

LIVING TRADITIONS



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Voice Dialogue Series

Article 1: Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves

Most of us believe we have a coherent and singular self, that my concept of “myself” is who “I” am and while “I” may have some suppressed and hidden aspects to my personality, ranging from childhood trauma to various fears and phobias, “I” am still a discrete “Self”, a singular entity, coherent and in control. Most of us never question who we are, regardless of evidence to the contrary. While we notice changes in mood, personality and most obviously behavior, even changes we may find a little strange or quirky, we rationalize these away and never question the solidity of our concept of self.

It is interesting that ancient “esoteric” traditions have always doubted this model. The early Gnostics, for example, portrayed the world as a battleground between various demi-gods (Archons) with the most forceful of the Archons gaining ascendancy and declaring “I am the creator of the world”. In this mythos, the most ego-centric demigod was Ialdabaoth (Greek for Ruler) and when he acclaimed his supremacy, a voice came from the heavens denouncing his arrogance. Stephan Hans Hoeller, a highly respected Jungian and Gnostic author, sees this as an early representation of the nature of the Psyche. The Archons are the many sub-personalities, while Ialdabaoth represents the more dominate primary sub personality. The voice from above symbolizes the need for a “coordinating ego” or the organizing of these many sub personalities. The battle between the Archons symbolizes the true condition of most human beings, we believe we are one self yet in reality we are a myriad of warring petty selves most of which we are not even conscious of.



This model is also found in Medieval Alchemy, where the Alchemists used symbols such as the various planets and metals to represent real aspects of their own psyche. Complex coded texts were written describing in detail the various aspects of what we now know as the unconscious and how to transform the more negative of these into something better. Rather than being the process of turning “lead into gold”, many now believe that the essential aim of the alchemical process was the transformation of the psyche of the Alchemist him or herself.



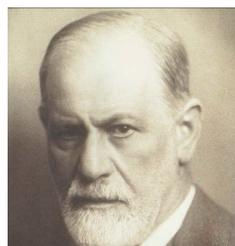
This interpretation is especially popular within the Jungian school.

The lack of a singular self is also found in the Buddhist traditions which have an elaborate psychology outlining the many aspects of the senses, psyche and what we know call the unconscious. Buddhist models of perception were way before their time and describe in some detail how our “sub personalities” filter the information we receive through the senses and hence model our way of dealing with the world. Indeed some of these early models of perception offer quite astounding detail of how our sub personalities are able to transform our experience of reality. In these models (which are now backed by modern science), we come to appreciate how the sub personalities are the filter which stand between what our senses perceive and what we actually see or understand.

The Fourth Way Tradition of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky is a more recent esoteric tradition which clearly stood against the model of a singular self. Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were Russian mystics of the early 20th century whose work on the fragmented nature of consciousness is still powerful and insightful. The Fourth Way placed a strong emphasize on understanding how little control we actually have over our lives, since the fragmented selves are actually running the show. Until we appreciate that we do not have a singular self and that we need to create or evolve a coordinating self to utilize the sub personalities we are essentially asleep. Indeed their key concept that we must create a “self” is an early echo of the Aware Ego as found within Voice Dialogue.

These examples may be somewhat obscure to those not read within the esoteric traditions, but do set the stage for the work on the nature of consciousness in modern psychology. While some philosophers such as Fredrich Nietzsche and Gottfried Leibniz discussed some aspects of what we could define as the nature of the unconscious and sub personalities it was Sigmund Freud who really offered its first historical presentation.

Within Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, the unconscious contains what is actively repressed from conscious thought and hence is composed of taboos, desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions. Freud sees these as originating via suppression of painful emotion and while Freud does not necessarily see the unconscious as negative, this does seem to be the overall picture one gets from his approach. There seems to be little room within the Freudian model for positive use of the unconscious or subpersonalities. Freud seems to see as the unconscious as a “Pandora’s Box” which is very dangerous to open and only contains suppressed “ills”.



Freud’s Model of the psyche included the conscious mind (or Ego) and two facets parts of the Unconscious: the Id or instincts and the Superego. Freud’s understanding of the Superego is strange to say the least and seems to suggest that it is a form of internalization of cultural standards. The Id within Freud’s theory certainly included some model of sub-personalities but it was never fully developed within Freudian theory and again has a strongly negative tinge.

Carl Jung took this model a lot further and transformed Freud's view of the unconscious. Jung posited deeper and deeper levels within the psyche, moving from personal through to collective and perhaps even beyond. Jung also introduced such concepts as the Archetype which he felt were forms which exist throughout all cultures within the collective unconscious of humanity. He placed a strong emphasis on myth and legend and brought back spirituality to psychology, which Freud has uniformly rejected.



As psychology has developed the traditional model of Freud is really considered fairly antiquated, however, one of the elements found in all the various psychological systems which seems to have been overlooked is that of sub personalities or the "psychology of Selves". It seems that many modern psychologists either deny the existence of consciousness altogether and see it as simply an extensive of the brain (a common view within cognitive psychology) or still see the self as a coherent whole. Accordingly we still regularly see the interpretation of multiple selves being representative of neurosis. Indeed in many forms of psychology sub personalities are still regularly related to models of disassociation and the experience of "splitting" where emotions, mental states and even memories are dislocated from the rest of the Psyche. This creates a strange anomaly since any objective analysis would show that everyone has sub personalities and while certainly the degree of pathology or sanity may vary, to suggest that the presence of sub personalities suggests mental disturbance is to infer all humans are mentally disturbed. While some radical psychologists such as Wilhelm Reich would heartily agree with such a diagnosis it does not especially seem like a useful one.

There is no consensus in modern psychology and philosophy about the nature of the self, many psychologists still place a strong emphasis on attempting integrate all the sub personalities, even within Jung's model of Individuation there seems to be an assumption that the Self is singular. Even when models accept the multiplicity of the psyche (such as with the Archetypal Psychology of James Hillman), there are no real techniques offered to work with and use these multiple selves.

The Nature of the Psyche

As more and more research is undertaken into the nature of the Psyche it seems that it is not a singular entity at all. The mind develops in response or reaction to various events within our lives. Depending on the nature of these events we develop specific "personas" to deal with them. We can easily see this by a little self analysis, it is quite clear that we deal with our parents, our boss, our partner and our business acquaintances in different ways. While we may not consider these sub-personalities, if we are honest and "watch ourselves" for a while, we will be surprised how different these various modes of behavior are and how they represent different parts of our psyche rather than simply being different behaviors. The model within "Voice Dialogue" is that we are a myriad of selves, some of which we are more or less conscious.

We have many different 'selves', such as the Perfectionist, the Analyst, the Inner Critic, the Pusher, the Clown, the Slave, the Pleaser, the Humorist, the Aggressor,

the Manipulator, the Sports person, the Couch Potato, the Playful one and so on.

Our primary selves are those which we use most often and are those which we could say exist at the edge of consciousness. While other selves are for various reasons; lack of use, fear, suppression, family or cultural pressure and so on, locked away in the unconscious. These are called “Disowned Selves”.

The question may be asked how do we manage these selves at all ? It seems that the various primary selves simply move in and out of consciousness as required and we create an artificial sense of who we are. We believe we are singular and “one self” and yet on another level we are unhappy because we realize that at times our behavior and attitudes are not coherent or consistent.

Why do we behave in different ways in different situations ?

Why do certain stimulus trigger certain controlled responses?

Why is it that when a certain stimulus occurs (seeing a dog, noticing a certain smell etc) that a whole different mood seems to come over us?

Voice Dialogue

Voice Dialogue is a technique to explore these various selves and make us aware of them. But that is not all, if we are simply aware of these various selves that doesn't mean we can co-ordinate them or use them. While in recent times some schools of psychology and self help have come to realize that we are made of many different personalities, they have little idea of how to work with them; indeed it seems that traditional modalities do not really have any techniques in place to coordinate our multiple selves.



Voice Dialogue is revolutionary in that it focuses on the development of the Aware Ego. The Concept of the Aware Ego is Central to the work of Voice Dialogue as developed by Hal Stone PhD and Sidra Stone PhD. It is different from any other school of modern psychology or self help system available today. It focuses on creating an aspect of ourselves which can co-ordinate all the selves and call on them as required.

Voice Dialogue does not work to suppress, integrate or destroy these selves, which ultimately is self defeating since they are all aspects of our make-up and it is rather silly to destroy or disempower our own inner resources. It works to create a coordinating faculty, the Aware Ego, who like a conductor of a vast and unique orchestra can call forth the instruments or groups of instruments as required, keep a balance of “sound” and play to script, so to speak, hence bringing the individual to maturity and allowing him or her to awaken their untapped potential. It is as though at present we are orchestras without conductors, making a terrible racket, some instruments overpowering others, some in the corner refusing to play and nobody knowing the score we are supposed to be working with.

The significance of this development cannot be over-emphasized, through the development of The Aware Ego the individual can not only deal with the negative as-

pects of the suppressed selves, but tap into and use all the resources that are locked within his or her unconscious. In many ways this model takes all of the modern schools of psychology and self help into a totally new domain, not only do we have a working model of consciousness but techniques to access the unconscious mind and co-ordinate its potential for growth.

There are various books on this system including **Embracing Ourselves: The Voice Dialogue Manual** from New World Publishing. This is the core text which outlines the basic theory of Voice Dialogue and will certainly be of interest to both professionals and laymen alike. It is written in a very down to earth manner and hence anyone can use this text to come to a better understanding of themselves.

Integral Naked also has a superb interview with Hal and Sidra Stone: <http://in.integralinstitute.org/talk.aspx?id=842>

For a more detailed biography of Hal and Sidra Stone see <http://www.delos-inc.com>

Hal and Sidra Stone also have a wide range of free articles at the **Reading room** on their site see:
http://www.delos-inc.com/Reading_Room/reading_room.html

Voice Dialogue Australia has a free five day email course in Voice Dialogue followed with monthly information and tips:
<http://www.bodymindinformation.com/index.htm>

In Part Two of this series we will examine **The Voice Dialogue DVD/CD Training Course** in some detail.

Images

- 1: Page from Nag Hammadi Library
- 2 "The alchemist", by Sir William Fettes Douglas, 1853
- 3: Sigmund Freud
- 4: Carl Jung
- 5: Hal and Sidra Stone

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