

THE VIBRANT BODY

By Alexander Lowen, M.D.

*Remarks addressed to the 17th IIBA International Conference (October
2003)*

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*Only a person who is not afraid to express love can be reasonably
secure that his heart will remain healthy.*

Alexander Lowen

I have been asked to send some greetings to the members of the Bioenergetic Institute attending this conference. I am happy to take the opportunity to do this, in that the Institute has had its fiftieth anniversary.

As you are aware, I was originally associated with Wilhelm Reich and the Institute of Orgonomy. A fundamental difference between my work and that of Reich is that I emphasize having the patient in a standing position. Reich always worked with his patients lying on the bed. Standing is an active position, and in it, the patient can literally feel his feet on the ground. As one patient remarked to me, "You put me on my feet." The standing position and the lying down position complement one another.

Theoretically that standing position implies that the patient has the possibility of being in touch with the reality of his life. To further promote the feeling of being connected to the earth, the patient was asked to bent forward, allowing his finger tips to touch the ground. We called this the grounding position. It seemed to be a significant change in the therapy.

Unfortunately, it did not greatly help, because the person still did not usually feel the connection with the floor or the ground. The reason for this, as I learned later, is that in most cases people's feet are relatively dead in a feeling way.

I tried many ways to help people feel their feet, for example by standing on one foot. But that does not charge the feet enough either. As many of you know, I also tried using a golf ball placed under the middle of the foot, and I also tried using a rubber roller. Neither of these did the job.

What I finally realized then is that people do not use their feet in an active way as they walk. Walking *ON* the feet is not to walk *WITH* the feet.

On one occasion I was watching some two or three-year-old children running. I saw the way in which their feet were actively moving. Then I also had the occasion to see a big wild bear in nature. As I watched it run, I saw that it used its feet in the same way as the children had. His feet were propelling him forward in the same way.

I realized that people use their feet in a passive way, as if they are something to stand on. In this case, walking is achieved by moving the legs but not the feet muscles themselves. The

implication of this is that the muscles of the feet and the plantar surface of the feet are the active, functional basis of walking or running.

I developed an exercise I call “connecting the feet to the Earth” to activate this dynamic in my work with my patients. In this exercise, the feet are parallel and placed 8 to 10 inches apart, the patient bends over, places his hands on his feet or around the ankles and rocks using the muscles of the sole of the feet. The patient breathes out as he rocks forward, and breathes in as he rocks back. At the same time the patient is encouraged to press DOWN as he rocks and make sound. The strength of the exercise depends on how well the patient breathes, and the exercise will deepen the breathing as it is done. The exercise may be done 10 to 15 minutes.

This exercise activates the muscles of the feet and brings a charge of oxygen to these muscles. Of course, the muscles of the legs are activated as well. The exercise makes the feet and lower part of the legs begin to vibrate. If one continues this simple exercise, the charge in the feet and legs increases, and the legs begin to shake more strongly. The vibrations are accompanied by increased blood and oxygen flow.

The vibrations start as a tremor, and as it becomes stronger the vibrations extend upward into the upper legs and up into the body. The vibrations will develop from this point so that they extend through the pelvis and the body, and they will then become a convulsion which extends through the whole body.

This convulsion is not a haphazard reaction. It is an activation of the orgasm reflex. Although it is not connected directly to any genital excitation, it is a very pleasant experience. As you will recall Reich regarded this as an indication of the capacity for healthy sexual release in men and women, and he regarded this capacity as the basis of emotional health.

I experienced the orgasm reflex in my therapy with Reich. Later, feeling my deep love for my future wife during our sexual contact, I experienced a total profound orgasm. I have recorded this experience in my upcoming Autobiography, *Honoring the Body*, which is being edited now.

However, I was not able to retain this joyfulness. The reason I could not retain it is that I lost the connection with the earth, our ground. Many years later, I realized that I never have grounded my developed the deep connection between my feet and the earth.

In my work, I quickly evaluate how much energy and feeling a patient has, and how much energy there is in the lower half of the body. At the same time, I do not ignore the individual's problems in daily life. Reich felt that there was a danger in starting work with the lower half of the body. He believed it was necessary to work from the head down because he had a deep fear of the sexual energy that could be aroused.

Sexuality is the key to understanding human behavior. However, life is based on the organism's connection to the earth. I begin therapy with the focus on the person's connection to the ground as I have described. I came to see that human beings develop problems because they do not have a stronger connection to the earth.