship they developed a system for working with couples that they published in *The Intimate Couple*. Teaching together was a challenge for them both. When they first started to facilitate workshops together, Jack had been a therapist for many years. He was the expert and a published author. He also had name recognition. When Beverly joined Jack as a teacher and workshop leader, she was relatively inexperienced and he had a worldwide following, She initially felt intimidated. Could she sit next to him, be a partner and let him have his brilliance, experience, skills and bag of tricks she asked herself. It took time, a lot of journal work

and a leap of faith and encouragement from Jack for her to not make herself less by minimizing her talents, experience and inner wisdom. They both knew how important it was to have absolute equality and reciprocity to develop mutuality and sustain love in a relationship. Because of the nature of their work they would each have to learn to carry the load equally or the group or couples would not respect them as a team.

Jack: "I supported Beverly: One day I said, "Don't lie down. Own what you know as a human being. It doesn't matter that you haven't been teaching as long as I have. It's embarrassing to see a woman of your caliber, smart and capable diminish herself. Don't giggle after you say something profound it disqualifies you and what you have just said."

Beverly: "At first I felt hurt. Then I had to acknowledge to my self that he was right. I was purposely, if unconsciously, trying to make myself less in the hope of making others more comfortable. But I did rise to the challenge and I found my voice. I had to. Our relationship has always been based on authenticity and equality. We have to live what we teach, or it is hollow and riddled with hypocrisy."

Jack: "We always strive to maintain authenticity in our work. We never make any claims or ask anything of our students that we haven't lived ourselves. Both of us have tremendous discomfort in being even a little bit dishonest. It has always been very difficult for either of us to work with other, especially couples, if there is any unresolved problem between us. We could never do anything that would hurt the bond that we share. We've learned to be careful with loaded issues. For instance, I can complain about my kids, but Beverly better not. She can complain about her kids, but God forbid if I do."

There are some remarkable synchronicities to our lives. Although we didn't meet for the first time until our forties, Beverly and I were both born in the same town, San Diego and in the same hospital. I was born five years before her. We grew up in houses that were only six blocks from each other. Our homes had the same floor plan and details and we slept in the identical bedroom. We went to the same elementary school and junior high school, but we didn't know each other then. We each had four children with our previous spouses and each of us named our second child, Melissa Ann. I used to be a dentist and for a time Beverly was a dental assistant. Our father's had stores a few blocks apart. We later in life both became therapists and met in Los Angeles."

Beverly: “We have always had a fantasy that we had crossed each other’s paths unknowingly. Had we been in the same room or on the same street corner but fate had other plans for us? Jack and I met several times professionally and through mutual friends through our study and practice of psychotherapy. At the ending of a class on sexuality that my former husband and I attended in our home, I was asked by the other members to keep the class going by taking over leadership. This was partly because I was in a masters program leading to becoming a licensed psychotherapist. I had heard of Jack’s work on the subject and invited him to be one of the speakers. Later I was invited to join IBP training by Jack’s then co-director, Marjorie Rand.”

Emotional closeness and authenticity has always been a top priority for us both. Neither of us has any tolerance for pretense of any kind. I think that one of the reasons that we prize emotional intimacy so highly is that we both have pretty high abandonment anxieties and this was not resolved in our previous marriages. It makes being together all the more precious to us.”

Jack: “We got married on April Fool’s Day, 1995. We deliberately chose that day. We wanted to bring the spirit of play and humor into our marriage. We had two ceremonies with our families. One was a Jewish temple ceremony, and because we were both so drawn to Eastern spirituality in our home we wore Japanese robes in a beautiful Shinto ceremony.”

Beverly: “To me, choosing April Fools Day expressed my unease that the titles lover and partner that had worked for us for ten years were about to be changed to husband and wife. I was afraid that we might both revert to old learned male/female roles that we had played in our marriages.

One of the things that I found especially attractive about Jack was how comfortable he was with his sexuality. His desire for me was primal and unmistakable. His sexually came with a delightful energy, rather than neediness. Shortly after the divorce from my first husband of twenty-seven years, my daughter went to an office party, where her father and many of his employees were gathered. Expressing true concern for a recently divorced woman of fifty, one of the men asked my daughter, “How is your mother doing?” My daughter answered with great timing, “Oh, she’s doing

extremely well. She's dating the man who wrote the book *Total Orgasm*, and she is just fine."

Ten years into their relationship, on their one-year wedding anniversary Jack had heart by-pass surgery. It really put to the test the personal and relational mental health skills they were practicing and teaching.

Jack: "I had chest pain and went immediately to my cardiologist. When he looked at the results of my tests and saw how weak and clogged my arteries were he said, "Don't stress yourself until we can get you to the hospital for surgery. I was terrified when I went for my open-heart surgery, because I have two relatives that died from overdoses of anesthesia. I had reported this fact to my doctors, but they had dismissed my concern as normal anxiety around a serious operation. With the first shot the anesthesiologist gave me, my heart stopped. I was on the heart lung machine for an over extended period of time. Being on the heart and lung machine so long caused a lack of oxygen to my brain."

Beverly: "During Jack's open heart surgery, I was downstairs a couple of floors below the operating theater. Jack and I were so attuned I knew he was in a life and death process even before the doctors came downstairs to inform me. Later I could sense him being cut into at the very moments that the surgery was taking place. Sitting there with family I realized that such an over extension of closeness was not helpful to either of us. I couldn't allow myself to get so stressed that I couldn't be strong, present and alert for all that Jack was going to need. It was just too easy a set up for me to get sick as well. His illness challenged me to discover how to be close, supportive, caring without self-abandoning, and taking the impossible responsibility for keeping him alive. I realized that I had to be grounded in my own center for both of us."

Jack: "I came out of the surgery with symptoms of senility. For the next two years I spent a lot of time meditating. I knew I had memory loss, but I was not aware that my cognitive functioning was also impaired. Emotionally, I felt terribly insecure. Not surprisingly, our sex life was also affected."

Beverly: "After his open-heart surgery, Jack hadn't been home from the hospital very long when he wanted to have sex. When he got close to orgasm, he would say "goodbye" to me. Sometimes he would say things like. "If I die, I'll watch over you." It was just a bit too intense for me to have death mixed up with our sexual experience. For

the very first time, I was shocked to find myself not wanting to be sexual with Jack. But we have a strong commitment to each other. One of the vows we made at our wedding was that we would not allow anything to get in the way of our love or sexual passion. Over time, we were able to work out the anxiety provoking sexual atmosphere by keeping the death conversations separate from our sexual interaction.”

This crisis also changed the nature of their relationship. Jack had to go inward to heal and Beverly had to turn outward to take over managing their personal and professional lives. This dramatically changed the balance of their relationship. Having separate domains put a dent in their closeness. When Jack’s cognitive functioning was impaired his intuitive capacity became stronger than ever. He never lost his ability to tune into what was happening with people on a very deep level. But his full recovery took a very long time.

Jack: “We had tried every single western and eastern medicine and practices we could find. And it seemed that I just was not improving enough. And in our continuous search I tried an alternative treatment called Externally Enhanced Cardiac Pulsation (EECP) that was recommended to me by an out of town cardiologist who dropped in for Thanksgiving dinner. There was an almost instantaneous improvement and I received that treatment five days a week for two years. At this point, I feel fully recovered. During the time that I was experiencing impairment from the surgery, my mind was not as keen and sharp as it had been and I was forced to rely more fully on my intuition. The seriousness of my illness and the long slow recovery has ended up being a gift for both of us. It has made us look into our own being and the issues of existence. Out of this crisis we both have grown and deepened our relationship.”

Through diligence, determination, and a powerful, shared commitment Jack and Beverly not only survived this challenge, but individually and collectively they came through it with greater strength, love and wisdom than ever before. Like many great teachers, their motivation to serve was driven by a commitment to personal growth and to pass on the treasured lessons from their experiences. As part of fulfilling life’s purposes they continue to pass on the lessons.

Jack: “Growth oriented relationships are not easy. They require time and effort. This style of relationship isn’t for everyone. Not everyone is a seeker, but Beverly and I

both are. We know that there is more to life than being stuck on the treadmill of desire and longings. Doing this work is a labor of love. We both have a clear intention: No matter what comes up, we are committed to hanging in there and working it out. We both trust that everything is workable. We've learned over the years that moments of crisis and challenge are necessary to strengthen us as individuals and as a couple. Although there have been times that our relationship has been severely stressed, I never thought that our marriage would break."

Beverly: "After Jack's heart surgery two of the six bypass grafts broke down. His doctor told me he might not ever fully recover. That really stunned me. I felt overwhelmed. Was the rest of my life going to be confiscated by this illness? I had worked so hard to escape from making the needs of others more important than my own.

Jack: "As it turned out, most of the work that we had to do was our own inner work. When we felt hurt or upset, instead of taking it out on each other, we would write in our journals. In the privacy of our journal writing, we continually looked into our own childhood history patterns and themes. We both had a strong commitment to know ourselves as well as we could, and not project our antiquated themes upon each other. We were convinced that this was the only way we could have a fulfilling relationship. The more we wrote in our journals, the more clearly we were able to see the themes and teachings that had been handed down to each of us through the generations."

Beverly: "Over the next few years, we wrote two books together. It was a tremendous challenge to co-write these books from equal voices. Anything that is this huge and difficult is an opportunity, because it forces me to learn and grow.

Many people look for formulas for relationships, but formulas don't work in the long term. The only thing we find works over the long term is to show up in the moment and tell the truth. Only when we are honest with our self, you we truly intimate with someone we love. One time, my therapist said to me, "You can only be as honest with yourself and others in direct proportion to the inner work you have done to know your underlying themes."

Jack: "At seventy-five, it's quite clear to me that I am in the end zone of my life. I live with the keen awareness every day that I don't have that much time left. It helps me to not indulge myself in being down, holding grudges, feeling victimized, or stewing in

self-pity or anger. I just don't have time for those things anymore. It is imperative that I let go of anything that might threaten my relationship to myself or to Beverly. Practices that bring us closer, like breathing together and skin time, we make sure to make a priority. We spend a great deal of time doing what brings us the most enjoyment. I am committed to Beverly having the experience of knowing and feeling how much I adore her.”

Beverly: “What I have always appreciated about Jack is his consciousness, intelligence and humor He has that nice balance of being sensitive and masculine. What attracted me mainly is his ability to make the most direct and intense contact with me. One of the things that I love the most about him is that I can trust him to take what I say into consideration. He always processes it and honestly looks for anything that fits for him. We both share our commitments to truth and authenticity. It has been powerful force that has brought out wonderful life changing heartfelt moments in both of us. I wouldn't have had it any other way!”