

Shrink Rap Radio #418
28th August, 2014

“How to be an Adult in Love”

Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Dr. David Richo PhD
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

Introduction:

My guest today is clinical psychologist and spiritual teacher, Dr. David Richo, who is also the author of *How to be an Adult in Love: Letting Love in Safely and Showing it Recklessly*. You can find out more about Dr. David Richo by visiting our show notes for this episode on www.shrinkrapradio.com

Now here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. David Richo welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

David Richo: Thanks for having me.

Dr. Dave: Well, I'm really glad to have you. Actually you were suggested as a guest by one of my listeners and I was shocked that you've written so much and that I was unaware of your work even though we're both located in the Bay area. So I was surprised and delighted to discover you and your work and really happy to have you on the show.

David Richo: Well thanks, Dave.

Dr. Dave: I wonder if you could tell us a bit about your background. How you got into becoming a psychotherapist, where you went to school, 'cause a lot of the people who listen are students; either wannabe students, students in process, former students etcetera, so tell us a bit about your pathway into psychology and where you went to school and graduate school and how you got interested in Jung and Buddhism and all of that.

David Richo: I began by going to a Catholic Seminary and I was ordained a priest in 1996.

Dr. Dave: Ah!

David Richo: Then I left the priesthood to be married and that's when I found Jung and Buddhism and I concentrated on that and got my license as a psychotherapist.

Dr. Dave: O.K. that makes a certain kind of sense to me, having read your book. Where did you get PhD?

David Richo: I went to Fairfield University in Connecticut, which is a Jesuit University. That’s where I got my Masters and then my doctorate was a combination

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of going to Boston University where I did the coursework and then I got involved in a University without walls, (unclear) University here in California and that's where I got my PhD.

Dr. Dave: Okay, okay well, boy, you have really earned your stripes. It looks to me like this might be your sixteenth book – *How to be an Adult in Love*. Am I right about that – it's about sixteen?

David Richo: I think it's thirteen because some are revised.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well that's still a very impressive number and you're still going, right?

David Richo: Yes. My new one is going to be called *The Power of Grace* and that comes out in October.

Dr. Dave: Aha! Okay, well we will be looking forward to that. Your work is very informed by both the Jungian perspective and the Buddhist perspective and in the preface of your book on *How to be an Adult in Love*, you say that writing is part of your spiritual practice. I thought that was very interesting. How so?

David Richo: I consider it a way of making a contribution to the health and spirituality of others, by sharing what comes through to me and so in that sense it feels like a spiritual practice.

Dr. Dave: Hm, hmm and how about the discipline of writing?

David Richo: I actually enjoy it, so it isn't really a discipline.

Dr. Dave: Okay (laughs) okay. We're going to be discussing what I think is your most recent book which is *How to be an Adult in Love*.

David Richo: Hm, hmm.

Dr. Dave: Are you implying by that title that it's tough for us to take a grown up approach to our relationships?

David Richo: Yes. My other book is *How to be Adults in Relationships* and this is a follow up based on the Buddhist practice of loving kindness, in which we show love not only in relationships but to ourselves first, then in relationships, then to the people that we have difficulties with and then finally to all beings. Hence it's a more spiritually oriented book than *How to be Adults in Relationships*.

Dr. Dave: Aha, yes because I certainly got that it was very spiritually oriented. On the face of it one would think that giving and receiving love would be the simplest and the most natural of things but most of us encounter challenges along the way. What's up with that?

David Richo: The main thing that gets in the way, as far as I can see, is our ego which is a kind of self-centeredness that it's hard to be free of and in that self-

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centeredness we believe that we're entitled to special treatment and that if people hurt us we can retaliate. This is also called a big ego, or a kind of arrogance and the way I see it, is that is the main obstacle to the kind of giving and receiving that happens in a love relationship, where you have to go outside yourself to the other person.

Dr. Dave: You know incidentally, speaking of that entitlement and arrogance, one of my colleagues at Sonoma State University was under the impression that a sense of entitlement seems to be on the increase. That's what she was experiencing in her teaching over the years, that it seemed like more and more students came into it with a sense of entitlement. It's a little bit of a divergence from your book but I wonder if you have any impression about that.

David Richo: Yes I can see how that would fit because you know we've brought up this generation to have so much and to believe that what they have is something they're entitled to and don't really have to work for, which wasn't quite the perspective in my own childhood and growing up.

Dr. Dave: Right, right. Nor in mine. I really like, in your book, it's very rich with wonderful phrases. I think it must come from your Buddhist orientation, sort of they're almost Zen-like turns of speech and one that I really like was... in your introduction, you write that the love in us arises from an innate goodness. Something about that really resonated for me I guess because deep down somewhere in myself I feel like I'm good, not that I'm perfect in any way but I hadn't linked love with that sense of innate goodness. Maybe you could tell us a bit more about that.

David Richo: I'm a believer that every person has an innate goodness and that the more we are loved, the more does it come out. St Augustine has an interesting statement: "everything we do, we do for good, even sin." So, we're always moving in the direction of what we imagine to be good for ourselves and I'm adding to that a recognition that we also happen to have true goodness in us but it's always up to us to make the choices that manifest it because we also have a shadow side, a dark side that militates against the goodness and makes it possible for us to choose paths that aren't in our best good or for the best good of others. So just having the goodness is a wonderful thing but it doesn't really make much difference if we don't make the choices that support it and mirror it into the world.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that certainly makes sense to me. I also love the turn of phrase when you say: "love sits in us some place between trust and fear." Maybe you can say a bit about that.

David Richo: We trust in a relationship when we notice that the other person is trustworthy and at the same time the closeness that follows from the trust might be scary to us because closeness is associated with fear. We're afraid if we get too close, or let the other person get too close, we might lose our personal freedom. We might be absorbed in the other person, we might be engulfed and so there's hardly any relationship that doesn't include some kind of fear. Or you could also have the fear of being abandoned by the other because you don't yet fully trust that the other will really stay with you through thick and thin. So that's what I meant by most relationships happen somewhere between trust and fear.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah that's very compact but it says a lot. What's the relationship between love for oneself and love for the other?

David Richo: How do you mean? You mean different kinds of love, or...?

Dr. Dave: Well, actually this is something I think that you discussed at some length in the book. Isn't there a way that they feed each other, that the ability to love oneself feeds the ability to love the other and love for and from the other feeds the ability to love oneself?

David Richo: Oh, I see what you mean. Yeah, they interact and mirror each other basically I'm proposing that love means, or is expressed by, five very particular styles of behavior which I call the five A's, since they all begin with 'A.' You pay attention to the other, to his or her feelings and intuitions and so forth. You accept the other just as he or she is. You appreciate. You show affection, physically and appropriately and at the same time you allow the other person to make the choices that he or she needs to make, even if one of those choices is to leave you. So those same five A's you could apply to yourself. I pay attention to my own needs and feelings and advocate for myself with regard to them. I accept myself as I am rather than judge myself, or feel ashamed or guilty when it's not appropriate. I appreciate myself, I take care of myself affectionately and I allow myself to make the choices that are based on my deepest needs and wishes. And when I do that for myself it's more easy to do it for someone else.

Dr. Dave: Hm. Hmm. Yeah, I really like that five A's schema that you develop in the book and it becomes a kind of motif that you pick up in relation to several topics as one moves through the book and we'll probably have reason to touch back on that again. I wanted to highlight another one of these very pregnant little phrases in your writing, where you say "true love makes every one irresistible." Perhaps you can unpack that one for us.

David Richo: I'm referring to the loving-kindness practice which is one of the main practices in Buddhism in which you beam out love and aspirations for happiness for yourself and others and when you do this it makes everyone more appealing because you see them all as in your circle of love.

Dr. Dave: That's quite an achievement (laughs).

David Richo: A big achievement – that's why it's called a practice and you do this on a daily basis and gradually you just do it automatically. It's having a kindly attitude and behavior toward others even when they're people that you don't even know or even people that you don't like. You try to find a way to come across to them with loving-kindness.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. You know one thing that I've noticed and I know many people have noticed, is there have been people who initially I was very turned off to and somehow later on got to know their story and once I knew their story, it totally transformed my perception. And I think everybody has a story, that's my experience, so I guess part of what you're talking about is assuming that to be true and kind of knowing at some level that that's true.

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David Richo: Yeah, I think that makes sense.

Dr. Dave: I also love the subtitle of your book, which is *Letting Love in Safely and Showing it Recklessly*. And I think that line condenses quite a bit, so tell us about the 'recklessly' part.

David Richo: In other words the extent of the love is recklessly universal instead of selective and once you say this, that would mean that the real love is unconditional. It's not based on the appeal that the other person has, it's based on just the fact of their existence and once it's also understood that everyone has this goodness within, then everyone *is* appealing on that basis. Even though the goodness is hard to see in some people, so that's the challenge part.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. It is (laughs). I really appreciate your humility that comes across in the book when you say that while you draw on our psychological training and your spiritual training and your own life experience, at the same time you resist any pat explanations particularly about love and that ultimately there is a mystery there. So kind of your book is a set of guidelines really in that way but you back off of saying "this is how it really is."

David Richo: Well thank you for noticing that. I do see it as mainly a mystery, all these things – like you know, love, caring, trust, fear and we only approach each of these topics. There's no final formulation that would, shall we say, settle it once and for all as to what something really is, kind of like poetry. No one could actually define it. You could describe it in various ways – you could say it has rhythm, you could say it has economy of words, you could say it brings out connotations instead of denotations, it has metaphors and images to convey a particular sense or mood etcetera. You could say all that but you still wouldn't ever quite know what it is fully because it's a way that the realm of mystery has touched into human writing and creativity. And so I'm very respectful of that dimension of things. It goes all the way back to my original religious experience because obviously religion is full of mysteries. There's no final way of saying what God is, what the Holy Spirit is, why things are the way they are, whether there's an after life. All those kinds of questions are way too big to have some ultimate and knock-em-dead response.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. I think the reason I lit up to that is because I share that kind of feeling with you and I like your poetry example and it also puts me in mind of what Louis Armstrong famously said about jazz, where he didn't attempt to explain it, I think he just said something to the effect of "you recognize it when you hear it, hopefully."

David Richo: Yeah. That's a good way to put it.

Dr. Dave: My depth psychology intern, Eric, is here as I mentioned and he was raised in Catholicism and we recently spoke with Matthew Fox and so, Eric, I want to invite you to just jump in here if you resonate to anything, as you hear David talking about his Catholic background and training, where it's taken him.

Eric Hanley: Actually, what I was kind of thinking a bit about were more along the Shrink Rap Radio #418
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lines of obstacles in loving and really the role of complexes. I guess how to bring awareness to some of the fears and obstacles one might face.

Dr. Dave: Okay, good, we'll lob that one at you.

David Richo: Okay. One of my books is called *When the Past is Present* and in that book I describe how the past, in other words what happened to us in childhood, has a direct effect on our relationships and can provide many obstacles to the full on closeness or commitment because we carry some baggage from childhood from our very first relationship, which was with our parents and if we weren't given those five A's by them, because those five A's of love are also the original needs we came into the world with. If they were given to us then it will be fairly easy to have a healthy relationship because we've received something that has been given to us so appropriately, that now we are shall we say able to give it to others. And when they weren't given to us then we feel like there's something missing and we try to get too much of it from others. Anyway, the obstacles surround those five A's. For instance, if I didn't get enough attention, I may be looking for too much attention from a partner.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, in a way five A's is a very compact way of working with some of the ideas relating to attachment theory, right?

David Richo: Hm, hmm. Yes, exactly. In fact I talk about that in the book.

Dr. Dave: You have various practices that you recommend throughout the book and you emphasize that you're not exactly talking about practice in the sense of developing a skill, it's more in the sense of a Buddhist practice. So please tell something about what you do mean.

David Richo: I'm a little unclear. Oh, you mean like what is a practice, or...?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Exactly – and particularly in the context of the practices that you recommend in the book.

David Richo: I see it as a daily practice and I have very specific ones in the book. The main one is the loving-kindness practice, another one is mindfulness. Basically what we're trying to do is alter the way our brain processes things so we start treating people differently from the way we used to and when you... I'll give a simple example of a practice that I use.

Dr. Dave: Good.

David Richo: When people used to cut me off in traffic, like on the freeway, highway, I would get very upset and of course that was my ego reacting because how dare they cross my path in that cutting off way, don't they realize that I'm a big shot? So, I thought to myself "well, that's all ego, that road rage is just your ego getting upset by not getting the respect you think you deserve" but that is not really helping you or anybody else, so I started the practice of whenever they cut me off, I take my foot off the accelerator and I say "May you arrive safely, may you not cause any harm, may you find Buddha's path." And I've been doing that now for several years

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and I do it automatically because I've practiced it and I no longer have the road rage.

Dr. Dave: That's a great example. As you mentioned the first practice in relation to love that you advocate, is to bring mindfulness to it and we hear so much about mindfulness these days in a very general way but in your book you break down the components of mindfulness very specifically. I know it's been a while since you wrote the book, it's probably been a year at least, so I don't know if you remember the details that you spell out but tell us a bit about the steps, or the specifics of mindfulness, if you will.

David Richo: It's basically a practice of staying in the here and now, noticing the judgments, fears, desire to be in control, attachment to outcome that keeps interfering with you being in the here and now and simply noticing them and just letting them go rather than entertaining them. You would do this in sitting position, or you could do it throughout the day. So for instance if you're thinking of some experience that just happened and you start to judge yourself about it, or wish you had done it differently, in other words you're kind of embroidering around the event with all this mental stuff, mental chatter, you would notice that and say "oh, those are interfering thoughts" and let me just come back to the pure event, the pure reality of what happened and just be with it as it is without the embroidery around it. And there's something about doing that that puts you in touch with the reality of the situation, rather than your mental picture of it.

Dr. Dave: Right.

David Richo: An example I use of the difference between reality and a mental picture is very simple, I use the example of a menu. You go into the restaurant and you open up the menu. The menu says 'spaghetti and meatballs.' You picture in your mind the best way that spaghetti and meatballs can be prepared. You think to yourself it's a homemade sauce, with fresh tomatoes and it's been made with ground beef turned into meatballs that have flavored the sauce. The spaghetti itself will be al dente and the sauce will be on top of it and there will be two or three meatballs at the side of the plate. So that's your mental picture of what it is and it's a good mental picture 'cause that is what it would be about. But when it actually arrives, it's overcooked macaroni with ketchup on it, with a couple of hamburgers on the side because that's the mental picture of the chef, which doesn't match your mental picture but that is the reality. So you're disappointed because the reality doesn't match your picture of it. That would be a great example of exactly what mindfulness is aiming at – how could you line up the reality and the picture? And the way you do that is by clearing away all the beliefs about what it's supposed to look like and go directly to "what does it actually look like?" So to go back to our analogy you could, when you open up the menu and it says 'spaghetti and meatballs,' you could say to the waiter "what does this include? What does it look like?" and then he will tell you and even then you're taking a chance but you certainly have a better image in your mind of what it's about and then you can make an intelligent choice based on what it's actually about. Follow what I mean?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I do. It's a great example because I've had that experience of disappointment and I think it's no accident that you choose that example 'cause I think somewhere in your book I encounter something that suggests that you're of Italian

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extraction.

David Richo: Yes, I am.

Dr. Dave: So you do have some expectations about spaghetti and meatballs (laughs).

David Richo: Yeah, right, exactly (laughs).

Dr. Dave: You have a chapter on how we can love ourselves and this is a challenging thing for many people. What's your advice to listeners out there who may be struggling with this?

David Richo: What I recommend first is to give yourself those five A's. Like "how can I pay attention to myself more. Can I accept myself just as I am? How can I appreciate myself?" and that means "value myself." "How can I allow myself to make the choices that really fit for me and how can I take care of myself affectionately?"

Dr. Dave: Okay, great. That's a great start. I also wanted to go back to where you were talking earlier about the fear of love as being sort of one point, one extreme of a continuum and you note that most of us fear love as much as we want it and that we fear both the receiving and the giving of full on love. How do you recommend we work with our fear of love?

David Richo: I see the fear going in two directions, as I mentioned before. One is the fear of abandonment, "if you go away I'll be sad and alone and maybe I won't even survive and if you get too close I won't survive because you will smother me." So those are the two fears, the fear of engulfment, or the fear of abandonment. Those are the two main fears that I've been able to recognize and you work with these fears by allowing someone to go away one minute longer than you can stand and to get one inch closer than you can stand and when you do this over and over, that's the practice. Gradually the fear lifts.

Dr. Dave: What's the difference between the kind of self love that you're talking about and narcissism?

David Richo: In self love you give yourself these five A's in an appropriate way and in narcissism you're deeply self centered and you're unable to love yourself appropriately, or others. The narcissist is too self-enclosed to make the journey out of him or herself to show love.

Dr. Dave: When it comes to self love I'm wondering if there's a bit of a paradox between accepting oneself, more or less as one is and on the other hand striving for some kind of Buddhist perfection.

David Richo: Well, we don't talk as much about perfection in the Buddhist style, it's more like you're already perfect, you're already enlightened and now you want to acknowledge that and act in accord with it. What does it mean to be enlightened? That you make your decisions on the basis of loving kindness, no longer in the grip of fear or craving.

Dr. Dave: Okay. As a Jungian oriented psychotherapist, you're very attentive to the role of the shadow. I think that came up earlier in one of your answers. How do shadow dynamics play into learning to love oneself?

David Richo: The shadow refers to the disavowed or repressed traits in our personality. We don't acknowledge them, so instead we project them as unacceptable onto others. So for instance, let's say deep down you're a controlling, manipulative person but you've never accepted that fact about yourself because you've repressed it, disavowed it, tried to dissociate from it but when you see someone else being manipulative or controlling, you get very upset and you judge that person and you become angry at that person but what you're actually doing, is you're showing the anger or judgment toward that person that is really about yourself. So the way to work with the shadow in yourself is just to list all the ways in which you... all the things in other people, that you strongly dislike and then ask yourself how many of those are actually true of you. You'll probably say none of them, so you would have to show that list to someone you can trust and say "do you see any of this in me?" That's the negative shadow. The positive shadow, that is made up the virtues that you haven't believed that you actually have like courage, so instead you project that out to others by admiring them. So what you strongly admire in others might be what's hidden in yourself, so you could do the same kind of list and say, "oh, these are the virtues that I have inside me and I want to work on expressing them."

Dr. Dave: Yeah and that comes into play too in romantic love, doesn't it? Where we are projecting those virtues onto our potential partner.

David Richo: Yes, exactly. In fact romantic love is totally based on the positive shadow because you're seeing only the positive features of the other person. You don't see the negative shadow that is also present.

Dr. Dave: I wonder why we get such a big hit of endorphins, or whatever it is when we're going through that, what's called infatuation?

David Richo: Oh, it's probably nature's way of having us get together and procreate.

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, that's right (laughs). You know earlier you referred to the brain and to sort of retraining the brain and you had a section in the book that has a bit of neuroscience in it. Maybe you could talk to us a bit about the role of mirror neurons and oxytocin in learning to love oneself.

David Richo: The oxytocin is the hormone that has to do with relatedness – gives you a good feeling when you're with somebody and feel loved. And the mirror neurons have to do with imitating others, so when others love you you thereby learn how to love others. A lot of the way we love is based on how we've been loved and we try to show that love to others that was shown to us.

Dr. Dave: Hm, hmm. What are the practices you recommend in learning to love oneself?

David Richo: It's the giving of those five A's to yourself.

Dr. Dave: We all have a deep need to be loved but how do we learn not to come across as needy? I remember years ago, during the encounter group movement days in the middle sixties and some people in a group would just, they would be so needy, like a bottomless pit, that pretty soon the group would just sort of tend to shun them. So, you know we have a deep need to be loved but it can be terribly off putting to others if we come across as needy. How does a person who maybe is in that place find some kind of balance?

David Richo: The neediness goes back to what you didn't receive in childhood, now becomes a bottomless pit, so by very definition of it, it's an incapacity to be fulfilled. So it's a kind of a tragic position to be in because you wouldn't be able to balance because it's just like an open wound, shall we say and you will soon notice that people turn away from you when you come at them with that must-have, can't-get-enough, energy. And gradually you would realize that you need very deep therapy to explore where that came from and how to give to yourself what your parents failed to give because the neediness goes directly back to childhood.

Dr. Dave: And what would the very deep therapy do? How would that address that?

David Richo: You would address the issue, process it by going through the feelings that are associated with it and thereby recognize the need for grieving the past and letting go of it, rather than continuing to blame your parents for it.

Dr. Dave: In your book you distinguish between three ways of connecting, one you characterize as courteous love, another as intimate love and then the third is universal love. So, maybe you could take us through those three.

David Richo: I was trying to show that even when you're nice to people that's a way of being loving because my definition of love is caring connection. So when you act towards someone with courtesy and civility, kindness, that is the, shall we say, basic level that love exists at and then in an intimate relationship which is the next level up you would show that caring connection in a deeper way. Then finally, in a spiritual way, you would show the loving connection by caring about all people, rather than just the ones that you meet up with, or the ones that you're in relationship to. So I saw it as three levels of love that you could work with, you know one to the next.

Dr. Dave: Hm, hmm. Now there's feeling love, you know having an experience of love inside yourself but that might not always come across, so what's your advice for actually showing love, if you will, in a relationship?

David Richo: You show it by those five A's – paying attention to the other, accepting the other, showing affection appropriately, appreciating the other, rather than taking him or her for granted and at the same time respecting the person's boundaries by allowing him or her to come and go, in his or her own way.

Dr. Dave: Okay and we'll kind of end up sort of where we began because you early on spoke about showing love everywhere, showing love recklessly. What's your recommendation for showing love everywhere? Again, how would that manifest itself, or what practices could people engage in to enhance that capacity in themselves?

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David Richo: What helps me do that is when I see the news on TV and I see all the things that people are going through in other parts of the world I say a little prayer for them, or an affirmation, try to have a contact of compassion, to look at what's happening in a heartfelt way rather than just take it as information. And secondly find a way to make some kind of contribution, even financially, when there is a terrible need somewhere in the world, like because of all the tragedies, disasters and violence.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Well that certainly is practical and down to earth. So as we wind down now is there anything more that you'd like our listeners to know?

David Richo: No, I very much appreciated your questions and I think they kind of take us into the main areas in the book. I was gonna read the first paragraph of the introduction.

Dr. Dave: Oh, yes and I forgot I wanted to have you do that, so this would be a good time to do that because there is a wonderful quality to your writing and I'd love to have listeners experience that, so go ahead.

David Richo: 'Introduction' – I begin with a quotation by Emily Dickinson in a letter that she sent to her cousins: "I scarcely know where to begin but love is always a safe place." And then I begin:

This little life of ours rests between a longing to be loved and a calling to show love. These two stunning possibilities, so tender, so fugitive are the subjects of these pages. I must admit however that this is mostly a book of guesses, as any book on love must be. My guess is that loving is what we are here for, that love is what every one of us deserves to receive and is here to give, that love alone makes this earth the heaven it was meant to be.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's a perfect wrap up for the interview and Dr. David Richo I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

David Richo: It was my pleasure. Thank you and thanks Eric also.