A Letter

By Ola Raknes, Ph.D. (Oslo, Norway)

Dear Dr. Reich,

You asked me to write down for the archives of the Wilhelm Reich Foundation and possibly for publication, the story of the way I became interested, first in psychology, then in sex economy, then in orgonomy, going back in my life as far as I can. I shall try to comply with your request, making my story as brief as I can if it is to be of any interest.

At least from the age of 10 or 11, perhaps even from my 7th or 8th year, 1 was strongly impressed by what religious people told of their having another kind of life, a superior new life, which was unknown and inaccessible to other people. I had a feeling that somehow they were right, but also that somehow they must be wrong. I had a vague feeling of having known that other life myself at the time when I was a church-builder, which from the age of three or four was my way of expressing that I had known another kind of life before.

From the age of ten upwards, I for several years tried to come in contact with that other kind of life, going to every prayer meeting in the neighborhood and also to church, although I, like the "saints," thought that less important because a religious conversion would be much less likely to start there. What chased me from one prayer meeting to another was above all my constant fear of hell, where I was sure to go unless I could find the new life.

I never succeeded in being converted in spite of all my attempts. I felt as if it would be dishonest in me if I were to stand up in a meeting and do as some of my comrades did, confess that I had experienced the grace of God—and I strongly doubted if all those who did confess were honest in so doing. Looking back now, I think it also was my fear of surrender that kept me back.
About the age of seventeen I came across a little pamphlet on Determinism. With the exception of a few popular newspaper articles by Dr. G. Armaker Hansen, one of the discoverers of the lepra bacillus, I had up to then never read anything that expressed a doubt of the religious teachings I had been brought up with. This pamphlet on Determinism, of which I do not remember much now, made the belief in an eternal hell seem senseless to me, and it also gave me the courage to trust my own thoughts and feelings much more than I had ever dared to do before. When sometime later I told a friend about my unbelief in hell, and he to my joy and relief agreed with me, my interest in religion for many years receded into the background, and my interest in a survival after death was gone forever. At the time before and after my matriculation (which took place at the age of twenty years and a half), religion, philosophy and psychology were mostly being ridiculed among my comrades as a playing with words and empty concepts; I got the feeling that such subjects were not fit occupation for a person who wanted to make something useful out of his life, and that was what I wanted to do.

After matriculation I began studying philology, hoping to find in the languages and literatures I studied, a field where I could feel that here I had a work to do. But I never succeeded in my search—whatever I came across, however interesting it might look, did not seem to present any problem that I felt important enough to become absorbed in. It was just as with my relation to girls: I met many whom I liked and who I now think took a liking to me, too, though at that time I felt that no woman could really come to love me, even as it seemed that I could never come to love any woman, although that was what I longed for most of all.

My first real and deep love since my childhood did not happen till I was twenty-four-and-a-half years of age. It meant a revelation and a revolution to me. Until then I had felt that life was passing by me, that I was merely an onlooker incapable of sharing the real things of life. From now on, I felt I was living, was a part of life in general, although I was still searching for my special field of work.

In the next years, I to some extent pushed aside that search, being too busy, partly with my education as a philologist, partly with making the necessary money, and partly with bringing up a family. But just about the time when I was thirty years old, an incident revived my past interest in religion and psychology. I got into a newspaper discussion with a well-known educator and an equally well-known bishop about the reward of good deeds. They, especially the bishop, said that human nature needs the promise of a reward in order to keep on the right path, while I maintained that love and goodness are natural to man, are essential to his natural functioning and do not ask for any other "reward" than to be permitted to function unhindered. After that discussion I began reading in a random way a certain number of books on other religions than Christianity, both primitive and advanced ones. I was, however, still looking for tasks in the field of philology where I had my education.

Some months later I was appointed lecturer of Norwegian language and literature at the Sorbonne, a lectureship which I held for four years. My teaching was supposed to take only part of my time; the rest of the time I was free to study whatever might interest me. My first intention was to study the influence of French literature upon the Norwegian literature in the Middle Ages and I began by reading Joseph Bédier's great work "Les légendes épiques." This fascinating book made it clear to me that if I wanted to understand medieval French literature and its influence, I would also need some acquaintance with medieval philosophy and theology. So I went to the lectures of the professor of those disciplines at the Sorbonne, François Picavet, studied some of his books and also had several personal interviews with him. He had the laudable custom, whenever he had been treating some problem of medieval theology or philosophy, of briefly sketching its later history and its influence upon contemporary thought. That was how I first became aware of the importance of religious psychology for the understanding both of religion and of philosophy—and so I began reading William James.

James' "The Varieties of Religious Experience" I still think the most exciting book I ever read. For the first time in my life I saw religion treated as a natural phenomenon, in a way that at least tried to be independent of what religion postulates about itself. It took me several weeks to read the book; I was in an ecstasy of new thoughts and feelings—I have now the impression that at that time in the early spring of 1918, in the midst of the bombardment of Paris, my friends considered me slightly crazy, with the exception of a couple of artists who envied me. For the first time in my life I discovered a field of work where I felt sure I should have something to do, something important at least for myself, but probably also for many others.

Though I believed in no dogmatic religion myself, I still felt that I now-
could understand religion from "within." I saw it as my task to set forth what was real and true and valuable in religion and also how in every single religion there had come in so much that was not true, but directly inimical to life. I felt a strong need of concrete knowledge both of the different religions, of the philosophies of religion, of ethnology as giving the background and soil of the different religions, and of life itself in all its manifestations. Somewhat indiscriminately, I read as much as I could in all those fields, followed university lectures, courses and seminars in general and religious psychology, in psychopathology and psychiatry, and in biology. I read the principal works of the French school of sociology (Durkheim, Mauss, Lévy-Bruhl), a number of books on mysticism, of which I consider "Les grands mystiques" by my teacher Henri Delacroix the most important one, and the chief works of the young, chiefly American, science of the psychology of religion. Among my ethnological readings were also quite a number of books by Catholic missionaries with their preconceived views of the origins and developments of religions.

At the back of my mind I had a strong and clear idea, although not clearly formulated, of what I wanted this knowledge for: I wanted it in order to be able to explain and to demonstrate my own conviction, which from the first I felt to be true, in spite of the acknowledged fact that I was not able to prove it. That conviction was that at the root of every genuine religion there is an inner experience of life and growth and communication with something beyond one's own narrow self. In its narrowest form you may have this experience localized to a healing wound, in its widest form it is the feeling of communion with the universe, which may come with the discovery of some all-embracing or all-pervading truth. I first thought of naming this experience "the consciousness of growth."

After the four years in Paris and another year in the University of London, where I could devote half my time or more to study, I had for several years to give all my time to economically remunerative work, teaching languages and literature in secondary schools and writing a big English-Norwegian Dictionary. Not until 1927, when I was well into my forty first year, did I find time to finish the book I had planned in Paris and begun writing in London. That was "Møtet med det Heilage" ("Meeting the Holy. An Investigation into the Psychological Foundations of Religion").

The main thesis of this book is that religion as we meet it in primitive societies is the ritual and ideational outcome of certain states of mind, at first

experienced by whole groups in common. I termed such states 
ecstasies, defining the word in almost the same way as does William James in his definition of what he calls mystical states of mind. With the development of society, the content of the ecstasies will change to some degree, and still more will their interpretation in ritual and belief change. But however great the changes, what keeps any religion alive is that same core of ecstatic experience which first gave origin to religion. And what threatens to kill every religion—as I see it today, 1950—is a certain tendency to formalization, mechanization and limitation which seems to be inherent in the idea of the sacred, which originally means the circumscribed, that which is fenced in or set apart, as opposed to the holy, which originally means what is whole and healthy.

During my work on the psychology of religion, I little by little arrived at the conviction that I could get no further in the understanding of human behavior without a method of studying the unconscious. At that time, in the latter half of the 20's, there was no other method for that purpose than psychoanalysis, and so, in 1928, I gave up all teaching activity and went to the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute to study—I even got a fellowship for that purpose from Nansenfonden, a fund belonging to the Academy of Sciences in Oslo. From then on I gave up all philological work, except that I completed a French-Norwegian Dictionary which I had begun in 1927 and which enabled me to leave Oslo for Berlin. My work since then has been devoted exclusively to psychology, to psychotherapy and of late to orgonomy.

It was in the course of my training analysis with Karen Horney that I first came to think, and later to be convinced, that psychoanalytic therapy would be a work congenial to me. After a paper read to the Berlin group, "Viewpoints for a psychoanalytic psychology of religion," where I differed greatly from Freud's theory, I was accepted as a member of the I. P. A. I went to my therapeutic work with enthusiasm and also with no little anxiety because of the responsibility I was taking upon myself, but with a feeling that now I had at last found my proper field of work. I dare say I had success in my work, in spite of the opposition of a great part of the medical profession, and I began gaining a certain reputation. But I was always on the look-out for ameliorations in the treatment technique, and was also dissatisfied with the theoretical explanations given by Freud and other psychoanalysts of the instincts, of the fundamental drives, of aggression and several other things. During my year in Berlin (1928-29) I had heard Wilhelm Reich's name
mentioned several times, especially was he praised as an excellent clinician, but I was warned against his tendency to draw social and political consequences from therapeutic findings—that might endanger the whole future of psychoanalysis.

For a long time I was so occupied with the study of Freud and other absolutely "orthodox" psychoanalysts, that I postponed the reading of Reich. Not until the appearance in 1932 of his "Charakteranalyse" did I seriously begin to study his writings, first that book, then "Die Funktion des Orgasmus," then his articles in the different psychoanalytic journals and finally in his own Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie. His writings disclosed to me new points of view and an abundance of new observations, but they did not at first produce any fundamental changes either in my theoretic opinions or in my therapeutic technique.

When first I met Reich personally at the Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Conference in Oslo, Easter 1934, I was strongly impressed by his personality, and his lectures and other contributions to the discussions of the Conference helped clarify my concepts on many points. Had it then been possible for me, I should have started training with him at once, but I could not go to Sweden where he was then working. We met again at the XIII International Psychoanalytic Congress in Luzerne in August of the same year, where Reich gave a lecture on "Psychic Contact and Vegetative Streamings," and where I and the other Norwegians protested against his exclusion from the I. P. A., with the result that, when later in the course of the congress our group was accepted as a unit within the I. P. A., we were left free to accept Reich as a member. Reich, however, declined our offer of membership.

Toward the end of the same year, Reich came to Oslo where he was to stay for five years. I had then started a new training with Otto Fenichel, whom I considered one of Reich's friends and collaborators. I said to Fenichel from the start that if Reich had been there I should have gone to him. When Reich came he very soon started a technical seminar in character analysis, and I was admitted to and took part in it although I had not undergone character analysis myself. In the seminar I felt more and more my own structural difficulties, but tried all the same to practice Reich's new technique in a couple of cases, partially with good results. At the XIV International Psychoanalytic Congress in Marienbad 1936, I read a paper on "Religion and Psychic Structure," which the president of the I. P. A., Ernest Jones, told me he considered one of the best at the Congress and asked permission to print in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. He got the manuscript, but never printed it—I presume because he found out that it also represented Reich's point of view.

A short time after that Congress, I asked Reich to take me in training, both because of personal difficulties and because of my professional conviction that his technique was much more efficient than the classical Freudian one which I had practiced before. Reich hesitated, thinking me rather old and too settled in my armor, but finally he gave in to my insistence.

I think I was one of the first persons to be treated consistently with the technique which he then termed character-analytic vegetotherapy. My training, that is, my restructuring, took a rather long time—almost three years with few interruptions, with three sessions a week. It was a hard time, sometimes my feelings of emptiness and despair were such that I thought I should never be able to do in a satisfactory way the work I still felt I was made for—and if I could not, then I would not live any longer. I think it took an unusually long time before I began to feel what was going on in my organism, the energy that was at work there, and what it would be to function freely. But finally I got so far that I both felt and began to understand what was going on in me, and from then on I also felt capable of going on living and working, both on myself and on my patients.

From my first acquaintance with psychoanalysis, I had been somewhat ambivalent with regard to Freud's psychological dualism; his theory of two fundamentally different drives, sexuality and self-preservation, looked fine on paper and also seemed to account for a number of psychological and biological facts. But it did not satisfy my philosophical as well as emotional craving for unity and harmony. When I then became acquainted with the last phase in the development of Freud's dualism, his setting up of a life instinct or Eros as opposed to a death instinct or Thanatos, I could follow him no longer, and I think that one of the things from Reich that first impressed me, was his clinical refutation of the death instinct theory. After that it was easier to accept Reich's theory of one unitary life energy, which I later came to see could also function in opposites. From now on, the energetic and economical point of view gained ever more in importance in my thinking as well as in my clinical work.

What next impressed me in Reich's work was the great emotional as well as intellectual difference between undergoing a psychoanalytic and a vegetotherapeutic treatment—the latter was something totally unlike the former.
When I experienced it, I had already read Reich's book on character analysis, I had participated in his technical seminar, and had even, as well as I could, tried to practice the new technique on a couple of patients. With all that, experiencing it on my own body was something quite new to me. I mention this for the eventual benefit of the many persons who, having read Reich's and his co-workers' expositions, still are not able to see any fundamental difference between vegetotherapy and psychoanalysis. I have never heard a patient or a trainee who was in doubt about the difference.

When I learnt about Reich's discovery of the bions, and also when I later heard him tell about his discovery of the organismic orgone energy, I thought the discoveries highly interesting, found them probable as they fell in so well with my whole trend of thinking, but took no personal interest in them until little by little I came to understand, first that they furnished a new and better basis for my own theories about the origin of religion, and secondly that they would transform my therapeutic work from a psychotherapy into a biotherapy. From now on it became important to me to see and to repeat as much as possible of the facts and experiments on which those discoveries and their corresponding theories were based. That is how and why I three times have come to America to study some of the principal facts and aspects of orgonomy.

Looking through these pages I discover that in my effort to remember and to present the main facts and phases of my scientific evolution, I have forgotten that I was writing a letter to you, Dr. Reich. Perhaps it is best so, if it ever should be read by other people as well; I therefore leave it as it is and hope you will excuse.

If you find my letter of sufficient interest to justify publication, please let some native American read it through and correct non-idiomatic expressions.


Sincerely,

OLA RAKNES
Projeto Arte Org
Redescobrindo e reinterpretando W. Reich

Caro Leitor
Infelizmente, no que se refere a orgonomia, seguir os passos de Wilhelm Reich e de sua equipe de investigadores é uma questão bastante difícil, polêmica e contraditória, cheia de diferentes interpretações que mais confundem do que ajudam.
Por isto, nós decidimos trabalhar com o material bibliográfico presente nos microfilmes (Wilhelm Reich Collected Works Microfilms) em forma de PDF, disponibilizados por Eva Reich que já se encontra circulado pela internet, e que abarca o desenvolvimento da orgonomia de 1941 a 1957.

Dividimos este “material” de acordo com as revistas publicadas pelo instituto de orgonomia do qual o Reich era o diretor.
01- International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research (1942-1945).
02- Orgone Energy Bulletin (1949-1953)
03- CORE Cosmic Orgone Engineering (1954-1956)

E logo dividimos estas revistas de acordo com seus artigos, apresentando-os de forma separada (em PDF), o que facilita a organizá-los por assunto ou temas.
Assim, cada qual pode seguir o rumo de suas leituras de acordo com os temas de seu interesse.
Todo o material estará disponível em inglês na nuvem e poderá ser acessado a partir de nossas páginas Web.

Sendo que nosso intuito aqui é simplesmente divulgar a orgonomia, e as questões que a ela se refere, de acordo com o próprio Reich e seus colaboradores diretos relativos e restritos ao tempo e momento do próprio Reich.
Quanto ao caminho e as postulações de cada um destes colaboradores depois da morte de Reich, já é uma questão que extrapola nossas possibilidades e nossos interesses. Sendo que aqui somente podemos ser responsáveis por nós mesmos e com muitas restrições.

Alguns destes artigos, de acordo com nossas possibilidades e interesse, já estamos traduzindo.
Não somos tradutores especializados e, portanto, pedimos a sua compreensão para possíveis erros que venham a encontrar.

Em nome da comunidade Arte Org.
Textos da área da Orgonomia Bífisica.
Texts from the area of Biphysical Orgonomy

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02 Wilhelm Reich. The Discovery of the Orgone 1941
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09 Lucille Bellamy. Vegetotherapeutic Gymnastics 1943
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