

Understanding Voice Dialogue and the Art of Consciousness

By Judith Tamar Stone

As newborns growing into young children our primary need is to be safe, loved and accepted. We subconsciously learn to favor behaviors that get us what we need and reject those parts that do not. The various "Selves" are born to help us handle, interpret and adjust to the requirements of our environment. What is significant, as we grow into adulthood, is that many of these selves continue to function in our lives as if we were still living as children in our family of origin. We have the opportunity to identify and honor these more dominant selves for the role they have played in our lives and to recognize them as a bridge to those selves that have been rejected.

According to *The Psychology of Selves*, the selves function in a very symmetrical way, organically dividing into pairs of opposites, much like the Taoist division of the world into yin and yang natures. For every yang self there is an equal and opposite yin self; for every yin self there is an equal and opposite yang self. The subpersonalities on the yang side of the spectrum tend to be more active and outwardly oriented, while the subpersonalities on the yin side tend to be more inward, reflective and creative.

A few examples of the yang selves are "The Thinker," a subpersonality that is constantly ruminating over daily experiences, planning for the next day, and often keeping us awake at night; "The Perfectionist," to whom nothing is ever good enough; and "The Pusher," who must always be doing something (and most famous for making lists). On the yin side, a few examples are "The Vulnerable Child," a subpersonality who carries our psychic fingerprint and our deepest feelings and emotions; "The Being Self," who thrives in stillness and is often accessed through meditation and yoga; and "The Creative Self," who craves a certain level of artistic expression, often manifesting itself in how we decorate our homes, offices, and what we wear.

From the perspective of *The Psychology of Selves* there is no such thing as a good self or bad self or even a false self; all selves are created equal. "The Voice Dialogue Process", which is based on the Psychology of Selves and *The Aware Ego*, is a technique for giving voice to each of the selves. When a self becomes a dominant part of the overall personality we refer to it as an Over-Identified or Primary Self. Over-identified selves are strengthened over time by the constant repression of their opposite selves.

For every over-identified self, there is an equal and opposite self that has become repressed or disowned. This self is referred to as a "Disowned Self". One of the goals of progressive consciousness is to dis-identify or achieve a balanced separation from an over-identified self, while at the same time reclaiming the opposite part that has become repressed or negated. This allows us to honor all of our aspects, not just the ones that we have become most comfortable with.

Powerful shifts of consciousness can occur when an over-identified self has been acknowledged. This allows us to reclaim our connection with its opposite. When we

communicate with these Primary and Disowned selves the essence of their concerns can be directly recognized and addressed and change can occur on many levels (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual).

An example of a pair of universal opposites would be "The Responsible Self" and "The Couch Potato". "The Responsible Self" is famous for its expertise in handling anything and everything. It is the self that friends, family and co-workers trust to get the job done. As an over-identified self this part can be exhausting. As an integrated self it offers us the capacity do what needs to be done in balance with our need for rest and relaxation.

"The Couch Potato" is the pure energetic opposite of the "Responsible Self", infamous for its extreme lack of responsibility and motivation for doing much of anything. As an over-identified self "The Couch Potato" insures a life of passivity and very little accomplishment. **As a disowned self, some form of exhaustion or burn-out is inevitable.** As an integrated self it offers us the capacity for appropriate rest and relaxation in balance with life's requirements for getting the job done.

What may at this point be sounding like schizophrenia is actually a very organized, safe and systematic approach to consciousness. The ultimate result of knowing and honoring our selves is a powerful re-configuration of awareness. The ability to stand between opposites and carry the tension between two very different selves is a profound and empowering experience. We refer to the capacity to consciously hold these opposite parts as "The Aware Ego."

From the viewpoint of The Psychology of Selves, what has been historically referred to as the "Ego", is actually one or more of our over-identified selves running the show. One of the best examples of a set of over-identified selves having taken charge of our lives is an over-identified mind ("The Thinker"), a strong "Pusher", and a powerful "Perfectionist" working in tandem. This group may be misidentified as "The Ego". But in actual fact this "Ego" is a group of individual selves that have become dominant as a result of a perceived need to protect and support "The Whole Self".

Progressive consciousness involves the identification and experience of our parts while having at the same time a more objective and inclusive awareness, or witness state. The result is the creation of what we call an "Aware Ego." Every time a self and its counterpart are brought to greater balance "The Aware Ego" is strengthened and fortified in its evolutionary role. The Aware Ego has the ability to experience the many selves without evaluating, judging, or identifying with them. It is neither rational nor, conversely, emotional, but simply a point of reference that objectively witnesses and experiences *what is*.

The art of consciousness is in the strengthening of "The Aware Ego" through the honoring of each self for the unique value it brings to "The Whole Self". Without a

“Pusher” not much would get done in our lives. However, without a “Being” side we could too easily forget to stop and smell the roses and burn-out would be inevitable. When we enter into the dance of the selves with a more Aware Ego, an opportunity for real choice is created. This new awareness supports true harmony and balance in all aspects of our lives.

The true choice that comes from observing our selves through the lens of the “Aware Ego” allows us to see how our disowned selves hold for us the very qualities we need in our quest for wholeness. For every self we disown, we end up attracting that very self into our lives. It can show up most blatantly in our significant other, boss, neighbor...or even our neighbor's dog.

That which we consciously or unconsciously resist persists. For every primary self with which we are identified, there are one or more disowned selves of equal and opposite energy that have been projected onto some person or thing outside us. These are the people and things we judge, hate and resent until we finally get the message that they are reflections of that which is disowned or repressed within us.

By embracing all of our selves we access an experience of Self that is no longer defined by the over-identified selves. Consequently, all of our selves can take their rightful places as members of our extended inner family, free to offer their council to an Aware Ego that is now capable of making choices from a deeper sense of "The Whole Self".

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