

HEARTS DESTINY
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When Oprah Winfrey Show producer Hilary Jane Robe searched for couples for the show's "Greatest Love Stories" she discovered a story about Dr. Moti and Ronit Peleg in a New Jersey newspaper.

Not only are the Pelegs destiny-driven soul mates with an incredible love story spanning four decades — and which eventually led them to Esopus — but they're also humanitarians whose Ego to Heart workshops emphasize heartfelt listening and communication between other couples.

It started when a 17-year-old boy became smitten with a magazine cover in his homeland of Israel. The cover photo portrayed the newly crowned Miss Israel of 1964 — Ronit Rinat.

Needless to say, he was not the only young man drawn to this beauty. But Moti said, "Indeed, many men in Israel fell in love with Ronit's image. She was the most soulful and gentle beauty queen that Israel ever had. There was some kind of spirited glow in her that I saw, in addition to her striking beauty."

He stressed that her eyes beckoned to him, and he kept that photo, feeling they would someday meet and marry.

Being a romantic farm boy, he said, "I always believed in my ability to reach and practically fulfill almost every dream and goal I set out to do. It might sound grandiose or delusional, but it was as if her eyes knew me and signaled me."

Meanwhile, Ronit married a physician from the United States at age 19. She moved to the States and had three children.

"I had my three kids by the age of 25, went to college while my kids were growing up and then opened an international store in Beverly Hills," she said.

Ronit said her husband was not only 20 years her senior, but was neither a communicator nor spiritual as she has always been.

"We went to a workshop for couples called "Flesh & Spirit" and it was just what I was seeking: to be listened to without judgment, to be spoken to from the heart and, most of all, to listen to my own heart before I spoke," she said.

The workshop gave Ronit a new communication and connection with her first husband, allowing 30 years of accumulated "shadows" to come to the surface and to learn how to forgive, share and be compassionate.

She then studied for five years under Dr. Jack Zimmerman and Dr. Jaquelyn McCandless, certified in the couples' intimacy practice of "Flesh and Spirit." She brought this counseling method back to Israel in 2002. Ronit became the founder of "Council" in Israel. She trained people throughout the country, and "Council" rapidly spread throughout Israel, with many followers and facilitators.

According to the Californian-based Ojai Foundation, "Council" helps one openly explore, offer heartfelt expression and learn to listen attentively. It is said to be the gateway to deeper communication, intercultural understanding and the non-violent exploration of conflict.

After her husband's death, Ronit was empowered to continue with a full life, as she was able to feel love, peace and harmony with those around her.

"I have trained, mentored, spread the council practice all over the country (Israel)," she said, "and, today, it is recognized as a way to reduce violence in schools, empower women, men, and children — to build community and connect through dialogue between Arabs and Jews."

Simultaneously, Moti came to the states in 1970 to fulfill his dream of becoming a psychologist. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in psychology from Queens College, got married and had two children.

"Sadly, my wife and I didn't have communication skills," he said. "We struggled with fears and insecurities that eventually drew us apart and caused us to divorce."

Peleg completed his Doctorate at Yeshiva University, and, after years of clinical hospital work and in his own private practice, he received his state board psychology license.

Moti Peleg has been in the clinical field of mental health as a psychotherapist and psychologist for more than three decades. His New Jersey private practice specializes in traumatic stress associated with pain and relationship issues.

However, one thing in his life had always remained a constant: His desire to meet the girl with the eyes that seemed to signal him. So in 2004, a friend called Ronit to say he had someone who wished to meet her.

At first, Ronit said, she thought it was a joke, but realized this man's voice seemed truthful, and, being a spiritual person, she thought this could be divine intervention. Confirming she would accept a call, she gave Moti a chance.

"I have been guided all my life and was told I would meet my soul mate after my first husband's passing," she said. "Lots of signs told me to pay attention and to listen to my heart."

Initially, Ronit thought he was coming on too strong, but, "there was something special in what he was saying that kept me interested."

Moti Peleg said, "It's just as Oprah Winfrey described it when Ronit and I appeared as guests on her show: 'He picked up the phone and made a date with Destiny. ...'"

Moti continued to communicate with Ronit via phone calls, e-mails, love letters and songs. (He is also a performing instrumentalist and songwriter).

"The lyrics and the songs talked to my soul," Ronit said. "I had to meet that man."

She flew to New York and then visited Moti's Hackensack, N.J., home.

Was it love at first sight?

"I did not feel it when I first saw him," she said. "I was very careful, as my heart was closed and the child part of me wanted to escape."

However, Ronit had her own way to dispel her fears with her training in "Council" and her belief in destiny. So for the first three hours of their face-to-face visit, Ronit asked Moti to join her in "Council."

She said, "We shared deep stories from our past, our childhood fears and dreams, and only then did I feel relaxed and decided to stay. My heart and soul felt it was okay to trust this man."

"It was a magical four days."

After two years, they were married.

Said Moti, "We were married exactly on the first day of the war in 2006 with the Hezbollah (a Lebanese terrorist group that battled Israel)."

The "destined" couple returned to the states, where they combined their counseling methods to form "Ego to Heart", which Moti Peleg calls an "emulation of 'Flesh & Spirit' conducted with our unique, personal style and approach."

Ronit and her mentor, Jack Zimmerman, felt Dr. Peleg was a natural at intimacy communication facilitation, but not as a psychologist. When they present "Ego to Heart" workshops, they're not performing the job of a psychologist or psychotherapist.

Said Moti, "We are facilitators, and what makes our workshops stand out, compared to long-term weekly psychological couples counseling, is the fact that our work produces rapid and deep results in couple intimacy communication, compared to lengthy analytical psychological therapy."

Both the Pelegs say they feel there's a lack of human contact in today's gratification-oriented society, causing a deficiency of communication and romance coming from the heart.

Said Ronit, "What we do in our 'Ego to Heart' workshops is remind people they must deeply listen to their hearts, dreams, intuition, inner voices and then share it with their partner in a ceremonial setting."

"The results of respect, humility and compassion, allowing a person to be seen as perfect in their imperfections, without judgment ... empowers each one of us and the relationship," she added.

The workshops enable people to listen to the "voice of the relationship," thus eliminating the ego of "me," transforming it to "we", which diminishes the power of ego that reduces a heart's connection," according to the Pelegs. This "letting go" of one's ego allows a person to move to their heart for a deep and truthful communication in a relationship, they added.

In fact, according to Moti Peleg, approximately 90 percent of couples who attend Ego to Heart workshops were on the brink of divorce or breakup. But, once experiencing the secret of balancing ego and heart in harmony, they remained together.

However, once more, destiny called the Pelegs to the Hudson Valley, where they had been looking for a country home. They were providing workshops in New Hope, but realized the location did not have the karma and warmth they were seeking.

"It just did not feel right," Ronit said.

However, Moti Peleg's son, a construction engineer, was searching for a valley home for himself and came upon a place in Esopus.

"To our amazement, when investigating the home's history, we found out the house served as a labor school for newly arrived immigrants who came to the states through Ellis Island in search of a new home," Moti Peleg said.

Not only was this dwelling a "destination" they loved but a "destiny," as the 10,000-square-foot mansion overlooking the Hudson River was called "Heart's Ease" with heart shapes and heart carvings found throughout the structure. In addition, by working with the Esopus Historical Society, the Pelegs' historic research revealed that one of America's greatest humanitarians, Eleanor Roosevelt served on the board of the labor school.

Architectural heart-shaped appointments, the name "Heart's Ease" and the grand humanitarian connection? This certainly seemed like destiny, and their life's synchronicities played a role in their lives.

Ronit said, "It's amazing that our practice focuses on the Ego to Heart connectedness and this house has hearts throughout."

With their hearts' desire of introducing Ego to Heart workshops to the Valley, they bought "Hearts Ease." If historical renovations and construction go as intended, by August 2011, the couple's destiny will be fulfilled.

Moti Peleg concluded by saying that the formula to an intimately fulfilling relationship does not necessarily include finding your soul mate. The challenge is to deepen intimate bonding, developing an emotional, physical and spiritually fulfilling union.

"You can heal your relationship and have a healthy, flourishing life with the partner you chose," he said.

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