

## DR. ALEXANDER LOWEN

### Talks to the Editor

*Dr. Lowen studied therapy under Wilhelm Reich and then qualified in medicine in Switzerland. He formed the Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis in New York.*

One of the biggest issues that we all face and it's an issue that has never been resolved, at a deep level, is the question of the self and society, the relationship of the individual to the community, to the group.

And that relationship is broken down everywhere in Western civilisation; the whole trend has been to make the individual the all important person. Everything is for the individual; like what is the Government doing for this poor person, you know? And this poor guy can't do what he wants. Why shouldn't he be able to do what he wants? Of course what happens is that nobody is working unless you pay them. In other words what they do for the common good, they're entitled to be paid for that. And in a psychological sense this is one of the basic reasons why there are so many emotional problems. Because obviously if we are all individualistic you know in our attitude then we don't have a sense of belonging. So what we do in humanistic society is we emphasize the *being*, rather than *belonging* and we create more alienation and more problems than we actually solve. I'm not criticizing humanistic psychology, I'm only saying that this is an issue that has to be squarely faced.

*Yes, logically-though, surely you should first get in touch with yourself and only then can you really get in touch with your group, with society.*

Well, we can't do it that way fully. You do have to do it through self, there is no question then you have to define the self. I mean, is there a self that exists apart, fully apart from its relationships? When we speak for example about a bodily self that you've got to get in touch with, there is no question that's the basic point from which it all takes off. But the reason why we lose the bodily self is because of the ego. And it's an issue that has to be looked at very deeply in a publication called *Self and Society*. The reason is that even in a family set-up which is about mother and child, there is too much of an individualistic outlook, I mean that the mother is thinking of 'my needs' and the child's needs and it isn't as though it were 'our needs'. So that the children feel isolated. The reason we have these problems is the lack of, you know they complain the father wasn't there, the mother wasn't there. Though I know there are many factors that are involved in it, but one of the factors at a psychological level is—everyone is trying to fulfil himself and with a mother-child relationship I'm finding that too. They are thinking of their fulfilment, their needs etc. Of course what happens is children are deprived, even used and become psychopathic are not given enough and become oral, or are rejected and become schizoid. The biggest problem we face is to knock out the egotism of people this me me me I I I I. Because that is really a very destructive force. We knock it out by getting them in touch basically with their

bodies so that they are not a 'me' up here, thinking of what I need 'up here', but being in the body and relating in a more immediate and direct way without that ego involvement. It's part of our goddam culture. We are too egotistic so that the real counter-force to egotism of course is the basic body work. There is no other way you can do it. On the other hand one has to be clear why it's so important to knock off this egotism wherever you see it. I remember for example we were talking about self awareness and self expression and then self possession you know and all of that and I want to introduce the idea . . . of humility. The problem of course always is that whatever understandings you develop, whatever insight and whatever techniques you desire, egotistic or basically psychopathic people turn that around and merely use them for ego aggrandisement, for ego purposes and they undermine everything you really try to do in a real deep sense. It's really a terrible problem.

*But in fact humility somewhat screws me up inside. I am not humble. I don't like humility.*

No, no, humble and humility are two different words. Nobody is saying 'be humble', they say 'have a sense of humility'. Humility is the opposite of arrogance, do you like arrogance?

*No, but I would substitute as I have said when we argued before, awareness.*

But awareness doesn't counter the question: I mean we are not aware because you see the only way we can be aware is to be aware be of differences, you can't just be aware. It's a word that allows you to overlook everything because it has in itself no qualitative point of reference. It's a blank cheque.

*So what is wrong with a blank cheque?*

Well, exactly what's wrong with it is that all the people who speak about freedom and their self and liberty, well not all of them but many of them end up using the situations . . . simply for personal aggrandisement. You have to take away blank cheques. I don't give anybody blank cheques. Who has the right to have a blank cheque on the world? or on society? Who is that important? I'm not. I mean if we as professional people here don't feel that we have the right to demand that people come through straight with all they've got, then we're never going to get it. Nobody is going to do it. We as professionals, we must demand it. Now I don't expect the person to do more than he can do, I mean naturally you can't be an Al Lowen but give it all you've got and give it straight and give it without your ego getting involved with the picture, right? And it is not *your* system . . . *my* system. It is a question of really confronting some basic issues in life and then having the courage to look at them, define them and work with them and I give you my word if you don't want to see them in their painful aspect, in their complexity . . . then we play games. And I venture to think, and I'll say this for the journal, there are more games played in the name of humanistic psychology than there ever were in the name of traditional analysis. And they call it games . . . they call it growth games. It is all very well but would you take humanistic psychology seriously, if people are playing games? Why should you? I myself do not go to any humanistic psychology meetings. They just play games.

*Surely this is the problem when anything is institutionalized, isn't it?*

No, it's not the problem. It's the problem of any institution that allows blank cheques without a sense of commitment and devotion to a superior cause.

*What is your basic philosophy of life, what are you serving, what is in it for you, what is the excitement in life for you, what is this great cause?*

Well, the great cause itself is life--not people, life. In other words we'd better start putting the universe ahead of the nation, right? We've got to put the earth ahead of its inhabitants. We've got to put the environment ahead of comfort. We've got to put to some degree the social situation ahead of the individual. We've got to put the honesty the integrity of our work ahead of what we get from it. There is a big question . . . and we've had some fights in our institute as to how much people should charge, how much they have a right to charge. Let me tell you about Wilhelm Reich; he was very upset that psychiatrists and therapists live and make a good living out of the misery of others and it's something you must never forget. They really do, they make their living off the misery of others. If you cannot be humble about that, you certainly have to see it in its full implication.

*Yes, but on the positive side they are making a living through ameliorating the misery of others.*

Well I don't know whether you are an optimist or you're just naive. You see we only ameliorate as much as we live off and there's a lot around making a living without real amelioration. Another aspect of it even if you ameliorate the misery of others, are you entitled--well I am this special person, this great person, I have to live in a very special way. I say this because in our own institute there is always this tendency; you know they've got these great gifts--it is a great understanding, bio-energetics, it's a wonderful insight, great techniques and they do work . . . And they learn it and suddenly they're important. They are not important. It's only the work that's important. Anyway that's the problem of humanistic psychology. That's the problem of *Self and Society* and it deals with the question of awareness . . . expanding consciousness. You also necessarily expand the ego and are you compensating that by corresponding expansion on the deeper level or lower levels of your commitment to life, commitment to your culture to your society, your commitment to your work and your work with your body? And I don't see that that's happening. I find for example that when people grow through an average workshop experience they are more self conscious . . . it's a me me me me me I've learned . . . People who've gone to sensitivity training groups which is part of humanistic psychology and learn a little about themselves, they don't come back and become self actualising and self sufficient. They immediately come back and start turning over others. They are aware of everything others are: it becomes an *I-thing*, you know. How are you going to get around that? . . . So with this awareness, awareness has to be an awareness of . . . the self and the other, the self and society.

*One thing that really excites me was your saying that bio-energetics is a dynamic technique which is constantly changing and not rigidified. Very briefly, what is the*

*difference now from five years ago and what is going to be the difference between now and five years ahead?*

Let's put it this way. What are the factors that will prevent any methodology both theoretical and technical from rigidifying. And the factor is one an awareness that you don't have the answers to the problem, an honest looking constantly to find out more about what's going on and what you can do. And I think for myself when I look back over the years of work I am shocked. You know, I moved in to do therapy many times thinking I knew something, and only finding out years later how little I really understood of the problems I was tackling. But willingness to face failure, to recognize your failures, and to accept your limitations and to realize this is where your humility comes in, not that you're humble but you can be fully aware that the problems are immense.

*What are the actual changes in technique? What is the difference now, your approach to the client and your . . .*

Well, the technique is relatively . . . we work much easier now than . . . I work much easier and in a much more relaxed way now than I ever did simply because my understanding has deepened, I don't even think it's the methodology that's important; it's the understanding that's important.

*So that the trend you would say would be less rigidity even still, and a more open . . .*

Well, openness is worth nothing, it's understanding. The first thing is to understand what you're working with, forget the technique.

*But I don't with respect believe that you were that different five years ago, I am sure you still understood . . .*

No, I didn't.

*You didn't?*

No, I understood a lot compared to what other people . . . Physics Dynamics came out in 58, seventeen years ago and when you read it you say 'Wah, that guy really knows something. You don't realize how superficial that was compared to what I know now and then ten years from now when I look back I'll feel my knowledge ten years ago was superficial. Actually changes it every year. Last year we've . . . We swung back to the sexual theme, much more, Reich originally postulated, and in a much more dramatic way and we've moved in on areas here What we did in that workshop was very powerful, that sexual thing we did. Ten years ago I wouldn't have known how to handle sexual problems, and yet I was trained by Reich in those very problems. But the answer simply is that if I think I've arrived then I start to rigidify.

If I was writing a journal, I wouldn't only talk about all the good things, because in the end people are not that stupid as to buy all the bullshit. We get a lot further by coming out with the truth whatever that truth is. Look at it clearly and say it, good and bad, and then people say: that's worth reading . . . and then things will grow, become alive.

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