



CHUCK KELLEY AND RADIX® NEO-REICHIAN BODYWORK

An interview by

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S: Please give a description of your work.

C: Radix is a personal growth program that was founded by my wife, Erica, and myself. I had been involved with Wilhelm Reich in his last years, and he published articles I had written. Reich died in 1957. After his death I founded an Institute to carry the work forward, and through that Institute I published the only periodical in America at the time, 1960-65, that was dedicated to exploring Reich's work. The periodical was called *The Creative Process*. I started it when I was living in the east, where I had gone to participate in the Reichian movement.

In 1963 I came out west again. Erica and I adapted the Institute to do personal growth in the late 1960's. We did pretty much the work we do now, which is a form of Reichian body work. It's not psychotherapy but is a personal growth process that serves as an excellent adjunct to psychotherapy. Many people take it who are in psychotherapy. They want our bodywork because it is effective at releasing muscular armor and freeing emotions that are blocked, helping the therapy. Others take our work who are not in psychotherapy. For them it is a straight personal growth process which will help them to free blocks in their body that are affecting them emotionally, but not to the extent that they feel a need for therapy.

We chose the name "Radix" for our work and our organization in 1974. Erica and I have trained over 150 Radix teachers, with a staff of eight or ten trainers, in North America, Europe and Australia. The training program was highly structured, requiring at least three years of experiential work as well as professional workshops, groups and tutorials. There were assignments, examinations, and clinical supervision -- all of these things are needed in teaching people how to do Radix body work. I retired from directing the Institute in 1986.

Erica and I moved up to Washington in 1989. We keep a small practice, and train by individual arrangement now, mostly of mental health professionals.



Through the years we also trained people who were not mental health professionals and who wanted to become Radix teachers. We trained those we thought could learn to do the work well. Some of the best Radix teachers never had mental health credentials. I myself have always practiced as a teacher and never as a therapist. Although I earned my Ph.D. in 1958 and could have gone the therapy direction, the therapy model is wrong for what we do. Radix work is a process of growth and development that is just as appropriate for healthy people not in need of therapy as for those that are.

Our work is closely related to the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and other body-oriented disciplines. Its primary difference from them is that there is so much emotion released in the Radix work. That doesn't characterize Feldenkrais, Rolf patterning, and Alexander work. I do have a high opinion of those body programs. I first became involved in Alexander work in the 1940s. (I go back a long ways.) I think highly of it and still recommend that my teachers get involved. I also recommend that trainees in Radix work take a good course in massage and get themselves qualified to do it. Many mental health professionals who study with us are not used to using their hands on the body. They're ordinarily not allowed to touch their clients in the psychotherapy process, whereas we're working directly with the body much of the time in Radix work. Massage training is needed so people learn how a tense muscle feels, how a flaccid muscle feels, and what is normal tone. They need to know how the body feels to the touch as well as looks to the eyes. People must become comfortable with touching and being touched.

S: How does Radix help a person who comes in for work?

C: That question requires some background. Remember that I descended intellectually from Wilhelm Reich, that he was my most important teacher, and that, although I don't work in the way that he did, Radix is built on his discoveries. But he worked with a medical model and I work with a personal growth model. Reich discovered the muscular armor, the chronic patterns of tension in the body, the blocked feeling processes. Reich began with psychoanalysis; he was an analyst and a student of Freud. As he worked he paid more and more attention to the expression of the body: how the clients spoke, how they related to him. There was a focus on the process that they were going through as opposed to the content of what they were saying or their history. Watching the process focused him on the here and now. We've carried that aspect of it further.

The muscular armor in Western civilization is primarily a block to the expression of feeling and emotions. It developed as the human race became able to predicate its behavior on more than feelings. Feelings are the old motivation, the motivation that dominates with children and primitive people. If they're afraid they act in one way, if they're attracted they act in another, and if they're angry they act in still another way. But human beings have been gradually developing over the past few thousand years the ability to act on the basis of their thoughts as well as their feelings. This means using their judgment as to what is appropriate, what is



the right thing to do, how it fits with their morality. It's a new motivation based not on feelings, but on thoughtful opinions and belief systems. This can set man into a conflict between feelings and thinking because sometimes what a person feels like doing is very different from what they think they should do. This conflict between feeling and thinking is the source of the muscular armor.

The muscular armor is the mechanism of the will and the way that thought can force its decisions onto the body. The person has to be able to do difficult things in spite of their feelings. They have to be able to delay satisfaction and let their mind be the judge of right and wrong. I have written about this conflict between feeling and purpose for more than 25 years. It is the source of the muscular armor, the source of the conflicts in the body, and central to the practice of Radix work.

When children are taught to armor too soon, when they're taught to block their feelings before they're ready, they don't have the equipment to do it very well. Massive contraction is required. These children become over-armored, and many, many people become over-armored. They're the ones that Radix work can do the most for. Over-armorng means that because the circumstances of childhood were difficult, they had to block their feelings massively, too early, and too long. They become excessively armored as a result. This just means that they can't cry when it's appropriate, and/or they can't express their anger normally, and/or they block fear. Usually one of the major emotions is most heavily blocked. People become (mostly) anger blockers or fear blockers or pain blockers. Their armor and much of their character is organized around the blocking of one or maybe two of these emotions.

In Radix we work with the body and help release the patterns of muscular tension through which the feelings are blocked. This allows the emotions that are blocked to break through. People become able to cry who haven't been able to cry in their adult lives. People learn to express their anger who have had to sit on it since childhood. They may experience and release fear blocked since childhood. Freeing the muscular armor is appropriate for these people, a real service to them. Even more importantly, it frees not only their capacity for pain, anger, and fear, it opens the capacity for the paired pleasurable emotions of joy, love and trust.

S: How do you help people who are under-armored?

C: People who aren't armored enough, who are too expressive of their feelings, are not sufficiently capable of purpose, of containment, of delaying satisfaction, of doing the hard things, exercising the discipline necessary to make life work. Those people need to build armor. This is the goal of Radix purpose work. Most people need to build armor in some areas and break it down in others. They need to restructure their armor to make it more flexible, to give them more options and more choice, and more awareness of what the choices are that they have. Radix is appropriate for people who are under-armored as well as over-armored.



My first book was Education in Feeling and Purpose. It was a little book first issued in 1970, but the principles have never changed. Radix is a matter of working with both feeling and purpose in our students' lives, and of helping to bring them into a better relationship.

S: -- How do people express the changes they go through working with you?

C: Because people are so different, they get different things out of it. Take the over-armored person. Reich worked in most of his practice with over-armored people. He never learned to work with people who were under-armored, and under-armored people didn't often come in to psychotherapy in his time. People who are blocking feelings heavily and chronically, and enter work with a Radix teacher or a highly skilled organomist or Reichian therapist report a loosening of the armor. This can be a godsend to these people. Sometimes they feel their whole life change as they become able to cry or to become angry. As I implied before, when people become able to express their pain in crying they become able to experience pleasure, because these emotions are opposed and paired. When they block pain they block the capacity for pleasure at the same time. When people are freed of their blocks to anger they are freed of blocks to love, because these are opposed feelings too. People who block anger, then, are holding back that anger and that gets in the way of their opening their heart in love. People who are chronically frightened and blocking their fear become unable to trust. Trust is the opposite emotion to fear. Working with a good Radix teacher, they free up their blocks to fear, and they experience a lot of fear when this happens, but they gain an ability to trust. For all these people, freeing armor is a great gift. They'll be very aware that they've become alive emotionally. The armor was deadening them.

It's much more subtle when they're under-armored, because they need to build up the capacity for control, the capacity for discipline, the capacity to build and live their lives long-range. That takes a development of containment, will power, the development of the capacity to make long-range commitments and live up to them, and the whole rest of the change that comes with developing armor. People who are over-indulged when they are little, and we see a lot of those, tend to lead unsuccessful lives because they have not learned how to delay satisfaction and to require themselves to do hard things. Schools taught that much more effectively when I was a boy than they do today. There's too much permissiveness in many of our schools. So there are a lot of people who need to build more armor as well as still plenty of people who need to free themselves of armor as the primary task. Good verbal psychotherapists must do lots of "armor building" in clients, though they seldom use that term for it.

S: How do you know when your work with someone is finished?

C: It's never finished. In Radix we're not treating illness, we're not "fixing" people, we're not doing therapy. What we do is help people to live more effectively. That's why we talk about personal growth. And there are lots of avenues to personal



growth. Working with the body and with the armor in the way that we do is one of them. After people have done so much of our work, maybe one to three years, they'll realize that, yes, they've made a lot of progress, and there may be much more that they can still do in Radix work, but they may feel they'll grow more if they go in another direction for a time. Perhaps they'll pursue spiritual growth. Perhaps they'll pursue intellectual growth. Many people find after they do quite a bit of our work that they're much more effective in university, for example. They finish the degree they never completed. Or they may want to take training in dance or music or art, something else that makes their lives richer and larger. There are many other growth possibilities available. We live in a time of wonderful opportunity. Some of our people work with us for two or three years, coming every week or whatever, then take a breather from Radix work and do something different. And many of those people will come back. We have people come back to us after twenty years. We encourage people to develop their lives broadly; not to focus in just one aspect of growth. If they've done well in their Radix work, their lives will be better for it. The time will come when they'll get more out of doing another kind of work, and that's as it should be.

S: Would you describe what a video camera might see if it were watching a session of Radix body work?

C: Of course every session is different, but I'll describe something representative. The student will dress lightly for the session. A man would be in underwear or shorts, and we like for a woman to wear something like shorts and a gym bra or 2-piece swim suit. We may have them doing active things like pounding with a tennis racket or kicking into mattresses; there's some vigorous physical work in most, but not all, sessions. Erica and I work with people both on their feet and lying down. We use foam rubber mats they can lie on, pound and kick into. They're working a good bit of the time on their back. We're working with their breathing, we're working with their eye contact with us, we're working with their body.

Imagine a student of mine has stretched and warmed up, as for dance or something else physical. The student now is lying on the foam mat, knees bent. I kneel alongside, where I can make eye contact and reach any part of his or her body. I work a great deal with eye contact. Much of my formal training was in vision improvement and vision research. It led me into personal growth work. I get improvements in vision in students by relaxing the muscular armor of the eyes. The student must learn to see me without defensiveness. We work with eyes every session. It's our real starting point in freeing blocks to feeling.

Imagine then that my student is a man who clamps his jaw tight. I have him open and shut his mouth, move and jut his jaw forward. I'm trying to free some of the tensions that developed from years of gritting his teeth and holding his jaw in a tight position. I ask him to exaggerate his breathing, and note that his chest remains high even when he tries to exhale fully. With these and other non-verbal clues I read his body as blocking anger. As his jaw loosens and the breathing becomes freer I have him make sounds while looking at me, pounding with his arms and



kicking into the mat. Angry feelings are releasing. I instruct him to accept those feelings and not force or fight them, to breathe fully, keep seeing me.

After the release, the body is softer, the chest and shoulders drop, the jaw relaxes. Contact between us is easier. He is less guarded. -- More sessions are usually needed to make the changes endure.

S: Would you comment on what you and Erica do in your demonstration workshops such as the one you gave to the Northwest Somatics Conference last February?

C: There are opening remarks, and then we use whole group exercises to help people get into eyes, hands and feet. We want everybody in the group to get a little taste of doing the work as well as seeing it done. After these group exercises, we demonstrate a personal session or two. We ask for four to six volunteers. I don't choose who we will work with in advance because we don't know who will best demonstrate the work before we see them and get the feel of the group

The volunteers form our inner working group for the demonstration. All of the volunteers must have a willingness to work, to take a Radix session in front of the others. They will all need to be prepared to dress for a Radix session, such as shorts for men, shorts and bra for women. We need to be able to see the breathing apparatus. We work a lot with skin coloration and patterns of tension in the breathing muscles, and need to be able to see those muscles, to touch them, to handle them. In large groups Erica and I may do separate sessions. Otherwise Erica and the volunteers forming the inner group will help me with the session. Volunteers may hold mattresses to kick into. One of them may be making eye contact with the person taking the session, and often they'll be empathizing. Radix sessions in this context are, on average, twenty minutes long. With the group organization and two sessions, the whole demonstration group could take an hour or a little more. We'll give people a chance for feedback. I'll try to choose two quite different types of people to work with. Watching a few sessions is the best way for people to see how Radix work is done.

Of course, we really don't know how any particular session is going to work out. We give them Radix exercises, and feelings may release. Feelings have to be spontaneous; you can't program people to get angry, to cry or whatever successfully. I may suspect, but I don't know what they're going to feel. I simply provide the opportunity for whatever needs to happen to happen. After the demonstration group, we'll come back together and do group work as time permits. We must have time for questions and comments.

S: If you could communicate to the world what you thought might be of help to people in how they live their daily lives, what would you want to say?

C: I would like people to become more self-aware and self-accepting as they free their capacity to feel and develop their capacity to live purposefully. I would



encourage people to find a purpose for their life, a mission if you will, something that gives their lives meaning. And I suggest people take work, -- personal growth work, bodywork, therapy, dance, music, college courses, a spiritual development group,-- whatever programs will help them equip themselves for their mission and enrich their life. Most people should cut way back on timewasters like compulsive overwork, TV and excessive recreation (golf, skiing, spectator sports). They need to consciously do things that are of personal significance. If their life lacks meaning, their first task is to find or create a meaning.

Meaninglessness is such an important factor in life today. The lives of millions of people are without meaning. We have taken away many of the things that have given meaning to peoples' lives, and we celebrate the trivial. Work too often lacks significance. Those of us who don't believe the old religious myths and rituals that supplied a kind of meaning to a lot of people need to find something else. What is the meaning for my life, what I believe, and how can I best pursue that meaning? Sometimes creating art or music, or involvement with environmental or humanitarian projects, or volunteering time with individuals less fortunate than ourselves, can bring meaning to our lives and a sense that we can contribute to making life better on this earth. And I see all the personal growth processes and personal growth opportunities that are available to people as resources to help them develop meaning, to find some effective mission, an activity that in the deepest part of their being has significance for them.

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