

**FESTSCHRIFT
FOR
ALEXANDER LOWEN**

**BIOENERGETIC
ANALYSIS**

The Clinical Journal of
the International Institute
for Bioenergetic Analysis

VOLUME 4/NUMBER 1/SPRING 1990

**What Is a Bioenergetic Exercise Class?
or:
What a Bioenergetic Exercise Class
Is *Not***

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The Opening Question

What is a bioenergetic exercise class? Often it appears to be all things to all men. Is it a space in which to try out techniques purporting to arouse the participants' Kundalini? Or a group for engaging primarily in Gestalt techniques? Or Music and Art therapy? Or a class in which to demonstrate exercises in Assagioli's Psychosynthesis? Or is it the correct platform for use by the person who has been to India for three weeks or more (or less) and who wishes to transmit to his fellow countrymen the secrets of the East? Clearly I am trespassing in the domain of what a bioenergetic exercise is *not* in the search for an answer to my opening question. Yet such trespassing is difficult to avoid since many activities that go (or get by) under the heading of bioenergetic exercise classes turn out to be, in actual practice, what they are *not*.

The present essay does not deal with the practice of bioenergetic analysis which includes character analysis, but with the conducting of bioenergetic exercise classes which does not. Bioenergetic analysis is only discussed for purposes of comparison and contrast. I shall use the abbreviation B-E for bioenergetic

exercise when both words are employed as adjectives, that is, for descriptive purposes in relation to a class, as in B-E class; similarly, the abbreviation B-A for bioenergetic analysis, as in B-A therapy group.

It is a privilege to be writing this essay for the Festschrift issue of the Journal published in Alexander Lowen's honor. The subject matter seems to be timely and fitting since the B-E class is always involved in that area of work to which Alexander Lowen has been urging us to return under the banner cry of, "back to basics!" Essentially, this means back to the body and there is nothing more basic than the bioenergetic exercise.

My endeavor to answer the title-question consists mainly of an attempt at clarification in some practical areas of bioenergetics: what is actually being *done*. The need for this undertaking did not arise because Alexander Lowen has not been clear in what he has written and taught to date but rather because, in the subsequent carrying of his discoveries and creative contributions into practice, the waters of this clarity have sometimes become muddied. In the area of bioenergetic exercises, the text, *The Way to Vibrant Health: A Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises*, by Alexander and Leslie Lowen, is notable for the clarity both in its writing and the illustrations it contains.

The material that follows is based mainly on my experiences in Europe; however, evidence suggests that professionals in the United States also, on occasion, succumb to the temptation to use the B-E class as a catch-all. Thus, the question raised in the title of this article may be of interest beyond the confines of Europe. Indeed, as I shall try to demonstrate, it is a question that takes us beyond the confines of the B-E class itself into the area of fundamental principles in the practice of psychotherapy. It also leads us to an examination of some basic ethical precepts pertaining to this profession.

As there is no lack of clearly established principles for both theory and practice in bioenergetics and because the theories are clear and illuminating, it is understandably assumed that practice by new practitioners will be scrupulously based upon these. However, leaving total freedom of choice to the individ-

ual to embark on operational activities in this or any other area of our profession, together with lack of supervision of the contents or substance of such activities once they are embarked upon, means that many distortions creep into or even stampede onto the work.

In the field of bioenergetics, which includes both psychotherapy and exercises classes, we may have a lot of theoretical knowledge before having gained very much practical experience and/or prior to having developed a mature attitude towards the work. Where extensive work-experience is lacking, a class conductor's healthy caution — may we call it professional modesty? — can be a safeguard. Yet such modesty (or humility) rarely exists in combination with immaturity. The paradoxical equation that external ambition soars in direct proportion to inner unpreparedness more often seems to prevail.

This problematical situation is not alleviated by the fact that it has often been assumed to date, that while the people with the least experience in bioenergetics cannot practice therapy, they nevertheless are the ones who can be assigned the conducting of classes in bioenergetic exercises. When this occurs the B-E class then inevitably appears to offer the irresistible opportunity to "jump the gun" professionally. If I have just been in a therapy group of any school or psychotherapeutic approach where techniques unfamiliar to me were used, I will try them out on the participants of the B-E class I now conduct! These new techniques are not bioenergetic exercises nor can they, in many cases, be integrated into the specific *mode* of doing these exercises; therefore neither can they be legitimized or justified as part of "my individual approach" in leading a B-E class. "Never mind! As a future therapist, it's good practice for me!" is the conductor's implicit if unspoken reply. Thus, the B-E class is treated as a laboratory for professional experimentation, paid for, most conveniently, by the guinea pigs themselves.

There are some genuine confusions about the nature of a B-E class. One of these in practice concerns the difference between a B-E class and a B-A therapy group. I would call into question comments I have heard in the past to the effect that the

B-E class is “boring” or “doesn’t work.” I must add that not only trainees but sometimes graduated therapists succumb to the temptation to transform a “prosaic” exercise class into an “exciting” therapy group. Professional ethics are also at stake here, for we cannot (ethically) make a contract to offer participants exercise classes and then proceed to involve them in a therapy group with all this implies for psyche as well as soma.

With conductors who are not confused in the area of professional ethics, a more intrinsic problem exists. It is how *not* to transform the B-E class into a B-A therapy group, which is something that can happen (or constantly tends to happen), contrary to the conductor’s intention and desire. Here skill is necessary as well as professional integrity. It involves having clear concepts concerning the scope and the nature of the work in B-E classes and also the capacity to carry forward the work within its just limits. Given the “potential potency” of the bioenergetic exercise, this is no easy task. It is certainly not a task to be assigned to beginners in the field of bioenergetics. Holding the work within specific limits must be done while still encouraging the flow of energy (not blocking it), and while conducting the exercises for say, ten people, rather than simply instructing a single individual. Along with clear concepts it is necessary to develop the ability to make distinctions, even subtle distinctions, in relation to the work: for example, in the selection and sequence of exercises, plus duration of “dosage” of these; and in relation to participants for example, varying individual reactions to exercises and differing rhythms and/or “tolerance factors.”

Other skills and a not-indifferent amount of experience are necessary for the B-E class conductor; first and foremost being experienced on his own person with bioenergetic exercise, having an awareness of their potency and a practical knowledge of basic principles in bioenergetics. A highly-trained faculty of observation in seeing rather than searching (that is, in seeing the body rather than looking for the character structure), is another necessary capacity. The aim is to conduct B-E classes creatively,

allowing participants a rich and expansive experience while still maintaining a specific structure. In other words, flexibility within a structure is positive while denial of a structure is destructive. It results in destruction of form; and chaos then tends to take the place of content. Experience and talent in teaching are also advantageous.

Gaining this experience and developing these skills is excellent training for the future therapist. Thus B-E classes have a place—I would even say an essential place—in training programs, in addition to their all-important advantage of providing additional body work for trainees. Looking beyond that professional area, the B-E class is, in my opinion, a potent yet neglected tool for bettering contemporary society; and could also play an important role in the area of preventative medicine. These latter two aspects will be discussed in greater detail in a future essay.

The actual use of the word “exercise” in bioenergetics can lead to some confusion, and, indeed, must be clearly understood. For what is an *exercise* in a B-E class, when used in a different setting and to a different degree in a B-A therapy session, becomes a therapeutic *technique*—and a potentially powerful technique at that. Thus, in effect, allowing trainees to conduct classes early in their training (classes for the public not subject to the trainers’ supervision), is to put powerful therapeutic techniques in their hands with encouragement to use them before they are qualified to do so. The equivalent of the therapist’s judgement as to whether to employ a potentially powerful technique or not and/or the extent to which to use it, is necessary in the class conductor’s use of exercises, precisely because the exercises are *not* to be used as powerful therapeutic techniques! That is, they are to be held within limits. There is a subtle (if not straight and narrow) path to tread in B-E classes in order not to transform them into what they are *not*.

Bioenergetic exercises can also be used as exercises per se in individual and group therapy sessions, to help in the process of grounding as one example. We use them as exercises (per se) in

the work we do on our own bodies all our lives, as practicing psychotherapists or simply as human beings dedicated to what Lowen terms “the truth of the body” (1989). Since our work in bioenergetics is aimed at wholeness — at becoming whole human beings — it must always be based on this truth. Indeed Dr. Lowen has pointed out that, “Back to basics . . . is a statement of our rededication to this basic truth” (ibid). He has also said in a simple, vivid phrase, that “The body is the person” (1984).

The whole person is the one who feels — both sensations and emotions. And both emotions and sensations are located and sometimes locked in the body. It is the specific purpose of bioenergetic exercises to help unlock energy trapped or bound within the body and to increase motility on the muscular and emotional levels. The B-E classes share this aim with bioenergetic analysis; some of the means used are the same (that is, the bioenergetic exercises!), but their use in classes differs from their use in therapy. We inevitably enter the arena of soma *and* psyche when we work bioenergetically but as conductors of B-E classes we do not engage in psychoanalysis even if our personal capacities and professional qualifications would enable us to do so. Our active intervention in the psychological area is clearly more limited. At the same time, as I learned from conducting B-E classes for participants who were not in therapy, it is rewarding and encouraging to see the extent to which people living in contemporary society and suffering from contemporary ills, can benefit from this specific ongoing process of bioenergetic work. For, of course, in the genuine B-E class we cannot escape the priority of the body!

All professionals in the field of bioenergetics know what a bioenergetic exercise is. So the pertinent question here really centers on its specific use in diverse circumstances. What is the mode, scope, intensity, method of employing the bioenergetic exercise in different contexts? For example, we may be aware of the nature of the bioenergetic exercise and still transform the B-E class into something it is *not*. So now I would like to change the emphasis of the question in this essay’s title, to ask: What is a *class* in bioenergetic exercises?

Background

Prior to conducting B-E classes my experience in bioenergetics consisted of three years of bioenergetic analysis with Alexander Lowen. My professional work was in the theater, with extensive experience in teaching. During the time I was in therapy with Dr. Lowen, I founded and became artistic director of the West Side Actors Workshop and Repertory in New York, where I trained actors and wrote and directed plays for our week-end repertory theater. We were geographically located Off-Broadway, but our category in relation to size was Off-Off-Broadway with all the freedom to experiment that this allows!

The actor is “his own instrument” and his training involves “tuning” and “stretching” and “opening up” the instrument; that is, it involves helping the actor to augment his capacity for emotional expression and to free himself of physical as well as psychological blocks to this end. Thus it is a very particular kind of teaching, not unrelated in some aspects to psychotherapy, although with all-important differences. It is significant that in this work, too, subtle but fundamental distinctions are the issue.

The work with the actor is aimed at helping him to acquire acting technique: the craft of the art of acting. It is not aimed at giving him psychotherapy even if his work in acquiring and practicing his craft is therapeutic. Similarly, I will interject here, the B-E classes should not be aimed at giving participants psychotherapy even though, when conducted correctly, the classes are indubitably (and correctly so), therapeutic.

In the last two years of my work with actors in New York I had been using some bioenergetic exercises and some other bioenergetic techniques with Dr. Lowen’s approval and encouragement. In class we used the bioenergetic stool to help with the breathing. The stools were also to be found in the dressing rooms of our theater, used by the actors regularly not only in rehearsal periods, but also before performances and sometimes during performances; that is, between the acts! Since tension is the actor’s occupational hazard and since rich emotional

expression requires full and deep breathing, the efficacy of helping the actor with bioenergetic techniques can be imagined by anyone familiar with them. However, both in class as a teacher and in rehearsals as a director, I was careful to hold in mind the distinction between teaching a craft, working with an actor on his role in a play, using some bioenergetic techniques toward those ends and, the use of such techniques to give psychotherapy. The function of the acting teacher is to help the actor acquire a craft in order to become an independent craftsman. It is not to seek gratification by making the actor emotionally and artistically dependent on his teacher.

My background prior to therapy had included a great deal of body-work. I had been a student of dance as a child (classical ballet), and as an adult (modern dance), and active in a variety of sports. This kind of involvement with the body, as I soon learned in bioenergetic analysis, can become what I would now call "a schizoid solution." Dr. Lowen has pointed out that many dancers of extraordinary ability who can execute virtuoso movements are quite devoid of feeling in their bodies. Yet this type of experience does give a useful technical knowledge about the body itself and its alignment while stationary and in movement.

Experience in body movement can also be a useful background for the future B-E class conductor as a means of making and maintaining educated and clear distinctions between body movement per se (as in dance, gymnastics and sports), and body movement engaged in with the specific bioenergetic approach. This means that the background experience in dance or gymnastics or sports (or in all three), is, of course, not enough on its own but must be followed by extensive bioenergetic work.

It may be of interest to add that the dance I studied as an adult was at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. Martha Graham herself was teaching at the time. The specific point of interest is that the Graham technique is renowned for the way in which it impels dancers to have *a relationship with the ground*. The Graham falls are famous for their beauty and are used both in choreography and in technique classes. The

technique itself is studied barefoot, although dancers may be shod as part of their costuming in theater pieces. In any event, there is a continuous recognition of the reality of the ground, consciously and physically "pushing off" with the feet against the ground for leaps or jumps or running or prancing.

Graham herself pointed out that in classical ballet the dancer's effort is not simply to defy gravity but to create the illusion that it does not exist! In her own work, by contrast, there was a constant acceptance and affirmation of gravity and the dancer's relationship to this physical reality: whether leaping away from it or falling towards it, whether moving across the surface of the ground or remaining simply still.

At the same time the Graham technique does not involve the dancer in "grounding" in the Lowen sense — far from it! The emphasis is on "pulling up" with the stomach muscles and it is this "pulling up" (and "in" as a result), that allows such beautifully-controlled falls to occur, with equally beautiful rising-up again executed by the dancers. In the Lowen work the emphasis is on "letting down" and this entails letting the stomach "out." The mode of each in using the relationship to the ground could be used as an illustration of one of the many differences between theater and therapy.

In the Graham work the performers create and donate a strong visual-aesthetic physical element which will cause a kinesthetic and emotional reaction in the participating viewer. In the Lowen work the person himself is engaged in the physical movement and muscular activity which deepens his breathing and causes emotional reactions within *himself*. This occurs without any concern for visual or aesthetic elements or for projecting an experience to participating viewers.

Thus while it is historically interesting that Graham's work and Lowen's work both developed around the same time in the 20th century and both have a conscious and fundamental relationship to the ground, *they are not the same*.

While I was studying and working in New York, I had noted that people would take a few classes with one of the giants among acting teachers such as Lee Strasberg or Gene Frankel,

then abandon their acting ambitions and decide to open their own private classes for actors. They were self-styled teachers with insufficient experience in life as well as in the work. They usually had some knowledge of psychoanalysis, if not through personal experience, then on a theoretical level. In their classes the “opening-up” exercises would often be used in such a way (whether through inexperience or intention), as to make the student-actor emotionally dependent on his teacher; whereas, as I have stated, their use in an authentic method of teaching is wholly geared towards enabling the actor to become an independent craftsman.

Already at that time, working in the field of theater, the capacity to make distinctions, or rather the lack of it that I observed everywhere, was “the bee in my bonnet” as, strangely enough, it was later to become in the field of bioenergetic analysis concerning, for example, the difference between B-E classes and B-A therapy groups. I believe this background helped me to give the early B-E classes in Rome (before Alexander and Leslie Lowen’s manual of bioenergetic exercises was written), in such a way as to make and maintain this essential distinction.

My experience was to conduct classes without ever having taken them as a participant, since B-E classes did not exist in New York before I left. So I could take nothing for granted; and conducting participants in each class was, to some extent, an adventure into the unknown. This tended to make me think through, on a theoretical level, each phase of the class, as well as the various phases in time of an on-going class. And it is this, I believe, that makes a recounting of the experience useful. A description of the participants and of the way I conducted these early classes, follows.

The First B-E Class in Rome in the '70s

The people in Rome who initiated the project of the B-E classes were intellectually alive as evidenced by their dedicated study of the work of Wilhelm Reich, which, in turn, had logically brought them to an interest in the work of Alexander

Lowen. It seemed to me, in fact, their interest in the bioenergetic exercises had such a large intellectual component that this presented a possible pitfall. My impression was that I was expected to share whatever knowledge of these exercises I possessed so that we could talk about them together, theorize about their effectiveness and thoroughly enjoy ourselves on an intellectual level! Therefore at the outset, I avoided talk about the exercises while declaring myself ready to *do* them with the group — and so the first class in bioenergetic exercises in Rome began. Some of the participants were in therapy, Reichian vegeto-therapy, and others were not. Bioenergetic analysis was not yet practiced in Italy.

What was the approach I used? I conducted the classes with a maximum of doing and a minimum of discussion. Explanations were given in small doses. Verbal directions for exercises might include brief explanations of their scope and purpose, often joined with directions by touch: a light pressure with my hand, such as an adjustment made to someone’s position or posture was, I found, frequently more telling and helpful than a stream of explanations. With this particular group, it seemed to me, it was especially important to operate on a non-verbal level as much as possible.

In fact, in this group, at one extreme was to be found the intellectual approach to the exercises while at the other was a primary interest in how they could lead to emotional expression or specifically, the emotional “break-through.” As we proceeded, I explained to the class as a whole that our attention was directed to our bodies while doing the physical work (the exercises themselves) without mental searching for results at any level. Letting go to tears was a positive phenomenon, resulting from deeper breathing and the release of muscular tension, a tension possibly originally created in order to withhold the tears. However, we were not seeking this specific release at this time. We were simply *doing* exercises in a specific mode — the bioenergetic mode — while results *happen*. With this approach we were also learning to *allow* results to happen.

My work consisted largely of directing each participant’s at-

tention to his own body. The skill of the conductor, I also discovered, lies in directing attention thusly without telling the participant *what* he should feel but simply helping him to arrive at feeling *whatever* the feelings and sensations in his body *are*. Where one person feels stress or strain, another may experience streamings! Where one exercise originally causes pain it may eventually, with repetition and release of tension, provide pleasure.

Here specifically, my experience in teaching actors was of inestimable help. For although feeling is the very stuff—the basic material—of the actor's art, he never works directly on emotion (Stanislavski). When, in the B-E class, role players in life begin to make contact with their bodies via the exercises that they are *doing*, they are beginning to make contact with reality (with what they *really* feel) and are thus taking the first steps towards *being*.

In this first B-E class in Rome, all my comments and explanations were spread out over time and always given in conjunction with the physical work being done. I told the participants that the effect of the exercises, as of regular use of the bioenergetic stool, was cumulative and could not be hurried. Each participant would progress—or enter a process—at his own rhythm and speed. The introductory physical work might be (one example) simply to ask participants to stand with feet parallel and apart, knees bent (or “unlocked”), and to let their weight down, down, down. . . .

When, due to deeper breathing, an emotional reaction spontaneously occurred in an exercise, this sometimes caused fright or even feelings of panic in the participant. With those who were in therapy such alarm was less acute and, as I would point out, the whole experience could fruitfully be referred to the therapist in the next session. However, if a participant who was not in therapy showed signs of having such difficulties I would go to him immediately, suggest he stop the exercise and curl up in the inter-uterine position. I usually kept physical contact with him by placing my hand on his shoulder or arm, if such contact was welcome and comforting.

While the rest of the class continued working, I would then explain to the individual participant in general and mainly *physical* terms, what I believed the difficulty to be. For example, the breathing had increased too much and too fast. It was at a volume that the participant could not *yet* contain. Most important of all, I said we would do well to go very slowly and that his capacity to breathe more deeply and sustain certain exercises would gradually increase, as would his capacity to let go to tears. I said quite frankly that it was not within my scope to go into (i.e., analyze) the specific emotional content of problems causing his present difficulty. These one-to-one conversations were held in the least dramatic way possible. This, too, was part of my effort to maintain the distinction between classes where we met regularly to do the bioenergetic exercises and the group therapy situation.

If one of these participants was crying and not simply expressing his feelings of discomfort in a verbal form, I handled the situation in exactly the same way. I am referring to crying experienced as a frightening phenomenon not as a natural spontaneous release.

In the beginning, one or more of the class participants who had experience in group therapy, would come over to touch and to talk to or hold the participant who was crying. I did not encourage this. In fact, short of hurting the feelings of the would-be comforters, I tended to actively discourage it. The reason was precisely because I wanted to make the distinction mentioned above. The active support and comfort and solidarity of other members of the group is an essential element of the group therapy session as these more experienced and well-meaning participants knew. However, I was not working for the type of emotional breakthrough or the type of experience that is the aim of group therapy. Thus I felt it was better to handle these events quietly myself on a one-to-one basis, while everyone else continued working on his own body in the specific exercise under way at that moment.

In fact, I did not want either the practices or the *atmosphere* of the group therapy session to creep into the exercise classes. A

group therapy session is one of the things a B-E class is *not*, even though a B-E class is therapeutic. One can put the same thought in the form of a question: If a B-E class is a B-A therapy group then why is it distinguished by a different title? This question did not become an urgent one until years later, but it was probably first formulated in my mind by the behavior of the participants (with group therapy experience) in the first B-E classes given in Italy.

During these one-to-one interludes I found that it was quite possible to direct my attention to the class as a whole, to follow their work and even give occasional verbal instructions without unduly disturbing the comforting contact with the class member who was not participating in the exercises at that moment. Indeed, as stated, from the outset I encouraged all participants to concentrate on what was happening and what they were feeling in their *own* bodies, to enter into their bodies and to live in their bodies, leaving head-control and other types of mental activity outside as much as possible during the exercise session. There were exceptions to this total self-absorption (or own-body-absorption) in certain exercises undertaken with other participants but it was nevertheless a general and major guideline to which I encouraged everyone to adhere.

My choice of communicating to the whole class or on a one-to-one basis was simply made according to whatever seemed more suitable at any specific moment within the class context. I felt the process underway of other class members, each involved with his own body-experience, should not be blocked or interrupted nor qualitatively changed for the sake of one other participant. Further, I noted that if the class process was in full swing in this way, the single participant would not be embarrassed about any difficulties he might be having and would feel freer to take the time necessary to deal with them. Thus the one-to-one communication was most appropriate.

It became increasingly clear that the conductor may need to make the choice of one-to-one communication at any given moment in the class time and not only on the occasion of the emotional break-through. Sometimes, simply by looking at a per-

son's body, it is apparent that he needs an extra verbal explanation (or touch) that would not necessarily be helpful (and might even be distracting) to the other class members.

Concerning the "noisy" exercises, for some participants, before they had protested vocally themselves, the yelling, shouting and screaming of other class members was emotionally disturbing and aroused feelings of anxiety. In these cases I explained, again on the one-to-one basis, that this reaction was probably due to the participant's own shouting (or "aggression") being inhibited, together with a strong need to give vent to it. The class situation here greatly helps the process of "giving vent" because the first timid efforts, which might have proved embarrassing to the novice, are drowned out in the general clamor. Very often, such participants who, minutes before, had insisted "I can't" or "don't need" or "don't want" to yell, were shouting along with the best of them! The feelings of relief and satisfaction they experienced thereafter were usually a pleasure to behold.

After several months with this approach I thought participants had experienced the physical exercises to the degree where we could speak about them on a theoretical level without diminishing or distorting our subject matter: namely, body work. It then became apparent that the class members were more advanced in this subject matter than I realized. I had decided to dedicate the last half-hour of this particular class to the discussion of bioenergetic exercises that the participants had so much desired to engage in during class time when we started working together. Now my suggestion to talk was met with blank or distracted facial expressions. As I started speaking in what I intended to become a class discussion, I sensed impatience and frustration around me. People were in their bodies. That is, they were feeling their energy move on that level and while it did so they had no desire to lift it up onto an intellectual plane. It was a beautiful moment! I ceded immediately and continued the physical work.

This experience indicated the potency and value of the exercises and also, it seemed to me, that the approach being used

was correct. Could these be the same people who only a few months before had been primarily interested in intellectualizing bioenergetics; who had demonstrated, even in class at that time, a quite strong resistance to *doing* the exercises?

The level of concentration of individual members and thus of the class as a whole, had reached astonishing proportions in a very short time. It manifested itself in a deep respect for the body's autonomous processes and in an increasing capacity to yield, on an ego level as well, to these processes even on the part of the most "intellectual" participants of the class. The joking, bantering comments and teasing of others which had prevailed at the beginning, ceased completely. They had been symptomatic of the combination of an intellectual resistance to respecting the body in this way and a cover-up for uncomfortable feelings of self-consciousness that emerged when the intellect began to cede its control. Thereafter there was hardly any chatter in class and, with the exception of those periods dedicated to the "noisy" exercises, complete silence prevailed broken only by the sound of breathing.

This account of our first experience in Rome is not to demonstrate that there is not a time and place for intellectual discussions and theorizing. It simply confirms that the time and place is not in the middle of a B-E class. Neither is it at the beginning. The art of teaching here is to communicate the scope of the activity being undertaken in such a way as to help participants move towards a body orientation at the outset.

"In such a way" usually means one sentence at a time and at selected moments! Even the tone of voice in which the instruction is given is of primary importance: it is not aimed at drawing attention to the conductor and interrupting a beginning concentration, but at communicating with people who are becoming involved in bodywork and helping them on a practical level in what they are doing at that moment. Neither is the tone of voice one in which a logical lecture, delivered to the intellect, is made; nor are instructions and/or explanations made as didactic digressions. In brief, the conductor's voice is not intrusive but in harmony with what is happening or being done at any given moment.

Yes, one or two statements may also be made right at the beginning of the class before the work begins; although, personally, I prefer to have people standing, knees bent, letting the weight *down* (etcetera!) from the start, including while the introductory comments are being made. This means immediately establishing the right priorities — for the conductor as well as for the participants!

Other opportunities were found outside the classes for intellectual discussions. An important principle had thus been clearly established and was maintained for the rest of the time I conducted classes in Rome: within the class itself, first help the participant to experience the B-E exercises on his own person and then, slowly, within the process of bodywork and not at its expense, to learn the profundities and subtleties of the theories behind them. I repeat that of course, a certain amount of theory is always given in instructions on how to do the exercises, but the dosage is all-important. Enough theory is given to help in the *doing* at that moment but not so much theory as to direct the participant's attention away from his body and towards intellectual rumination.

It is important to emphasize that the use of the verb "to do" here is not related to mechanical activity: all "doing" in the classes is related to sensation and feeling in the body. (The "doing that leads to being.") Thus, the "doing" at times may appear to be quite inactive, as in the example given above of simply standing and letting the weight down. It is a biological and energetic (hence, bioenergetic) approach in a natural process of deepening the breathing and freeing energy blocked in tense muscles. Sometimes the resulting movements are large and active, but mechanical perfection in their execution is never the issue. Fundamental to the concept of bioenergetic exercises is that where there is freed energy and feeling, grace in movement will follow. And fundamental to such grace is the work on grounding.

The conductor may, indeed should, respect the participant's desire to learn about the exercises on an intellectual level but never *at the expense* of their true nature and function which is to be felt on the physical plane. A lecture (pure and simple)

given to people interested in embarking on the exercises may be helpful and in order. But it should be given in a lecture hall to fully-clothed listeners, not to class participants clothed in leotards and ready and rarin' to go!

While the first class in Rome consisted of both people who were in therapy and those who were not, later, as the classes increased in number, most of them were made up exclusively of people who were not in therapy. In either case, when we started I explained to the participants quite clearly the scope of the bioenergetic exercises: to help each participant make greater contact with his own body, to increase sensations in the body, to become aware of the body's muscular tensions and blocks and, working with movement and breathing in a very gradual process, to endeavor to release them. The result we hoped to arrive at with this process was a freer flow of energy in the body which would bring with it a greater feeling of aliveness which, in turn, would increase the capacity to feel pleasure on the part of the participants.

All this has been said many times and said much better in Dr. Lowen's books. But these simple truths about work in bioenergetics must be transmitted in B-E classes, in order to communicate the *scope* of the activity being undertaken in such a way as to help the participants move towards a body orientation at the outset.

The account of the early classes in Rome illustrates another important factor. When people have been dominated by their thought processes nearly all their lives, these exercises will soon put them in touch with their sensations and feelings, that is, with their body processes. Among men and women surviving under the pressure of city life in our epoch, a means that helps towards a feeling of greater physical aliveness meets an urgent need. This was further demonstrated by the speed with which the classes in Rome grew in number, concurrently with a waiting list which grew in length. There was no advertising and the number of classes steadily increased as word-of-mouth recommendations caused people to request them. Participants included university students, school teachers, bank employees,

housewives, doctors, psychologists, psychotherapists and other professional people. There was even an army officer in one of the classes.

The fact that in the very first class, described above, many of the people were in Reichian therapy was an early and useful challenge to me to maintain the difference between a B-E class and a B-A therapy group. Now, looking back, after completing training and practicing as a bioenergetic analyst for several years, I believe the approach used was intrinsically correct. Evaluating my work, I do not say I had professional modesty because I did not even consider myself a professional in the field of bioenergetics. I would say, rather, that I was afraid of the psychological as well as the physical potency of the exercises in the hands of a non-professional (myself) instructing other human beings in their use. I will add: it was a healthy fear. It caused me to set limits *intuitively* then. Today I would not have the same fear and so a more-conscious *ethical* effort on my part would be necessary in order to set the correct limits for the well-being of participants as well as to fulfill my part of the contract made with them.

While I was not a qualified bioenergetic analyst, I had specific life- and work-experience and training that enabled me (in my opinion) to conduct the classes adequately and without distortion of their basic scope and function. Certainly at the time I thought it would be much better to be a qualified bioenergetic analyst. Yet experience has shown that even being a qualified bioenergetic analyst conducting a B-E class, is in itself not a guarantee that the class will not be turned into what a B-E class is *not*. (A triple negative does not make a positive!)

The way of working described was also an expression of my personal style. Personal styles always differ and may range the colors of the rainbow if based on clear concepts and basic principles.

In this first (or background) experience in conducting B-E classes, a number of basic principles had already emerged. These concerned: the priority of the physical approach, including grounding; the importance of establishing this priority at

the outset; measuring introductory comments to a new class; amount and content of verbal explanations and directions given during the class; relating all comments, explanations and directions to the physical work being done; the use of one-to-one communication in the class set up; the conductor's voice; the importance of not being intrusive and respecting class and/or individual concentration; the conductor's use of touch; some examples of emotional "break-through" or reactions and how to handle them in the class set-up; not transforming the B-E class into a B-A therapy group, which could be included in holding the work within its just limits.

As the requests for the classes increased, so the need for class conductors became more pressing. It was here that my major interest in these classes as a means of helping "everyman" began, that is, as a major means of help for those people who do not wish to enter into psychotherapy. This interest does not negate the usefulness of these classes for those who already are in therapy; or even as an experience that for some individuals may eventually lead to the desire to enter into therapy. However, when I speak of B-E classes for "the man-in-the-street," I am envisaging them on a wide social scale, that is, on a scale not possible with any approach or method that reaches out to individuals only. I believe B-E classes could be given in different stratas of society and to varying age groups ranging from school children to seniors. For this possibility to be realized a sufficient number of qualified people is necessary, who need to be not only adequately prepared, but also *accurately* prepared as conductors of B-E classes.

This now brings us to training programs in bioenergetic analysis and the place of B-E classes within them. In the third training program of the S.I.A.B. (The Italian Society for Bioenergetic Analysis) in Italy, which is still in progress, attendance at a *weekly* B-E class has been required for all trainees during the first two years of training; with a seminar on conducting B-E classes in the third year.

In conducting further B-E classes in Rome, after the first one described earlier in this essay, the number of important elements or "basic principles" gradually increased from the 12

listed above. In the work I do with the trainees in the third year seminar, the list has grown to a number in the neighborhood of 50! It now provides some specific practical answers to the question "What is a B-E class?"—which I hope to set out in a future essay, along with varied case studies illustrating what a B-E class is *not*. In the seminar, the latter have helped us as much as anything en route to discovering and clarifying and defining the nature of the genuine B-E class. The seminar which was programmed for the third year of training only, has continued into the fourth year on the request of the trainees themselves.

One of the aspects of the seminar that has pleased me, indeed fascinated me the most, is, as may be expected, in the dimension of making distinctions. In the theoretical discussions which are always based on the practical work done (i.e., the laboratory approach), there has been a constant back and forth concerning structure and limits, as well as content. For example: "*this* belongs in a B-E class when used up to *this* extent," while beyond that it belongs in a B-A therapy group. And so on.

It is possible that my concern in this area will seem exaggerated to highly qualified persons who already conduct B-E classes. I realize this concern grew in large part from having seen, at first-hand, the serious, and on occasion almost disastrous, results that occurred when these classes were conducted by unqualified people. Furthermore, and beyond this specific concern in helping to develop the capacity to make distinctions, I hope the seminar will prove useful to the trainees as future therapists, as well as future conductors of B-E classes.

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