



*The Basic Elements of Voice Dialogue,
Relationship, and the Psychology of Selves*

THEIR ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

by Hal Stone, Ph.D. & Sidra Stone, Ph.D.

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The story changes depending upon who tells it. And, as the journey goes on, we view our lives from different vantage points and through different eyes as we integrate more and more selves. What seemed important at one time seems less important later. What seemed less important can assume greater importance as time goes on.

At this point in our lives—our 70th and 80th years—we have decided that it is time to look back and to tell the story of the origins and development of Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves the way we see it. We wish to honor those we know have directly contributed to our work, to clarify some misconceptions that are common, and to tell—to the best of our ability—the stories of those moments when some new element was added or our thinking has changed.

Let us begin with our view of the creative process. We find that outer and inner influences blend indistinguishably. We have lived rich, complex—and jointly examined—lives. From the outer world, there have been teachers and information from many disparate sources. We have had many powerful experiences with others, both professional and personal. From the world within, we have had our individual dreams, transpersonal experiences, and mo-

ments of sudden clarity that seem to be gifts from sources outside of our personal experience. All these are digested by each of us, providing us with the raw material from which we create. When an idea or a concept emerges, we are never quite sure of where it comes from.

In the past, people's first reactions to Voice Dialogue were usually: "That's a Gestalt technique" or "It's psychosynthesis." Interestingly enough, Hal's actual work in Gestalt started only after Voice Dialogue was definitively established in our lives and although Sidra had some contact with very early Gestalt work, her experience of it was extremely limited. As for psycho-synthesis, we were both fascinated with its use of imagery, but neither of us had delved deeply enough into it to know about its concepts of the different selves. Nor were we particularly influenced by psychodrama or TA, having only a passing acquaintance with both of these through the popular press.

We have always honored these various approaches as having some relationship to Voice Dialogue since they were clearly a part of the general psychological culture in the early 70's. At the same time, we recognized that our own creative process was based upon a very different, and unique, set of experiences. The roots of our work go far deeper than our exposure to

these newer schools of thought. We came from two contrasting, one might even say conflicting, backgrounds.



*Hal & Sidra in the Early Years:
Treasure Hunting in the Bahamas 1978*

The Earliest Influences— Hal's Experiences

I was trained as a Jungian analyst, eventually becoming the president of the Society for Analytical Psychology in Los Angeles in 1968. I studied at the Jung Institute for several months in 1957 and actually had the opportunity to meet with Jung himself for an individual session. These experiences went deep into my being and have, to some extent, informed my work throughout my life.

My experiences with the Jungian community and my early training gave me the gifts of a deep

understanding of dreams, **myths**, fairytales, and depth psychology. On the other hand I knew that something was missing. I didn't feel like a grownup. I go into these matters in greater detail in the **5 CD series I made last year**. The outcome of all this was that I left the Jungian community—and the traditional practice of analytical psychology – in 1970. This was two years before Sidra and I met. My experience of all of this was the end of my personal and professional life as I had known it and the beginning of a new life that was as yet totally undefined and unknown to me.

Though I found it necessary to separate from the professional organization in 1970, I realize now that I would have had to separate from anything that I was a part of. I needed to float free and not be tied to any kind of outer professional form. Only in this way could I begin to move into an entirely new kind of creative process that has led me to where I am today. I shall be eternally grateful for the remarkable opportunity I had to discover Jungian Psychology, to the colleagues I had, to the clients I worked with and to the innovative spirit of Jung himself. From my very first analytic session my unconscious opened and with it the life of spirit and a most remarkable dream process that has always helped to maintain some kind of objective clarity. From that first session I had come home to the symbolic life of spirit and I was able to separate from the arid desert of my rational mind.

My first encounter with Voice Dialogue, or the idea of talking to selves, came some time in the late sixties. The story I am about to tell you is not about Voice Dialogue directly. It is concerned about a clinical experience that led me to a different place professionally and that is intertwined in my mind with the early origins of the work.

In the late sixties a couple came to see me in regard to their son who we will call Jimmie. The couple lived in Southern California and their son had spent the past year at a special residential treatment center on the east coast for acting out or disturbed children. In particular Jimmie was acting out in school and it was felt that he couldn't function in a regular academic setting.

Jimmie was eleven years of age when his parents first came to me and they were very upset. They had just received a letter from the school informing them that they had done a complete psychological evaluation on the boy because of his disturbed behavior, that he was being diagnosed as schizophrenic and that they were strongly recommending he be placed in a special setting run by a psychoanalytic group in the area. Since they felt that he was schizophrenic they felt that he needed a special facility for this level of mental impairment.

The parents had moved out West the year before and they were looking forward to his joining them in their new home. They were very upset by this letter and their question was whether I could help them in this situation. I told them I would be willing to see Jimmie if they brought him to L.A. and I would do an independent evaluation. I would need all of the medical records that were available before I saw him. I couldn't promise them more than that.

Two to three weeks later Jimmie walked into my office. He was a very curious child, interested in everything he saw. On my desk I had a pile of psychological and psychiatric reports four or five inches high containing notes, test materials and psychiatric evaluations. All of them concurred in the diagnosis of schizophrenia. They described how what had begun as acting out behavior had, over the past year, developed into an increasingly disturbed state. As I sat with Jimmie I was exper-

riencing a huge conflict because my experience of him was very different. It was very positive. I liked him very much and I thought he had a wonderful spirit. On the other hand, I had these reports from a very fine school and very qualified health care practitioners all making the same diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Jimmie was easy to talk to and he told me about his school and about its philosophy. Basically, their management style was to never let children be alone but to always keep them busy doing things. It was felt that being alone allowed them to collapse into their own imagination and fantasy and that this would be damaging to them. It was becoming clear to me that Jimmie was a very imaginative youngster and that the school routine might not have been the best kind of experience for him.

In the course of our discussion I asked Jimmie if he ever remembered any dreams. He told me that he had one just last evening. This was the dream:

"I am sitting in a wheelchair in the lobby of my school. My parents are visiting me before they go back to California. I am crying and begging them not to go. They feel they have no choice however and they get up to leave and I wake up sobbing that they are leaving me here."

The dream was totally stunning to me. He was in a wheel chair. Why was he there? Did this mean that he was indeed crippled in the way the reports on him indicated was the case? Why else would he be in the wheel chair? Yet every instinct in me felt a core of health in him that was incompatible with the diagnosis.

I asked him to close his eyes and go back into the dream and be in the wheel chair. He did this easily, just as I expected, and after a half-minute or so I asked him why he was in the wheel chair. What was wrong with him? Could he tell me anything about how he felt sitting there?

Jimmie then said a remarkable thing to me. “What I feel is that there is a magnet in the back of the wheel chair and that this magnet is holding me in the chair.” I said before that I was stunned when I heard his dream. Hearing his response to my questioning was being stunned to tenth power. Suddenly it was all so simple. Everything made sense and the excitement I had been feeling began to lessen and I really felt very happy with things.

I realized then that Jimmie was a highly creative, highly gifted, highly imaginative child who had been misplaced in this school. I’m sure the theory worked for many of their children, but for a youngster like this one it was totally counter-productive. He was a magical child and the world of imagination was essential to him. It had literally driven him into schizophrenic behavior because he had nowhere else to go. It was an artificially induced state and this I felt could be changed.

I then said to him that if he was being held in the chair by this magnet it seemed to me that he could do something to break the power of the magnet. We did this together. First he broke the power in his imagination and then he actually got up from his chair in my office (as though it were the wheelchair) and walked around the room. All of this was done using simple methods of active imagination. After five or ten minutes we then went into my art studio where he began to work with sand play and painting. I saw him for about 12 sessions. He was now ready to stop our work together and he began public school near his home in Southern California. I saw him for two sessions when he was in High School and he just wanted to talk over some of the issues he was dealing with in high school. Through other sources I can tell you that Jimmie ultimately went into the film business where he has led a successful professional life.

It was a month later that I received a call from Dr. Hedda Bolgar from Mt. Sinai hospital. Hedda was a lovely woman, a gifted therapist and analyst; she was the director of psychology at Mt. Sinai hospital in Los Angeles. Hedda was also affiliated with the psychoanalytic group that was in charge of the school that Jimmie attended. Apparently they were very upset because Jimmie was now in public school and they couldn’t imagine how this could happen. They contacted Hedda and asked her to talk with me and find out what had happened. I told her that it was a long story and maybe it was best for us to meet in person over lunch and I would share with her what had happened.

Hedda has always been a remarkable woman. She has always been open to new ideas and new possibilities. When we met and I gave her the whole background on what had happened with Jimmie, she really understood what had happened at a very deep level. Shortly after our meeting, she called and invited me to become a consultant to the department of psychology at Mt. Sinai and then to become a consultant to the department of psychiatry, also at Mt. Sinai. This was the beginning of a wonderful few years working with Hedda and other staff members and students in training in this dual capacity.

It was about a year after I started my consulting work that Hedda told me about a clinical demonstration that she had witnessed that was facilitated by a professor at U.C. Santa Barbara. She had watched him working with a client using a number of chairs for the different selves of the subject. I was fascinated by her description of what had taken place in this session. I contacted the professor and asked him about the demonstration and he told me at that time that he had no real interest in this work and he didn’t mind at all if anyone wished to explore it more deeply. Whatever he was doing had no name though it

certainly seemed like the way a Gestalt therapist would work even though the professor had no connection to Gestalt work

I then began to play with the idea at home using my daughter Judith and my son Joshua (now deceased) and my then wife, Thea, as subjects. We facilitated each other and it was fun, and sometimes seemed important, but it never went any further and within a year or so it seemed to have died a natural death. The resurrection did not happen for another two years or so when Sidra and I first met.

The Earliest Influences— Sidra's Experiences

My earliest psychological influences date back to the early 1950's at Barnard College. At that time I was a committed behaviorist and basically a "Skinner groupie." My friends and I were fascinated by the early operant conditioning work as an explanation of human behavior and we would go to hear Skinner whenever he came to New York to speak. Our favorite psychology instructor arranged for a special seminar for four of us who showed particular interest in this work. There we investigated the possible interface of the (Freudian) psychoanalytical thinking of the time and operant conditioning.

I was intrigued by the idea that a psychologist could break down complex behavior into its component parts and see how everything worked in an ultimately sensible and predictable fashion. This was only one area of fascination with how things worked. Along these same lines, I had seriously considered becoming a physicist.

I still see this early Skinnerian influence in the way I look at the development of primary selves—at how they emerged, at least in part, as a result of operant conditioning. I was always looking for ways in which they were adaptive and how, as selves, they did their best to protect

us and to earn us love. So, as an old-time Skinnerian, I deeply honor a primary self.

The other major influences that I brought with me from earlier times were the writers Hermann Hesse and Nikos Kazantzakis. As a woman of the 1950's, I was uncomfortable with the psychological and psychiatric establishments as they related to women. At the time, I didn't know what it was that didn't feel right, but I felt it was important—and somehow safer—to keep my teachers more impersonal and at a distance.

Hesse and Kazantzakis were men whose lives were deeply committed to the evolution of consciousness and whose writings contained—for me—a glimpse of universal truths. All of their books explored the struggle between opposing forces within each one of us, what Hal and I now call "the tension of opposites". Each had his own passionate polarities. Hesse worked primarily between the mind (the intellectual) and the feelings (the romantic) while Kazantzakis' interest was the tension between the earthy and the spiritual.

Both men were influenced by Henri Bergson and based their worldviews on the existence of an "élan vital", a creative or evolutionary impulse within each of us, a powerful force that moves us towards continual evolution and greater consciousness. That concept felt like a deep truth and became a part of my life view. I recognize echoes of this in what we now call "the inner intelligence" or "the intelligence of the universe".

Hesse's *Steppenwolf* was the most impactful book I ever read. It was my introduction to the many selves and to the "Magic Theater" in which I began to view my own tumultuous inner cast of characters. Once I peeked into my own Magic Theater through the doors opened by this book, my view of life and of people was unalterably changed. I could no longer look at any of us

as single entities. From that moment on, I was fascinated by the many selves that I could see in myself and in those around me. I loved it! This following quote sums it all up:

“Harry consists of a hundred or a thousand selves, not of two. His life oscillates, as everyone’s does, not merely between two poles, such as the body and the spirit, the saint and the sinner, but between thousands and thousands. Every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. As a body everyone is single, as a soul, never.”

—From *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse

Interestingly, Hesse was deeply influenced by Jung and this, I feel, provided much of the crossover between Hal’s Jungian background and my own thinking. Kazantzakis, on the other hand, was a Cretan by birth and Greek to the core. His thoughts, much like those of the Jungians, were never far from the ancient gods and goddesses. He knew the importance of honoring all the gods and goddesses—and I always felt that as an underpinning in his writings. His greatest book, *The Odyssey, A Modern Sequel*, was like a Bible to me in my own intellectual and spiritual wanderings.

My own journey was an outer journey in these early years. I traveled extensively and was particularly interested in ancient cultures. I visited the sacred sites in Greece and honored the gods and goddesses by visiting their shrines. Hal visited Jung, I paid my respects at the grave of my teacher, Nikos Kazantzakis, in Crete.

And so it was that from these disparate backgrounds—these opposites as carried by each of us—that something new came to be born. Now let us look at the basic elements of our work and see how each evolved.

THE FIRST ELEMENT

Voice Dialogue as a Methodology THE BEGINNING OF THE JOINT ADVENTURE

It was early in 1972 that Sidra read an article by Assagioli on Guided Imagery. She was fascinated and decided to try it out in her practice of psychotherapy. It was amazingly successful and totally different from anything she’d ever done before. A new kind of depth and universality—the kind she had previously experienced only in her contacts with great works of art or of literature—was now available to both herself and her client. People had such wonderful experiences that she wanted to learn more about this and—most important—wanted to go on one of those “trips” herself. She asked a friend, Dr. Jean Holroyd, the head of the psychology intern program at UCLA, where she might learn more about this technique.

Hal had been teaching this work which was central to his training in Jungian Psychology. He had recently given a very powerful demonstration of this work at UCLA that Jean had attended. She recommended that Sidra contact Hal and see him for a few training sessions. So it was that in February, 1972, Sidra came to see Hal making it very clear that she was not interested in personal therapy, not interested in anything that might change her life, but that she just wanted a few training sessions so she could become more effective in facilitating this process.

In the first few sessions Sidra went very deeply into the realm of the creative imagination. Her initial experience was of initiation into the ancient goddess mysteries. It was in these depths, one might say, that the two of us met. It became clear almost immediately that the exploration that was happening was a joint exploration—not a mentor/student relationship—and that Hal could only continue on this basis. In the depths

of this kind of work there could be only equality between us. We began to share our dream process in addition to the visualizations and in the course of one of these sessions we started talking about how vulnerable they were both feeling and how unfamiliar this was for both of us.

It was during this discussion that Hal suggested that Sidra move over and become the vulnerability instead of just talking about it. It was the moment of the resurrection of this technique of talking to the selves. The term Voice Dialogue did not yet exist. That came later. In this moment, the game that Hal had played with before became something quite different and the birthing process of the Voice Dialogue method began.

This is how Sidra remembers that very first experience:

Hal asked me to move over and to become the vulnerability. I knew it was the right thing to do. I trusted him. I trusted him so deeply that I moved from the couch where I'd been sitting, sat down on the floor and put my head down on the coffee table. In total silence, I allowed myself to move into my vulnerability, I literally became someone else. I became a very small child who experienced the world in a new way. There was total stillness. I had the sense that the "I" that was sitting there had been hiding in a deep cave for my entire life and that this was the first time she felt safe enough to come out. The world around me changed, my perceptions became more acute, colors and sounds were different, and I could feel Hal's energy holding a space for me (although it would be years before we were to know more about the energetics of relationship). This was totally foreign to me; I was accustomed to experiencing the world in a rational, sensible, and controlled way. I felt that I had finally entered Herman Hesse's Magic Theater!

Hal was himself stunned by this experience. He could feel that he was in the presence of a

child and he knew that it was best to say nothing. He was with a pre-verbal child—the child was real, and the selves were real. When Sidra left her place on the floor and returned to her seat on the sofa—returning to what we later called the Aware Ego—we both sat in silence. We both realized that something momentous had happened.

Hal had to wait a week before Sidra facilitated his child. His own experience was most profound. It was the beginning of Little Harry, a totally unknown quantity in his life up until then, and so it was that instead of Sidra and Hal exploring together, there were now four of us at work. There were Sidra and Lisa and there were Hal and Little Harry. Everyone's stories and ideas were different.

So the work began with what we named the Inner Child—as far as we know, we were the first to use that term. It began out of a relationship in which a deep love was evolving. It had no context so far as therapy was concerned. These children of ours were real and the continuing work we did with them gave us a way of widening and deepening our co-exploration. We were not just stunned by what was happening. We were extremely excited. If these inner children were real, who else was there? After all, there were many doors to open in the long hallway of the Magic Theater. We were off and running, meeting the myriad selves that began to emerge into consciousness.

In the next few years we did a great deal of this kind of exploration. At this early stage there was basically no theory, no Aware Ego. We were simply two explorers who were very much in love and who had no idea where our lives were heading. We only knew that what was happening was rich, creative, and original and that it deepened our connection to each other at each step along the way. We still used the visualization process and shared dreams but in this early stage the ex-

citement of the dialogue process quite possessed us. The theory was to come later.

Our work with relationship began with a very powerful experience very early in these explorations. One of Sidra's early visualizations was that of an ancient Minoan ship sailing on mythic seas. We were both on that ship. Emblazoned upon its sail, watching over us and protecting our journey, was a golden eye—the eye of God. As part of that visualization, we were told that we were on a journey that would not end. This meant that there was to be no real security or predictability for us. We were not permitted to set up a permanent home; we were not even permitted to spend more than one night at a time on land. It was truly the beginning of our journey of relationship—a journey in which in which the relationship became our teacher.



Collaboration in the Early Years 1983

This is not the place to discuss our work in detail, but only the story of how it evolved and what—to our minds—are the most important

elements involved. To learn more about the work itself, we suggest the classic book, [Embracing Our Selves](#); or, if you prefer to listen to CDs, [An Introduction to Voice Dialogue, Relationship, and the Psychology of Selves](#); and finally, if you prefer to see us as well as hear us, the documentary, [The Voice Dialogue Series](#).

THE SECOND ELEMENT

The Psychology of Selves

THE BEGINNING OF THEORY

It is difficult to remember how and when our theoretical considerations began to intermix with our deeply personal work. We were both psychologists (practicing psychotherapists). Things were happening and changes were taking place with remarkable speed and, quite naturally, we began to organize our thinking about the events that were occurring.

The first realization to come to us was that these selves inside of us behaved like real people and that they had to be treated with the greatest respect. If they sensed that they were being judged in any way or manipulated in any way, they withdrew. It also became clear very early that for a self to remain with the facilitator, the facilitator had to remain totally present—the self required a strong energetic connection to hold it. This was long before our more sophisticated development of the energetics of Voice Dialogue. It was, however, a beginning.

Primary and Disowned Selves

Very early in our explorations we began to see that we are made up of primary selves—a group of selves that define our personality. (We had some question as to whether we should call them primary or dominant selves and we settled on primary.) It seemed to us like a very simple idea. Why hadn't we ever been able to

see this before? Who we think we are is really a group of selves that we have identified with and these selves become the persona or how we present ourselves to the world.

The next step seemed quite natural and obvious as we continued our work with each other. Whenever we identify with a primary self then on the other side, equal and opposite, is its opposite. We called this the disowned self. Nathaniel Branden had first coined the term: the disowned self. When he talked of the disowned self, he was referring, however, to the disowned self as the emotions that are disowned by people who identify with the mind and have a basically rational approach to life. We spoke with Nathaniel about all of this and he was comfortable with our using this term. We are grateful to him for his largesse in this matter because the terms disowned and primary selves fit together so perfectly.

Within the first few years, these ideas were getting pretty well set. In the earliest years, we used the idea of a Protector–Controller as the main primary self, the self that set up the basic rules and was the guardian of the gates of entry to our inner world. We saw the Protector/Controller as a self that gathered and organized information about the world around us so that we could understand it, a self that protected us, and controlled both our behavior and our environment.

It took time before we realized that this was a generic term and that every primary self was a protector and a controller in its own way, that each had its own way of figuring out the world around us, and that each primary self lived by its own set of rules. The Protector–Controller is still used by many teachers and is still a very good self to use at the beginning of Voice Dialogue. It provides us with a picture of what clinicians often refer to as the basic

defense structure of the personality.

We, however, don't think in terms of defenses; instead we think of the primary selves in terms of their adaptability and creativity—we honor their attempts to contribute to a person's wellbeing. We saw them as selves that were central to survival, accomplishment, and the ability (however limited) to relate to others and, therefore, always to be regarded with the greatest degree of respect.

Working with Opposites

After the first excitement of exploring individual selves, and after the ideas of primary and disowned selves began to emerge, we began to work more and more with opposites in our work together. This happened gradually because in the earliest phase of our work we enjoyed concentrating on a single self. We spent a great deal of time working with the Inner Child, the Inner Critic, the Responsible Parent, the Observing Mind, and the Protector/Controller. And we had a great time talking with the disowned selves. Those selves were a lot more adventurous and rambunctious—often quite intense—and usually irreverent.

We began to see, however, that the real gift of the work was not simply talking to selves. Instead, we began to get the sense that the real point of the work was working directly with opposites. It seemed important to learn how to separate from the primary selves, to talk with the disowned selves, and then learn to stand between the opposites (of the primary and disowned selves) clearly feeling both at the same time. It was the opposites that were important.

It took time for this shift in emphasis to occur because talking to many voices, and especially to the disowned selves, was so much fun. As time passed, we increasingly put our emphasis on working between the opposites.

But something was missing—we needed to address the issue of a model of consciousness that could encompass all of this.

THE THIRD ELEMENT

The Consciousness Model

A NEW DEFINITION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The old forms didn't quite work for us. We knew that we needed something new, but weren't quite sure what it was. We remember driving across a great flat valley wondering aloud about just what it could be that would be beyond the selves and take charge of life; and what we could do to bring in the spiritual dimension. We tried and tried, but nothing gave us what we were seeking. That had to wait.

Finally, we looked at the term "Ego". The Ego has always been seen as the directing agent of the personality and it is an excellent term—one with a long history. It is often described as the executive function of the psyche. It is the "I" that we refer to when we talk about ourselves.

What we began to realize was that this all-powerful Ego is, in fact, a group of primary selves that together run our lives and rule the personality without anyone knowing it. It can be the Rational Mind, the Pusher, the Pleaser, the Responsible Parent, the Independent One, the Rebel—it is whatever it is that we think we are—it is whichever selves are running our lives. *We decided to call this group of selves—the traditional Ego—the "Operating Ego".*

Then we had to develop a new name to describe what happened in Voice Dialogue when we separated from a primary self and returned to center. That center space was no longer occupied by the Operating—or traditional—Ego. The new term we used was the Aware Ego. We found that this Aware Ego Process evolves and gets stronger and

stronger with continuing work. What became increasingly clear to us was that the Operating Ego is here forever but it gradually surrenders power to the Aware Ego Process as we separate from more and more primaries and integrate more and more disowned selves.

Now a new way at looking at consciousness began to emerge.

We saw three levels to the process of consciousness. *First there was the level of Awareness.* This has been around for a very long time. It is often referred to as the witness state in meditation. It gives us the ability to step back and see the big picture. It does not act. It is not attached to outcome.

The second level of consciousness we began to see as the actual experience of the selves, the experience of life itself. Awareness does not experience. It witnesses. Awareness without experience isolates us from life. Experience without awareness keeps us locked into the animal kingdom. Both are essential to an ongoing consciousness process.

Then there was the new kid on the block. Someone has to live our lives; someone has to drive our (psychological) car. Someone has to use the gift of awareness and the treasure of experience and, for us, that someone or something was the Aware Ego or, more accurately, the Aware Ego Process. We realized that this was an ongoing dynamic process that was always changing, that there was no such thing as an Aware Ego.

As a matter of fact, over the years we have come to see that consciousness itself is a process—with each of the three levels of consciousness representing a distinct, individually evolving process.

Honoring the Primary Selves

We were learning a great deal about primary selves in those early years and the learning has never stopped. There is one thing that we

understood from the beginning that has stood us in good stead all through the years. *One must always honor the primary self.* In the practice of Voice Dialogue this is probably one of strongest recommendations we can make. The primary self is the ally of the facilitator. Both have the interests and wellbeing of the client at heart and there must be a mutual respect and deep understanding between the primary selves and the facilitator.

What we learned early in the practice of Voice Dialogue has yet deeper and more far reaching implications for living life. We are always dealing with people and essentially we are always dealing with their primary selves. Knowing this can save us much unhappiness.

Many years ago, very early in our work together, we were at a social gathering and a rather traditional psychologist asked us about our work. Not yet truly appreciating how important it was to honor the primary selves in the “real world”, we opened up to him and shared our ideas and work. He became very judgmental as he aggressively questioned us about the empirical basis for our work and wanted to know exactly what kinds of experiments we had designed and carried out. He accused us of making up these selves and made some vague threats about malpractice. All in all, it was a very unpleasant experience.

We are fast learners and we learned from this experience to feel into people more carefully and to explore the nature of their primary selves before we shared our ideas and feelings. We have tried our best not to share our work with people who are not ready to listen. As we’ve often said, “We go only where the door is already open.” After this experience, we were much more cautious. We began to screen invitations to speak and, before we spoke with a new group, we did our best to determine the nature of the primary self system that dominated that particular group,

clinic or center. This kind of sensitivity was particularly important when we were working in other cultures. It’s important to know the rules, and to use language and concepts that do not polarize the primary selves. This attention to the primary selves in our surroundings has saved us untold discomfort—both professionally and personally.

THE FOURTH ELEMENT

The Theory of Bonding Patterns

THE SELVES AND RELATIONSHIP

We are giving a very short version of our theoretical structure. This material is available in detailed form in [our books](#), [CDs](#) and our [DVD](#) documentary. In this article we are attempting to give you a more sweeping view of where we have come from. Someone who worked with us in the late 1970s or 1980’s cannot help but have a very limited idea of what we are doing today. We do not enjoy stagnation and neither does our unconscious. When some new idea emerged or methodology changed then we let it change. Sometimes we weren’t even aware of a change, it evolved so naturally. It is confusing to many people to watch this happen. For us, it is very exciting to see the work evolve and to bring everyone along as a part of this process.

We met in 1972 and we were married in 1977. This article is not about our personal life. We raised [five children between us](#) and the personal work we were doing with each other helped us enormously in understanding our parental role. These were also the years when Sidra was the Executive Director of Hamburger Home, a residential treatment center for adolescent girls and Hal was the Director of the Center for the Healing Arts. Our professional lives were completely separate, but our work together and the evolution of our thinking were central aspects of our lives.

Those five years of work clarified our relationship and made marriage possible. We were using Voice Dialogue in our respective practices and Hal had started to do some teaching of the process at the Center. It was becoming increasingly clear to us that in relationships selves were constantly interacting with the selves of the other person. With our marriage, however, some of the interactions between us were turning quite sour. Old patterns suddenly emerged but with the new partner—a partner who was totally different from the previous one. We called one another by the names of our former spouses. We found ourselves judging each other—often for the same qualities that had attracted us to one another in the first place. We literally became other people: judgmental, closed, and humorless. Underneath it all there was a vague feeling of betrayal, helplessness and desperation.

What was happening? Was marriage necessarily the end of love? There had to be a way of understanding these painfully divisive interactions, of bringing them under some kind of control. We wanted our relationship back. We knew that the selves we had worked with over the previous years had something to do with this. It was obvious to us that a set of selves had taken charge of our relationship. There was no more “us”, there was no more connection, and the vulnerable children that were a part of our relationship from the very beginning were nowhere to be found.

This was the start of a remarkable three months of a new kind of exploration. We looked at the selves that had taken over our relationship and tried to figure out what was really going on. We wrote down and diagrammed out every negative interaction that we had. We did this over and over and over again until a pattern began to emerge. We began to see how these negative interactions followed a basically simple

pattern that repeated itself.

Hal would get angry with Sidra and suddenly he was no longer Hal, he was a cold judgmental father talking to her. She became a victim/defensive daughter and argued back. Then, in the blink of an eye, she became a judgmental mother—withdrawn, critical and cold—and although Hal became a hurt and vulnerable son to this cruel mother, still his judgmental father attacked. There were always four selves (or sets of selves) involved. We replayed this scenario over and over again but now we were beginning to see the pattern. We looked for all the selves involved in these interactions. Some were more apparent than others. But they were always all there.

We named this pattern a “bonding pattern” in recognition that it was basically a set of parent/child interactions. We also felt that this was a way to honor it as a normal way of relating as contrasted to a pathological one. In those years, we looked at these patterns as basically an interaction between power selves and disempowered selves. As time went on, our views of this have clarified; the parent/child nature of the interaction has become ever more apparent and we have come to see this *bonding pattern as the basic default pattern in all relationships.*

We discovered other constants in these interactions. *All bonding patterns grew out of the negation or disowning of vulnerability.* This took many forms, but it was always present. When our interactions became negative we could always trace back to a time when we lost contact with our core vulnerability (or what we called our Inner Child). Something had happened to hurt it, to frighten it off and we had ignored this; instead we had reacted in a more seemingly adult fashion. We had basically disowned our vulnerable child. If we could hold on to the child, (or to our vulnerability) and took care of this directly, these negative patterns lost their power; they

didn't need to play themselves out.

The other constant we discovered was a truism that we had recognized from our early dealings with selves. *Whatever you judge is a disowned self of your own.* In these negative interactions, or bonding patterns, our judgments would flare up and assume center stage. We looked carefully at this. Gradually it became clear to us that as we reacted to each other negatively we were, in fact, being given pictures of our own disowned selves. If we recognized this, we could use it as a teaching in our own relationship—and we could help others see this in theirs.

This was almost painful to realize. We had hoped we were beyond this. Besides, our judgments were so much fun. It was such a wonderful feeling to pin the other up against the wall with brilliant and self-righteous criticisms. It was so wonderful to be unquestionably right.

If, however, our judgments are reflections of our disowned selves, then where's the fun?

How can you feel righteous in the middle of a "righteous dance" in full knowledge of the fact that you are basically attacking your own disowned self or selves?

We had some wild and (in retrospect) funny interchanges as we closed in on the bonding pattern theory. One evening we were still arguing over a particular bonding pattern at 11:00 PM and Sidra finally said that she was exhausted and going to bed. Hal continued to work on the pattern, simmering in the heat of his judgments and furious at Sidra's comment that he wasn't in his Aware Ego. After about 10 minutes Hal stormed into the bedroom and with great grace and dignity yelled at her: "I am too in an Aware Ego." We both laughed and that was the end of that one. Such is the snake-like path of the co-exploration of consciousness.

Our excitement at this time was enormous. What was emerging was something quite new. It was something that worked for us in everyday



Teaching in Holland 1987

life. *It was a simple, precise, and elegant way of looking at relationships that had a sense of a mathematical certainty and balance. Later we came to think of it as a kind of technology of relationship.*

Our excitement about all of this was magnified as we realized that the theory of bonding patterns gave us a very creative (and non-pathologizing) way to look at the transference. The same principles were operating. The only difference is that we refer to it as transference if we get paid and bonding patterns if we don't. We've come to call this "[The Psychology of the Transference](#)".

There was immediate gratification from our discovery of bonding patterns. We felt better. Feelings of love and intimacy returned. Of course, we had to accustom ourselves to the loss of self-righteousness (that deliciously seductive feeling) but we were a lot happier with each other.

There's something wonderfully freeing about escaping from a negative bonding pattern. And it totally changed the nature of working with couples, making it a joy rather than a nightmare. Teaching people about the bonding patterns and then working with the selves created a wonderful path to change and we used it ourselves with increasing effectiveness.

It was much later that we began to attend to the positive bonding patterns and to realize how often these set the stage for the appearance of negative ones.

THE FIFTH ELEMENT

The Psychology of the Aware Ego

AN ENERGETICALLY BASED PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO CONSCIOUSNESS

With the theory of bonding patterns in place and the re-defining of consciousness providing us with a model that seemed effective over time, we began to think about actually changing the title of our work to the Psychology of the Aware

Ego. We realized more and more that the core work was not about talking to selves. This was important but not as much as the development of an Aware Ego Process. This was really the key to the kind of changes we were looking for.

We saw that people could work forever with selves but until there was a true separation and dis-identification from the primary self, changes were easily lost. *We saw that, without an Aware Ego Process, the primary self would automatically regain control. This Aware Ego Process evolves between any pair of opposites.* Some common opposite sets of selves are power and vulnerability, pusher and beach bum, thinking and feeling, control and release.

There are many sets of opposites and the Aware Ego Process emerges from one set at a time. Clarity in one area does not mean clarity in all areas. For instance, we find the someone develops an Aware Ego process that is capable of holding the tension of opposites between the mental and the feeling selves but—at the same time—has no Aware Ego Process when it comes to spirituality. This same individual who does such a good job of embracing both feelings and thinking, still might be totally identified with spirituality and reject selves that are ordinary or instinctual.

For a spiritually identified person to develop an Aware Ego Process in relationship to spirituality, he or she would have to do work that separates him/her from the spiritual self so that there is an Aware Ego Process that can see it and experience it but not be identified with it. This separation can be very difficult but we have discovered a truly fascinating self we call the "spiritual pusher" that runs the life of many a spiritual seeker. After the separation from this spiritual self (or the spiritual seeker) there would be the challenge to discover and integrate the spiritual sloth, the "ordinary" self, and the instinctual.

Conversely, someone who rejects spirituality from a primary self that is rational and mental must learn to unhook from the rational mind so that the Aware Ego can begin to see the rational mind as a separate self/energy system. This makes a space for the spiritual selves to emerge and be properly embraced. At this point, we have an Aware Ego standing between the more earthbound rules and experiences of the mind and the numinous realms and experiences of the world of the spirit.

At times it has felt to us as though we were running a divorce court. In this framework we help people to learn how to get a divorce from their primary selves. Once a person is divorced from a primary self, the Aware Ego can learn how to use that energy in a conscious way. Nothing is lost. The primary self simply begins to operate under the aegis of an Aware Ego that has all the information and input from that primary self but, in addition to this, has the complementary information and input from the opposite self or selves.

We have tried to give you a feeling of the ongoing process we have been in as our work has developed. The focus on the Aware Ego dramatically changes the nature of the Voice Dialogue process. Whatever work we may be doing with selves, the primary focus is how to support the Aware Ego in its evolutionary process. It is this transformation of the work that moves the system onto the larger world stage. It now becomes more of a philosophy of life. Yet at the same time it remains a system that anyone can integrate into their work and it is not opposed to, or fighting against, any psycho-spiritual system.

The Importance of the Aware Ego Process

Our hope is that all the facilitators and teachers will have a basic understanding of the Aware Ego Process. If this understanding is there, then the applica-

tions of the Psychology of Selves and the actual use of Voice Dialogue will be much more effective. Deliberately activating a self or energy system is a very exciting use of the Psychology of Selves. But we do not see this as Voice Dialogue. For us, Voice Dialogue—in addition to the direct work with selves—includes an experience of opposites and an Aware Ego Process.

We finally decided not to officially change the name of the work to the Psychology of the Aware Ego a number of years ago. Voice Dialogue, Relationship and the Psychology of Selves has achieved such a strong name recognition that we decided to let it rest there. Our sense is that there is a gradual increased use of the terms “Aware Ego Process or Psychology of the Aware Ego” amongst practitioners and teachers and eventually this shift in name may well take place.

The Aware Ego and Spirituality

We are often asked: “What is the relationship of the Aware Ego to spirituality?” or “How does the Voice Dialogue process address the issue of spirituality?” We would like to take this opportunity to address these questions.

For us, it is important to understand that spirituality has two different components that have to be considered separately. One component of spirituality has to do with the rules. The second component has to do with transcendent experiences—the experience of God, of the Higher Intelligence, of the Transpersonal or whatever name best expresses an experience that goes beyond ordinary consciousness and the words that can describe it.

Generally in the development of religious institutions there is first the transcendent experience and then a body of rules develops to support this experience and bring it to others. These rules usually become more numerous and powerful as time passes and eventually they may

well cover over the original experience.

For us, the transcendent experience is a very real and glorious gift. Who in us receives this gift and what is done with this gift can vary. When a self receives this gift—let us assume that it is a spiritual self—then that self usually develops a series of rules and expectations about this experience. And that self judges other selves that are different and polarizes against anything or anyone that does not fit in with its expectations and follow its rules.

We see this as the way in which many spiritual or religious institutions evolve. The original experience is taken up by a primary self (or the primary self of the group) that guards it and keeps out anything that might destroy it. Only the energy of that particular self is considered good and it is to that self and its rules that one must surrender. We know that much can be gained by this kind of surrender; this is the basic premise of the Guru/disciple relationship. The disciple surrenders to the Guru and—in doing so—can receive the gift of the transcendent experience.

In contrast, the Aware Ego surrenders to all energies or selves. This is quite different from surrendering only to the spiritual energies. This means very simply that the Aware Ego is committed to hearing, seeing and feeling all the different selves. It excludes none. When one self starts to dominate, it is the job of the Aware Ego to find the opposites on the other side and to consider their input as well. In this sense the Aware Ego is like an orchestra conductor who welcomes all the instruments and then uses their individual contributions to sing the song of the soul.

Learning to surrender to all of the selves requires constant work with our negative judgments towards people (and things) to help the Aware Ego in its constant evolution towards

clarity. Whenever we feel judgments towards someone or something, we know that we are in a primary self because the judgments come from the selves, not the Aware Ego.

You may well ask “But how do you know when you are in an Aware Ego? How do you know that it is an Aware Ego that is doing the surrendering at any moment? Might you not be fooled by the Mind that loves to act as though it were God or any other primary self for that matter?”

The answer is that we don't. We don't know when we are in an Aware Ego except for brief moments of time. If your responsible self has just been facilitated and you can feel your separation from it, the most you can say is that at this moment of time you have an Aware Ego Process operating in relationship to responsibility; at this moment you have a certain level of understanding of this responsible self and a certain separation from it.

A second answer is that when we are convinced we are operating from an Aware Ego, we are not. We are most probably identified with a spiritual self, a rational mind, or a control self. All of these have a sense of certainty to them, and they like to masquerade as the Aware Ego.

So as the Aware Ego bows down to the different gods and goddesses of the light and the dark, of heaven and earth, of good and bad, of body and spirit, of knowing and not knowing, it is embracing both of the opposites. It is the “and” rather than the “either/or”. It truly represents the Middle Way.

We see the Aware Ego as surrendered to the Intelligence of the Universe. This intelligence can manifest in many different ways. It is not personal in any sense, though for some of us it may manifest through our personal relationships. Others can see it with utmost clarity in the

*Teaching in France 1989*

dream process. For still others it may manifest in meditation or spiritual practice. For many scientists it manifests in the organizing principle at work in the material world and—on a grand scale—in the galaxies. Whatever the case, the Aware Ego must be surrendered to the reality of this higher intelligence and how it can be perceived operating in his or her personal universe.

For us, the Aware Ego must also be surrendered to the way that this higher intelligence operates in human relationship. It must be surrendered to the idea that everyone in our life is potentially a teacher for us. We understand that peoples' reactions to us must be taken seriously. And we learn to use our own negative judgments of people as a teaching device to discover our own disowned selves.

The Aware Ego is an expression of a

psycho-spiritual consciousness process. The Aware Ego has the job of embracing the world of Spirit in all of its glory and, on the other side, the world of physical matter, of emotion, of passion, and of psychological and mental realities.

For us, it is important to not confuse spirituality with consciousness. A consciousness process encompasses spirituality. Spirituality does not necessarily encompass a consciousness process. Spirituality does not encompass matter or instinctual energies. That is why so many people in the spiritual tradition lose the connection to their bodies and their instincts. An Aware Ego process requires us to do the work of spirit and the work of relationship and the physical world. For ourselves, we must say what a delight it has been, and what a delight in continues to be, to spend our lives in these kinds of explorations.

Moving into Many Worlds

People use Voice Dialogue and the Aware Ego Process in many different settings and with many different kinds of clients. Management consultants have found a way to use the Voice Dialogue technique and the concepts of the Psychology of Selves and bonding patterns in a business setting with individuals who are not at all interested in consciousness issues. They have translated the language we use here to make it work within a different frame of reference and for a different set of primary selves.

Coaches or a management consultants might, for example, speak of “traditional habits” or “familiar strategies” versus “unexplored creative potential” rather than talk of primary versus disowned selves. They are not likely to use a term like “Aware Ego” because this kind of language might not be acceptable in a business setting. So they improvise—some quite brilliantly—and many have experienced great success.

One of our major teachers keeps a focus on what we call “being” energy because she feels that is extremely important. Others use this “being” energy as a vehicle for igniting the spiritual energies.

Other teachers are specializing in working with the selves involved in addiction. In the field of Western medicine, there are researchers who are beginning to investigate the neurobiological aspects of consciousness, meditation, and the selves.

In a totally different arena, this work has proven extremely valuable for training actors. There, too, different words are used that match the requirements of the situation. There is even an internationally acclaimed Tango coach who uses the energetics of this work in his training of competitive dancers.

There are a myriad of ways to work with the

selves and we are delighted to see the creativity and the diversity of these new developments.

Body Dialogue:

The Work of Judith Tamar Stone

This is a perfect place to introduce the innovations of [Judith Tamar Stone](#), Hal’s daughter, who has added an entirely new dimension to this work. In her early twenties Judith was working at Blue Cross and very much committed to a career in business. Her plans were interrupted when she developed a debilitating medical condition that was diagnosed as rheumatoid arthritis. Her symptoms were so severe that she had to abandon those particular professional plans and devote herself to her own healing process.

Judith made a choice at that time to not follow the orthodox medical model that is generally prescribed for these kinds of arthritic conditions. She found an MD who was open to the idea of her trying different treatment modalities and this began a remarkable journey of exploration and healing that lasted five years in its more active phase but in reality has continued to this day.

Judith opened herself to ongoing psychotherapy, to many different forms of complementary medicine, and to certain aspects of traditional Western medicine. She took all of us along with her on her journey. Hal, in particular, has been delighted to work with many of the people Judith discovered in her own explorations. Without the constant health-oriented input and recommendations Judith has given to Hal through the years, it is quite possible that he would not be here today.

Very gradually, out of the profound experience that she was going through with her own healing process, Judith began to develop a very special and different kind of connection to her body. It became much more real to her than it is

to most of us who don't spend much time sensing into the body. She began to shift her overall professional identification to psychology and she used the Voice Dialogue work as one of the central healing modalities of her own healing journey. Over the years she has become one of the senior teachers of our work.

What also began to evolve was an entirely new and different aspect of the Voice Dialogue work that Judith called Body Dialogue. What she realized, from her own experience, was that the body had a voice that could speak for it. She also discovered that many of the individual parts of the body were able to speak and to give specifically targeted information and guidance.

Even more significantly, Judith began to tune in to the fact that the physical body carried an intelligence and that one could activate this "intelligence of the body" and receive remarkable information and guidance. The process of working with the body in this way began slowly and

through the years has developed into what we consider a major contribution to Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves.

THE SIXTH ELEMENT

The Energetics of Relationship

LEARNING TO PLAY YOUR OWN INSTRUMENT

There have been a great many periods of excitement in our adventures together as we've developed this body of work. Certainly one of the most profound and most gratifying has been the Energetics of Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves. Hal was first introduced to the world of energy by the work of William Brugh Joy in 1974 when he made his first public appearance at the Center for the Healing Arts' summer conference. It was a truly seminal moment in the world of consciousness because large numbers of students flocked to Brugh and were introduced to the body's energy fields and shown how to work with them.



In Central Australia 2002

At that time the energy had to do with healing. Hal was not interested in becoming a healer per se, but the world of energy was opened to him by Brugh and, over the next few years, he developed his own style of energy work that he called field clearing. It has always been a significant part of our lives and our work and has helped us move through difficult physical challenges both at home and, perhaps even more important, on our travels.

It was only after we met that we began to consider the world of healing as it applies to personal relationship. Early on in our explorations together, we began to notice that different selves actually felt different from other selves. Being with a vulnerable child or a loving parent felt like being in the room with an energy machine that gave off a warm glow that could be sensed and that made a palpable connection. We called that “personal energy”. Facilitating the mind was totally different. The mind generally gave off no energy and we did not feel a connection. We called that “impersonal energy”. One was warm and connected, the other cool with clear, crisp boundaries. These are two very different ways of meeting the world.

We paid more and more attention to what we began to call “the energetics” of Voice Dialogue. Different selves had different energies connected to them. If we were facilitating sensual energy (which we called Aphrodite energy) we could sense a tingling in the skin of our whole body. If we were facilitating the higher self we could feel a powerful sensation in the top of our head, the crown energy. Though Hal had learned about energetic reality through the work at the Center, Sidra seemed to have a totally natural connection to it. We began to see that some of the difficulties of our interactions were based on energetic realities we hadn’t previously known. Sidra’s primary self was personal in those early years and

Hal’s primary self was impersonal.

We began to recognize that some of our most impassioned judgments towards each other were based on this difference. When we first starting teaching together this was a real problem. Sidra said of Hal that if someone in the front row of the audience fainted and fell to the floor, Hal wouldn’t notice it. Hal said of Sidra that if someone in the last row of the audience got up to go to the bathroom, Sidra would be upset because she felt abandoned or judged.

One time we were teaching and at the end of the first hour at the break Sidra asked Hal if he had seen the couple in the front row right in front of him. Hal didn’t know what she was talking about. She then pointed them out to him and it was a couple that was apparently involved in S&M practices. The girl was wearing a very large metal collar around her neck and metal bands around her ankles embedded with metal rings for bondage. Hal was quite sure that he was the only one in the room that had missed seeing that.

Another time Sidra and Hal were walking on the beach near Santa Barbara and Hal—in full impersonal energy—was immersed in the ideas they were discussing. Sidra stopped walking and, with a smile, asked Hal: “Hal, would you mind looking around and seeing where you are?” To his great astonishment he discovered that they were in the middle of a nude beach and that all around him there were naked sun worshippers. It was not only impersonal energy that created this diminished perception, but impersonal energy was certainly a good part of it. Hal’s basic primary selves were impersonal and he just didn’t make an energetic connection with the world around him.

In more recent years, we have begun to use

the word “linkage” or “energetic linkage” when talking about this energetic connection. When we got into negative bonding patterns, when judgments took over, we lost our linkage. Things felt hopeless between us. Then we did our work with each other. Maybe Hal discovered he had been holding back his reactions. Maybe Sidra discovered she was pushing too hard.

Whatever the case, by doing our work with each other we got back our linkage. We would feel energetically connected again. We felt like newlyweds. This happened over and over again. We were beginning to see with absolute clarity that it wasn't marriage that destroyed love and intimacy. It was the development of negative bonding patterns and the ensuing loss of linkage.

This happened repeatedly. Hal's feelings would get hurt. Maybe he was jealous of Sidra at a party when she was energetically connecting with other men. If he didn't share his jealousy, his vulnerability—whatever forms that sharing took—his inner child disappeared from view. He used to joke about it disappearing into the universe about a hundred light years away when this happened. What we realized was that linkage ended at that moment. Linkage is real. When it is lacking it is very lonely and the relationship feels terrible. And—unless you know about what you have just lost—it is not so easy to get it back.

We began to examine the nature of peoples' linkage. You can be linked to your dog or cat. You can be linked to a child. You can be linked to your work, or your computer, or your book, or your television set, or your secretary, or to money. Or to worry, or to your “to do” list. Or to alcohol, or to drugs, or to food, or to exercise. You can even be linked to your spiritual practices or to your consciousness process.

In relationship work we began to see that if the primary linkage wasn't between the two people in the relationship, then there were

problems. The primary linkage might go to one of the children, creating a kind of psychological marriage between the parent and that child. This happens with great frequency and then, if the marriage breaks up and the parent meets someone she/he loves, there is as wrenching disconnect from the son or daughter who had carried the primary linkage before the arrival of the new partner. This awareness of linkage introduced a new dimension to our considerations of family relationships and led us to a deeper understanding of the intense pain involved in step parenting and the introduction of a new partner into a family system.

Our work with energetics was in two basic areas. First, there was the fact that every self could be experienced energetically and that the awareness of this was of utmost importance. We saw clearly that the effectiveness of the facilitator was dependent upon the recognition of the energy and the ability to hold this. We realized that the best facilitators worked at an energetic—rather than verbal—level. They paid more attention to maintaining the energetic integrity of a self than to asking it the “proper” questions.

There is another aspect to the facilitator's sensitivity to energetics. If the facilitator was able to use energetics, then he or she could often help a self to emerge by a process of energetic induction. This works like a tuning fork—you strike the tuning fork and set it down on a sounding board. The sounding board then vibrates at the same frequency—giving off the same note. The facilitator operates like a tuning fork, calling up a specific energy within himself or herself and the subject responds with the same. In this way, and when appropriate, the facilitator can help to induct a sought-after energy. This is particularly helpful when helping people to learn how to utilize personal and impersonal energies.

This was a whole new world to explore. We also began to teach the Aware Ego how to bring into itself, or channel, the different energies and, here again, it was the awakening of a whole new world. We literally taught people how to “play their own instruments”, how to affect their own energy fields. This work was particularly important because it was a way of strengthening the Aware Ego Process and empowering the individual.

The second area of work with energetics was our exploration and experimentation with linkage. We looked at linkage as it related to bonding patterns and saw how it led to an increased understanding of the dynamics of family systems.

Hal has one strong memory here of an experience with Sidra that catapulted him to a new understanding and appreciation of linkage. A good many of the negative bonding patterns he got into with Sidra had to do with feeling left out when she was with her children. Since her basic energies were personal, the linkage with her daughters was very strong. One day they were alone in their home in Southern California; it was the first day that all of the children were away. They were sitting on the two ends of the couch and there was a very strong energetic linkage—they could feel a buzz between their hearts. Hal was a very happy man. This process went on for five minutes or so and suddenly stopped completely.

Hal asked Sidra what had happened. Sidra then said something that was truly remarkable for Hal. She said that she was doing an experiment. She wanted to see what would happen if she visualized her daughter in the next room. When she did that, the linkage between them ended totally and her energies automatically (or unconsciously) went to her daughter.

Hal had been working on his judgments about Sidra’s mothering for a long time. Sud-

denly he understood at a very deep level how this process works. If a mother has children, and if one or more of those children is near her, then her primary linkage is going to shift to the child. We don’t mean every time but we do mean most of the time. What Hal saw is that the mother is hard wired to link with her child. This is not a conscious choice so if we want to be very clear, we call it “unconscious linkage”.

If Hal wanted quality time with Sidra away from the children, he had to learn how to go to her with his own intimacy needs and make them clear to her without sounding either like a whiny victim child or a killer judgmental father (he had an advanced black belt in both, but they were not very useful). She then was able to become aware of where her energies were and was able to handle them in a more conscious way. She could reinstate her linkage with Hal—and she could even maintain her connection to a child at the same time. We call that “conscious linkage”.

This was a turning point in Hal’s life and interestingly enough, as we might well expect in this kind of process relationship, Sidra was able to more effectively look at her own linkage issues with her children. Because she now knew what was happening, she finally had some choice and she was able to begin to control where her energies went.

Everything changed in the work and in the theory with these kinds of experiences. *For the newer person, Voice Dialogue may well look like a simple technique; just ask the right questions and you’ll get to the self. For anyone who senses into the underlying energetics of the work, it becomes something quite different. Experienced facilitators are able to work at deeper and deeper levels as they become more at home with the energetic realities that are in us and that determine so much of what happens in our lives and in our relationships.*

And so it was that we began the practice of

*Collaboration in Recent Years—On Our Back Porch at Sunset*

helping people to develop mastery in the world of energy. Sidra describes this process as teaching people how to play their own instruments so as to be able to meet the world within and the world outside with ever increasing levels of subtlety and imagination. And, as we age, we find this ability to dance with the energies is truly one of the loveliest gifts imaginable.

Recently Sidra had a dream in which three women in their mid 90s came to our home to teach us about aging. What they basically taught is that as we get older our relationship to energetics becomes more and more important. We had to learn at ever deepening levels how to run our own energies, how to call up the necessary energies to do whatever it is that we needed to do.

Thus it is that learning to play our energetic

instrument becomes an integral part of Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves. We have not written a separate book on the energetics of relationship, but it is included in our book [Partnering](#) and in the CD sets [“The Aware Ego”](#) and [“Partnering: The Art of Conscious Relationship”](#). For the energetics of Voice Dialogue, see Robert Stamboliev’s [The Energetics of Voice Dialogue](#).

THE SEVENTH ELEMENT

Partnering

USING RELATIONSHIP AS
TEACHER, HEALER, AND GUIDE

In the last ten years, we’ve begun to think of our kind of relationship as a partnering relationship. A partnering model of relationship is a non-hierarchical way of being with someone. This way

of thinking about relationship can be applied to all relationships but its primary focus has particular application to ongoing primary relationships. In addition to being non-hierarchical it is also seen by us as being a serious Joint Venture in both a personal and business sense.

As part of this Joint Venture, both people must be surrendered to some level of a psycho-spiritual process in their own personal lives and also surrendered to such a process in their relational lives together. It is important here to understand that the surrender is not to the other person but to the relationship itself.

The ability and willingness to surrender to the process of relationship has a number of major consequences. For one thing, your partner/friend becomes your teacher just as you become their teacher. Another way of thinking about the Partnering Model is simply to think of it in the sense of **Relationship as Teacher**.

There is another consequence to this process. We gradually learn to embrace the disowned selves that we carry for each other. This happens over a very long period of time. Ultimately we come to the discovery that in each of us lives an introject of our partner. Sidra is learning about the energy configurations in her that correspond to Hal. Hal is learning about the energy configurations that correspond to Sidra. This is a very exciting process and one that allows a continuing conscious separation of the two people and a yet deeper clarity regarding the whole issue of bonding patterns.

There is an extensive ongoing learning process where both people must learn the basics of the psychology of selves, the Aware Ego Process, the consciousness model, the work with bonding patterns, the understanding of energetic realities, and the relationship to the physical body. There evolves an ever deepening relationship to the spiritual dimension and, hopefully, there is some

connection to the dream process that is shared in the relationship. We have seen that, over time, the dreams can become an increasingly powerful inner teacher both in our lives and in our relationships.

The concept of a Joint Venture also has major consequences. Every aspect of relationship involves a joint decision making process. There is nothing wrong with one person being responsible for taking care of finances. It is simply that the other person cannot abdicate responsibility for finances. The other person must not become an unconscious daughter or son just because someone else is taking the major responsibility for a particular area. In a partnership, both partners are liable—even if one has a special expertise or interest in one aspect of the business of living.

In this light, an ongoing partnering relationship can be seen in part as a serious business venture between two people, one that requires a good deal of time and energy. We strongly recommend business meetings where the business issues of life can be dealt with. That may sound unromantic, but if there aren't regular business meetings, then the business of life—the requirements of everyday living—have a tendency to invade all available space and to be handled unconsciously.

We live our lives most of the time out of our primary selves. This changes as we do our psycho-spiritual work. We begin to have a choice about who is going to live our life—or, as we like to say, who is going to drive our psychological car. As partners we must decide over and over again who is going to do what and when. Who is going to call the friends about the party? Who is going to take the clothes to the cleaner?

Default unconsciously decides whatever partners do not decide consciously together. This is analogous to the default position on a computer.

The computers we use came with default settings for each application; there are hundreds of default positions. They work, but they're generic. If you want to use the computer in a more personal, creative and artistic way, then you must learn how to change these settings so that you have real choice as to how it will operate.

If you wish to have a more creative, imaginative and sensual connection to each other, you need to be constantly handling the business and personal decisions—determining what belongs to each of you at a certain time and then working out who does what. In this way, you do not live your relationship via default positions, which simply means through your primary selves. Instead, you are a team—constantly working together to support the Aware Ego Process in

each of you. The gradual integration of whatever it is that the partner carries for us greatly enhances our ability to make conscious decisions and choices.

The psychological work is essential to discover who is running our lives and who is living our relationships. The spiritual work is essential because without a sense of spiritual reality / God / Higher Intelligence our lives cannot expand beyond purely personal considerations. The work with energetic reality is essential because for a truly satisfying relationship, the primary energetic connection must be between the two people involved.

All of this is an ongoing process that can last forever. One of the greatest surprises and delights of our aging process is the amount of change, creativity, and intimacy that remains for



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us in a true partnering relationship. The continuing support of our dreams is truly awesome, and the profound power of the Intelligence of the Psyche becomes more and more of an everyday affair accompanying our ongoing and ever-present dance with the world of bonding patterns.

THE EIGHTH ELEMENT

Dreams, Daydreams and the Intelligence of the Unconscious

ACCESSING THE INNER TEACHER

As we mentioned earlier in this article, dreams and visualization have always played an important part of our explorations. At the very beginning Sidra, in particular, was deeply impacted by a series of visualizations that initiated her into some of the very deepest waters of the unconscious. With time the work with visualization became less important to us as Voice Dialogue and the dream process became more primary. And in recent years we have found ourselves placing an ever-increasing emphasis on the dream process for ourselves and with our clients. We have also enjoyed working with daydreams as we discovered how daytime fantasies provided a gold mine of information about what is happening in people's lives (including ours).

What we first became aware of was the fact that when people began to develop an Aware Ego Process and were able to stand between opposites, the nature of their dreams began to change. They became clearer. They become more organized. We have always known this at some level, but somehow our understanding and appreciation of this process changed. We watched clients begin to decode their own dreams in relatively short periods of time, depending, in large measure, on the strength of the Aware Ego Process.

As this process continued, we saw that the intelligence of the unconscious began to manifest

in an ever more powerful way, and we found that the dream process itself was becoming the teacher for people. We had experienced this earlier in our own lives as we watched how the unconscious organized itself and seemed to have its own agenda for our development.

What is this intelligence? Where does it come from? What does it want from us? And how does it manifest in our lives?

We became aware of the fact that the dream ego, or how the dreamer appears in his or her own dream, gives us a picture of how the primary self is behaving. This seemed to be true of most dreams, though not all of them. Occasionally the dream ego would represent not the current primary self system (or operating ego) but instead, the disowned self.

Then we began to ask for the daydreams or daytime fantasies of people. These are different from the visualizations of guided imagery. These are not deliberately sought after like visualizations; instead, they are going on much of the time even though many people have no awareness at all that they are, in fact, daydreaming. These daydreams play like background music—and nobody knows who put it on.

For example, imagine that you are driving in your car and someone passes you and then cuts in front of you. You are angry and, in your mind, you begin to talk to that driver, expressing your outrage at what happened. This can go on for a long period of time and can totally destabilize you. Some people will continue this daydream and imagine that they drive after the other person and deliberately crash into him and hurt him. Others will have just a momentary flash of fury or a fleeting image of destruction.

The “you” of the daydream generally gives us a picture of your disowned self. Your primary self may be calm, controlled and rational. The disowned self that emerges in your daydream is an energy that carries the rage, anger, and resentment that is gener-

ally kept under control. We found that by listening to people's daydreams and by making them aware that they are having daydreams, they begin to get a picture of a disowned self.

Once the picture is clear, then there is the chance to explore the self. In this example, there is a chance to learn how to stand between the control and rationality of the primary self that continues to drive carefully and the more uncivilized part of us, the angry, destructive self that can be so frightening to the rational, controlled side.

Rather than trying to change ourselves—which is always a problematical thing to do—what seems to be required of us is a surrender to the unconscious itself as we learn to trust that the intelligence it makes available to us has a plan and direction for us. The surrender we refer to is not that of a passive child who gives up all responsibility. It is, rather, a surrender to a kind of knowing that is not ordinarily available to us. The deeper problems of life can seldom be solved by the rational mind alone. We need the mind, it's true, but it is only one of our resources.

The ignition of this intelligence is not the same as having a particular religious, or enlightenment, experience. Instead, it is an ongoing process that seems to clarify and deepen the Aware Ego. It wants to help us see who it is in us that is living our lives so we can learn to take over from that part (or self) and live our life with ever more choice. This is not short-term work. As we've said, it is a process that continues forever!

We are well aware of the fact that not everyone remembers dreams and we can only be grateful that there are so many different approaches to consciousness that can be utilized in the journey of personal growth. Yet, we cannot help but be amazed at how often the act of standing between opposites will initiate a dream process or to deepen an already existing one.

Where all of this leads is to a natural and

organic movement within us whereby the unconscious itself becomes our teacher and gradually the bonding to the outside teacher diminishes in strength. The role of the outer teacher changes to that of a consultant to process. Finally, even this is no longer necessary and the inner teacher takes over completely. We have had the deep satisfaction of watching this happen to more and more people. And so it is that [Hal has revisited](#) his Jungian roots, and this work with dreams and daydreams has become one of the basic elements of Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves.

One of the greatest surprises for us as Hal approaches his 80th birthday and Sidra approaches her 70th birthday is the ongoing nature of this intelligence as it continues to unfold and bring to both of us new understandings of matters both personal and transpersonal. It has helped us prepare for aging and it continues to help us with all the gifts and the challenges that come at this time of life.

God, the Greater Intelligence, the élan vital, the Organizing Principle of the Universe, whatever you prefer to call it, manifests in many ways. We feel privileged to have been a part of this manifestation in the work that we have shared over the past 35 years. And, as we observe the various manifestations of this intelligence all around us, and as we feel the organizing principles behind them, we cannot help but feel assured that God is indeed a mathematician.

Others have discovered this organizing mystery in their work—whether it was with mathematics, the cosmos, the subatomic world, “the field”, the physical body, the structure of cells—or in a variety of spiritual practices, both ancient and modern. For us, this intelligence has found us, as we have found it, in the depths, the complexity and the infinite richness of human relationship.

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