

# CULTIVATING THE SEEDS OF HOPE

by

**Albert Pesso**

## Introduction

Abuse and the trauma that follows it are topics of high current interest. We read about it and hear of it everywhere. Children are abused by their parents, their teachers and others who would ordinarily be expected to be earnestly concerned with their care. Wives are abused by their husbands, and husbands by their wives. And now, in this insane period when acts of terrorism have become common, ordinary citizens, tourists, and innocent bystanders are beaten, held as hostages and often murdered (Pesso, 1991).

The experience of trauma often leaves victims feeling hopeless in the present and despairing as they confront a meaningless future. It is common in the treatment of abuse/trauma to attend to the wounded aspect of victims and to create a safe atmosphere within which they can learn to return to the outside world with a modicum of calm and control. This is as it should be. However, there are other issues pertaining to the trauma victim's distrust of their own inner world that may be overlooked in typical therapeutic processes, resulting in unrelieved suffering even after years of treatment. In this chapter I will pay special attention to those unattended topics and explain how Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP®) theories and techniques can help those victims recover more rapidly and more fully. PBSP® is a body-based psychotherapy co-founded in 1961 by myself and my wife, Diane Boyden-Pesso (See Howe, 1991).

To begin with, I will look at the anatomy of hope and despair. Later, I will look at the psychological impact of trauma and especially at the role played by automatic body responses to trauma in the diminishment of hope and loss of self-control when the feeling of alarm is extreme. I will describe in detail the application of PBSP® theories and techniques regarding body-ego limits which innate responses to trauma appear to drastically disrupt. I will also discuss other standard PBSP® techniques which we use with trauma victims to confirm the dignity and validity of their existence. Then I will describe the special therapeutic setting called the Possibility Sphere, which is the arena we create in PBSP® to conduct therapy. Following that I will briefly review the theories, techniques and procedures we use to create a new, satisfying, symbolic, synthetic history for clients. This new history enables clients to face the vicissitudes of life without sinking into despair as it helps them discover, cultivate and sustain the emotional resources necessary to fulfill what they hopefully, yet realistically, have envisioned for their future.

## The Anatomy of Hope

Hope is the natural state of human existence. Our genetic heritage is the source of the wellspring of hope for it fosters the expectation that there will be a good end coming, that there will be light at the end of the tunnel and that we will manage to experience sufficient safety and pleasure during our

lifetime to warrant going on living, for, after all, hasn't life progressed with greater and greater success and complexity since the beginning of time? Hope is primarily a felt body-state and not only a state of mind (Damasio, 1994, 1999). The felt state of hope is first established in an infant's *physical* relationship with its mother who pays attention to the bodily satisfaction of its needs. Thus the feeling of hope is reinforced and becomes an expectation about the future as the mother regularly and reliably satisfies those basic needs when they arise (Erikson, 1964; Stern, 1986).

What are the underlying mental processes that give rise to the possibility of experiencing hope? First, one must have a clear notion of the flow of time that includes experiencing the present. Second, one must have the ability at a later time to consciously recall that present experience as a memory of events that have passed by. This is the past. Finally, one must all the while be able to conjure up memories in an inner theater of the mind where one can imaginatively and creatively elaborate upon and project those memories into the not-yet-present- time which is called the future. Memories are not to be thought of as only representing recollections of past thoughts and experiences, but more importantly, as Edelman has written, they are "representations of interactions." Likewise, the inner theater of the mind encompasses not only the "mind's eye," but also the "mind's body." Thus, in that inner theater of the mind those remembered interactive representations can be interiorly "seen" and "felt."

In that inner theater of imagination, using soul-satisfying memories of life-validating interactive events as a base, one can innerly practice experiencing interactive events of what one would desire to have happen *before* it happens. It is precisely this ability that constitutes hope. Antonio Damasio, in his book, "The Feeling of What Happens," (1999), calls this process of inner practice, "making a memory of the future." By making a memory of the future, one can practice today what one would like to have happen in some future tomorrow by using the memory of that practice as a template/model for what will actually happen when that future comes.

Thus, in order to have hope, one must have a plentiful supply of memories of past interactive satisfactions upon which to base future anticipations of interactive satisfactions. With such a history one can enter the future with hope and confidence, supported by memories of life validating events that were confirming of one's true being. In PBSP® we use this knowledge about memory and its effect on future expectations to provide clients with body-based experiences -- cast in the hypothetical past -- to create new symbolic memories that support having hope in the future.

People with a history replete with interactive satisfactions of basic developmental needs come naturally to the conclusion that there is love and caring in the world and that there is a future of pleasurable connectedness to look forward to (Erikson, 1964). They are able to live contentedly in the present, fully certain that they will experience pleasure and satisfaction in the future.

It is this deeply engrained hope which sustains us in times of adversity. If one has been fortunate enough during their maturational years to have it sufficiently reinforced and well registered in their personal memories, they will be able to continue functioning productively, sustained by realistic hope, regardless of outer stress (McFarlane & van der Kolk, 1996). If one has not, we can provide its symbolic equivalent in PBSP® sessions (Cooper, 1996).

## **The Anatomy of Despair**

Those who experience constant despair also have a clear notion of the flow of time that includes experiencing the present, the past and future. They too are able to conjure up memories in an inner theater of the mind where they can elaborate upon those memories of the past and project those memories into the future. Those who live in despair, however, do not have an interior, treasured store-house of optimistic expectation. In contrast, they have memories of significant, life conditioning interactive events that denied the validity of their being.

The above store-house of optimistic expectation can be damaged or destroyed in anyone who has faced life-threatening events of terror, abuse and trauma. It is even more likely in those who have also lacked the history of satisfactions of basic developmental needs. They have to have been treated not as a human self with wondrous capabilities, but as a thing, an object, a commodity to be used by others. They have to have experienced the uselessness of their attempts to control the outer world. They have to have had an early history where all their needs and choices were nullified or denied. This results in their images of a future full of frustration and their expectations of satisfaction nullified.

The major damage in all traumatic shocks is to that part of the self that is conscious, has identity, a sense of autonomy, a sense of mastery of the self and others, a sense of meaning, a sense of the future and a sense of hope. Trauma causes tremendous losses to these senses and leaves the fragment remains of the self in despair.

## **The Psychological/Metaphoric Impact of Trauma**

Trauma/abuse figuratively pierces the personal boundaries of the self and breaks the encircling bands of victims' interactively crafted egos that had heretofore enabled them to manage and control the dual domains of the inside and outside worlds. The traumatic event itself can be experienced as rape, for it thrusts a powerful, unwanted experience at the victim, without his/her consent. The ego is thereby severely damaged as abusers do whatever they want with the victim. The ego, which throughout one's lifetime constantly increases mastery of the self and surroundings suffers a great shock, for the trauma gives it no part in what will come in to one's body or consciousness. Ordinary ego capacities are reduced, resulting in intermittent feelings of loss of control, loss of language, loss of consciousness, loss of identity, loss of meaning, loss of ability to discriminate between the inner and outer worlds, fantasy and reality, dream and wakefulness, and other bi-polar distinctions (Pesso, 1991, pp. 170-173).

As trauma is extremely life threatening, it produces highly charged survival reactions, which figuratively raises the internal temperature to a dangerously high degree. This condition leaves the inner soul without boundaries and gives rise to unbearable but surprisingly addictive, experientially-omnipotent, levels of feeling (see Pesso, 1991, pp. 180-186). The victim's interior feels chaotic and seemingly without order and purpose. This may be so because until now victims may have never been fully in touch with the power of those innate forces. Their life histories may simply have not prepared them for that amount of reactivity. As these feelings may have had insufficient interaction or contact with any ego constructing figures such as parents or appropriate caregivers during their upbringing, they have remained unknown. The result is that there may have never been a place made for that level of primitive emotions in their self-construct. They may not have had the help of having names given to those powers. Naming defines forces, describes their functions and gives them dimension. Not doing so leaves them outside the realm of the cognitive part of the self. Thus, those powers are reacted to as if foreign.

Having also lost control of their inner world, which now appears strange, unfamiliar, mysterious, and without dimension, victims tend to distrust their own core emotional processes, for it appears to them that it is their core itself that is the source of those now uncontrollable, spewing, chaotic, forces. Thus, they try to distance themselves from their own bodies and whatever other interior regions they fear might harbor and release those threatening energies. This leads to coping strategies of dissociation, passivity or frantic external action. Unlinked from their core, they become even more uncertain as to who they are, and what their true identity is (van der Kolk, 1996). Thus, they become terrified and wary, not only of the *outside* world – the original source of the threat – but also (and sometimes even more so) of their own *inner* world. This is evidence that their weakened ego is in great distress and jeopardy.

## **Instinctive Repertoire to Threat**

Threat-aroused impulses have the potential to have a powerful, almost irresistible, effect on our emotional states, producing survival reactions evolutionarily geared to provide us with behaviors that will result in the continuity of our existence: keeping alive (Ledoux, 1996, pp.138-178; Ekman 1973). That is one of the two primary goals of our genetic heritage. The other is keeping the species alive. We have built-in systems and tendencies laid down in us by evolution with the aim of making sure there is a continuity of existence beyond our immediate generation (Gazzaniga, 2002). In other words, replication of the species is the main aim of sexuality.

The instinctive terms are clear and simple: when danger appears, freeze, flee, fight, appease (Ledoux, 1996, pp.128-137). How clever of our genes to note and make use of the fact that offering love can sometimes result in surviving a life-threatening encounter. When the danger is simple enough – and one's ego strong enough – all goes as one's genes predict and the problem is well attended to. According to each given situation, one can hide, run away, fight off the threat or offer love and receptivity to the threatening person and all's well that ends well.

When held in check by the ego, our psyches can present us with the livable stuff of complex, varied, external and internal reality. When that membrane of containment and differentiation, the ego, is stripped off, pierced, or shattered by unbearable trauma or abuse, those energies are no longer felt on the individual, human, living dimension. Though this is clearly a metaphor, the energies in our psyches react like – and feel similar to – cosmic events. It is a personal, psychological holocaust that is the equivalent of a nuclear explosion and a nuclear meltdown combined. The nuclear forces of polar opposites in the core expand/explode/open without the restraining, containing, discriminating and modifying effects of the surrounding band of the encircling ego. Order and complex states are no longer experienceable and atomic, psychic forces are unleashed in their simplest, primeval, uncontrollable level. Primordial expanding, exploding forces and their opposite engulfing, receptive, swallowing forces are set loose and the outer world seems on the verge of being destroyed by one's self, or hell-bent on plummeting into one's self – incinerating the boundaries between inside and outside. Thus, traumatized clients feel both the unbound forces of exploding fury and the capacity for boundless receptivity awakened inside themselves and they become terrified and helpless in the face of their seeming uncontrollability.

It takes a lot of power to meet those forces in the therapy session and that is why body action and touch are absolutely necessary to deal with them. It requires great strength and enduring/consistent physical effort to tame those forces so that the primacy of the executive ego can be re-established.

We are better or worse for having those powers and capacities within us depending on the level of discrimination afforded by our egos, which when healthy, can screen and differentiate between appropriate or inappropriate entrances of the outer world. It is our ego which filters and modifies the intake process, just as it does the outgo process. When our egos are shattered, people don't feel so much like a well contained human being serene in the integration of polarities, but as if they were oscillating wildly between the open vulnerability of endless space and its corollary, a black hole sucking in everything in its vicinity, like a hellish explosive force able to demolish anything it comes in contact with. The unbound primal psyche can feel as if it can both explode and implode if there is nothing to hold its immense forces in check. Power erupts and gaping chasms of vulnerability (openness) are present – destroying everything by force or capable of drawing everything outside, inside, without end. The personal, experiential level of terror this produces seems infinite and without dimension. Cataclysmic, chaotic action or frozen, powerless, paralysis can ensue.

How can we repair the intra-psychic damage caused by traumatic events and heal the shattered ego? How can we resurrect the primacy of the fully integrated, conscious, worthy, sovereign, autonomous self? How can we help trauma victims to re-awaken hope? In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss PBSP® interventions which help traumatized clients find hope and order in their lives once again.

## The Ego and the Body

Having explained how the shock of trauma over-rides the ego, we need now to touch on PBSP® theory's view on the ego and its relationship with the body. As I have said, in trauma, the ego is endangered both by the outside and inside worlds and when this happens hope is destroyed and despair is triggered (van der Kolk, 1996). PBSP® technique is based on our theories about how the ego was created and can be repaired. In order to understand our approach to treating trauma and the restoration of hope, it is necessary to first understand our theory about the ego, which I will now explain.

Think of the soul as a biological entity that has not yet accumulated a personal history but has within it the history of all successful life processes pushing forward to live/survive in the present and to thrive in the future. A newly-living soul could be described as a nuclear, organic center of being that is fresh, naked and having no present knowledge of a self with an inside and no present experience of an outside world. Though the core is genetically pre-organized, the outer membrane surrounding that center is only constructed through contact with the outside world. The organism itself, as it develops and matures in interactions with that outside world, becomes a living record of its encounters with it. In other words, the ego is literally created through interactions. It is in those encounters with the outside world that its actual, as well as its metaphoric/psychological skins are woven. The psychological skin, which can also be thought of as an ego membrane, can be described as the interactive interface between the inner and outer worlds. It is an interface in that one side of the membrane faces in and from that standpoint is able to regulate and modify what is coming out. The other side of the membrane faces out and from that standpoint is able to filter, regulate and modify what is coming in. Thus, the interactive interface is able to filter, regulate and modify what is coming out of the self as well as what is coming in. It can regulate behavior (output) as well as perception (intake). The soul, now with an interactively woven skin, can evolve into a conscious, inward and forward-looking, self-directing, human being.

From birth onward, through every developmental phase of life, loving, meaningful, interactions first with parental figures and then with the rest of the life-supporting outside world, lay the foundation for the development of those interactive/containing membranes which become the building blocks of hopeful, healthy egos. In contrast, if one has had frustrating, negative and meaningless interactions with the overseers of their rearing and later, similarly negative relationships with figures in the outside world, memories of those life-conditioning, interactive events become the building blocks of despairing, unhealthy egos (see Pesso, 1973, pp.121-154)

Another way to say it is that the soul is a given, but the skin of the soul – the ego – is constructed in interactions with the outside world. The combination of the soul and the ego comprises the self. A true, hopeful self results when the soul's interaction with the world sufficiently matches the genetic expectations coiled in its DNA. A false, despairing self occurs when the soul's interactions with the outside are combined with an ego that has been fashioned in a way not congruent with the needs, true dimensions, and characteristics of the soul.

Development of the ego is not only a cognitive process. Prior to the existence of a psychological ego, there is a body ego that is created by sensorimotor, kinesthetic interactions with parents and other early caregivers (Stern, 1986). Motor activity in satisfying, life-validating interactions is essential for maturing individuals to learn how to cope, not only with the outer world but also with the nuclear, core-resources in their inner world during childhood. That is precisely why the body has to be involved in the healing

(and further development) of the ego following traumatic events. Familiarity and control of those previously out-of-control forces need to be re-experienced and re-integrated on the sensorimotor, kinesthetic level and not merely on a cognitive rational level. In order to deal with the damage caused by trauma to the body ego and to create the deeper levels of healing necessary for trauma victims to overcome despair and replace it with hope, it is clear that body-based therapeutic interventions are absolutely essential.

## **The PBSP® Setting**

Before we can discuss how we in PBSP® help trauma victims reconstruct their lives and regain their lost hope, we need to first explain the main elements of PBSP®. The key elements we will touch upon are the Possibility Sphere, the notion of Accommodation, the notion of a Structure and the notion of making a New Memory and describe the steps leading to the fulfillment of the self. In this brief explanation of PBSP® techniques we'll begin by describing the PBSP® concept of the Possibility Sphere because this is how we conceptualize the psychological space within which the therapy takes place.

## **The Possibility Sphere**

The possibility sphere is a psychological, welcoming, expansive space, which we metaphorically extend to the client as part of the therapeutic relationship. The reason we call it the possibility sphere is that it is a surround that is so flexible and so full of "yeses" to the soul, that it gives the unspoken message, "Yes, all that is within you is possible to come into being, life is possible, life is good. You can feel hope that nothing in you has to die in order for you to live. None of your potentiality, your possibility as a person, has to die, and those parts of you that you felt you had to abandon may still come alive". It's very much a "yes" to life and implicit in it is a belief that life is good, so it is an optimistic view. It transmits the message that the energy the client is born with is essentially good. The possibility sphere offers an environment that implicitly says "yes" to the energy that's in the soul.

The possibility sphere is connected to the notion of the need for interaction and for countershape. It's a sphere that is so open and so full of non-shape, that it has all shapes in it. The possibility sphere contains all possible countershapes, to whatever shape is coming out of the person at any given time. Thus, the possibility sphere, by its very nature, prepares the ground for trauma victims to become familiar with and accepting of the positive, interactive, healthy ego-building satisfactions that will be experienced later in structures.

## **Accommodation**

Accommodation is a technique used in PBSP® to provide clients with the kinds of interactive responses that "match" or "countershape" the "shapes" or physical forms of each emotion the client expresses in their individual work (called a "structure"), in the group. Since the PBSP® process includes motoric/bodily expression, emotions are not only spoken about but also acted upon (see Pesso, 1969, pp. 159-185). For instance, if the client expresses fear in its physical form, and either runs for safety or curls up in a ball (shapes) – they know they can ask one of the group members to –role-play a "protection figure" or a "safety-giving figure" who would supply the wished for physical responses (countershapes) of a haven to be run to. The role-players represent figures who, in the hypothetical past created in the structure, would offer the safety of their own body as a protective shield to be securely

wrapped around them, when the client would have felt vulnerable and would have curled up into a ball in the past.

In PBSP®, all physical reactions which might and do emerge as sensations and impulses in the body are met with the archaically wished for and internally anticipated outcomes via the accommodation process. Countershaping, or matching the expressed emotion gives it a place in the ego, allowing newly discovered emotions to be expressed and consciously experienced by the client. The client is the arbiter and decider of the aptness and correctness of the countershapes that are offered. Nothing is done in an interaction that is not acceptable to the client or requested by him. This supports the client's mastery and control throughout the process, i.e., their consciousness and their pilot.

## **The PBSP® Process**

### **Structure**

When I describe the work of “structures” in PBSP® it will become clear that what we do is “stage” a piece of “new” history in the Possibility Sphere, where we make, not a *memory of the future* in order to have hope, but a *memory of a hypothetical past*. It is memories of the past that people internally call upon to make preparations for the future (Schacter, 1996; Rose, 1993). Trauma clients have experienced severe deficits of life satisfying interactions. With structures we help them enrich the database of their actual histories with healing “symbolic interactive events”. In structures they have a powerful sensorimotor experience with role-players representing kinship figures that their genes had prepared them to anticipate in their lives. Instead of having only an *interior theater* where the practice of the future takes place, structures provide a sensory motor, *external theater* to provide sensorimotor, kinesthetic experiences out of which new representations of interactions will be made. This provides them with a well stocked bank leading to hope because these new memories are abundant with pleasurable and satisfying “felt” memories (Lea, 1996).

A “structure” is the name given to the approximately 50 minute time-limited segment of the therapy session where each client in turn is given the opportunity to be fully in charge of the creation of his new memory. The rest of the group is then available to accommodate or role-play, when requested by the client who is having the “structure”.

The structure begins with “micro-tracking” the client’s present consciousness with the understanding that present consciousness is made up of the client’s present *affect* and its concomitant bodily responses to what is presently felt, plus the client’s *thoughts* and attitudes about what they are seeing and feeling at the moment. It is a given in PBSP® that *present consciousness* is mostly driven and influenced by *past memories* (Schacter, 1996; Rose, 1993). This fact becomes abundantly clear when past memories associated with the review of the present immediately come to mind and at once affect the client’s body and emotional state at that moment.

When a significant event of the past arises during the micro-tracking process – which the client is now able to recognize that has negatively influenced his present situation – that past event can then be played out in the group assisted by group member’s role-play. This gives the client the opportunity to discover what had been felt or experienced in the past. For now, having a structure with the freedom given in the possibility sphere, they have the opportunity to physically, as well as verbally, express whatever comes to body or mind. This part of the “structure” allows the client to process unexpressed

emotions and discover, with greater consciousness, the implications of that past event's impact on his present state. However, this expression and insight are only the first steps of the structure.

## **Making New Memories**

Processing the past, grieving about the losses experienced and gaining insight is not enough. In Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP®) we take the bold step to create new symbolic memories to offset the debilitating effects of past, deficit ridden, personal histories.

The heart of this part of the work consists of creating a “counter-event” which is staged and controlled by the client. This is framed as if it too had taken place in the past, but this time with more satisfying interactions provided by “ideal figures” who, had they been in the client’s past would have provided what was necessary to assist them in developing their full capacities. Their interactions are staged to offset the toxic effects of the actual event with the original figures. This “antidote” event is organized and configured to provide the client with a new piece of “synthetic, symbolic memory” as if it had happened at a requisite age and with the appropriate kinship relationship that would have been optimal for that client’s maturational development. Though indeed we are creating a symbolic fantasy, these role-players do not represent magical, spiritual or non-human figures. The “ideal figures” parental behaviors are based on the genetic/evolutionary human capacities we are born to anticipate from parents in the real world.

People with a history replete with interactive satisfactions of basic developmental needs come to the conclusion that life has meaning, that there is love and caring in the world, that there is a future of pleasurable connectedness to look forward to (Erikson, 1964). They are able to live contentedly in the present, fully certain that they will experience pleasure and satisfaction in the future.

## **Steps Leading to Fulfillment of the Self**

These new memories are not randomly supplied but conform to fundamental ideas regarding the maturation process leading to optimal maturational states. Thus, PBSP® structures attend to what we see as the necessary steps that would result in optimal living and generativity. For a complete review of those steps see Pesso (1997).

### **We need to:**

1. Satisfy the basic developmental needs for:

§ Place

§ Nurture

§ Support

§ Protection

§ Limits

2. Integrate and unify the polarities of our biological and psychological being:

§ Sperm/Egg – own and comfortably identify with mother's and father's antecedents and gene pool.

§ Neurological – integrate and have good communication between left hemisphere and right hemisphere.

§ Sensorimotor – be comfortable and skillful in all combinations of perception and action.

§ Behavioral - have an easy acceptance and comfortable use of all body apertures involved in "putting-out" and "taking-in".

§ Symbolic - at ease with one's metaphoric androgyny of combined "maleness/femaleness" (Animus and Anima) while able to identify with one's biological gender.

3. Develop our consciousness – increase subjectivity/objectivity, with a well developed interior world of images and concepts combined with a strong sense of individual identity and ego.

4. Develop our "pilot" – have a strong, active, self-organizing, self-initiating center, akin to taking our rightful place as the "president" of our own "united states of consciousness".

5. Realize our personal uniqueness and potentiality - come to maturity, ripen and bring the precious fruit of our existence to the world

Structures are basically geared to provide the client with experiences that should have taken place in the past and would have provided the satisfaction of fundamental life needs. The pleasure that is experienced when such satisfactions symbolically take place in a structure provides the experiential basis which makes it possible for the client to have hope in the future. It is our understanding that given a personal history where the above tasks have been successfully attended to either in actual history or in structure-created "symbolic memory", a client would be more able to contend successfully with the vicissitudes of the real world and especially with the consequences of traumatic events. However, when working with traumatized clients, structures are especially focused on what would help them experience, integrate and find limits for the unruly emotions released by the trauma.

## **Cultivating the Seeds of Hope by Offering Limits to Unbounded Receptivity and Aggression**

The following is about a client who had a history of incest with her father. The story below is a compilation of several structures done over a period of time but presented in the form of a single structure.

The client began to remember the sexual contacts with her father. She started to feel sick and felt that she would throw up. I understood that reaction as having too much feeling in her body, more than she could handle. This is an example of her ego being disrupted. She was one of those people who learned how to leave her body and now we could see why, because if she felt what was in there it would be too much. Whenever there is such an overload, I know that the route out is to have the person use the energy in their body very strongly and then to have that action that comes out of the body be in contact

with supporting or containing figures who provide countershaping pressure and resistance to the action as a way to help them handle it. Without those outside people to contact them when they have those feelings, they might feel as if their egos would explode from the force of the feelings inside and that they then might go crazy. The physical contact and pressure from the outside contacting people is experienced like a healing seal or cover over the hole torn in their fragile egos.

So I suggested she select some people to role-play just such contact containing figures so she could process that energy. The contact figures, who were females, gently put their arms around her as she sat on the floor with her arms around her knees and then I suggested that she tightened the muscles around the areas of tension in her body. She began to tremble. The contact figures held her more securely and she began to cry, saying she was very frightened. I understood that she was frightened not only because she remembered how helpless she felt when her father abused her but that she might also be frightened of the feelings that it brought up in her that she did not understand. It could be fear of the inside as well as the outside. In those instances, the contact figures are usually asked to say, or are needed to say things like, "We can help you handle how scared you are". This gives license to the feelings, giving them a name and making them handleable as the containing figures are there as an outer surface to hold them together.

The client, in the arms of the protective figures, felt free to touch even deeper levels of fear and terror. Suddenly, she clasped her neck, which had cramped with pain. That is a common reaction when people feel very vulnerable. At those moments some part of the body, frequently the neck, becomes very hard, as a kind of alternative to one's own softness that has made one feel so defenseless. I asked her to exaggerate the tension in her neck and in doing so her head pressed backward. That action needed to be contacted with and one of the containing figures, with her approval, placed her hands around the base of her head and the client, using the force created by the contracted muscles, pushed her head backwards into her hands.

This kind of intervention is provided to meet the counterforce which the client calls up in the attempt to balance the too vulnerable feelings. It is important that when this hard reaction to their soft feelings surfaces, it is not met with limits. Limits are that special intervention which stops an action from being completed. In this case limits are not required, but a more subtle amount of resistance is offered, with just the right amount of pressure. This allows the clients to continue to move their body in whatever direction they wish it to go but they have to work harder to make it happen. This intervention demonstrates to the clients that their strength and force is effective. The words that the accommodators might be asked to say in connection with it are, "You're strong, you can have an effect on me", or other words that would give a similar message of validating the client's attempts at increasing the amount of power they have available in their bodies. This validation of that increase of strength has the paradoxical effect of giving the clients the license and safety to go deeper into their vulnerable feelings. Hope has arisen that it could be safe to be vulnerable again.

From that interaction, the client, with great force, pushed her hips forward and with the contact figures giving counter pressure on her hip bones, the client's thighs and pelvis shook violently.

She said something like "That is so sexual", sat back on her heels and began to pound on her thighs. Quickly the containing figures restrained her from hitting her legs and in a flash she began to aim her fists toward her face which it appeared she would attempt to smash. She seemed to be in a fit of self hate, guilt and shame for having sexual feelings in her body and would destroy those parts of herself that had those feelings. The limiting figures with her agreement, I must say that nothing is allowed to

happen without the client's agreement, say to her, "We will not let you hurt yourself". Then, when they are clearly ready for her attempts the client feels free to release all the pent up self hate and disgust she has about her own sexual feelings. Clients at this juncture struggle greatly but it is always a relief for them to find that no matter how hard they try they will be limited from doing damage to themselves.

The guilt that she feels at such moments is enormous. She blames herself for her own predicament. The fact that she just found herself feeling sexual seems proof to her that it was her fault that the abuse occurred. She would kill the offending parts of herself; "If thine eye offend thee pluck it out". She would pluck out her sexual feelings in her guilty thighs and smash the sexual feelings out of her head.

But when this self-hate and guilt is limited it can quickly turn to hatred and murder directed toward the person who made all those unwanted feelings happen. That too must be expressed, but in a form where it is clear that there would not be allowance for literal murder.

When those feeling of self-hate shift to become hatred of the person who brought those feelings out in her, the client chose to have a negative father enrolled so that she could vent her fury at him. The negative father role-player accommodates as if struck when she directs her blows at him. It was satisfying to the client to see her negative father in pain. She wanted to punish him for what he had done to her.

"I'll really kill him now" she said. If she had not been limited she might become frightened that nothing would stop her from carrying out her murderous intentions. At such moments the containing figures can say, "It's all right to be so angry at him, but we won't let you literally kill him. We can handle your anger and we can help you handle it". Their firm limiting action is concrete proof of that. This allowed her to fully express all the hatred and rage she felt for him. She lunged toward him and punched in his direction and kicked toward him venting all the suppressed hostility.

But she didn't stay with anger for long. Shortly, she was remembering how much she loved her father; how he had been the adored daddy for her in her childhood and now she could not bear to think of him being hurt. That aroused a great sadness and loss in her, for she remembered how hurt and confused she was the day he first approached her sexually. It was like the end of her world.

Paradoxically, during the process of expressing this sadness and grief, right in the middle of her crying and all the shaking and convulsive feelings that came with it, she noted that her thighs were trembling and that there was another tension in her belly and lower back. When I asked her to exaggerate the tension and to see what movement came of it, it made her legs shake in a way that they oscillated between opening and closing. Before carrying out the appropriate intervention to limit this erotic receptive feeling I explained some of the theoretical notions about it to her. This was helpful to her and permitted her greater freedom to move under the force of those impulses.

The limiting figures, and it is important that in this case they be female and not male, otherwise it might feel like she was submitting to male strength, wrapped their arms around her knees so that no matter how hard she might try to open her legs she would not be able to do so. It is a paradoxical thing. Here is a person who has been abused and who wants more than anything to close herself up to keep from being abused, and she finds that a part of herself that she is not in conscious control of, intends to move in a way that is quite the opposite. Now that external figures are doing the closing, she can attend totally to the impulse to open her legs and that releases an enormous amount of energy. There is a great

struggle, and not only does she fight to separate them, but her hips thrust forward repeatedly and when she makes the sounds that the effort brings, it surprises her. She says, "Those are the sounds that he made when he was doing it". Now the emotions connected to that event are entirely conscious and she can find some of the same feelings in herself. Although it at first makes her ashamed, she finds that she can continue to make the movement and the sounds and is relieved that she can own those sexual feelings in herself but still while she is kept from separating her legs. If in the sexual contact a client had included some conscious sexual excitement and a wish to have incestuous relations, the ideal limiting figures could say something like this, "It is OK that you might want to have sex with your father but we won't let you literally do it". There is relief when limiting figures succeed in getting that omnipotent feeling of receptive sexuality and vulnerability under control. After the limits she feels that her body is more her own and she relaxes in a way she has not been able to do before. This is another increase in the possibility of hope, now that her own interior, unruly, unconscious responses to the incestuous events, are having more body-ego as well as psychological ego control

She takes some time now to review and examine her emotional state and remarks that the room looks different, lighter and her body feels softer and less tense. She looks over to where the negative father was and begins to remember her real father again and how she used to adore him. Feelings of love well up in her and she begins to cry. She is filled with tenderness and begins to stroke the floor in front of her as she remembers and speaks about how wonderful she thought he was.

She then asked a group member to role-play the loved aspect of her real father. This second figure is spatially placed to be entirely separate from the negative aspect of the father and represents only the part of her real father that she loved. This polarization allows her tender feelings to be expressed toward the loved aspect of her father without ambivalence. In the event that she might begin to be angry again, those feelings would be directed toward the negative father.

At this moment, she is not feeling sexual, furious or guilty. Instead, she is suffused with the tender feelings of the unexpressed love she had felt for him in her childhood, feelings which she could no longer express after the incest began.

The male group member role-playing the loved aspect is asked to sit closer. She is still being held by the contact figures around her. As she looks at him, her body begins to tremble again and they do their encircling function to help her to contain her vulnerability as she feels the love for him. This is reassuring, for without it those feelings might get out of control. In a way it is omnipotent tenderness. Their holding can include their saying, "We can help you handle how much you love him". For her love feelings are also somewhat out of body-ego control.

As she reaches her hand to touch him she becomes frightened by the force of her feelings and other containing figures are enrolled to hold onto her wrists as she reaches toward her father's face and hair. They exert a little counter pressure, giving just enough resistance so that the effort is not stopped completely. That is why they are called resistance figures, not to represent her resistance, but to give her enough external resistance so that she does not get paralyzed by her own ambivalence about touching him. Those resistance figures make it just possible for the tender feelings to be expressed without getting out of control.

This intervention enables her to give vent to all the tenderness she feels inside without being overwhelmed. It is very touching to see that moment and to note the open, happy, hopeful expression on her face.

The structure has brought her to a place where she is more able to face and control the forces that had been ignited within her by the incest. Now she needs to have an alternative, symbolic experience with parental figures who would have supplied her with the kind of childhood interactions that would have permitted her to become her adult self with greater mastery of her inner and outer worlds and with a sense of safety, comfort and hope as she anticipates the future.

Here is how she uses the ideal parents in her structure. She chooses two group members, male and female, to represent the ideal father and ideal mother. They are instructed to sit side by side, entirely opposite to the original situation where the parents were not close at all. She said something about still not believing that they liked each other or had sex together and I asked her if it would be OK if I provided her with what I have found is a kind of classic image of parental intimacy. I described it to her and when she agreed I instructed the ideal parents to embrace each other and look into each other's eyes. This made her face light up. She said she had never seen her real parents so close and that it was wonderful to imagine her ideal parents being so intimate. The ideal father would say, "I would never be sexual with you, I would only be sexual with your mother". It was a great relief for her. It made her feel free like a child and now she felt she could have a mother again. She began to cry and climbed into her ideal mother's lap like a little child, experiencing what she hadn't felt in her actual childhood, being loved and protected by a mother who was only a mother and not a competitor.

This work has brought her to a place where her nuclear forces of power and vulnerability need no longer be totally suppressed and are less likely to bring her to a place where she is in dread of imminent meltdown. She has expressed the emotions in her body in a way that she can feel more control over them. They have been seen, touched, named and given boundaries and are thereby ego-wrapped. She is more of one piece. The integrity of her body and the feelings in it have been recognized in a respectful setting and given a place. The establishment of these new memories can become the basis for hope in the future.

## **Summary**

This ends my overview of the ideas and methods used by PBSP® therapists to help trauma victims move from despair to hope. Structures are designed to help clients review past, life-determining situations in the possibility sphere and then reconstruct those events with appropriate ideal kinship figures in interactions that support and confirm gene-based expectations of success in surviving and thriving. This is achieved with the help of new, healing, memory-building symbolic events which take place in the therapy room and are seen with the client's real eyes and felt in the client's real body. They are then placed, with the aid of the mind's eye and the mind's body, in the appropriate storage space in the brain where real old memories are kept and can later be accessed. The traumatized client constructs the kinds of interactions their sorely taxed egos are "starved" for. The end result is a hopeful, more optimistic person with an ego-structure more able to regulate and control both the inner and outer domains.

Though the therapeutic process is by its nature "symbolic", the client's experience is anything but artificial. When the wished for interactions are seen with the client's real eyes and felt with the client's real body, the impact on the client is dramatic. Those real feelings of expansion and realization are what make the new memory so memorable and so believable. The new memory is not an abstract construct; it is a felt experience of great power. What makes it symbolic is that the client shifts the locus of the storage of that memory from a short term "happening right now" location, to a long term "it happened

when I was a child" location. This shift in time, age, and place is what gives the structure the power of long term memory.

The look of relief, the relaxation of tense muscles and rigid postures, the tears of grief at knowing what was missed, the heartfelt expressions of warmth and gratitude to the figures in their structure, the look of happiness and hope as their demeanor shifts from a gloomy interior focus to a smiling, sunny, outward-looking, expression - one can only feel awe in the presence of a soul, stretching and flowering, safe and unthreatened, shining in all its glory. It is my hope that the materials presented here will help trauma victims to return more rapidly to a life of hope with plentiful quantities of pleasure, satisfaction, meaning and connectedness.

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