

Shrink Rap Radio #230, February 11, 2010. 101 Exercises For The Soul

Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. Bernie Siegel

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Jo Kelly)

Excerpt: *“In order to know who you are, you really need a still water. So the ugly duckling realizes he’s a swan, and Campbell shares a story where a tiger dies giving birth and chasing some goats, so the goats take over the baby and raise it, and it thinks it’s a goat, it doesn’t know it’s a tiger, until another tiger comes along and says to him, hey dumbbell, you’re a tiger, you’re not a goat, come with me. And Campbell goes on to say, he takes him to a still pond and says look, you’re a tiger. And it’s like meditation and yoga, and that’s why I try to help people heal their lives; you know find that quiet, find their authenticity, because that’s when the body gets an incredible “live” message.”*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Bernie Siegel, one of the pioneers of mind-body medicine. Bernie Siegel, M.D. is a well-known proponent of alternative approaches to healing that heal not just the body, but the mind and soul as well. His 2005 book, *101 Exercises for the Soul* has just been released in paperback. Bernie, as his friends and patients call him, studied medicine at Colgate University and Cornell University Medical College. His surgical training took place at Yale New Haven Hospital, West Haven Veteran’s Hospital, and the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. In 1978 Bernie pioneered a new approach to group and individual cancer therapy called ECaP (Exceptional Cancer Patients). His innovative methods used patients’ drawings, dreams, and feelings, and broke new ground in facilitating important lifestyle changes while engaging patients in the healing process.

Bernie retired from general and pediatric surgical practice in 1989. Always a strong advocate for his patients, Bernie has since dedicated himself to humanizing the medical establishment’s approach to patients and empowering individuals to play a greater role in the healing process. He is an active speaker, traveling around the world to address patient and caregiver groups. As the author of several books, including *Love, Medicine & Miracles*; *365 Prescriptions for the Soul*; *Smudge Bunny*; and *Faith, Hope, & Healing*, Bernie has been at the forefront of the medical ethics and spiritual issues of our day. He and his wife Bobbie live in a suburb in Connecticut. They have five children and eight grandchildren.

His website is www.berniesiegelmd.com

Dr. Dave: Dr. Bernie Siegel, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Siegel: Thank you David.

Dr. Dave: For some time you have been one of the most visible pioneers in what might be called mind-body medicine. In Joseph Campbell's terms, when did you get "the call"?

Siegel: I'm glad you mentioned his name – we'll get to him again – because he's really one of my teachers, but I think it had a lot to do with why I chose medicine, meaning that I chose it for healthy reasons. I like people, I wanted to help them fix things, I loved science. But when I say that, there are a lot of doctors who love the human body and science, and then have trouble because people come in your body. It's like a veterinarian said to me – when I said it's too painful being a doctor, I'm going to become a veterinarian – he said, "Don't, people bring the pets in." So he got me to focus on people. When I went to a conference that I thought was for doctors, in terms of its title "Caring for Cancer Patients". When I got there, there were only three doctors: two of them were psychotherapists, and myself out of 125 people, and my patients were sitting there. This sentence changed my life, she said, "You're a nice guy and I feel better when I'm in the office with you but I can't take you home with me, so I need to know how to live between office visits."

Boom. That just refocused my life and my direction because I suddenly realized I don't have to be in pain all the time when I can't cure something. I can help somebody live with it. And literally when I got back to the office one of my partners said to me, "You're gone." I said what do you mean I'm gone? He said, "You're totally different." This was a week-end workshop, Friday to Sunday, but he said you are a different person and you're going to leave surgery.

The meeting was in 1978 and in 1989 I left the practice to go out and just keep helping people, and lecturing and teaching.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. Now was that before or after you developed a cancer program, that I think you called ECaP (Exceptional Cancer Patients) – do I gave that right?

Siegel: That meeting is what got me to start ECaP, because the meeting I think was like in the Spring/Summer, so I said good, in the Fall people are back from vacations and we'll start ECaP. I didn't have a title for it at first,

and I'll tell you how the title came, but we sent out a hundred letters to our patients from our office saying, "If you want to live a longer, better life – come to our meeting." After I mailed the letter I realized, dumbbell you didn't say it's only for your patients, so they are going to bring their friends and relatives, and you're going to have three and five hundred people, and what are you going to do with them? Well less than a dozen women showed up, and that's when my wife labelled them "exceptional" so it became "Exceptional Cancer Patients"; which of course then caused the problem in the sense that people who grow up unloved, with guilt, shame and blame from all the authorities in their life see the word *exceptional* and think, "I'm not exceptional, so I can't go to the meeting." (laughing) And to me, what I really learned is it's letting people know that we all have that potential to be exceptional, to exceed expectations.

Dr. Dave: What were the elements of the program as you began to develop it?

Siegel: Well first of all I'm a surgeon, and there are several oncologists in town who said to me, "You don't know what the hell you're doing, you may make these people feel worse." And I thought I'm not going to make them feel worse, I may not help them feel better. So I read a lot of books on psychology and psychiatry, then we sat down and I realized what I need to do is shut up and listen; because they were living the experience you see, I was the tourist in the room. So I have to say that basically what I share now is what I've learned from all of them. What I call "survival behavior" and "empowerment" – these are people who participate in their life and in their decisions and fulfil a certain personality.

So I see myself now as a coach trying to get others to act and behave as if they are the person they want to become. Let me add this. This ultimately ties in with a lifetime – because again I don't make up these stories – a quote, "My mother's words were eating away at me and maybe gave me cancer." So it's not just treating the cancer, but treating all the things her mother said to her – that she dressed her in dark clothes so nobody would notice, told her she's a failure. Then there is worse, where parents tell you to commit suicide, abuse you, totally reject you. So it's all those wounds that people are living with, and it's hard to get that group to care about themselves. That's what I try to do in a sense, reparent them, let them know I love them, and then hopefully they will come to realize they are worth something and begin to take care of themselves.

Dr. Dave: That's fascinating. I was struck by you saying that you're serving as a coach these days, because that seems to be a metaphor that's really caught on.

Siegel: The word "doctor" I think is derived from teacher, so that's what we're really here to do is to teach, to coach. So that in a sense criticism is not a bad thing – call it feedback if the word criticism has a negative meaning to people – but if you're playing ball, or in a play and the director or the coach says, "hold it, hold it", and tells you how to do it better you don't walk away saying oh I'm terrible. The same when you're confronting a disease. It's what kind of attitude, what can I do, what can empower me? It is the people who become what I call the characters, who speak up, they don't become victims; and they're not fighting a war.

On my website www.berniesiegelmd.com I have an article, *Waging the War Against Cancer* because Mother Therese taught me something. She was invited to an anti-war rally, and she refused to attend; and the people were very disappointed so they turned to walk away, and she said, "but if you ever have a peace rally then call me."

So that is what I'm trying to help people do, is heal their lives.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Siegel: See Monday morning we have more heart attacks, strokes, suicides, and illnesses. So it's fairly obvious how your health is affected by things you don't like to do. So your body responds. I say that in the sense that the body is interpreting: you're unhappy with life, your body says hey we'll get you into the hospital, you don't have to go to work; or you'll be dead tomorrow, and you don't have to get up and worry about all this. So your body is interpreting what you're telling it, and so are your genes for that matter – and people have to realize that, that the genes don't make a decision. Things I was criticized for decades ago are now scientific: from things like cancer patients who laugh live longer; loneliness affects the genes which control immune function; you play music in an operating room – which I did and was called an explosion hazard for bringing in a tape recorder – but it now shows that you need fewer drugs, people wake up more comfortably, the operation goes faster. These are simple little things but it shows that you can't separate mind and body, and as our belief systems change then the research begins to change and support these things.

Dr. Dave: Yes and there really has been quite an evolution of research in recent years.

I'm wondering to what extent you might have been influenced, if at all by the work of Carl Simonton in this way?

Siegel: Oh yes, he got me started!

Dr. Dave: Well I wondered about that.

Siegel: As a surgeon – I just talked to his daughter recently, because she is doing a little film on him – the first week-end was basically Carl Simonton when I talked to you about that workshop, and I can't remember the exact title but when you read the title as I said my assumption was he's here to teach doctors, and no doctors showed up. But the thing that really blew my mind – I'm an artist in the sense of a painter, and that's part of why I went into surgery as a kid, I didn't know you could be an artist and earn a living selling what you painted, so I thought you've got good hands you really ought to use them, so surgery seemed like a natural choice – Carl said we're going to do guided imagery, and I thought this is nonsense, I didn't come here for this craziness, I came to learn things.

Dr. Dave: Yes, you're a New Yorker right? Natively (laughing).

Siegel: Yes, so he starts doing this and I'm sitting there just watching him; then he looked at me, and I thought oh my god he knows I'm not doing it. So I shut my eyes, and now I'll fool him. Then the images were incredible, because I'm a visual person, so as soon as I shut my eyes, boy was I convinced. One of the things I learned because of Carl, that early on the imagery would have Pacman eating cancer cells, but again just as I said before it doesn't have to be violent; you don't need a German Shepherd chewing up the tumor. You can have the tumor be a block of ice and god's light melt it.

I had a Quaker friend with cancer who refused treatment because the doctor said, "I'm going to kill your cancer" and he said I don't kill anything, and he walked out. When I got him to draw a picture he is carrying his cancer cells away, he doesn't want to hurt anything. The other person as I mentioned, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, I drew a picture for her at one of her workshops, and it's an outdoor scene, and to me it didn't represent anything except a scene I saw when I did my guided imagery. So I had a picture of my guide George – that was his name – and some other symbols in it, some trees and a mountain. Elisabeth looks at this picture and says, "What are you covering up?" I said what are you talking about? She said, "You put snow on the mountain." I

said yes, it's a mountain with snow. She said, "Bernie, the page is white – you took a white crayon and added a layer – what are you covering up?"

It was all my emotions and feelings. Then, "Why is twelve important?" I've been doing this for twelve months. I mean I look at this picture and I thought holy smoke. How does all this get into this picture? Well think about your dreams – how much they come up.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Siegel: But again you see with Carl, with Elisabeth, I went back to the hospital with crayons and said to all the patients, draw pictures. It was amazing again what was revealed – because I knew anatomy – literally people drew their diagnosis, what was going on within them; or if you said draw yourself in the operating room, it told me what that procedure meant to them.

I still have never met a doctor who while in medical school was told that Carl Jung interpreted a dream many decades ago, and made a diagnosis of a brain tumor from a dream.

Dr. Dave: I wasn't aware of that story; I'm kind of a Jungian myself, but I was not aware of that.

Siegel: I think we need to tell doctors those things, so they'll talk to patients. Again, anatomy – I show slides when I lecture, and people sometimes laugh because you see the symbolism, the body parts, and you don't have to be a doctor to recognize this. Then they go home with a very different feeling and thought. Our lives are stored in us too: we transplant organs and the recipient has memories from the life of the donor of the organ, so people need to understand that, and above all the consciousness is not a local phenomenon, it's not limited to the body. All these things play a part in patients' lives and their response to doctors.

Another study, then maybe I'll take a breath if you have another question. It was in – I don't keep track of every journal where I read these, because if I see something that I agree with I go, Oh yeah. This was patients who had infections and colds. Those who had a compassionate doctor recovered one day sooner than those who didn't have a compassionate doctor. So again you begin to see how the attitude of the health care professional makes a hell of a difference in the recovery of the patient. And our words too.

Dr. Dave: Oh, sure.

Siegel: You can kill people with words – that I’ve learned – take their hope away and they go home and die. I never had a problem doing what I call “deceiving people into health” – giving them hope, and giving them something to believe in.

Dr. Dave: Now some people would talk about the placebo effect, and often that’s spoken of in negative terms, but it seems to me that that same idea of the placebo maybe is what you’re talking about.

Siegel: Yes it shows us the power. I keep thinking when you watch TV or listen to the radio, you hear a commercial for a drug and they tell you this is good for your headache, but also if you take it and you’re pregnant, this could happen, your fingers could fall off, they go into all the possible problems. Now if that’s all you heard you’d say I’m never going to take that thing. That’s what doctors tend to do – they say I’m going to give you chemotherapy, and go into the operating room and here’s the problems. They don’t say this will can make you well and you can live for another 25 years – it’s no, this is what will happen to you, and so people go home and have it happen.

When I say deceive people into health, especially I did a lot of children’s surgery, I would tell parents get a bottle of vitamins, label it for whatever you want for your child; it could be anti-nausea, anti-pain, hair growing pills and it’s amazing how well the kids do because they believe in me and their parents.

This story – again I don’t make any of them up – a radiation therapist came up to me at a conference and he said, “Boy I feel terrible.” I said what’s the matter? He said, “We repaired our radiation therapy machine; a month later do our routine inspection, and discover that there was no radioactive material put back in the machine – we haven’t treated anybody for a month.” I said, you don’t realize what you are telling me. He said, “What do you mean I don’t realize what I’m telling you?” I said, you’d have to be a total idiot to not realize you weren’t treating anyone. So you had tumors shrinking, you had side effects of radiation, because people believed they were being treated; and his eyes bulged out of his head and he said, “Oh my god, you’re right, yes.”

Dr. Dave: There is a story much like that that goes back to Anton Mesmer, that supposedly he forgot to put in the magnetic filings – or his assistant forgot to put in the magnetized filings – in the bottles that were supposed to be floating in the tub, and people had the experience anyway. Then that’s

what led him to conclude, “Oh the magic must be in me; it must be animal magnetism.”

Siegel: Yes, that’s why doctors really as far as I’m concerned need to be trained in communication. Somebody who helped me a lot was Dr. Milton Erickson who had polio as a child, learned a lot about how doctors could be destructive talking to him about his polio, and he learned how powerful words were. So reading his *Teaching Tales* I learned to tell stories to people, especially the kids because they believed in me, and so whatever I would say to them, it was just amazing to me how simple it was to hypnotize them.

Even under anesthesia people hear you. So I would tell people you will wake up comfortable, thirsty and hungry; and they would. But the problem was (laughing) my patients started gaining weight, and one of the nurses in my office said, “Oh yes he tells you you’ll wake up hungry.” So they started getting mad at me because it’s my fault they are gaining weight because they’re always hungry. I realized just a simple change – you’ll wake up hungry but won’t finish what’s on your plate – took care of the problem. But it just showed how vulnerable patients are under anesthesia. Think if all the surgeon says is, “Oh it’s the worst case I’ve ever seen”, or “If they leave here it will be feet first”, and then you wake up wondering why you’re feeling so depressed and tearful because you’ve heard all those things stated in the operating room.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I’ll bet you probably know Dr. David Cheek who has written quite a bit about that.

Siegel: Yes I’ve read some of his things.

You mentioned Joseph Campbell at the beginning. I’m reading, and re-reading, and re-reading his work, and the one I’m reading now, the title I thought was very interesting, *Reflections on the Art of Living*. I often entitle my lectures *The Art of Living and Healing* because I do so much work with dreams and drawings; but the other was the word “reflections”, and my latest book *Faith Hope and Healing* which is inspiring lessons from cancer patients, after every story there are Bernie’s reflections.

And to me it had to do with two things: one being the role of water, and in order to know who you are you really need a still water. So the ugly duckling realizes he’s a swan; and Campbell shares a story where a tiger dies giving birth and chasing some goats, so the goats take over the baby and raise it, and it thinks it’s a goat, it doesn’t know it’s a tiger, until another tiger comes along and says to him, hey dumbbell, you’re a tiger, you’re not a goat, come

with me. And Campbell goes on to say, he takes him to a still pond and says look, you're a tiger. And it's like meditation and yoga, and that's why I try to help people heal their lives; you know find that quiet, find their authenticity, because that's when the body gets an incredible "live" message.

In other words you are living a life imposed on you; and then you learn you have cancer or some other life threatening illness, and then you say, OK then I'm going to do what I enjoy doing. I'm going to save my true life. It's amazing how that then adds to longevity or even leads to self-induced healing – because that's a term from Solzhenitsyn in his book *Cancer Ward* – he uses a symbol, a rainbow colored butterfly flutters out of a book that one of the men is reading about self-induced healing. Not what doctors call spontaneous remission, but self-induced. The rainbow colored butterfly really hit me because again the butterfly symbol of transformation, every color has a meaning; the rainbow is your life in order, like the still pond. So you quiet your life, transform into who you are meant to be, and it's amazing because then the body says, "Oh you love life, I'll do what I can for you."

Dr. Dave: I like that story that you tell from Joseph Campbell's book (laughing).

Siegel: Oh he adds some humor to it too, because when the other tiger shows up and says, "You're a tiger, you're not a goat, here's a piece of meat", he says "No I'm a vegetarian!" (laughing) But when he gives him the piece of meat, you see that's also symbolic, that's like ("growl growl") he is beginning to become his authentic self, he's not a goat. The other thing that Campbell ends with is that we all need to have that tiger in us: it's OK to dress like a goat so you don't scare people, but keep that tiger – your authentic self – alive.

Dr. Dave: Yes. I'm interested in what you do with dreams, and drawings. Can you say more about that?

Siegel: Originally whenever anybody wanted to enter the group I would ask them to do some drawings, answer some questions, and enquire about their dreams. The drawings were – one is draw yourself, your treatment, your immune system and your disease. Those are the instructions. They have all colors available – I give them a full box of crayons so black, white, brown and all the rainbow colors – your self, your treatment, your disease, your immune system. Then I can sit and look at it. Now some people will put the disease on another part of the page: OK, then do you help yourself if it's out there? Or their immune system is looking out in 27 different directions and not surrounding the disease, they're not letting the treatment into their body.

Or the other side too, people say, “I don’t want chemotherapy!” and they draw this beautiful yellow fluid running into their body right to the tumor, and I will say to them – go and get it, you know it’s good for you intuitively, your intellect is the problem. Or an operating room: you can be lying on the table, so you draw your treatment and there’s nobody in the room to take care of you; and somebody else draws it with god’s light shining in the window, and family doctors, everybody around caring for them, and they are much more likely to survive and do well.

Now if you get a negative picture, or have a negative dream, I again will use imagery to reprogram the person, or tell them if the X-ray machine is a monster and you don’t want it, that’s up to you. I always say if you are trying not to die well do what’s right for you; if you are comfortable saying no, OK, but you are not going to be angry with yourself. But if you said, no I want radiation, then go home and visualize yourself in the operating room, chemotherapy or radiation or whatever, or even eating vegetables – because some people don’t like vegetables, they would rather have an operation than cure their problem. I mean that, when I say draw a picture, I had one picture of a kitchen where everybody’s head was at the bottom of the page, and the guy said, “I hate the diet I’m on; if I could have medication or chemotherapy I would prefer it.” So I said fine, we’ll do that for you so you can go home and eat what you want.

Again you can visualize going to the operating room, waking up, feeling well, going home quickly, and doing well – and it’s amazing – if people do that three or four times a day for a week or two you say, “Draw a new picture” and it’s beautiful. It’s a total transformation, so they have reprogrammed themselves.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Siegel: A lot of this, if people want – because I have them mail it to me and we interpret it – if they go to my website they will see information about how to do that, but what I would say they don’t necessarily even need me, you can draw a picture and then look at it tomorrow with some family members or friends.

The reason I say look the next day, then you’ll see it as if someone else drew it because the unconscious blinds you. I can draw a picture of my family and try to make sure everybody knows, oh we’re wonderful. Then you look the next day and the kids aren’t holding hands, you see; or maybe their noses are missing, so there’s no life, no inspiration. You notice that the next day but

it's amazing that you don't notice that you've left it out when you're drawing it.

Dr. Dave: I think using drawings in that way is really wonderful. It allows them to communicate with you unconsciously, it brings material that might be unconscious out into the open, and also brings emotions into the picture.

Siegel: Another thing that makes it helpful – as I said I did a lot of children's surgery – that one little boy said the kids were teasing him in the locker room at the gym, so would I fix his body. I said, draw yourself in the operating room; and literally all he used was a black crayon, and he looks like an insect on the operating table, this little black thing. Now how do I use that drawing? To show his parents, because I said to them, what this kid needs is your love. I mean he could spend his life having plastic surgery and never feel beautiful because he's a speck on this big page. See then they don't argue with you, because the child drew it. I'm not criticising them, it's their child.

Or another child, with cancer: I don't get enough time for my family. There are six people in the family, I could spend the day talking about what do you do all day; but she drew herself sitting on a chair and the rest of the family was on a sofa with an extra seat that was empty on the sofa. The parents said, "Thank you" and went home and spent more time with her. So over and over again what the kids draw I can show to the parents.

I'll tell you, three quarters of the drawings when you just walk into school and say to the kids draw your home and family – three quarters of them a disaster – it's not a family, they are not touching, they are not near each other. The teachers are always amazed how I know so much about these kids, and all they did was draw a picture. Yes, but they are sharing that information and it can really help family members to see how that person feels; and not take it as a criticism but take it as a statement from the person, and then they can step in and fill their needs.

Dr. Dave: As you pointed out earlier there has been a lot more research supporting the mind-body connection in the past 40 years, since you began your work. Is there any recent research that comes to mind that you find particularly important or hopeful?

Siegel: Well I'd say hopeful, in the sense that there was a book by Bruce Lipton, *The Biology of Belief* and he's a geneticist who agrees with me, and I agree with him (laughing) in that genes get a message and then act – what's called "epigenetics". I was criticized for this years ago, because I'd say to patients what's happened the last year or two in your life? And I was told,

“You’re blaming your patient for getting sick?” I’d say no, I’m trying to understand why they might be vulnerable now. That’s why, when a study like loneliness comes out suddenly it’s not crazy to ask somebody what’s going on. So his book really shares this, and to me what it also says is what does the treatment of the future need to be? It needs to be communication type treatment; so that if you have a disease we will say, OK how can we communicate with the disease, alter its genes, give it a different message, and get it to behave itself.

If you think about it from another perspective: if you and I were bacteria or viruses, and we are exposed to antibiotics and vaccines, what do we do? We alter our genes in order to resist what could kill us. See that system is built into us too, but our lives are a lot more complicated – I mean emotionally as well – so there are a lot more mixed messages in us than I’m sure are in a bacteria or a virus. And when we can get to a therapeutic point and say, alright let’s communicate with a cancer cell: tell it to behave itself, stop doing this, mature, go back to normal, or just stop growing – that I think will be the treatment of the future rather than to kill, burn, assault, cut out – let’s heal the body and return it to normal.

Dr. Dave: Speaking of the treatment of the future, as you know the health care debate is front and center in the US right now. What’s your take on what’s right and what’s wrong in healthcare today?

Siegel: Well I hate politics (laughing).

Dr. Dave: Me too (laughing).

Siegel: I used the word “potential” earlier, those are the best politicians and a few of them are like that, meaning that Kennedy used this term, our state representative Rosa DeLauro did – because she had cancer a few years ago and we were both at a lecture as speakers – and I said to her, I can’t stand politics, I always resign because all we do is have meetings and all the good things you want to do never get done. She said, “Bernie it’s the potential – it can take five or seven years.” And that’s what Kennedy said too, he said “It took me five years, ten years sometimes to get things done, but they got done.” And boy you’ve got to be patient to be able to put up with that.

I think that yes, we need healthcare, we need to let everybody know that they are entitled to healthcare, that we love them and care about them. All the craziness – see if I were in charge, if I were President I would get much more into the psychology of people. I always say I would put on the income tax return, “Why do you want to live another year?”

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: If people put in a nice reason, “Because I want to do some good,” rather than a selfish reason, “I want to make more money.” If they gave a selfish reason I’d assign them to the Peace Corp for a year, or raise their tax rate. If they gave a compassionate reason I’d say good, and maybe reduce their tax rate. So what we need to do is reward health, number one. See I can go all year not filling a prescription, not needing medical care except for a physical exam, and nobody does me a favour at the end of the year and says Thank You and lowers my premium.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Siegel: So I would say, reward health.

We need to look at parenting, so children grow up feeling loved so they are not self destructive; because addiction, obesity, all of those things are not due to stupidity you see. So if you love yourself you don’t become an addict, you take care of yourself. So I’d say parenting is another significant public health issue. In a sense, if we let everybody know we care, we are reparenting them. I saw that as a doctor, that self destructive patients, if I kept seeing them rather than rejecting them like everybody else did they began to take care of themselves. I think when we can say to people we care about you, we will take care of you, they’ll begin to realize hey I’m worth something, so I’ve got to take care of myself too.

I would reward research – in other words if you came up with an herb to treat something, and you can’t patent it, it’s like well why the hell should I bother to spend money on research? OK then let’s reward you tax wise, so that the government would also reward research and therapies that can’t be patented so that you can make millions and billions of dollars on a new drug – reward them for keeping people healthy too, and finding ways of doing that, that may not be big money makers but could be money makers through the government.

Dr. Dave: I don’t know if you are aware of the revolution that’s been happening in psychology in the past 12 years or so – have you been tracking what’s known as “positive psychology”?

Siegel: Well you’d have to define it for me. I read more spiritual and psychological literature than I do the mechanical stuff.

Dr. Dave: Well the good news is, I think that the “traditional mechanical literature” is beginning to more and more resemble the spiritual literature that you’ve been reading. There has been a movement within psychology of people who are saying that we focus too much on what’s wrong with people, and too much on pathology. Let’s look at what leads to happiness.

Siegel: You know that’s interesting, because when patients came into my office I would always say, how can I help you? Not, what’s wrong. Yet in the medical history, the formal history, you have a “chief complaint” that’s how it starts, and then a present illness. So what’s the first thing you ask a person to do? Complain. You ask what’s wrong. Again, you focus on that versus how can I help you? What is it you’re looking for? What’s going on? And I found that when you treat the person’s experience then wonderful things happen, rather than the diagnosis.

In psychology too, what I found was if I said to people how would you describe your illness? The words they used were always about their life. So if people were in pain it’s amazing how the words apply to what’s increasing the pain – words like draining, failure, confusion pop out of them. You say how do those that fit your life? I say in other words use the darkness, let it become a diamond, let the disease help you heal your life. Then they don’t get so upset about their symptoms because they become something useful.

I may add, there are people do say this is a gift, and a blessing, and a wakeup call, and a new beginning; and those are words from people with cancer, and you’d say how can they say that? Well it’s what it’s led them to, see. Just as I said earlier that cancer patients who laugh live longer – and they don’t need humor, if you know what I mean. If you laugh three or four times a day – because I love experimenting with it – I find if I start laughing, out walking the dogs and just in the street, and just start laughing it’s hard to stop! And I feel better.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I was just recently looking a bit into there’s this group in India, his fellow started “laugher yoga”, and he gets groups of people together just to laugh. You can see videos of this on YouTube.

Siegel: Yes I did that, I went to a class one week-end and I was hysterical. I couldn’t control my laughter. I’m sitting there just laughing uncontrollably for no reason, and it just seemed so crazy but it was just fascinating to me how in a sense my mind and body took over, and just went on doing this.

Dr. Dave: It’s got to be good for us, right?

Siegel: Yes. And this is what I would say to people too. Well let me take a step back. I would say things to doctors and they would say, “I can’t accept that.” That used to drive me nuts. I said, look if you can’t explain it or understand it, OK I can buy that; but why do you say I can’t accept it? And it’s because they have never been exposed to it. I learned if I experienced something, I accept it, so I try to become involved in the experience rather than say, I believe in this, or I believe in that, or I heard about that. It’s what do I experience? I say to people keep your minds open, and experience life, and various methods of healing.

Again if quantum physicists and astronomers couldn’t accept what they can’t explain we’d be in big trouble. You’d say, what’s the point? How did the world get here? Who knows? It’s the intelligence behind it that fascinates me, because when you read about quantum physics and astronomy just think about things I never stopped to think about – if we took the moon away what would happen to the earth. If we moved the earth a few hundred miles closer to the sun what would happen to the temperature, and to us. You think about wow, look at how it all worked out, what’s behind it.

To me, again I think our body is just as fascinating in the sense of what dwells within it. Again if I was back to being the President, I would spend all the money that we’re spending in outer space, on what I call inner space. I’d like to know what’s going on in the body.

Let me bring up something that’s fascinated me. Remember the Lockerbie killer, the guy who blew up a plane, killed 145 people, was in Scotland.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Siegel: They learned he had cancer and they said, “OK you can go home, you’re going to be dead in a few months.”

Dr. Dave: I didn’t remember that part.

Siegel: Yes. He has already outlived the prediction.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: I wrote a Letter to the Editor in August saying, watch what happens to him when he goes home.

We haven't heard that he is dead, or sick or anything else. Did the Scots make a mistake? You're darn right. If they wanted to punish him for what he did you don't send him home to compassion, and love and admiration.

Dr. Dave: Yes, celebration, right.

Siegel: He becomes a hero.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Siegel: He's not going to die when he's supposed to, and he hasn't.

Dr. Dave: That's fascinating. Well what you're getting at, is you're talking about exploring the world within, maybe it's the realm of spirit. Talk a little bit about spirit, because I know one of the things we want to talk about too is your 2005 book, *101 Exercises for the Soul* has just come out in paperback. So let's talk a little bit about spirit and soul. What are these words; what do these words mean to you?

Siegel: Let me say, with that book is *365 Prescriptions for the Soul*, and at the end of each is a *soulution* – soul. Then *101 Exercises* is to give people ways of making that transformation. It's hard for me to define a word like spirit, or maybe self – your true self – your spirit. Who are you? What are you here for? And what I'm trying to do is help people find that meaning. It's not whether you are here for 92 years or 29 years, it's what have I done? Have I shared love? Am I immortal now? Those are the things on the very practical level.

In the book – I'm not sure if it's the first chapter or not, let me open a page – but it's about attitude; what's your attitude towards life, and towards the world. Yes, that's the first chapter: *Attitude is Everything*. Here's my subtitle, my sense of humor: *Don't sweat the small or the large stuff (and save on the cost of deodorant)*.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: I don't know where that came from (laughing). But again you see you talk about happiness, I call it keeping that inner child alive. The kid in me does things like this, comes up with statements. Just very simply, this could be an exercise: you go to a store and they say "sign here" – if they take your credit card and fill out the slip – I write "here" on it.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: And people look at you. But I've had a call from a lawyer saying, "Thank you, we rarely laugh early in the morning in a lawyer's office" because I wrote all over this contract, *here here here here*, because he had all these stickers that said, "Sign here".

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: And he didn't get mad at me.

Dr. Dave: He didn't?

Siegel: He was happy to have laughed, and then asked me for my autograph, which I gave him (laughing).

Another about the word *attitude*: I met a man who had a pin with the word "Attitude" and he said that was how his wife helped him, because she would walk over to it, give it a spin and say, "Honey you need to straighten out your attitude." She was his coach, but they were doing it in a way that would not offend him – like "you are doing it wrong", or "don't you want to get well" – and those are the things I think that people need to look at. So I've got many topics there, from humor.

Dr. Dave: I'm glad you've got a copy of your book close at hand because I was going to ask you, if you would be willing to maybe pick out two or three of your favorite exercises from the book.

Siegel: What I love to do, is I leave it to consciousness – I'll just open the book right now. *Exercise 20: the topic is Vocal Warm-Ups – find your voice and sing your song.* The one I'll do is, *Give a speech, be heard.* It starts with, *There is no reason to have a voice unless you're going to use it.* You know when people are afraid, let me read what I wrote: *As you get to know your voice through the exercises in this chapter, start using it to speak out. For this exercise give a speech and share your ideas with others.* Speaking out can be one of the hardest things to do because of how most of us were brought up; parents and teachers told us to be quiet and not disturb anyone. This is a true story: a woman had developed cancer and I was helping her, and she sent me a letter saying her son came home from school and said "the teacher called me a something elephant" and when the mother went to school and said, "Why are you calling my son an elephant?" She said, no he's a bright kid but he keeps speaking out; he's a disturbing element.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: What I found, if you want to survive in the hospital you are better off being a disturbing element, then you are someone people know. You are not the submissive sufferer lying in a room getting the wrong treatment, and perhaps dying due to a medical error. Again, be heard, speak out.

Don't be afraid, it's not about what the audience think – because I do a lot of speaking now – I'm there to help. If somebody comes up to me and says, "That was boring." I'm sorry! (laughing) Because the next person you see will come up and say, "Thank you, you inspired me." So what I've learned is what people hear and see in me, is in *them*; and I look for people who think I'm wonderful, because I know they're wonderful!

Dr. Dave: (laughing) That's great.

Well I chose one at random here, when you said that. Just picking one at random, I've got:

Exercise 51: Pick pick our favorite animal qualities. The animal kingdom contains many diverse species, each with a distinct personality and unique abilities. Though we may all have similar structures and colors on the inside, we are very different on the outside. I believe that is for recognition and to enhance our unique abilities, authenticity and individuality. Do you already have a favorite animal? If not, think of one now. What animal do you relate to and admire because of its spiritual qualities and personality? Write down a list of characteristics and personality traits that attract you to this specific creature. Now read the list to the people who know you well, and ask them what do they think it describes – right, it's you! You can think of this animal as your totem or special teacher. Emulate it in your life and call on it for guidance as needed. As time goes on, and you change, so may your totem animal take different forms.

Siegel: You are looking at the page – if you look to the left to the previous page – I always teach people that when in doubt, when you aren't sure what the right thing to do is, to remember "WWLD"; in other words "what would Lassie do?"

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Siegel: You know when you become the animal you're really living as you should, because they say the children and the animals are living in the moment, expressing their needs. That's what we need to do. When you are the submissive sufferer, making your parents happy, internalizing your

emotions, you make yourself vulnerable to illness. So speak out, and learn from your animal.

I had one young lady tell me that she was suicidal. I said to her, what's your favorite animal? She said an eagle. I said, describe why. And she described this beautiful bird soaring through the air; and after a couple of minutes she looked at me and said, "I'm not going to commit suicide." You could see her become the eagle, and sense this in herself.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Siegel: There's one other I've got to share with you.

Dr. Dave: Good.

Siegel: *Exercise 59. Page 112. Finding Pennies – Look for Symbols.* To me pennies have always been significant. Began to have some of my grandchildren say they're pennies from heaven. Because number one it says "Liberty" on it, number two "In God We Trust", number three you've got Abe Lincoln looking to the east but the poor guy has no smile. We all have to accept what's going to happen to us is what happened to Lincoln; all our lives are going to end so enjoy the time you have. But I really feel that they don't have any great value, but it's like God telling me, "Hey I'm dropping some crumbs, you'll know you're on the right path."

So look for signs as you go through life. I am amazed at how often pennies are present in an airport, in my driveway, someplace. Some friends I know were going to run the marathon – a lady who has had polio and she doubts she was going to make it – and I said, look for pennies, and she found some and it helped sustained her.

The first marathon I ran – which was to raise funds for lymphoma leukemia – I thought, I don't know if I'm going to make it, I need a sign. This is in New York, 25 thousand people, I'm standing there ready to begin, look down between my feet was 25 cents, a quarter. Miles later, running through the streets of New York there's a penny – and the marathon's 26 miles.

Dr. Dave: 26, right, you got your 26 sign.

Siegel: Yes – so I knew I couldn't stop, I'd get trampled, so I ran onto the sidewalk and circled back; and the funniest part were people saying how poor can he be (laughing) he's stopping to pick up a penny! But I still have that 26

cents, and once I found that it was like, you're going to be OK. It may take me twice as long to finish as the person who wins, but I made it.

The other nice part, when you talk about life – you finish the New York marathon, they hang a medal around your neck – you're all winners. And that's what one lady was saying, standing on a street corner, "You're all winners". That's what we need to understand.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Well Bernie, you and I could go on and on

Siegel: Definitely. (laughing)

Dr. Dave: But this is a great place to wrap it up (laughing). So I want to thank you very much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Siegel: Well thank you, it was a pleasure Dave.