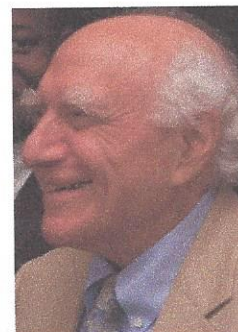


Master Class: An Interview with Albert Pesso

By Nancy Eichhorn

Visionaries see what has never been seen. Entrepreneurs bring these visions to life. Teachers impart concepts so others can use them. And Masters? They see what hasn't been seen, do what hasn't been done, and embody the teachings of a lifetime enabling the survival of the Self and the human species.



At age 82, Albert Pesso is one of three living masters of body psychotherapy. His contributions to the field over the past 50 years are innumerable; he has written or contributed to almost a dozen books and written more than 50 articles along with leading seminars worldwide in the Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP) mind body approach he co-founded with his wife, Diane Boyden-Pesso. Pesso will be honored as the 7th recipient of the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy's Lifetime Achievement Award during the August 2012 USABP Conference in Boulder, Colorado. He is also presenting a pre-conference workshop on "The Drive to be Happy in an Imperfect World," August 9, 2012.

"We're made genetically to be able to be happy in an imperfect world that is endlessly unfolding, and we are the local agents of that unfolding process," Pesso said during a recent SKYPE call. "Our lives are not predestined, the world is not done, and we are not puppets in it. We are part of an exciting unfolding and participate in it."

As a writer responsible to create Pesso's character with words that do justice to his truth, I feel stymied—nouns and verbs cannot convey the body and the immense actions of this man. Pesso joked saying that "the body guy got into language," but his essence doesn't conform to a unidimensional character placid on a page. Pesso has choreographed his professional footfalls starting as a dancer studying under Martha Graham before moving into his roles of teacher, researcher, therapist, director and co-founder of PBSP.

Early in his career, Pesso believed that truly talented performers knew their instruments intimately—a flutist fingered her flute, a drummer drilled his drums with a synchrony of beat and sound, and

a dancer knew his body's movements—what created and maintained each action and reaction—inside and out. His drive to understand the body's mechanisms led to dancers connecting with their deepest emotions to bring forth on stage. The release proved cathartic in many ways but nothing truly changed, healing wasn't achieved. When he and Diane started cathartic healing groups, unconscious family-of-origin "Holes and Roles" resulted in mismatches between participants. Pesso knew healing was an interactional process but something was missing.

"The participants were touching stuff in the body that never got answered, but we had to learn how to give them what the body needed rather than simply let it out. The old idea that you have to get it out to get new in is absolute nonsense," Pesso said.

Pesso has introduced a multitude of topics to the field of psychotherapy including theory and terminology. His views on trauma and its triggers in the amygdala include the standard three—flight, fight, and freeze—and he offers a fourth—appease—a novel and accurate action that saves lives as surely as running, striking back, or playing dead. His concept of "Holes and Roles" within family networks that translate throughout our lives include what he calls our "stem-selves"—the parts of ourselves that are able to fulfill any role be it father, mother, sister, brother, teacher, friend, minister, miser, murderer, or demonic monster.

Pesso speaks of the mind's eye and the mind's body: the mind's eye sees mental imagery; the mind's body feels the sensations of mentally enacting what was seen (aided by mirror neurons) or what was perceived as needing to be done. Pesso articulates that first we

see in our mind's eye and then we do in our mind's body before there is a single thought. "Seeing and doing" become recorded as sensorial and motoric memories based on past experiences that create our current reality. Accessing memories of how we see and what we do with what we perceive to foster new memories creates lasting change in our lives. Pessó's latest venture into the brain's memories and their impact on our lives involves getting into the brain without cutting it open.

"Real change comes," Pessó said, "when we get into the brain in order to change perceptions and motor reactions from the past. Our sense of self and the resources we have in our body are altered here in the present."

Conceptually, it appears that much of Pessó's current work is grounded in his belief that we have an innate need to live a 'just' existence both for ourselves and for others. And when something goes astray, when an injustice is perceived, people must right it even if only in their mind's body (versus actually physically doing something). He talks about a fundamental push to be alive, to love, and to do justice based on incoming sensory motor information—we see the world and react in order to stay alive and in order to keep the species alive, he said.

"Memories are the way we perceive and react, they impact our present consciousness which is a tapestry woven of threads of infor-

mation, information that is embedded genetically or by history (autobiographical, the stories we hear, and the reactions we have to the stories we hear) which is formed by information which informs us about the world and life itself. How we perceive, how we react is based on memories, and they all make big impacts on our personality," Pessó said.

The Messiah Gene

"We are all born with the Messiah gene which is designed to help us heal what is broken or left incomplete," Pessó continued. "Stories of incompleteness make the brain nuts, so it makes movies that the person doesn't see but is in fact the star of that movie. That's why Superheroes attract so much public attention—people love to see justice prevail. However, the Roots of Justice are in the body—they are not rational or cultural, they are in fact a genetic drive."

According to Pessó, there are three kinds of connection in life: connection to the self via the limbic system; the need to connect to another, to mate and procreate; and the connection to God (of our own belief and definition).

"We all need to have a sense that there is some ultimate meaning and order in the Universe, he said. "My definition of God is all that is," Pessó said. "My definition of me: I am all that I am. If we fill a hole/role, we begin to think we are the only one to do it. We stop being human and become God like."

There is a Messiah in every culture, the one and only; however, Pessó noted there's danger when there is no other. God, he said, is omnipotent, and when a person assumes a God-like place and sees his role as the one, the only, the situation becomes dangerous. As humans we possess the power to create (sexuality) and to destroy (aggression), and these two powers need to be modulated and limited. When we become the one and only those titrations are blown apart.

The result? For some anxiety and panic attacks, for others systemic defenses such as depression, dissociation, retroflection attacks, incompleteness, and never being happy. There is a direct reduction in our ability to receive what we need, Pessó said. Unwittingly, the unconscious movies we made to be the hero and right what we perceived as injustices shut down our receptor sites for what we long for all our lives—to be cared for and loved (that's where resistance comes in during therapeutic interactions).

Absolute Present

Working with patients, Pessó starts in what he calls the absolute present and micro-tracks the process in terms of bodily presence and consciousness (language). Knowing that people receive information about the environment from perceptions in the moment, both the external physical space and the internal environment based on

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genetic information, Pessó notes that the present moment is actually made of our remembered moments. Perception impacts an immediate motor response—if we see something we like, we move toward it; if we see something we don't like, we move away. We can't have an emotion without a body reaction.

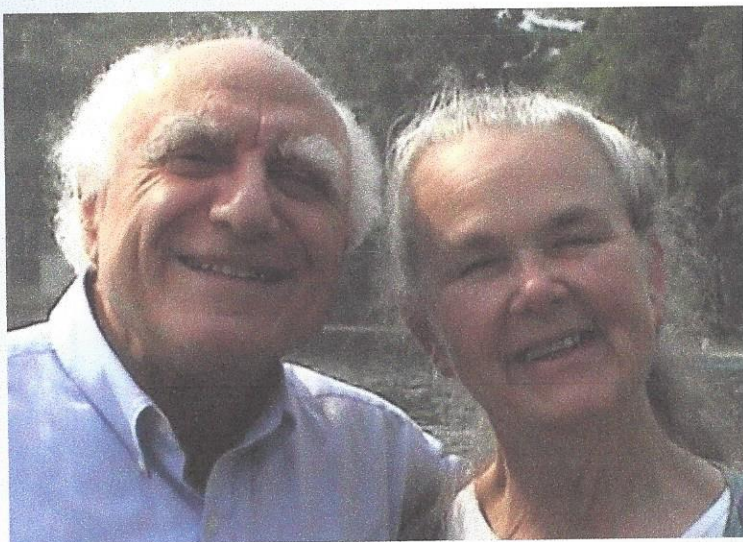
And present consciousness contains perception, motor response, affective response, and thoughts linked to everything we are seeing now. Micro-tracking affective responses, Pessó notes facial expression as well as words spoken along with patterned automatic responses in the body.

"Thoughts are words, and mostly patterning," Pessó said, "We do not ask patients, 'What do you want to work on?' To do so sets the aim, and

they only work on what they have prepared or we have prepared. This is not the absolute moment. We speak thoughts in the present mind."

Pessó's work continues as his explorations nudge him forward, ever expanding his field of knowing and sharing. As a researcher and a teacher, as a dancer and a therapist, as a husband and a colleague, as a being who is and also does, Pessó's presence enriches the lives and work of all he touches.

For more information about Albert Pessó and his current work, plan to attend his pre-conference workshop on August 9, 2012, in Boulder, Colorado. You can also log onto the Pessó Boyden System Psychotherapy website: <http://www.pbasp.com>



Albert Pessó and Diane Boyden-Pessó

Poem

by Albert Pessó

May 17, 2007

*So I looked Existence in the eye
and asked:*

"What do you want of me?"

*"What have you pulsed
into my being?"*

*"What rhyme, rhythm, or reason
have you installed in me?"*

*"What song
shall I sing,
what dance
shall I spring
to life?"*

*Existence didn't blink,
but its constancy
made me think
that its eye
was an I
with an aye.*

*Yes, my heart leaped,
seeing the harvest
that would be reaped
for the multitude of I's
with an aye for all eyes*

*"Yes, Yes!" I cried.
"We come to be,
fit to be tied
with those with an aye
for our I's"*

*What a world this can be
when all I's are a we
that say "Aye " to all I's
with their eyes.*



Pessó Boyden System Psychomotor

A Mind-Body Approach To Emotional Well-Being & Peak Performance