

# Connecting to the 'Primary Couple Personality': Couples Therapy with Body Psychotherapy

By Gabriel Shiraz



**Some 40 years ago**, my teacher, Gerda Boyesen, wrote an article about the 'Primary Personality' with which we are born. Within it are all the qualities, potential, essence, flow of energy and sexuality in the body, the power of vitality, and the fundamental love inherent within us. As we mature, our emotions, senses, powers, and sexuality develop and express themselves. We overcome our fears and our primary personality develops and grows stronger. In contrast, according to Boyesen, the 'Secondary Personality' develops over time, influenced by external agents of oppression like our parents, education, early traumas, and the failure to express emotions. It takes shape around our inner core, creating an 'armour'. Sometimes this armour also hides our Primary Personality, our original potential and qualities, and even makes them disappear.

**Through observation when conducting** therapeutic work with couples over the past decade, I noticed that just as we each have an inner essence and a Primary Personality that is vital for us to connect to so we can grow and flourish, in exactly the same way every couple has a 'Primary Couple Personality' generated with the encounter of the two halves of a couple, an encounter between qualities, emotions, patterns of thought and behaviour; an encounter between shared life-stories that create the couple relationship. As the relationship initially takes shape between the couple, there is a place of authentic connection, without words and thoughts. A spiritual encounter between two people, a meeting of one Primary Personality with another. Potentially it is an encounter for profound connection and love. An encounter that's able to intensify and grow stronger as the relationship deepens in all strata, and as the family grows. Naturally, the more difficulties, crises, poor communication, and growing apart occur, and when the couple fails to invest in their relationship, the result is a distancing from the individual Primary Personality and the couple's Primary Personality.



**When Idit and Daniel entered my clinic** for their first therapy session, Idit's slumped way of walking and Daniel's hunched back and impaired breathing were obvious—a heavy and blocked energy, that reminded me of armor, in this case, the 'armor of a couple'. I couldn't sense any energy, closeness, or connection to vitality in each one of them, and not as a couple. I couldn't

feel that they were connected to each other's Primary Couple Personality, and not to their mutual couple relationship.

**Wilhelm Reich, the father of body** psychotherapy, called for couples to perform a 'joint creative endeavour'—a shared effort of the body, energy, emotions, mind, spirit, breath, and soul. I believe that Reich's words reflect the creative work of the Primary Couple Personality.

**A couple's primary relationship** comprises, among others, love, communication, intimacy, sexuality, containment, confidence, acceptance, and giving. Just as each of us has the capacity to be connected individually to our Primary Personality and to be happy and in balance most of the time, so too a couple relationship has the potential to be structured by all that richness. It is the richness of the Primary Couple Personality.

**Some couples connect directly to the** Primary Couple Personality in the midst of falling in love, with its euphoria, butterflies in the stomach, tremendous excitement, temporary blindness, and the desire to be constantly together. But when couples are building a relationship, friendship and intimacy also begin— a connection that flourishes into love, and as their emotional relationship deepens, a profound link is created to their inner core, to their qualities, the love within them, and to their personal and couple primary personality.



**Frequently, at the very start of a** relationship, or after the falling-in-love period ends (a matter of a few months), we see that difficulties crop up, such as disappointments, frustrations, and impaired confidence, stemming from the meeting between wounds, between the couple's differing life-stories. In other words, the Secondary Personality of each of them has created a shared Secondary Couple Personality, which places obstacles, triggers off crises, and bars access to the essence of the Primary Couple Personality.

### **An Example**

**I offer an example from therapy,** concerning a couple that underwent a process of 'dissolving the couple's armour' and, in the course of therapy, connected to their Primary Couple Personality.

**Daniel (52) and Idit (50)** came to couple therapy following a marital crisis that led them to feel they were living 'in parallel' to each other, but not together. They have been married for 27 years and have four children. They married out of love. Over the years they drifted apart and the relationship soured. Daniel is an impressive man, self-controlled, and tough. He seemed emotionally insensitive, as if his wife had 'dragged' him to therapy. Idit is sensitive, creative and brimming with softness. She initiated the idea of therapy, since the family and their mutual relationship are very dear to her; she strongly hoped to save their relationship and restore their lost intimacy.

**Currently, they are both successful in** their work, both are self-employed. They reached this point after a crisis some years previously. Idit had gone through a difficult time with much anxiety after a professional change that was compounded by her mother's death. He became depressive



because of problems in his business. Following his personal crisis and their unravelling marriage, Daniel went abroad some years ago and remained there for several months. After he returned to the family, the emotional detachment between the two persisted, and in fact intensified.

**In most cases, like Idit and Daniel,** couples seek couples therapy after encountering difficulties in the relationship, and following a range of crises: a crisis in trust, burnout, poor communication, problems with sexuality, damaged intimacy, anger, cumulative anger and violence, a personal crisis of one of the couple, problems with children, economic straits, and so on. Crises like these build-up armour around the body and the breath, impelled by the need to protect the Primary Personality of each member of the couple. Adding to this is the load of everyday life—anger, frustration, exhausting routine, and difficulties vis-à-vis the partner. All of these together create the 'couple armour' which contains emotions like disappointment, frustration, bitterness, and in tandem builds up a Secondary Couple Personality with its own patterns and defences. In this way, a sort of 'lack of oxygen' is created in the relationship itself that can be fatal for the couple, in which the relationship cannot breathe or even exist.



**In many cases, the desire to dismantle** the relationship and to divorce stems from a strong detachment that persists over years between the Primary and the Secondary Couple Personality. As long as some connection is retained with the Primary Personality in the couple's relationship, some hope and desire exists to return there because of the fond and encouraging memories from good periods of shared life. Thus, the main thrust of working with couples is maintaining the ties with that place. Once detachment occurs, the crisis between the couple becomes a crisis that threatens the very relationship.

**Gerda Boyesen termed a situation of** total detachment between the Primary and the Secondary personality as a 'kind of schizophrenia'. In the same way that schizophrenics have a complete detachment between the two personalities, which causes severance from the life force and inability to function, so too in a couple relationship: when detachment occurs between the Primary and Secondary Personality, that is, between the potential and love inherent in the relationship, and the defences, anger, and armour, the result is a situation in which the couple 'suffocates', the soul of the

couple relationship is lost, and the road to separation is short.

**One of the main trajectories in couple** therapy is regaining the relationship with each one's Primary Personality; to the qualities, the core, the potential, and love within us. From that personal connection, there may also be a return to the qualities of the relationship and a process of couple development—to the love, communication, and intimacy that typify the Primary Couple Personality. After discussing with the couple the reasons that led them to embark on therapy, what their expectations and needs are from the partner and from the couple relationship, I lead them back to the start of their relationship and ask: "How did you meet? What happened at the beginning? What did you like? What attracted you? When were the best times in your relationship? During the relationship, did you feel that you were falling in love with, and loved, your partner?" In most cases, when the early relationship was healthy, characterised by giving, acceptance and love, one can help the couple elucidate what happened along the relationship, how the burdens of life affected them, how the personal changes in each of them left their



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traces on the relationship, and what baggage it created, and the wounds it sustained. That joint process of discovery lets them observe the process in which the couple armour started accumulating, as well as the process of holding their breath and blocking the inner flow of oxygen. In other words, they examine the process which created the Secondary Couple Personality' in which both of them are partners and are responsible for.

**Idit worked through a deep personal process** after the crisis she underwent. Because of it, she connected to her qualities and strengths. In the couple therapy process, she reconnected to the emotions and feelings of her first home, where she grew up—a loving, warm, and enfolding home. In tandem, she returned to her memories of falling in love, how the relationship with Daniel started and developed, and what impelled her to dissolve her armour. In the therapeutic process, it was visible how her body and breathing softened in the course of reviving communication and the rapprochement process with her husband. Daniel, who had ostensibly 'been dragged' to therapy, went through a process of plugging into his strengths and qualities as an individual and a man. In his childhood home, there was a sense of survival and emotional chill, which explained his difficulty in voicing his emotions to his wife. During therapy, he learned how to express his feelings in words, and this allowed him to make a connection with his Primary Personality. Once they had each revitalised their Primary Personality, after many years of attrition in their relationship, the result was a powerful and vibrant 'Primary Couple Personality'.

**Regaining the 'Primary Couple Personality'** is not always an option, particularly in cases where the wounds are too deep and trust cannot be restored. In the case of Idit and Daniel, it was possible. Through couple therapy, they recognised and regained the qualities of their original relationship—falling in love, and feeling love that was full of emotion, unconditional, and without defenses. The process required each of them to think back and answer questions such as "Why did you fall in love with him?", "Why did you fall in love with her?", to pay each other compliments as 'homework', to say things that the other one likes hearing, to identify with the other's individual qualities and their shared qualities, as a couple. Another therapeutic tool that I used was role-reversal; here they managed to identify with their partner's difficulties and pain. The modelling process, when I sat next to him or her, and spoke instead of them, touched their heart, increased empathy towards the partner, and awoke the connection to the intensity of their mutual relationship.

**The therapeutic process** enables the couple to look inward at their most profound wishes, to observe how the relationship was worn down by routine, by removing intimacy and sexuality from the relationship. It also makes possible an examination of personal wounds and a shared encounter with the childhood wounds which structured certain patterns and defences. It's also important to spark-off empathy and containment towards the other partner— improving mutual communication and reviving the healthy relationship. The process of observing, talking, venting, expressing feelings and articulating wishes, generates a situation in

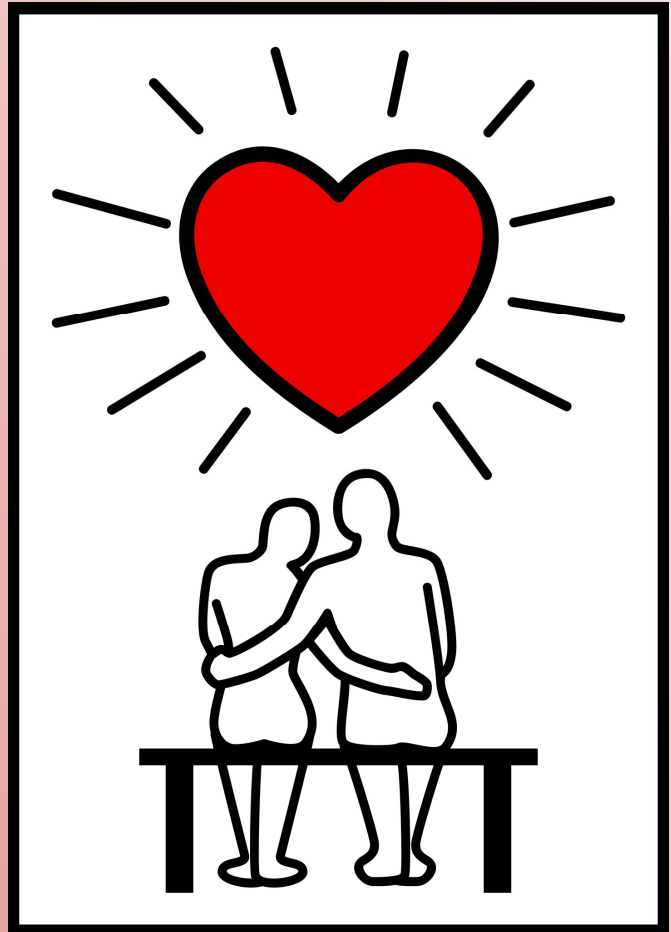


which the Secondary Couple Personality dissolves and allows the couple to experience once again the Primary Couple Personality and to form ties with it. Throughout that process of communication, expressing emotions, and restoring intimacy and sexuality to the relationship, something magical happens to the couple . . . they fall in love again, and their love revives the magic of reconnecting to the Primary Couple Personality.

**Through therapy, Daniel and Idit were** able to recall why they fell in love. And following the process they resumed talking, communicating, complimenting, and enjoying each other, breathing life into their Primary Couple Personality.

**The potential of a couple is vast. It is a** great challenge, but one that can be achieved: rebuilding the relationship and restoring a family, grounded on connection at the emotional, physical, and spiritual level, while handing down the power of the Primary Couple Personality to the next generation. The more successful a couple is in making a deep connection to their personal qualities, to the core, the desires and love within them, to the Primary Couple Personality, the stronger the resonance that impacts so powerfully and thrillingly on the partner. In turn, this can lead to healthy development, a relationship that's stable, loving, respecting, and exciting, that can withstand life's trials and engender the sense that  $1 + 1 = 3$ , where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The creation of a Primary Couple Personality.

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**Gabriel Shiraz** is 50 years old, married with four children, two boys and two girls. Upon his return from studying Biodynamic psychotherapy with the late Gerda Boyesen in London in the 90's, for the past 18 years, Gabriel Shiraz is practicing as Biodynamic Body-psychotherapist. He is a trainer, lecturer, supervisor and psychotherapist for individuals, couples, therapists and groups. In 2001-2008 he founded and was a director of the body psychotherapy program in Israel at Reidman College. Currently, he is a senior trainer at the college; he has taught various courses for 15 years, supervised and trained about 10 years in hospitals for mental health in Israel. Gabriel is a senior teacher in the field with extensive experience in Israel and Europe. He is a qualified member of the EABP. He teaches for the third year, couples therapy for trained psychotherapists who want to develop and become couple body-psychotherapists in the field. He runs workshops for couples, focusing on improving their communication and relationships. His vision is that every experienced body psychotherapist can progress and expand to work also with couples.