

A Pioneer in Medicine: Chester M. Raphael, M.D., Medical Orgonomist

By Michael Mannion

In the spring of 1956, in Portland, Maine, a trial took place in the District Court of the United States, District of Maine (Southern Division) that marked a watershed in U.S. history. For the first—and only—time, the full force of the American state was marshaled to kill both a revolutionary scientific discovery and its discoverer. The jury's verdict, and the harsh sentence imposed by the court, led to the destruction of scientific devices; the burning of medical and scientific books by the United States government; and to the death of a medical and scientific pioneer in a Federal penitentiary. Except for coverage by the Village Voice, the scientist's death was barely noted in the mass media. Wilhelm Reich was the scientist who died in prison. His discovery? The cosmic orgone energy, or the Life Energy.

"I am well aware," Reich wrote, "that the human race has known about the existence of a universal energy related to life for many ages. However, the basic task of natural science consisted in making this energy usable. This is the sole difference between my work and all preceding knowledge."

Who was Wilhelm Reich?

Best-selling author and physicist Fritjof Capra wrote that Reich "was a pioneer of the paradigm shift. He had brilliant ideas, a cosmic point of view and a holistic' and dynamic worldview that far surpassed the science of his time and was not appreciated by his contemporaries." *Psychology Today* called Reich the "grandfather" of today's popular bioenergetic, body-centered psychotherapeutic and body work therapies. Although many have heard Reich's name, few have an accurate understanding of his work.

The medical and scientific community may have ignored and disparaged Reich but many well-known creative figures have been drawn to him: musicians John Lennon, Bob Dylan, Kate Bush, Itzhak Perlman; actors Sean Connery and Jack Nicholson; writers Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, Paul Goodman and Alan Ginsburg; and acclaimed New Yorker cartoonist and award-winning children's book author William Steig. Steig, who stood by Reich in his darkest hour, illustrated Reich's book *Listen, Little Man!* and dedicated his own *The Agony in the Kindergarten* to Reich.) In 1996, a show at the Whitney Museum in Manhattan exhibited an orgone energy accumulator, along with instructions on how to build one.

Most Americans alive today were born after Reich's death in 1957. Few people have heard of Reich or his work and even fewer are aware that the U.S. government burned his books—an activity usually associated with Nazi Germany, not with the bland 50s America that is now re-run ad nauseam on "Nick at Nite" and other cable channels.

The FDA destroyed Reich's orgone energy accumulators in Maine on June 5 and July 23, 1956. On June 26, 1956, again in Maine, the FDA burned 251 pieces of scientific literature. At that time, Reich told a government agent that his books had been burned in Germany, but that he had not expected it to ever happen again.

In New York City, on August 23, 1956, six tons of Reich's books were burned by the FDA. Among the works consigned to the flames that day by the FDA were: *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*; *The Sexual Revolution*; *People in Trouble*; *Character Analysis*; *The Function of the Orgasm*; *The Cancer Biopathy*; *Listen, Little Man!*; *The Murder of Christ*; *Ether, God and Devil*; and *Cosmic Superimposition*.

In burning these books, zealous FDA agents went beyond the court order and, consequently, acted without authority. There is even evidence that FDA files regarding Reich were falsified in a cover-up of these illegal activities.

What knowledge was contained in those books that provoked their burning?

In 1996, I visited with the late Chester M. Raphael, M.D., who was at the time one of the last living students of Wilhelm Reich. Dr. Raphael, the co-editor of Reich's published works, was a physician who practiced orgone therapy in Forest Hills, New York. We spoke about his work as an orgone therapist and about the value and implications of Reich's discoveries.

Dr. Raphael received his M.D. from the University of Michigan in 1937. After his internship, he went into psychiatry in 1939. "I worked in the mental hospital setting," Dr. Raphael said. "Some referred to psychiatrists as alienists at that time. There wasn't much psychoanalysis; most psychiatrists in the state hospitals were practicing shock therapy. Treatment was at best, supportive; largely restrictive. Then along came the shock therapies: metrazole, insulin and finally, electroshock, which is still being used today. We didn't even have penicillin yet! That's how long ago it was."

After four years in the Army during WW II, Dr. Raphael returned to his work in the mental hospital setting. In November 1945, when he was a young psychiatrist at the State Hospital at Marlboro, New Jersey, Dr. Raphael first read Reich's work, *The Function of the Orgasm*. "I sat down to read it and I could not believe there was anything as significant as that. I was absolutely enthralled with it."

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Raphael got in touch with Reich. "I didn't know that I needed any therapy. I was interested in it didactically," he explained. "I started to see Reich on February 13, 1945," Dr. Raphael recalled, "and that's where it all began." He was a patient of Reich's for over two and one-half years before he began to practice orgone therapy himself.

Dr. Raphael learned very quickly about Reich's discovery of the biological energy, which Reich named orgone. "I finally found something that I could feel really had meaning for me," Dr. Raphael said. In contrast to his work at the large mental hospital at Marlboro, in which the mentally ill were simply warehoused, Raphael felt he "could actually deal with

the pathology that I felt existed all the time but didn't know how to deal with.”

Because of the discovery of the orgone energy, Raphael could work with the biological basis of a patient's psychological and somatic problems. “What I felt more than anything else,” he said, “was that it wasn't just a matter of what patients had to say. It was a matter of how they were saying it.” Dr. Raphael observed the manner in which patients expressed themselves. “Not only how they said it, but what they looked like in saying it. That was the biological basis!” he said vigorously.

It was a great relief and inspiration for the young physician to know that, with orgone therapy, one could tackle the underlying basis of both psychic and physical pathology. “That there is a biological basis for emotional dysfunction,” Dr. Raphael said, “is the thing that impressed me more than anything else. And still does, to this day.”

Reich discovered, through more than a decade of clinical work, that most human beings are “armored.” By armoring, Reich meant the total defense system of the person, that is, the rigid character attitudes and muscular rigidities that block the expression of the primary emotions—basically anxiety, rage and sexual excitation.

The aim of orgone therapy is to mobilize the bioenergy in the patient; liberate the biophysical emotions; and establish what Reich called “orgastic potency,” (i.e., the capacity for complete surrender to the involuntary during orgastic convulsion, assuring the complete discharge of biosexual energy).

“To know that a person is armored, that a person is limited in his capacity to discharge the damned-up energy in his organism. ..” Dr. Raphael paused for a moment. “You see, most sexuality consists of having sex! Local gratification is what exists. It isn't a question of the involvement of the entire organism in the sexual process. But sexuality doesn't consist merely of erection and ejaculation. It consists of a discharge of the damned up energy in the organism through orgasm. The more rigid and armored a person is, the more limited is his capacity to discharge that energy. If that is the case, the goal of therapy should consist of finding ways to overcome this biophysical and emotional rigidity.”

With Reich's work, a new era of medicine had opened, one in which the therapist's task was to overcome the rigidity and armoring in patients and to do it in an orderly, organized and demonstrable way.

“To this day,” Dr. Raphael said emphatically, “I never tire of trying to feel what the patient is expressing, rather than merely listening to his recitation of complaints and prescribing tests and/ or medication in a routine fashion. To feel what he's doing so that you don't proceed mechanically. *You need to feel a patient's problem and observe his total biophysical and emotional expression.*”

The foundation of Dr. Raphael's therapeutic work is the reality of the orgone energy that Reich discovered. “To me,” Dr. Raphael said, “the discovery of the orgone will ultimately be the solution to the prevention of disease. I still feel that the only truth I can really trust is

the prevention of pathology in the first place.”

According to Dr. Raphael, the damage to human beings begins in the first days, weeks and months of life. His clinical experience suggests that there is some opportunity during the first puberty of early childhood and during adolescence—periods in which there is a sudden surge of bioenergy in the body—when the damage can be modified or corrected somewhat. “But the damage is done right at the beginning of life. The damage is done in the newborn. And that damage will persist, with a few exceptions here and there.”

For Dr. Raphael, the word “prevention” means something quite different than it does for most in the health field today. For him, prevention entails protecting “the living” in human beings. “What characterizes the living,” he explained, “is that the living pulsates. And it is the restriction of the natural pulsation in the organism that gradually leads to various diseases that we treat mechanically. You see, we take away what's been destroyed. We operate; we use radiation; we use chemicals. Most of that deals with what has already been destroyed in the organism.” For Dr. Raphael, “there's nothing in mechanistic medicine that really helps to improve the natural function. Mechanistic medicine removes pathology; only rarely does it cure.”

“Prevention will be the solution,” Dr. Raphael said. “The idea of prevention—which is not a very lucrative way of dealing with pathology—has to be based on something that is preventable. And that is the fact that we know what the life energy is and how we can prevent pathology right from the beginning of life. Even in the womb,” Dr. Raphael asserted, “even in the intrauterine environment of the living organism.”

Because medicine is an business today and not a science, prevention does not interest many people who become doctors. “That's what it is—an enterprise!” Dr. Raphael said. “Finding new drugs. You get rid of the old ones and get new ones! Billions of dollars are made. And then you get rid of those drugs. You have to get rid of them because you have to build up a new source of money and profit. You can see how much pathology there is with all the drugs we have. And then the drugs cause pathology as well. We find toxicity. Damage is done in the therapeutic process itself.”

Eventually, when mechanistic medicine has tried everything it knows to cure pathology- and fails-prevention will finally come to the fore. “Most of medicine is directed towards degenerative disease,” Dr. Raphael said.

“As far as I'm concerned, the most important element is the prevention of those degenerative diseases in the first. place.” Dr. Raphael has used the orgone energy accumulator as an essential part of treatment with some patients. “The use of the orgone accumulator became important to me. Some patients used the accumulator conscientiously, some intermittently. But I didn't have patients with enough overt pathology—for instance, cancer—to show the value of the accumulator.”

Dr. Raphael also has used the “Reich Blood Test” with appropriate patients, and performed pelvic examinations to study the vaginal secretions and sputum of some patients. “I had a

very good microscope with apochromatic lenses,” he said, “that enabled me to look at tissues in the living state. I could see the real color of the blood and living tissues.” Most microscopists work with dead, stained samples—not living cells.

Dr. Raphael smiled. “If you ask anybody what the color of blood is, they’ll look at you and think you’re—” He made a gesture to indicate they would think you were crazy. “But the color of blood is *blue*—like the blue of the sky. Orgone energy is blue as well.” Dr. Raphael said he saw the same blue color “when Reich was doing his orgone vacor or vacuum tube experiments.”

For Dr. Raphael, the impact of Reich's work is yet to come. It will, one day, establish itself. “You can't kill the truth,” he asserted. “You can't destroy what he discovered: that there is a universal energy.” The indifference of mechanistic medicine and science to Reich's work will inevitably give way out of necessity.

When this article was written in 1996, Dr. Raphael was approaching his 84th birthday. (He died in March of 2001.) “I’m still practicing orgone therapy,” he said. “It still moves me. It still interests me. It still discourages me. It still makes me feel that Reich's work is something that the future will intensify because there is a biological energy and there is a cosmic energy. It's demonstrable. Our mechanistic world is almost ready to destroy itself. We may find the opportunity then to deal with the cosmic and biological energy. As far as the living organism is concerned, that will involve the prevention rather than the treatment of pathology.”

Reich left a legacy that is unclaimed today, a wealth of scientific discoveries that remains to be seriously scientifically studied, developed and applied for the betterment of human society:

- Microbiological work in the area of biogenesis; studies of the bioenergetic nature of sexuality and anxiety
- A new medical approach to the prevention of cancer and other diseases
- A theory of disease based on the presence of stagnant, immobilized life energy and a medical device to remove that deadly energy from rigid musculature
- Investigations of the antinuclear properties of orgone energy
- Orgone energy weather modification experiments
- An astrophysical hypothesis of the superimposition of cosmic orgone energy streams as the basis of galaxy formation; and
- Advanced mathematical gravity and antigravity equations related to the phenomenon of extra-terrestrial space ships and space travel.

Will this body of scientific work-orgonomy-receive the attention it deserves? Or are the powerful economic, political, social and characterological forces that converged to destroy Reich and his work still too influential and active on the social scene today?

Wilhelm Reich wrote:

“The discovery of bioenergy is here to stay. It will be opposed most severely by those who have lost contact with nature to the greatest extent. They will object. They will malign the discovery of life energy in the future as they have done for years in the past. They will defame the discoverer and the workers in the field of orgonomy. They will not shy away from any means to kill the discovery, no matter how devilish the means of killing may be. They will shy away only from one thing: looking into microscopes or from doing any kind of observation that confirms the existence of an all-pervading cosmic energy and its variant, bioenergy.”

Dr. Raphael looked into the microscope, worked with tissues in the living state and saw the evidence of orgone energy. He witnessed Reich's orgone energy vacuum tube experiments that demonstrated the reality of orgone energy. He felt the orgone energy expressed in the emotions of his patients. He knew the truth of the Life Energy in his life and work. Dr. Raphael is gone but the truth is still out there. How many in medicine today-complementary or conventional-dare touch the truth?

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