

The Next Part of the Journey

Some Thoughts About the International Voice Dialogue Community

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by Sidra Stone, Ph.D.

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This is a major time of growth and change for all of us in the international Voice Dialogue community. It's a time of deep satisfaction for what we have created together, a poignant time that brings home to each of us the inexorable flow of the river of life, and a time of hope for what can emerge from our joint journeys of consciousness. Although Hal and I are still active professionally and personally and we continue to evolve, we are no longer involved in the daily workings of the community in the old way. And, as we pull back from our traditional roles as leaders and assume a more mentoring role, the international community is organizing itself into a number of different communities – each with its own particular energy should be. But it is different from the traditional model in which there is an initial vision or inspiration (like Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves) that becomes solidified into a school (with its own dogma) and then certifies its students as proficient practitioners of its methodology. We see this as an unfolding of a non-hierarchical, inclusive, and continually evolving international movement. Rather than being planned -either by us or by our students - from the “top down”, it is a living self-organizing set of communities. Some of these (particularly those involved with universities or professional training) will doubtless become more traditional and formal in form and content; others will be less form bound and more flowing. Still others will take only a part of our work and combine it creatively with theirs in ways we never would have imagined and something totally new will emerge. But all will be related and there will be a familial sense of shared roots reflected in their basic concepts. And all would be involved in a similar process of expanding consciousness - a consciousness that is inclusive rather than exclusive and mutually respectful rather than polarized.

The Dream

Hal had a lovely dream image that described this process. In his dream he sees us living in a lovely, very large, forested area with a feeling of Thera but it isn't Thera. In this forested area live the teachers and leaders of the extended Voice Dialogue community as well as individuals who are related to the spirit of the work, whatever their life work might be. The quality that all share is an Aware Ego Process (although this was not named in the dream. Each individual, couple, or group has its own unique place to live and - since the area is so large - there is a great deal of space around each of these places. Thus, there is a feeling of spaciousness and privacy as well as community. Each person has his/her own life and lives totally independently of us and of the others in the community. We come together at times that are appropriate for each of us. We all share in the spirit of the work that we do, but the community is totally non-hierarchical. No one is “certified” in this group and no one is special - not even ourselves. Everyone is simply a natural leader. This is our community.

The Bonding Patterns

The challenges as these communities form will come in the classic form: bonding patterns. This is to be expected and - in the past - these bonding patterns between groups have signaled the end of cooperation and the end of growth. Hopefully, the experience we all have in dealing with bonding patterns both in our individual processes and in our interpersonal dealings will give us the ability to deal with them as communities. Each of us - and each community - has its own unique contribution to make. But since these will differ, it may be difficult for some to see the contributions of others. Isn't that always the way of our selves? This is a perfect time to use the tools that we have developed over the past 35 years. It is the time to use the Psychology of Selves to see what is happen-

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ing. As usual, we look at the three aspects of the bonding pattern and ask ourselves the three basic questions. Each aspect of the bonding pattern has something important to teach us and, in doing the work that is presented to us, we continue in our individual and community growth and enrichment. The Disowned Selves First, and most simply, look at the disowned selves that your group and the “other” group hold for each other. The question to ask is: “What do you judge about the other group?” Another question that gives the same information is: “What is it that intimidates you about the others and makes you feel ‘less than?’” The answers to these questions will give you the primary self of your group and the disowned self that the other group carries. You will each have a gift - a particular self or way of dealing with life - that is missing in the other. Then the challenge is to separate from the primary self of the group and to find within yourselves, as individuals, the disowned self that is carried by the others. Standing between these opposites automatically moves you beyond duality, into the Aware Ego Process of an expanded consciousness. And, on a very practical level, it gives you the ability to see the world through the eyes of the others, to understand them, and to communicate more effectively. And as the group changes, the bonding patterns with outsiders will be less intense. We can’t tell you how to do this; each group will work this out independently and in its own particular way. No two groups will be alike. There are many sets of opposites that are just waiting to emerge. The following are just a few possibilities.

Form vs. Spirit This dichotomy has always been a concern of ours; we see the need for a certain amount of form in the need for training requirements and/or appropriate licensing for facilitators, but we are eager to preserve the spirit of the work. We are aware that embracing these

particular opposites is particularly difficult and will pose an ongoing challenge.

Academics (content oriented) vs. Processors (process oriented) Some groups will be more interested in getting together to exchange information and ideas while others will prefer to engage in an ongoing group process with like-minded peers.

Mental vs. Intuitive There will be groups that are more oriented towards evolving systems and others that wish to preserve a free-flowing, moment by moment, approach to this work.

Spiritual/transcendent vs. Pragmatic/worldly There will be groups that are oriented towards practical applications of the work in the world, such as those who work in business consulting. Others will be more interested in transcendent states and will use this work (or portions of it) as an adjunct to the primary goal of spiritual growth.

Traditionalists vs. Rebels There will be groups that wish to move this work into traditional scientific, therapeutic, or academic settings and to carry out acceptable academic/scientific investigations while others will reject - and studiously avoid - any such mainstream requirements, associations, or activities.

Psychological vs. Physical There will be groups that use this work for deep and transformative psychological work in a fairly traditional psychotherapeutic manner. Others will focus upon working directly with the body rather than being interested in psychological matters and use this work in a circumscribed way to help to decipher the messages that the body carries.

The Form

Whenever we enter into a bonding pattern, two of our selves (at least) take over our interactions with others. This is what we mean by “the form” of the bonding pattern. This can be true of communities as well as individuals. So the question to ask yourself is: Which of my selves have taken over?” or “Who did I just become?” Here’s an idea of some selves that could possibly be waiting to take over the wheel of your group’s psychological car.

On the “parent” side there are the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, controlling parents, judgmental parents, demanding parents, shaming parents, responsible parents, and proselytizing parents. And, on the “child” side, there are rebel children, stubborn children, inadequate children, shamed children, guilty children, passive/aggressive children, frightened children, desperate children, and conforming children.

When these selves take over, they have lives of their own. It is very easy for matters to spin out of control when this happens - and happen it will. Again and again. To step back (whether sooner or later) and to recognize who you have become is an extraordinary act of consciousness

The Disowned Vulnerability

The question to ask is: “What is making you vulnerable?”

There are a number of areas of vulnerability that most of the emerging Voice Dialogue communities share at this time.

We, as the original parents to the community, are gradually withdrawing. This loss of a set of parents, of a recognizable vessel, of a strong leadership

- or focus - creates a vacuum and a real vulnerability in the community at large. Also, for those of you who have been with us for many years, there is a personal loss as we are no longer available in the old way.

This is a big change - for ourselves as well as for the larger community - and, for us, there is the vulnerability of being unable to handle the multiple tasks we used to handle. We see that conferences are being held around the world that we can no longer hope to attend and we hear of exciting innovations that have evolved without us. We feel a deep sadness as we experience this inexorable flow of the river of life. But this is what is and it is a vulnerability that we wanted to share with you. For ourselves, as we allow ourselves to experience this sadness rather than fight it or deny it, it brings a certain peace and a real happiness at what continues to emerge.

There are also the financial aspects of this change and the possible loss of a more stable source of income. When we traveled, we were able to bring together groups to attend conferences and trainings and our staff and teachers could then use these as a base for further expansion. This is no longer available. To make matters even more challenging, this change is coming at a time when there is an enormous amount of economic stress in the world.

This financial vulnerability is not to be underestimated. At times like these competition for resources will likely become the focus and your primary selves will rush in to protect you and often become a part of the problem. This financial vulnerability is real, and it opens you to bonding patterns. This is true for groups as well as for individuals.

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These are just two major current vulnerabilities. Each person and each group will have its own specific ones.

Feeling this vulnerability - and not becoming a victim to it - is the first step in dealing with it. And sharing it with others - who often have the same vulnerability - can lead to real intimacy and some creative problem solving.

Empowerment - the Aware Ego Process

This situation presents you with the opportunity to move out of the bonding patterns and into a deeper level energetic awareness and of empowerment. As you make the move towards caring for your own vulnerability (as an individual and as a group) and as you learn to separate further from the primary selves that have cared for this vulnerability in the past, you will be able to move through life in a more empowered way.

You, and your group or community, will no longer need to be recognized as “the one” or “the best” but as unique - and one of many related interacting energy systems. Hal and I go through this process ourselves in relation to the worldwide consciousness network. We deeply love our extended community and we are sorely tempted to think that it - and the work we do - is the very best of all. It is true that we are unique, but so are others and each has something important to contribute. We are just one among many.

The Journey

We see our international community as participating in a grand experiment. Our journey has moved us in ever-expanding circles. We began with ourselves as individuals, moved on to learning about ourselves in relationship and, as we continue the journey, we seem to be moving into a wider arena - that of multiple communities. For each of us, this work begins with our own individual journey of consciousness. We learn about our many selves from our own feelings, from our interactions with others, from our dreams and daydreams, and from whatever path of self-exploration we follow. We learn about our primary selves and - as we discover that there is more to us than these selves - we separate from them. As we no longer identify with these selves, we are open to the inclusion of their opposites. And - as we can actually feel opposites, as we truly develop choice in our lives - an Aware Ego process emerges. Our lives are no longer run by the rules of a few selves, but a self-organizing principle begins to work within us. Our choices and our lives become more congruent and individual. It's somewhat like the formation of fractals - universal and familiar, but at the same time individual, patterns emerge from seeming chaos. Moving from ourselves as individuals to the journey of relationship, we learn to look at ourselves through the lens of relationship. Our relationship - and the inevitable bonding patterns (the “dance of relationship” as we called it in the early days) that it brings with it - teaches us who we are when we interact with others. We expand beyond the automatic responses of our bonding patterns and are able to relate at a deeper and more purely energetic level. We then make space for the self-organizing principle that works within the relationship. We believe that this is what is referred to when people speak of “the other” as the third participant in the relationship between two people. Here the relationship itself becomes more indi-

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vidual and congruent as a new harmonic evolves. And now we are all embarked on a new exploration. As communities evolve, and as we use Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves as tools for the evolution of consciousness and as a common framework for mutual understanding, we will see what emerges. Our expectation is that a similar self-organizing principle will begin to operate and that just as unique individuals can learn to live together creatively and to synergistically evolve, so can unique communities. The Aware Ego process was a milestone in the development of the individual. The Bonding Patterns were a milestone in the exploration of relationships. We are eager to reach the next milestone, but we are still on the journey of discovery. And, as we did in the past with individuals and couples, we again trust that as we follow the path ahead, something new and exciting will be discovered. This time we hope that we will see a much needed new paradigm emerge - one that deals with the interacting energies of unique, and quite disparate, communities. The old ways are no longer effective and a new consciousness is needed. We hope that in learning ways of dealing with its own underlying vulnerabilities and with real differences in values and beliefs among its members, our international Voice Dialogue community will make its own particular contribution to this new consciousness. This next phase of the journey is yours.

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