

KNOW THYSELVES: *Self-integration with Voice Dialogue*

by Victoria Resch



Does something inside you always sabotage your plans and goals, despite your best intentions? Do you find yourself torn by indecision? Does a voice inside criticise you, ridicule you or undermine your confidence and self esteem? Do the same destructive patterns keep emerging in your relationships? Do you find yourself being dictated by your head or emotions? Discover how Voice Dialogue can help you with these questions by learning more about the different and independent ‘selves’ seeking voice within you. The words ‘Know thyself’ were inscribed above the entrance to the ancient temple of Delphi, and reflect a pursuit of self-knowledge and understanding that is as pivotal to our civilisation as it was to the Ancient Greeks.

Voice Dialogue takes this belief one step further to incorporate ‘thyselves’. This is because the Voice Dialogue process helps you to explore the different aspects of self—your many ‘selves’—freeing you to achieve your own personal best in your work, your relationships and any other aspect of your life that may facilitate personal insight, understanding and integration.

Voice Dialogue is a powerful tool for personal growth and development which can help you resolve and overcome these and other issues in a profound yet non-threatening way. It is a wonderful therapeutic technique which enables personal insight, understanding and integration. It can also be a lot of fun. As a qualified psychologist, I am trained in a wide variety of techniques and healing modalities, yet I find Voice Dialogue the single most effective tool available to me. As it is so respectful of the individual, Voice Dialogue is a technique that people can be trained to use in workshops with friends, partners, parents or children—as long as both people each take the ‘client’ and the ‘facilitator’ roles at some point, to avoid one being cast in the role of therapist to the other. Of course, working with a trained facilitator in Voice Dialogue is very valuable.

SO WHAT IS VOICE DIALOGUE?

It was originally developed in the United States in the early 1970s by two doctors of psychology, Dr. Hal Stone and his wife, Dr. Sidra Stone. They refer to its theoretical base as the ‘psychology of selves’.

You are probably aware that the person you are at work is different from

the person you are at home, and at a party you are probably different again. All of these aspects of yourself have developed (in interaction with your genetic blueprint and your 'psychic fingerprint') as part of your personality in order to enable you to function and survive in the world.

PRIMARY SELVES

Even as babies, we learn that certain behaviours meet with positive responses and we modify our behaviour accordingly. The Protector/Controller emerges first and gradually develops into a cluster of 'primary selves' such as the Rule Maker, the Inner Critic, the Perfectionist, the Pleaser, the Pusher—designed to help us receive positive responses from others, and to help us achieve according to the values of the society we live in.

DISOWNED SELVES

These are our shadow side. They are the opposite energy to the primary selves through which we actively interact with the world, and they are equal in their power and impact on our lives. If your Rule Maker is a powerful self, it will draw people and experiences that may drive it crazy. If the Pusher is a primary self for you and just will not give you a break, there is a lazy disowned self within, and you will attract that energy into your life—in your partner, your child or even your pets.

THE PROCESS—A METAPHOR OR TWO

Through Voice Dialogue, we explore the different facets of self—played out by a cast of sub-personalities—and develop an increased awareness of 'who is running the show' in our inner lives and in the way we present to the world. It is as if the cast of selves within has been rioting, sleeping or wandering aimlessly and directionless on the stage of our lives, and then a strong, caring, compassionate Director arrives and a powerful and fulfilling ensemble is formed. The Director arrives mindfully and tactfully, honouring the unique gifts of the entire cast, for if he or she were to come on like gangbusters to 'clean up this act', it would only result in resistance. The awareness and insight of the Director ensures a cooperative, contented, energetic and motivated cast. For the auditory among you, consider the selves to be musicians of different instruments in the orchestra, having the musical score only for their own parts in a symphony, playing away as best they can. As they get to know the other musicians and exchange sheet music, they begin to play in harmony and piece together more and more of the full, magnificent score. The Conductor, the Aware Ego, steps out of the wings and communicates with each musician in turn, compiling in this process the full orchestral score. The Conductor takes the podium and raises the baton. Each instrument then achieves its full potential in harmony and synergy with all the others. This is not to say that no-one will ever hit a wrong note or that the actors will never blow their lines. This is the real world. Being human and on earth means that we will continually confront issues and challenges, whether interpersonal or material. This is the stuff of life, and the challenge is to meet these issues skilfully and mindfully, hold ing the tension between the opposite energies that are in contention. That is a part of life on earth.

We can do this far more effectively, rewardingly and lightly through the Aware Ego through a fine Conductor, an excellent Director as an integrated human being.



CASE STUDY 1

Late last year at a Voice Dialogue workshop outside Sydney, I was working with a group in a shady clearing surrounded by ferns and flannel flowers. The ground dropped away very steeply into a gully close behind me. We were seated in a circle and one young woman—I will call her Sophie—volunteered to be facilitated in front of the group.

Sophie declared that she wanted more access to her Power Self. She explained that she would do workshops, study, gain qualifications, make plans and she knew that she had the ability to put all that she had learned into practice. Yet something was stopping her. Somehow her Vulnerable Self would leap in and take over, not allowing her to be fulfilled and realise her potential.

She explained this to me from her Aware Ego position. In order for both myself and Sophie to gain a clearer understanding of what aspect was sabotaging her, I asked to speak to her Power Self. She sensed this energy within her slightly to her right and shifted her chair to that place. As she did so, a huge rottweiler dog emerged from a bush. This was day three of the workshop, but this was the first we had seen of this dog. It approached us, circled the group, then circled Sophie and sat down behind her. We all looked at one another in awe.

There was such a strong lesson about summoning up one's power in that experience. I chose to cement that lesson in on a number of levels, and pointed out to Sophie's Power Self that dogs do not get more powerful than that rottweiler's jaws, fangs and haunches. The rottweiler's power was present and available to it when necessary, but the dog had felt no need to carry it in

a threatening, intimidating way. It had approached the group in an open and friendly manner, and settled peacefully at rest behind Sophie.

I then asked to speak to Sophie's aware ego, and she shifted her chair back to her original position. As she did so, the dog got up and disappeared over the steep drop behind me so quickly, that it was as if it had never been there.

I spoke with Sophie's Aware Ego about the experience with her Power Self, raising her awareness of the factors at play. I then asked to speak to her Vulnerable Self, the one sabotaging the Power Self. I explored how the Vulnerable Self had responded to Sophie's experience of her Power Self, supported and enhanced by the energy of the rottweiler. We discussed some childhood experiences that Sophie had carried with her into adulthood which had inhibited her realising her potential. Her Vulnerable Self felt appreciated for its efforts to protect her and also realised that she could now take very good care of her self.

She then returned to the Aware Ego position and, this time, I suggested that we do an exercise designed to give her more choice about whether her Power Self or her Vulnerable Self was in charge at any given time.

I asked Sophie if she could tune into the energy which she had felt when fully experiencing her Power Self. She closed her eyes and drew in that energy and, as she did so, the dog came over the rise and sat down behind her again. At this point we were all pretty aghast. The universe was certainly supporting Sophie's commitment to access her personal power, as well as supporting the profound instrument of self-development that is the Voice Dialogue process.



THE VOICE DIALOGUE SESSION

In the process of a Voice Dialogue session, the facilitator will talk with you, perhaps about your life in general or about a specific issue that you would like to focus on. At some point, the alert facilitator recognises that a particular energy pattern has taken control or centre stage. It may be

the Perfectionist, the Inner Critic, the Inner Child, the Rule Maker, the Vulnerable Self, the Competent Self, the Fearful Self, etc.

The facilitator will ask to speak to that sub-personality, asking you to move to another position so that the sub-personality is separated out from the everyday person, the operating ego, and addressed as a separate entity. Each voice is greeted and responded to individually, according to its own unique energy pattern, just as we interact differently with different people that we meet.

As the Voice Dialogue facilitator speaks directly with the selves within you and the process of communicating with these sub-personalities proceeds, you become less identified with them and gain more insight into your own functioning, as the operating ego becomes more of an Aware Ego.

Through this process, we become aware of our sub-personalities as entities in themselves with their own methods and motives, their own personal histories and ages.

CASE STUDY 2

In his early twenties, Ben found himself very alienated from the world around him. Wherever he went, he was alert to signs of danger, ready to fend off an attack watching behind him and around him. In addition to this, he found that people seemed to ignore him. If he did manage to engage them in conversation, they would walk off when he was in the middle of it, leaving him mid-sentence as if he were not talking. He felt invisible. Both the hypervigilance and the inconspicuous parts of him were ways of being that he had deliberately chosen to adopt as defences when he was a boy, but they had taken over his life.

When he was about twelve, Ben's family had moved to a new city where he found himself excluded and victimised by his peers. He was very unhappy and buried himself in a fantasy world of comics. One in particular had a great impact on him. He was very struck by the notion of the Ninjas, the Japanese warriors whose martial arts training gave them superhuman powers. They could make themselves invisible, had senses highly tuned to signs of danger and could defend themselves and others using special weapons and magic. He imagined himself as a Ninja—invisible and invincible. This gave him some comfort and escape at the time, but over time his identification with the Ninja Self had taken over, to the point where he truly seemed to be invisible, insignificant or ignored by people. He also found that his anticipation of danger in any public situation was placing him under unnecessary pressure. Rationally, he knew that he was lucky enough not to be under constant threat of attack, but his Ninja Self would not let him relax. Neither was it safe to risk being noticed.

This Ninja Self was an aspect of Ben's Protector/Controller which had run riot. Ben's aware ego had no choice over who was running the show in Ben's life.

I asked to speak to Ben's Ninja Self. Some selves take form slowly but his emergence was dramatic and immediate. He rose, walked straight to the door and crouched on his haunches, his arms raised and held close to his body,

ready to strike out. This Ninja Self seemed much larger than Ben. His voice was deeper and more steady—almost robotic. I greeted him and asked him about his role in Ben's life. We talked for some time. He was very clear about how effective he had been in protecting Ben, but also acknowledged, with some sadness and regret, that his function had outgrown its usefulness and that he was actually holding Ben back now. It was time for him to depart.

I suggested that perhaps we could explore a new job description for him so that he could continue to play his important protective role in Ben's life but in a more functional way. He was adamant that he must leave altogether for Ben's sake. He obviously cared deeply for Ben so I was confident that he and Ben's aware ego knew that it would be safe—that some other aspect of Ben's Protector/Controller was now ready to take the reins.

Suddenly Ben turned to me and said: "He left. I saw him leave." Ben rose slowly from where the Ninja had been crouched, and returned to his seat. He had the tender vulnerability of something newborn, and yet he seemed lighter and a great deal more present, more grounded. We spent some time processing what had just taken place as Ben gradually adjusted to his new sense of self.

In the weeks that followed, Ben was very aware of the shift, feeling quite vulnerable until his Protector/Controller network adjusted to the change. He was astounded, however, by the immediate change in the way others related to him—noticing him, interacting with him and listening to him. His hyper-vigilance vanished. He retained normal sense of caution but he was able to move comfortably through the day without fear of attack.

As this case history shows, it is possible to make profound changes within a single Voice Dialogue session. Each person has their own rhythm, their own rate of unfolding. Sometimes the process is exciting and dramatic and sometimes the road to self-discovery is a gentle unfolding. It always proceeds at the pace that you are ready for. In Voice Dialogue, it is your own rhythm that guides the process—even their own 'birth' stories as to why they came into being. It is extraordinary to observe the unique postures, gestures, manners and facial expressions of the different aspects of self. Furthermore, they know answers with certainty that you, the aware ego, have no idea about.

POSITIVE INTENTIONS

The motives of your sub-personalities are always positive, but they are sometimes mis-guided. Each one is there to serve you—wanting to help—but sometimes they operate on the best solution that was available to you at an earlier time in your life. Now, with added maturity and experience, you may well be able to improve on the habitual methods of a sub-personality that was formed when you were an infant, a child or a teenager.

TAMING OUT TORMENTORS

With their good intentions recognised and appreciated, a sub-personality may be very willing—often relieved—to hand over the reins to another aspect of self that may approach life in a way that is more functional and

effective; or, they may mature within that sub-personality with the help of other aspects of self. being able to act in that functional and effective way themselves.

Through this process, the previously destructive selves become more benign and, in the course of conversation about themselves or the person on behalf of whom they represent an aspect, a sub-personality may come to realise that the way they have been operating is now obsolete or is no longer the best means available to the person.

That inner critic may just decide to take a holiday or may realise that it can better achieve its ends by replacing negative self-talk with a more supportive, encouraging attitude.

That self-saboteur, whose aim is probably to protect you from something, may realise that your interests are better served if it steps back and lets your achieving self take control. Self-saboteurs are often very relieved at the prospect of giving up battle mode and retraining as a vigilant, caring protector.

Often a sub-personality that has been getting in your way or running your life has just wanted to be heard, and the only way they could achieve that was to yell and take over. To be given a voice is often very healing to them and can be all they need in order to back off and give you a go.

GAINING INSIGHT, CHOICE AND CONTROL IN YOUR LIFE

By meeting and becoming familiar with your various sub-personalities, their 'shadow' sides, their motives and functions, you will develop and strengthen the 'aware ego' as separate from the sub-personalities.

As a result, we develop the ability to choose who is in charge of ourselves. This is the aim of Voice Dialogue. Instead of being puppets of our emotions and past conditionings at the mercy of habitual and unconscious patterns, we learn to take gentle, effective control of our own lives.

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