



Garet Bedrosian

Active Pause *October 2011*

Garet Bedrosian says: “My life’s path has been motivated by curiosity and a desire to know the world around me at a deeper level. I sensed energy and knew there was more which was evidenced in always wanting to know the “why” of things; therefore I’ve dedicated much of my life to self-exploration and following my wonder about people, relationships, and diverse cultures. I believe the mind and body are inextricably linked. In more than 30 years of psychotherapy experience I have trained in Bioenergetic Analysis, Expressive Arts Therapy, Imago Couples Therapy, EMDR, and Addictions. I am currently the Executive Director of the Southern California Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis as well as a faculty in the Certification Program. I am also a member of a Playback Improvisational theater group, I dance and practice yoga, so being alive and energetic is a personal commitment for me.”

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (<http://relationalimplicit.com>).

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge Prengel: This is a conversation with Garet Bedrosian. Hi, Garet.

Garet Bedrosian: Hi, Serge.

S P: So, you are trained in several modalities?

G B: Yes, my primary modality is as a Bioenergetic therapist. I’ve been involved in Bioenergetics since 1990 and because I am a dancer myself and I love to be in my body. I also like doing improvisational theater, I decided to train in expressive arts so that I can combine the freedom in the arts with the technicality of the Bioenergetics.

S P: Hmm. Wow.

G B: I am also trained in imago relationship therapy and fits with the other modalities because imago is based on a developmental model and Bioenergetics is also based in a developmental model. I don’t know if you know this but Bioenergetics has also integrated a lot of attachment theory so we work in a very relational way with our clients even though we are doing somatic work with them. So the combination of the Bioenergetics and the imago relationship work is very exciting to me so I started using bodywork with couples, as well as with individuals. That’s my new passion.

S P: Hmm. So that would be great. Maybe we can talk a little bit more about how you integrate these two approaches.

G B: Okay. That’s great. Well, I don’t know if you know much about imago. Imago is based on a theory that we learn our template of love and our families of origin and then that template becomes an unconscious kind of radar system as we become adults and start looking for our life partners. And

if you think about the number of people that you come in contact with in your life and the number of people that possibly you become attracted to and maybe even the few that you fall in love with, those people fit that unconscious template. Their energy somehow feels familiar to you because it's something that you learned in your family.

S P: So that's a very nice little touch including just with the imago, the sense of that the recognition is done at an energy level.

G B: Yes, exactly. So energetically, in our families, certain parts of our character are supported and so we can live more fully and those parts of our character and other parts of our character are maybe not supported or maybe even rejected.

S P: So again, I am stopping just because there is a lot in what you are saying. You say certain parts of our character, you're alluding to, in Bioenergetics, the character structures. So it's a sense of, in a way, the stages of development, character structures that fit you, you live in more of the time and that connection is at that level?

G B: Yes, and speaking actually in both senses of the word character. In Bioenergetics, we certainly have certain characteristics, character types that are associated with the developmental stages of our life and we get stuck sometimes in certain developmental stages. But also by character, I am talking about passions and personality and the places where we feel alive and interested in our lives. Sometimes in our families, those things about us get supported. Like, if I wanted to be an artist and my family didn't necessarily value that, they might dissuade me or even reject that part of me so then I would reject that and that energy would get disturbed or held or depressed or repressed in my body. So then when I go out into the world as an adult, then maybe what becomes interesting to me is somebody who has developed that part of them. Their energy in their artist is more alive.

S P: Yes.

G B: And, possibly what they are interested in is that I've become very responsible and serious and maybe they are looking for somebody very grounded. So now we find each other because our energies match.

S P: Yes. So they could match at a level of, "Well, this is like me", but they could match at the level of, "this is what I'm yearning for."

G B: Yes, exactly. We have an energetic pulse that pulses in and pulses out and so if we get stuck on an in-pulse, then we might look for somebody who has an out-pulse about those things that we are missing in ourselves and they are looking for the opposite. So that brings together an attraction but of course, even though those things are attractive and interesting to us in the beginning, those are the things that ultimately cause power struggles in our relationship because they challenge us and they make us vulnerable. And then we say, "Uh-oh, I'm not sure I'm ready to go there", so then we do to our partners exactly what our parents did to us and say, "No, don't do that. Don't be alive in that way." Then our partner doesn't like that so much. That wasn't the contract that they signed up for and vice versa.

S P: Yeah. Yeah.

G B: So energetically, when I am working with individuals, I'm looking for where are they stuck, where are they repressed, where's their energy held in the muscles and cells of their body and what can we do to release that holding. We think of the body like an energy economy, just like our national budget. If we're using a lot of the national budget for defense, then we don't have as much available for social programs. So in our bodies, if we are using this to defend ourselves against being hurt, then it's not available for aliveness, passion and creativity. So we want to free that energy.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. So the areas of stuck are actually a way in which we hold energy in the area that has to do with something that we are not able to protect ourselves, so that's kind of an armored area.

G B: That's right. And the irony of that, of course, is that when we are defending, then we are more vulnerable. You know, it's when we are fully alive and grounded that we are more protected, we are safer, because we have a sense of safety in our bodies and a sense of groundedness in our bodies. If that energy is being used to defend and hold or if I'm holding my body tight, then I'm more likely to get pushed over emotionally and physically and more likely to get wounded. So we want to free that energy so we can feel solid within our sense of self. So that's with individuals and then with couples, of course, we have them mirroring each other in their energy and triggering each other into these places of vulnerability and fear and trauma and need for protection so all that energy is flying around the room all the time. So what I like to do is stop them when I can experience that and ask them to slow down and pay attention to what just happened in their body. I might ask, what just happened in your jaw? I noticed you tightened your jaw or you stopped breathing or you turned, you twisted your body in some way. Let's pay attention to that, let's exaggerate that, what is your body telling us right now. What happens when we start to release that, so we can go in either direction, we can exaggerate it and learn more about it or we can release it and find out what happens. And often times, the vulnerability then starts to come through.

S P: Yeah, so in contrast to say doing couples therapy or imago therapy specifically, in a talk therapy mode, what happens is when you notice a pattern, you bring the client's attention to what's happening in the body and the way you do it is you have noticed, for instance, the clenching of the jaw or tightening some place, so you just specifically attract the client, push the client's attention to that area, what's happening there, so that they can be conscious of the body experience at the same time as the emotional experience.

G B: Right, exactly. And as they are learning and becoming more aware of this unconscious holding that is happening and what it could be protecting them from, their partner is witnessing and the partner then can develop more empathy for them because they are watching the struggle with this internal unconscious need to protect and where it might come from all the way back into their childhood.

S P: Yes. Yes, so in other words, that's a very visual experience that what's happening is, okay, I'm not taking it personally because I can see how it's happening to him or to her, you know, and it's a very profound powerful experience that actually shows in the body.

G B: Exactly. Exactly. And you said something that hit the nail right on the head. They don't take it personally. This has nothing to do with me. This is something that you have in your own body that you struggle with within yourself, that maybe you don't have a choice about it because it wasn't conscious before.

S P: So can we talk a little bit about what, you know, what it's like in a session? I know that you gave a general sense of observing what it is, noticing patterns, pointing out to the attention to what's happening in the body. Can you maybe give some examples of that?

G B: Let's see. I have been working with a couple. They were very, very bright. They come from foreign born families so they have that cultural similarity and, the strict structure of that culture as well. There is a lot of feeling about who they should be and who their partner should be, so they have a lot of expectations about each other. And quite often, without recognizing it, they criticize and reject one another. It's so unconscious because it's so engrained in their personalities from their culture, from their families that I have to slow them down quite a bit. He has a tendency to lift his head and his neck and look down his nose at her. It's very interesting to watch his body actually transform as he looks down at her and gets this tone, this parental critical tone. When she first came into session, she said, "I never feel good enough with you", which of course is the way he felt with his father. So now, his body has adapted that and he actually looks down his nose at her so I've gotten him to the point where he can feel that actual transformation happening in his body. He can feel his chest lifting, his head going up as he looks down his nose at her. He has started to shift that stance. He could soften his chin, soften his chest, relax his jaw and actually say, "Wow, this is amazing. Just by changing my body, I noticed my feelings have changed."

S P: Okay. So what's interesting here, is for people who think of Bioenergetics as a method that is about catharsis, what you are describing is really more of a sense of mindfulness. As you have pointed out what happens in the body and the client is able to follow it to be more aware of it, comes the idea that there is a possibility of acting on the body and in that of having a different experience of reality and giving a different experience of self to his partner.

G B: Right, exactly. And, he was also able to say, "You know, now that I've experienced this on a body level, I can see that my dad used to make me feel that way." So he got two awarenesses here. One about his own wounding and then he now has adapted that as a defense, as a protection, and now how he does this to his wife.

S P: Beautiful.

G B: Yes. It's been beautiful.

S P: So what's the experience of the wife, you know, as you work with him?

G B: Right. So she came from a family, of course where her father was authoritarian and very opinionated about who she should be in the world and the way that she learned to protect herself was to develop a secret self inside that she doesn't share. And that, to him, feels like abandonment. So when he is in his critical mode, then she withdraws to protect herself, just like she did in her family. She actually would twist in her chair or cross her arms and that's the way she withdrew, which of course triggers his abandonment. So now I'm getting her, when he can come forward and recognize what he's doing, to soften. Then she comes forward and he can experience that and when she pulls away and withdraws and pulls herself back, then she can notice that he's getting triggered and she can then soften her face. She gets a very harsh look on her face. She can soften the muscles on her face, bring her body forward to face him, open her posture, breathe more deeply, let herself know that he's not intentionally trying to control her like her dad and be present. Just be present. And that then changes him and of course, gives her the experience that she's safe.

S P: Yes. So again, I am struck, as I am listening to you, by the fact that you're noticing a pattern, again, just the same way as in talk therapy, you would notice the pattern, notice how it's connected to the experience in the family of origin but you are also very, very carefully noticing the way the pattern is expressed in the body language and in the choreography. You are a dancer, so in a way, it looks like you are looking at what's happening between these two people, not just as a play or radio-play, but as a piece of choreography where you notice the movement and the facial expression in the movement and as you are pointing it out to people very precisely, you are able to give them the option to actually change that choreography and to notice what's happening when it has changed.

G B: I'm going to steal that. I liked what you just said. I'm going to put that on my website, that I choreographed the session. I really like that.

S P: Yeah. And it feels really like a sense of choreography, not at all in a sense of imposing your will, but really very carefully noticing a worthy movement in order to redirect the energy. So it feels like a very, I mean I have that sense of you, very keenly being in touch with the energy, as it is expressed and so that, in a way, through your intervention, there is the possibility of the energy being reflected and redirected.

G B: That's right. And what I tell my couples is it's not so important that we get through this content or that we solve this problem. What's more important is that we intervene on these patterns because if we could do that, then the change will be more embodied, more thorough, and then you will be different in the relationship. And the issues will begin to disappear. And then, you know, sometimes, in a more traditional Bioenergetic way, I might choreograph something more contrived like if they are in a push-pull in their relationship, I may have them match hands and push and pull on each other, like a tug of war with their hands. Or I might have them, if they are frustrated with each other, this is a really good way to get a back massage is to have one of them bend over and have the other one just kind of pound on her back, of course if there is no domestic violence or abuse in their backgrounds, but just that kind of pounding and saying, "You frustrate me so much!", and the partner who's getting hit says, "Oh, do that harder! That feels really good!" And then, they start laughing. Now because a person is able to express their frustration by pounding and saying these things and the person being hit saying, "Wow. I like this. Do my legs now!" Then they can see, oh, this is us, this is what we do, we get frustrated with each other and now we can act it out in a humorous way and move past it and release the energy.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. So it becomes really healing energy at that level.

G B: That's right. That's right. And, on a sweeter tone I do something with couples that I call spoon-tuning. So, I have a mat in my office, and I have them lie down together with one person spooning the other and then I will have the person on the inside begin to breathe in a way that the person on the outside can feel. Then the person on the outside begins to match the breathing. So now they are attuned with each other's breathing. And I tell them, if you do this for just a minute or two when you feel a frustration coming on or when you are feeling disconnected from one another you're going to begin to feel connected again, and you might not even have to talk about that frustration anymore. It might just disappear. Because what you want really is connection. So let's get connected and then see what happens.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. So it feels like a, you know, in that example, it's a specific technique but it's also a metaphor for what you are doing, is just helping people connect and discovering the barriers to connection but not staying in a way in the problem or trying to solve arguments, just finding the way to look at what is behind the block.

G B: Exactly. I talked to them about this being a team issue and we need to be on the same team and solve this problem as a team. So how are we going to get on the same team before we start addressing this problem. So I'll do whatever I need to do to get them on the same team. And then we'll address whatever the issue is.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. So what about clients that come to you, as a couple, but might be a little bit more shy about, you know, just paying attention to body or can be so wound up in their issues that it's really very difficult to shift from that to something that's focused on, you know, just working inside and paying attention to the energy.

G B: Well, certainly I have couples coming in that are so triggered that getting them to cooperate can be challenging. So I will work with them in relationship to me and translate to the partner to create some safety and I speak about safety a lot. So my job is to create the safety in the room and to find out what it is that they need to be able to relax enough to take a breath. So I work with them to let them know that I am hearing them, that I am interested in them, that I hear their frustration, I know they are at wits' end and they are feeling very desperate about all of this and I really want to help them and what I know is that we need to start from a grounded place. I want them to have success and if I start them from this chaotic place, we are not going to have success. So I get them to define their own goal. Do they want success? Do they want to work on this relationship? Okay, then, let's start from a more grounded place and I will work with them, individually while their partner observes this and then work with the other partner before I have them talking to each other. If it gets interrupted, I have them stop, go back to their original goal or their original mission and to just stop, get grounded, find that place of calmness inside of them and then come back to their partner again. So generally I can get them to at least talk to me, if they can't talk to their partner. Sometimes they are not ready, even though the imago process is to get them talking to each other, sometimes when you have very early wounded people, you have to teach them how to do that and sometimes you need to titrate through the therapy to do that.

S P: Yes. But you still are doing that in the context where the two of them are present. It's within the...

G B: Always present.

S P: It's not individual sessions with each of them. Okay.

G B: Because my hope is that their partner will see how hard they are working to become grounded, to be available to the relationship and I will say just that. I want you to notice how hard your partner just worked right now to contain their reactivity, to be calm so that she can be available to you. Did you notice that? Yes, I noticed that. Let them know that you appreciate that. So I am always bringing it back to them and having whatever efforts they are making be appreciated.

S P: So in a way, there is a very clear contract for people coming in and the contract is, it will not work out, unless both of you agree to contain your reactivity, that you may not see it and experience

it at this point as reactivity but you have to do that because otherwise, it won't be safe and it won't be productive.

G B: Right. And I tell them, without safety, there will be nothing else. So my job is to keep both of you safe and that's my contract with you. I will keep both of you safe. I had a couple come in the other day and he had just returned from a trip and she was so angry, she didn't want to talk to him and he had no idea she was this mad. I was so surprised that he had no idea she was this angry because I could feel it the minute she walked in the room and she didn't want to talk to him. So I had her talk to me and of course she had nothing but bad things to say that he had left without telling her when he was going, where he was going, when he would be back, he was gone for four days, she had no idea, she was left holding the bag of selling her house. Very angry. And in her family of origin, she was the oldest of five and had to be responsible for her siblings while her parents went out drinking. So she has all of that rage and all of that frustration and sense of responsibility that she does not want anymore. So I got her to the point where I could say to her, "You need to be taken care of and you don't have a sense about how to take care of yourself and I really want that for you. So let's find out what we need to do so that you are taking care of yourself, regardless of what he's doing." And then when I turned to him. She had told the story about her father beating her with a strap and he said, "I never knew that before." And he had so much empathy for her because she opened up to me. And then what he was able to say was, "I tried to tell her where I was going but she was drunk and I couldn't tell her. I was so mad that she was drunk again that I left." And so I could turn back to her and say, "Okay. So this onion is being peeled now and we are seeing the layers of it. And I want both of you to take a breath, you both make sense to me, while each one of you are frustrated it makes a lot of sense to me. This is going to take many conversations to get through so we know where we need to go so this spiral doesn't continue for the two of you." By the time they left, they were both breathing. They were both a little bit more relaxed. They both had had some relief. This doesn't solve the problem but they had an experience in my office of getting through this in a way that is different than the way that they are used to doing it at home, where they stop talking to each other or they criticize each other.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So really, you're the embodiment of safety and communication, the possibility of communication, the possibility of being heard.

G B: Yes. The possibility that there is another way than the way that you're used to, the way you've been taught. There is another way that maybe you don't know yet. Let's be curious about it.


S P: So Garet, that is a very beautiful explanation and description of what you do. Just as we are coming to the end, is there something that you might want to add or is this a good place to end?

G B: I just think that working with the energy, whether it's with individuals or with couples and whatever way that you do that, is really important, I have to be aware of my own energy in the room and what's happening inside of me and I use that as well. I may notice that I am feeling unsafe or I notice that I am feeling some sadness. Let's see what that's about. So sometimes, I let them borrow my sense of self-awareness and energy or sometimes I get a feeling like my jaw starts to tighten and I look towards them to see who's jaw is tightened. So between my energy and their energy the three of us create a partnership. Then, they start learning this language of energy and the body so when they leave my office that becomes one of their first awarenesses. They can ask themselves, "What's happening in my energy and what can I do to shift it."

S P: Yeah. Yeah.

G B: So I both the client and the therapist need to be aware of their energy.

S P: Thanks, Garet.

 *This conversation was transcribed by San Kim*

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