

# Al Pesso Talking

**Professor Albert Pesso with Michaela Baron, Denise Leblanc and Vivian Milroy**

When I first started in this work, people said that before the theory was established there was no system, it was just me and my wife's personality and that irritated me no end. I determined I would write several books about it so that there would be other people who could do it and that's what we have done. A part of this world tour is to get the therapeutic community aware of it's existence so that they can apply it. But it is teachable, it is very organizing and can be used by other people.

*Primarily what kind of people would this be aimed at?*

It goes across the board, right across the board, mental hospitals, for out-patients situations, for professional people. But as far as your article is concerned, (Madeleine Francis, Psychomotor, Self and Society Vol.I No.2) it is one of the best popular expositions describing psycho-motor techniques that I've read. But since that time we have been emphasizing rather more the elements of becoming a person: and the spiritual aspect of that becomes much more important - the satisfaction of early deficits. But now I feel that providing a strong enough ego base is only the beginning of the process.

I guess I am changing, too. I think that after all these years of working that I am reaching for a re-statement of the value of the nuclear family. I am rather hesitant about making that statement because so much of the current culture is to be promiscuous and have serial-relationships rather than a constant relationship and downgrade the family, see the family as the source of the problem rather than the absence of family as being a problem. But the concept of the nuclear family seems to be - at least within a structure - I don't see how people can become an individual without that. I think most of the theoretical reasons aren't very appropriate to talk about just now. The more important thing is I am willing to make a statement publicly and champion the family. And make it of value again. What came out of a lot of the Esalen counter culture thing is that commitment to one person is hogwash and that responsibility to your mate is hogwash and encourages acting out as the way to find yourself and that has proven an incredibly destructive reinforcement. So I guess I am wanting to be a prophet of traditional values or for a return to old fashioned ideas of character, of commitment, of value and the family.

*In that a lot of families do behave destructively, they may not be entirely responsible for neuroses but obviously are quite largely responsible. A lot of parents are very bad at bringing up children. How are you going to get them to match up?*

Well, some of the concepts we are developing, will teach people to be better parents, that is parents who will be better within this type of setting. One of the problem is that of defining and then of becoming a whole person. If we are not whole, we are

going to look upon our mate as filling aspects of ourselves and offering to be mother, father to us and all things we didn't get. So we don't really marry a peer. We marry a pair of parents and vice-versa. And then as people try to become whole, they say they can't stand for this and that's what leads to separation and blow-ups.

I think the reason people are divorcing more and separating more is that the concept of identity is expanding and the concept of who we are as individuals is getting larger. And the old concept of marriage cannot stand this. Because the old concept of marriage was that two half people should become one rather than these two whole people. If you are a whole person you permit your mate to be a whole person, then when you have children you won't ask them to play out the rest of your unfinished business, have them be the parent you never had or the person you never became. Of course if you're married to a magical mother or father and your kids are an extension of yourself - that's a formula for chaos and that's what I think a lot of families have been. The family that I'm speaking about is two whole people that recognize that the child is not an extension of the self, is not there for the satisfaction and consumption of the parent.

*Well here am I older than you I presume, and I think, on absolutely equal and non-hierarchic terms with Michaela and Denise. If I enjoy life more by not having the hierarchal boundary, by being able to look Denise straight in the eye and if I want to take her to a discotheque, take her to a discotheque, this seems to add to my life rather than vice versa.*

I wonder what it does to Denise.

*That's her problem.*

That's Fritz Perls talking, he says there's no responsibility to the other and I think that's another plague set upon this earth. Fritz Perls thing of 'I go my way, you go your way', I think that's a pile of crap, and I think it's doing more injury to people who've bought this as the new way than anything you could think of, I'm watching it cause disaster all over the place, because it denies the other and it denies the responsibility for the other or to the other and it gives us licence for acting out and behaving in a regressive way. One more thing about the family and the community thing. We feel we've learned a lot about the inner-environment about how someone in the intra-psyhic process becomes whole, and how I'm beginning to look at what kind of social and community organization will enhance the speedier development of that individual and to that extent we're becoming political, my wife today is looking at one of your planned communities in England, this year she's travelling with me and next year I'm supposed to be helping her develop a community in the States. That's what we'll be trying to work towards, so we'll not only clean-up the inner landscape, but maybe the outer landscape too.

Sometimes when we work in a group, people say 'Oh gosh it's so good to see you and your wife together, you look so warm', and it's a credit to a married couple to be warm to one another. And then we say we have children, and they say 'Oh that's marvellous, how old are they' and we say '12, 13, 16 and 22', and they look at my

wife and say 'the 22 year old is not yours is he', because assuming that were so happy this must be the second wife. The first one you get kids by then marry the young one you really want. That's a kind of a built-in expectation.

*A lot of people in this field say it's no good getting people straight and happy and developed because they're doing dull jobs and until you can change society, it's a waste of time.*

Well, we're trying to do that another way I suppose. My wife is concerned in community and in that sense is building a community which will allow people to become more whole.

*This is community, rather than a commune?*

A lot of the commune type thing is you marry the commune instead of marrying the parents. And they want the commune to do all the things for them that the wife would have done before. From what I've seen in the States, communes are the most fluid, ego-less organizations and everybody lets go of their responsibilities because they figure that the other person is going to pick it up. Nobody really pulls together So I don't believe in communes, but I do believe that there can be community sharing, but that each person should have their own primary group, this is also connected to the whole family bit and I'm getting . . . almost fanatical about it I feel like an old fashioned prophet. A lot of the counter culture and a lot of the 'new wave' of things in the States that spring out of this had denied that there is such a thing and that there's a value between the separation of the generations, they're trying to break the generation gap and make believe there's no real differentiation between one role and another. We should all be buddies and all be the same and I think that's incredibly stupid and unreal. The more we break that kind of identity, the more we break the sense of reality and order - you and I will never be the same as 'they', because we see things differently. You remind me of a story. I teach at Emerson College and about 10 years ago I invited some students to babysit for my kids, I identified with them, thought we were all out of the same gang. I made some comment using their language and they said, 'You know Mr. Pessa,' (why did they call me Mr. Pessa' I thought we were buddies?) it's funny to hear an older person like you use our language. At first it horrified me, but the more I live I realise that there is a difference and they see things completely differently and vice versa. And we ought to attempt not to deny that, but to talk across that and communicate, but not as if we're all the same. If we break the generation distance then our children begin to feel like they're having a magical marriage, instead of a metaphoric marriage. This is very confusing for both the child and the parent because they're playing out a sexual relationship on a reality level, which should only be symbolic sex. It's the breaking between literal and symbolic which occurs when you break the generations. Let the children be children and the adults be adults. The people who believe in consensus and letting everybody be equal, and no hierarchy or differential - I think they're crazy.