

Voice Dialogue: Introduction and Method

VOICE DIALOGUE is an approach, developed by Sidra Stone, Ph.D. and Hal Stone, Ph.D. for facing ourselves, our selves, and our relationships by exploring the various parts of us, the various selves/aspects/voices within us. These parts or selves are sometimes called sub personalities. They are the building blocks of our psyche, our persona, our person. They are discrete, separate parts. Each part is important and necessary for our functioning. The selves, when collected, make up who we are.

Each of us has primary selves [or voices], the main ways we have expressed ourselves throughout our lives. These voices have helped shape who we are and how we function in the world. These voices are valuable and significant. Frequently occurring voices are, the "pusher," the "critic", the "thinking" voice, the "knower," the "entitled" or "not-entitled" voice, the "rebel", and many others.

Each of us also has disowned, denied or underdeveloped selves [or voices], parts of us which were discouraged, thwarted, or pushed aside because they were not acceptable or desirable to the people who were our caretakers. Under each of our primary selves is a vulnerable part of us. Our job as adults is to recognize our primary selves and learn about our denied parts. For every primary self, there is an equally strong and opposite denied self.

Once the parts are allowed to be recognized, the aware ego must be developed to sit between the two sides and help us choose how to be in the particular situation. We have the choice of embracing each side and choosing, with awareness, how we want to act in a particular situation. The challenge is not be either the primary self or the disowned self but to hear both sides within us, embrace each side, and act from with consciousness, making an intentional choice.

Bonding patterns. There are positive bonding patterns and negative bonding patterns. In any relationship, a primary love relationship, a friendship, an

acquaintance relationship, we are in a bonding pattern. This is an interaction between the dis-empowered selves of one person and the powerful selves of the other person without the benefit of awareness or the aware ego. It is an interaction between the selves of one person with the selves of the other person. These bonding patterns are not good or bad, they just are.

A bonding pattern has three aspects:

- a form,
- an underlying vulnerability, for example the fear of being controlled or the fear of being left if the person expresses how they actually feel about something;
- and, disowned selves which fuel the pattern of being with this other person.

A positive bonding pattern is when two people feel good and safe with each other, when everything feels okay. For example, the nurturing, encouraging caretaker self of one person takes care of the needy, scared self of the other person. The difficulty with the positive bonding pattern is that living in the positive bonding space, all the time, costs us our reactions [which we modify or do not express in order to keep the peace], and our ability to take care of ourselves, since the other person's needs come first. We go to great lengths to avoid giving up such good feelings.

A negative bonding pattern, on the other hand, is not a bad thing, or something to be avoided. This is when there is conflict or upset or the experience of distress in one or both people. The learning from negative bonding patterns teaches us important lessons about ourselves.

These bonding patterns are archetypal parent/child interactions. When we are in a such a pattern, we have no choice. The selves are in charge and are running how we act. The selves drive the bonding patterns and determine how we view things, determine what we say and how we say it.

For example, if the judgmental mother is out, we will judge [no matter how hard we try not to speak our judgments outloud] and the other person will know, from the energies we are putting out, that we are judging them. This feels awful.

When something goes wrong, there is an incredible feeling of betrayal. Many people go to great lengths to avoid this experience, including letting go of many things which bother them. This results in fusing of the two people together because it is too fearful to speak about what might cause upset or distress.

In the positive bonding pattern, there are no boundaries and no sexual energy, either. Whatever does not fit comfortably in the relationship gets discarded until the relationship is homogenized and there is no energy left.

When two people are in a bonding pattern, there is always an underlying vulnerability, some underlying, often unidentified, tender part of the person.

The steps to living consciously are:

- **No awareness.** We are in these bonding patterns, acting from our primary selves and moving around the world with some good experiences and the feelings of betrayal.
- **Development of awareness** of what we are doing but having no control about how to do it better.
- **Move to the Aware Ego,** moving beyond duality where there simply are two choices. We give up being right and see that if something someone does bothers us or inspires us, we have discovered a denied, disowned or underdeveloped part or self within us.

In this model when we speak of consciousness, we speak of three important conditions which must be present:

- **The experience of and knowledge that we have selves which are opposite to each other within us,** some of which are primary and strong, others of which are denied and weak. An example is the person with a primary self which pushes her to work hard and achieve may have a denied self which does not take care of her.
- **Awareness of the primary and previously denied parts.**
- **The aware ego which can move beyond the duality of the primary and disowned selves** and has a willingness to wrestle with these opposite selves within our self.

This definition of consciousness eliminates the idea that we should just do what we want to do. This definition says there are three aspects as to how to be in the world, not two, not a right and wrong way to do something. The goal here is to see that we all have choices, to recognize those choices and to live within the struggle about how to make a choice from awareness. This is to stand between a pair of opposite choices and have both available to us as ways we can actually behave. Stand in the tension of the opposites.

For example, a person can want to see her parents because a primary part of her is a pleaser who wants everyone to feel good about her and she cannot want to see her parents because the rebel in her finds the time boring and upsetting. Her overt choice may look the same but her internal experience of the choice makes for a different experience for the person making the choice.

Whatever destabilizes us, makes us uncomfortable, upsets us, or leaves us feeling jealous, in awe of another person, is a signal that there is some denied part of us we can learn about which will allow us to know ourselves more and have more of a life which serves us. When our dreams are telling us something, or there are de-stabilizations which occur, or we are making judgments of others, those are times to look at what we have to learn.

The goal of voice dialogue is consciousness where, with three aspects present, we embrace the opposites and act out of an aware ego while staying linked, connected with the other person. Voice dialogue is the method for contacting and learning about our selves. Dr. and Dr. Stone frame their theory as "the psychology of the aware ego and the selves."

Call me to try out these helpful ideas!

The Voice Dialogue Method/Psychology of the Aware Ego!

Voice dialogue is a tool for creating choice, freedom, and balance in our lives. For thousands of years, we have been caught in a struggle between seemingly irreconcilable opposites.

Almost every religion and philosophy holds certain aspects of life to be good and others bad. Human society reflects this in innumerable divisions between white and black, masculine and feminine, spiritual and sexual, rational and intuitive--on and on. We are asked to pledge allegiance to one side or the other not only in war and politics, but also in our neighborhoods, our families, and inside ourselves. This means trying to hold back part of our humanness, an exhausting and ultimately futile task.

Imagining we can get rid of certain parts of ourselves, we project them out on to the world where they inevitably show up in our more challenging relationships, in our dreams, in our enemies, and perhaps worst of all, in our physical bodies where they manifest as illness and even death. The concepts of the Psychology of the Aware Ego applied through the Voice Dialogue method allow us to transform the unconscious struggle of opposites that we carry within us into a conscious acceptance of all of our humanness, making it possible to disengage from old reactive patterns and become fully alive in the present.

The Psychology of the Aware Ego describes human personality as multifaceted, made up of numerous [perhaps innumerable] selves. These selves, which are also often called "voices," "sub personalities," "parts," or "energy patterns" have their own feelings, desires, memories, opinions, world views. Many of our more dominant selves have grown up with us our whole lives, taking care of our early survival, our identification as individuals, and our success in the world. These "primary" selves form the core of our personality--we think of them as who we actually are. Other "disowned" selves have experienced a lifetime of repression, becoming evident only when we lose control and act contrary to our character ["I don't know what came over me!" "I'm not myself today."]; or, more commonly, when we project these disowned qualities out on to others, usually those we either overvalue or deeply dislike.

Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone, originators of the Voice Dialogue method, point out that what we think of as our ego, is not really a single entity at all but rather a group of primary selves that run our lives, an "operating ego." Understanding the reality of the operating ego explains the mystery of why so many of us sabotage our efforts at success. From the perspective of the operating ego, success is safety, comfort, and the status quo. Taking on a bigger project, becoming more accountable, getting out there in the world, being more

visible, leaving a relationship, etc., all threaten the security of this group of primary selves--to them success is making as few waves as possible.

Voice dialogue facilitation gives us direct access to the selves and their experience. It also enables us to separate from the selves and become aware of them. Out of this separation and awareness is created the space to birth a new aspect of personality, an Aware Ego. It is this Aware Ego that can stand in balance between opposite selves, honoring both of them, perceiving their sometimes mutually exclusive needs, and taking action based on wholeness and integration rather than on duality, control, and repression. That Aware Ego is capable of perceiving both sides of the story and can make choices that honor the concerns of the primary selves while allowing us to evolve beyond their constraints.

Voice Dialogue facilitation is an effective tool for people who feel caught, immobilized, or torn between opposites in themselves as well as those who are seeking balance, wholeness, and creative expression in their lives. In relationship Voice Dialogue work enables us to separate from the parts of us that judge and resist other people and then teaches us to reintegrate those energies in a positive way through an Aware Ego. We often reject the difficult offerings we bring to each other in relationship, the qualities one person has and the other lacks. Developing an Aware Ego helps us to receive these important gifts.

Several aspects of Voice Dialogue work make this modality very different from many other approaches to psychology and personal growth. An essential element of the work is a focus on "energetics"/[our personal energy] and teaching the person being facilitated to become conscious of how they use their energy and how to manage their energy field. One important result is achieving a new form of intimacy that allows us to maintain both warmth and closeness and create healthy boundaries. Voice Dialogue is also collaborative in nature and profoundly non judgmental and non-pathologizing in its approach.

Of key importance is the Voice Dialogue model of consciousness. Many traditional models of consciousness have held awareness to be superior to the experience of ordinary life, but the Psychology of the Aware Ego honors both [the selves] living life and our witnessing of that life through awareness. It is the Aware Ego that is responsible for being aware of the opposites within us and

balancing between them. A very positive consequence of this approach is that everything that happens in our lives, including our "mistakes," is useful in the process of evolving consciousness.

Voice dialogue is a tool and not a separate psychological approach or discipline. This means it can be used creatively in combination with many different therapeutic, healing, and coaching modalities. [There is a close connection between the Psychology of the Aware Ego and the work of Caroline Myss.] The basic groundwork in Voice Dialogue is to "disidentify" from primary selves and their opposites. These selves hold our "tribal consciousness" and correspond to our basic archetypes.

Voice Dialogue can be a powerful and compassionate tool to use in conjunction with many other avenues for personal and spiritual growth.

Miriam Dyak