

## Voice Dialogue:

### Getting Out Of Your Own Way

*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.*

**Steppenwolf** Hermann Hesse

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.*

Isaiah 11.6

*You get a lot more with a kind word and a gun than you do with a kind word alone.*

Irwin Corey

## **eChapter 2.1 - Putt It This Way**

Two friends were playing golf. One was having a bad day and his friend said, as a joke, 'My pet chimpanzee can play better golf than you.' The friend did indeed have a pet chimpanzee. The jibe became an argument, and a bet was made. The next day the chimpanzee was brought to the course to play a one-hole sudden death tournament with the golfer for a prize of \$1,000.

The human teed off and hit a creditable 150 metre drive down the middle of the fairway. The chimp addressed the ball and hit a huge 350 metre drive to within half a metre of the hole.

As the friends surveyed the scene, the human golfer, who had calmed down a lot from the day before, immediately conceded the game and handed his friend the cash. As he was putting his club away, he said, 'We may as well finish this properly. Just get your chimp to pop the ball into the hole.' The chimp's owner gave the chimp the putter. The chimp took it, addressed the ball, and monstered it a further 250 metres.

The purpose of Voice Dialogue is to assist in the development of an Aware Ego, a broader sense of identity than the limited ego we call 'I'. The Aware Ego Process embodies the ability to embrace opposites consciously. The word 'process' signifies that this development is always a work-in-progress. 'Voice' in this context means sub-personality or self or part. Dialogue is there because the facilitator talks to sub-personalities as well as about them.

In Voice Dialogue we don't work with problems we work with people. How Voice Dialogue is applied will depend heavily on the person's initial state of awareness and their specific personality.

When my behaviour does not support my intentions I get in my own way, stopping myself getting to where I wish or need to get. Hence the title of the chapter. Getting out of our own way requires us to find out what are our individual habits and separate from them. This does not mean getting rid of habitual behaviours. It means recognising what we have been doing absent-mindedly, that is, to make conscious what was unconscious. It involves building a bigger set of options in which earlier habits play an important but not an exclusive role. Like acknowledging that a monster drive is very useful in golf and other skills are important too! With an expanded set of options we can respond to a wider set of challenges. We can also initiate change less reactively and more credibly.

'Habit' seems like such an innocuous word; those behaviours we decide to give up on New Year's Day: smoking, eating chips, driving to the shops. In fact habits are much more pivotal than this. By habits I mean all those behaviours we adopt mechanically and over which we actually have no choice.

When somebody responds intellectually most of the time that may be a habit learned long ago and always the first cab off the rank. If somebody reacts strongly to an event by jumping immediately into action that may be a habit. If somebody is unfailingly

courteous that may be a habit carried over from childhood conditioning or strong family rules.

These behaviours may also not be habits. The issue is whether there is choice available.

The developmental process underpinning Voice Dialogue can be expressed in three points:

1. An individual has many selves (also called sub-personalities, parts or voices).
2. We learn early in life to prefer one set of selves over another as they help us survive. These are the habits!
3. Voice Dialogue supports each of us to separate from exclusive identification with one set of selves and access opposite sets of selves consciously while not identifying with either side. The emergent identity is the Aware Ego Process.

## eChapter 2.2 - Enter Through Form: Habits and The Development Of Personality



There was a comedy series on TV many years ago called The Greatest American Hero. The hero in question, a school teacher, was given a suit by aliens and the suit gave him superhuman powers.

Unfortunately, he lost the instruction manual so the series involved him learning by doing with humorous results. We humans are like that. Blessed with great potential but without an instruction manual on how to access it. We take off, fly, wobble and land with a thump. We most often get by but you can bet there is much more to each of us than we know or use.

We are born in a completely vulnerable state. Not for us the instant walk, climb or canter. There is a long period of time during which we are utterly dependent on other people for survival. It is essential that there is a survival strategy that ensures that those individuals who need to care for us actually do. This comprehensive strategy is the development of personality.

Imagine a several weeks old baby, who is hungry and starts to cry. If the baby has a mother who dotes, considers good parenting to be about demand feeding and has the capacity to handle that load, the baby will be held, loved and fed. As the interaction continues with smiles, warmth, hugs, love and attention a pattern is established. Asserting works. The behaviour yields not only milk but love. At this early age the baby is developing an assertive part of her personality as a primary self; that is, as a survival pattern.

A rule is developing 'it's OK to go for what you want', a perspective that sees the world as friendly and supportive may also develop along with other do's and the don'ts.

The opposites of assertive — pleasing, waiting your turn, accommodating to the needs of others — are not being developed. They don't bring love and attention in this example.

Now consider a rather different example. The same baby meets a different environment. The difference is that the parents have a view that control is important and establishing a schedule is vital for the baby's own good. The baby may still cry but the response of the parents is different. There is no response. Or warmth may be replaced by a slight coldness. Crying does not work. Expressing needs does not work. What works is waiting until feeding is offered, and being obedient and grateful. Observing the environment to see how it is evolving also works. In the second case being assertive may become disowned; that is, repressed, and it will not be available to the developing child.

The same dynamic of personality development but different rules.

In the second case being assertive may become disowned; that is, repressed and it will not be available to the developing child. What keeps disowned selves disowned? Initially the control of significant caregivers keeps certain behaviours at bay. At the level of personality development something else happens. Inner control develops in the form of an inner critic.

The inner critic's role is to inhibit the expression of disowned behaviours before they emerge. Better to carry out inner criticism before actual punishments — withdrawal of love, affection and attention or even physical punishment — are applied. The result is that when we behave in ways that are opposite to our survival patterns such behaviour is accompanied by guilt, shame, a general feeling that it is wrong, and also by incompetence, which attracts its own condemnation from outside and inside.

The functioning of the inner critic explains the surprising twist that what starts off as unhelpful or even dangerous becomes bad. From this perspective good and bad are less ethical stances than the results of conditioning. This is not a denial of the importance of ethical behaviour. It's just that ethical behaviour requires we sort out our own motivations more often than we do.

Absent a large disturbance to our lives behaviours persist. As we age primary selves continue to run our lives even as they become less relevant. We have the ability to develop survival strategies as habits but not to unwind them when they are no longer necessary or desirable. Putty starts off pliable but it sets.

We all have the capacity to live lives of purpose, freedom, connection, creativity and joy. Yet we cannot do it from habit. A primary self or a group of them, the operating ego or the explicit ego, expresses conditioned behaviours, values, judgements and rules that were formed in response to our need to survive. We are creatures of habit using the vocabulary of choice. It's a new habit! This fashion in language is harmless if self-deceptive and self-elevating until changes — externally imposed or internally desired — present us with the challenge of accessing different behaviours. This challenge turns out to be too difficult — primary selves can only do what they do — and we are confronted with the vice of our virtues.

Here's a simple table that summarised these developments. The top table shows asserting as primary and pleasing as disowned. The inner critic is carrying out border control.

How I Can Be		
How I Am	Inner Critic	How I Am Not
Assertive		Pleasing
	Vulnerability	

The second table summarises the polar opposite case. Pleasing is primary and assertive is disowned. This critic is still carrying out border control.

How I Can Be		
How I Am	Inner Critic	How I Am Not
Pleasing		Assertive
	Vulnerability	

We discuss vulnerability in depth later. This organisation can change radically as we shall see.

## eChapter 2.3 - The Voice Dialogue Method - an example

The essential feature of the Voice Dialogue Method is inquiry into who is performing actions by interviewing the selves themselves. The initial purpose is to get to know the few key energies, primary selves, which are in charge of our lives and to begin the process of separating from them. This development sees the emergence of an Aware Ego Process, a broader centre of identity which stands between opposites, witnesses them and makes conscious choices.

### Example 1 - an organisational issue



George works in a large organisation and has been chosen to lead a major change project. He is thrilled to have the opportunity to take a department from a hierarchical, authoritarian culture to a team-based culture which values openness and two-way communication. However, George's project has hit a snag.

George's team leaders have no experience of open, collaborative leadership and its members are not responding to the new opportunities as he had envisaged. He has hired a consultant to help him overcome the problem. After an initial round of interviews and some preliminary team development the consultant realises that the new team leaders are out of their depth. They feel overwhelmed, desperate for direction and clear guidance. George, however, does not like to direct people. It reminds him of the autocratic style he is only too pleased to leave behind. George's team members are disappointed that they are letting George down and they are starting to bicker with one another and judge each other silently. Fortunately, George is open to exploring his own leadership style (after all he is open and collaborative).

His primary selves are pleasing, accommodating, accepting, respectful and ambitious. His disowned selves, the parts which are hidden and which George does not realise are part of him at all, are controlling, directing and boundary-setting. We have strong hints of this by the way he judges the old regime harshly.

George's habits are now getting in the way of his performance and he needs to get out of his own way. Yet it is no use advising him to be directive. To correct is incorrect. He does not yet have the capacity to be directive or assertive. The essential step is for George to see that he has a Pleaser who runs much of his life and to separate from the Pleaser. The Pleaser acts to keep people happy. If it appears he has caused discomfort in others his Critic will maul him. If he tried to be directive he would run the risk of the psychological stretch reflex — the primary self rushes back in even more strongly.

After a discussion of the workplace issues and an introduction to the idea of selves the facilitator asks if he can speak with George's Pleaser. In the Voice Dialogue Method a facilitator interviews a client's sub-personalities in order to help the client get to know them and to separate from them. George moves his chair to where the Pleaser sits, a means of talking directly to the self rather than about him.

The summary below captures the essence of the interaction but is not verbatim. An interview like this can easily take an hour.

*Facilitator: Hi, It's good to meet you. Are you the part of George who wants his colleagues to be open and collaborative?*

*Pleaser: Oh yes, that's me. I'm thrilled that I have the chance to move the unit forwards. There used to be so much bullying. People were frightened.*

*F: So George has got you leading the change process at his work. How do you want it to be?*

*Pleaser: I want everybody to be friendly with one another, so that any issues can be brought up, and discussed and resolved in a civilised way. It's a great opportunity. I've already organised a get-together at the weekend. That never happened before.*

*F: How do you prefer George to manage?*

*Pleaser: I want his team to trust him and know they can bring up any issues. Then they will blossom into their full potential. People have been kept down you know. That's a terrible way to treat people!*

*F: George has come here because the team leaders are not doing a good job. I wonder if you know this.*

*Pleaser (looking very concerned) No, not really. I don't know what to say. I really have been working hard and I have never upset anybody.*

*F: It's certainly not your fault. In a way George is being a bit unfair to you. You like to please people. His job has got many parts to it and he is asking you to do them all. But there are things you are not supposed to do; like directing people.*

*Pleaser: No, I certainly don't do that.*

*F: It sounds as though George needs to take responsibility himself and only ask you to do the things you do best. How does that sound?*

*Pleaser: As long as you don't think I have let him down.*

*F: No, I appreciate what you do for him. It's just that there are some things you do not do and George has to do them himself.*

This conversation with the Pleaser is the beginning of a distinction between George and his Pleaser. This conversation continues in the central position. When George started the session it was really George's Pleaser. Even now George is beginning to separate from the Pleaser. The 'George' back in the central position is different from the 'George' (the Pleaser) who started out. George is more thoughtful and more impersonal than a few minutes earlier. Moving back to the central position is the conception of the Aware Ego Process.

The facilitator may pursue many lines: summarising what the Pleaser said, asking George to notice how he is different from the Pleaser, how he perceives differently from the Pleaser and how he moves and sits differently (these features are often very pronounced), going back to the Pleaser to check things out and to consolidate the separation. The facilitator may also find out a lot about the Pleaser's history.

The interaction is not purely cognitive. The essence of Voice Dialogue is energetic though this is difficult to get this across in writing.

Once George has become stable in his separation from the Pleaser the facilitator may find out if there is an opposite part, an energy who may more directive, less personal and less pleasing. This is at least a second session. Let's take up the interaction at this point after George has moved back to the position occupied by the Pleaser. [It is sometimes not necessary and sometimes not advisable to go to an opposite which is a Disowned Self. It takes careful facilitation. There are many ways to proceed.]

*F: (to Pleaser) I wonder if there is somebody else inside George who is different to you, opposite even?*

*Pleaser: Well sometimes he gets very resentful. I never show it though. Is that what you mean?*

*F: Yes. How would it be if we talked to the part who gets resentful?*

*Pleaser: Well, (hesitant), I suppose it's OK but what will happen? I mean if he starts being resentful all the time nobody will like him.*

*F: The point is certainly not to do that. It is to make him aware of his possibilities so he can make better choices. You will always feature prominently in his choices. How about this, after I've spoken to the other side I'll come back to you and get your responses?*

*Pleaser: Yes (relieved), that sounds good. He can't do without me you know.*

It is important to get the Pleaser's permission for this step. George moves back to the central position then moves his chair to a different position which in this case is on the other side of the central position. This part of George sits forward in the chair. He makes very clear eye contact and projects a strong, almost combative, energetic connection.

*F: Hi, You seem very different from the other side.*

*Assertive/Angry Voice: Well thank Christ I'm out. I can't tell you how angry I am. I've been locked up in a cellar for so long having to watch that wimp (gestures to where the Pleaser sits) bumble along being so sweet! He makes me sick!*

*[This rush of energy is common in an initial meeting with a disowned self as the frustration of not being consulted comes out. Eventually, this will subside. It does mean that the Primary Self will be getting worried.]*

*F: How long have you been locked up?*

*Assertive Voice: Most of his life — a life sentence!*

*F: (picking up on the word 'most' rather than 'all'): Were you ever in his life?*

*Assertive Voice: Yes I was. In fact I was him for the first three years of his life. Then I had to go.*

*F: What happened when he was three?*

*Assertive Voice: He had a baby sister and she was his parents' favourite. He had to be kind to her and not get angry or rough. He had to share. Yuk! His parents were very unhappy with him — well with me I suppose.*

*[Here we come to the heart of the disowning process. Being assertive and selfish were unwelcome and had to be disowned.]*

*F: Could you help George with his problems at his work?*

*Assertive Voice: How could I not?! Let's start with his team leaders. Some of them are out of their depth. They just need clear instructions on what to do next. It's not a crime to tell people when they don't know.*

*Then there's his second-in-charge. He needs a good slap. He is just refusing to change. He needs an ultimatum. Shape up or ship out!*

*And his boss. George just says yes all the time even when he gets given an impossible job. He needs a bigger budget to do this job and I would simply give his boss that information. That other guy can't do that.*

*F: What else could you do?*

*Assertive Voice (warming to the task): I could really help him with his kids. They walk all over him. He's so intent on keeping them happy that he can't say no. He lends them money and they even borrow his car without asking. Can you imagine that? I would set things straight very quickly.*

The point of this conversation, which can clearly go on with great benefit for a long time, is not to make George a 'make my day' tough guy, an exclusively assertive

leader. Pleasers oil the mechanisms of society. They are essential, especially when they can be accessed through an Aware Ego Process. Flipping does not bring liberation! The purpose is to give George some choices in his organisational life and more widely in his whole life. The facilitator, as promised, talks to the Pleaser again.

*F: I wanted to make sure I talked to you again and George hears what you have to say. And I won't go back to that other voice today. What did you think about what he has to say?*

*Pleaser: Well, if George behaved like that it would be awful! He would destroy everything. It would just be like it was when he started. But I did like a couple of things he had to say. I tried to help the two most junior team leaders but it didn't work. Maybe George can talk a bit more directly and help them. As long as he didn't criticise them.*

*F: It would be hard for you to help the team leaders, You don't give instructions and are not supposed to. It will be better if George himself gives advice and tells them what to do.*

*Pleaser: But George can't do it either!*

*F: That's right. George won't be able to do it he until he separates from you. (The Pleaser is very quiet). You still still play a large role in his life and George will still listen to you.*

*Pleaser: I feel very relieved to hear that. George can't live without me.*

*F: And he doesn't need to. He just needs to have an assertive energy turn up on the occasions he needs it.*

*Pleaser: In that case he could help with George's kids. I try but they don't listen. And one of them is becoming quite a bully. I don't like that at all.*

*F: Let's go back to George now.*

George to return to the central position.

*F: How do you feel?*

*G: Extraordinary. My head is very quiet. Most often there is a barrage of conflicting commentary going on. And I'm getting a different perspective on many issues that would have been impossible a short time ago.*

The central position, the Aware Ego Process has the ability to access or embrace opposite selves. It is the most important part in the whole experience. The facilitator would spend some time helping George stabilise the Aware Ego Process, from which he can sense and feel the opposite energies. He would help George understand that the Pleaser and the Assertive part are neither good nor bad. They are both choices that may be made and channelled through this central position, the Aware Ego. He would also spend a lot of time making the distinction between accessing new voices in a safe, learning environment and in his workplace. It will take work and time before George can reliably access the Assertive Part in many settings.

George's developmental process came to a halt early in life with the Pleaser and Pleasers don't lead, or at least they lead with an eye on how it is going down. It is ineffective and frustrating (for both people) to coach, persuade or cajole a person identified with pleasing to be assertive.

In the same way an individual identified with pushing finds it very difficult to relax, a person identified with thinking will be unable to get in touch with their feelings, and an intuitive will not focus on detailed plans. What is needed is to assist the person to relax their identification with only one part of themselves as if it were all of them. The initial step is for the person to see what they have been doing absent-mindedly.

Eventually, George will not be destabilised easily. If a difficult team situation arises he will combine accommodation and direction as he sees fit. If his boss makes an impossible request he can calmly and authoritatively discuss the consequences and suggest alternatives. If he is destabilised it will lead to learning.

The resolution of many issues is simply too difficult until an Aware Ego Process is ignited. Our perceptions remain distorted, there is misdiagnosis, projection, and essential abilities remain latent. The way forward is to retain our strengths and add abilities we may never have developed. It is a move from 'either/or' to 'and'.

## **eChapter 2.4 - Metaphors For The Aware Ego Process**

A metaphor is worth a thousand words. Here are a few that suggest the nature of the Aware Ego Process.

### **The Native American Life Walk**

The Native American Life Walk envisages the first half of our life as walking along an expanding spiral, dropping things off as we go. At the halfway point we turn around and move back along the same spiral, picking up those things we have set down.

This rather eloquent statement of the consciousness process shows us disowning those parts of our potential, which were too difficult to express. Our job is to pick them up again and integrate them into our identity and our life.

### **Orchestra**

In an orchestra the role of the conductor is important. She carries no instrument and makes no sound. From a conductor's point of view all instruments are good, the point is to play music beautifully. You can also bring to mind the cacophony prior to performance and the harmony during it. (Even when we disown many parts of ourselves they often assert themselves in constant inner commentary while we are behaving in other ways.)

### **A Team Meeting**

An organisational image is the management team meeting, complete with a large table. Think of a meeting you have attended dominated by one person, the CFO, say. The CEO is under his or her sway. Other points of view do not get heard. The decision is the one the CFO prefers. This may lead to distorted decision-making, based on limited information and consultation. It certainly leads to resentment and frustration.

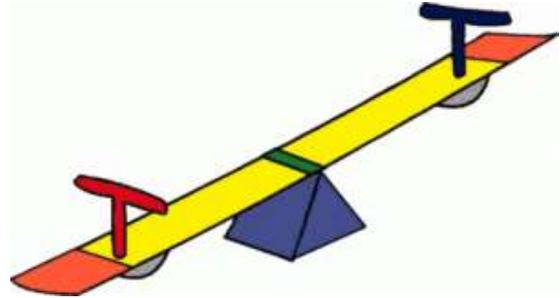
In a functional meeting the chairperson makes sure all points of view are heard. After there has been a full consideration of all the relevant issues the chairperson makes a decision, delegating actions and allocating resources. It is not necessary that all team members agree with one another or with the decision — agreement and compliance are not the same thing - but a wise chairperson will listen to dissent.

We have a management team on the inside. When we listen only to the loudest voices the primary selves are dominating the inner meeting and making the decisions. Dissenting voices — the disowned selves — are censored or suppressed.

An Aware Ego Process allows us to listen to more information and opinions (from the inside and from the outside). Decisions are often different and have a different quality to them.

## Seesaw

Do you remember the game we played on a seesaw? If you stand in the middle and walk towards one end the seesaw tips towards that end. It stops when it hits the ground. You may get thrown off! However, kids are resourceful. You can get very nimble at this game. With one foot either side of the fulcrum you merely shift your weight a little and the seesaw moves controllably. A highly unstable system is converted into a stable one when we acquire the sensitivity to control it.



## eChapter 2.5 - Embracing Opposites



In the next few sections I go into more detail about opposites, vulnerability, awareness and explore the Aware Ego Process more deeply.

Many books are written on opposites. In the example of George pleasing and assertiveness are key opposites. There are many pairs of opposites. Many people specialise on one side of personal energy or impersonal energy. Some people are big picture thinkers while others do detail. Some people really push and drive while others relax.

There are more general categories that contain many members. There are sets of achieving selves and relating selves. Achieving selves (such as pushing and thinking) help us achieve in the world while relating selves emphasise connection.

A canonical pair is power and vulnerability. Power allows us to get things done. Vulnerability in this sense is about openness and connection and is not goal-oriented at all. Another example involves the opposites of mind and heart or thinking and linking. When I look into the eyes of our dog, Missy, I fall into the deepest pools of pure connection. This is linking. When you look at that wonderful ice dance performances of Torvill and Dean that is linking. Balancing thinking and linking or mind and heart leads to radical changes in our views of the world (and here I mean perceptions as well as interpretations) and experiences in it.

## **eChapter 2.6 - Vulnerability**

Vulnerability is one of our most repressed and therefore least understood experiences. It is our intrinsic openness, sensitivity and connection. The experience of vulnerability at birth is very close to whatever is beyond our individual lives, maybe life itself. Even as we develop and age vulnerability is still the doorway to the soul but the door is often very difficult to find, and the primary selves have an interest in keeping it locked.



Vulnerability does not have boundaries. Vulnerability is carried by an inner Vulnerable Child who has an extremely fine-tuned sensitivity to people's moods and is able to detect slight changes in the atmosphere around us. It is the part in us that enables us to be intimate with others. It is also very shy.

Our remembered contacts with vulnerability may be associated with woundedness, pain and humiliation. When you have not experienced vulnerability consciously it is most often thought of as victimhood. The Vulnerable Child is easily hurt. When he or she gets hurt it is because it is a child, not because it experiences openness, sensitivity and connection. Our early development is often designed to build the boundaries and defences we need to survive physically and psychologically.

It is important to reclaim our vulnerability and our contact with the vulnerable child in the course of the inner work we do. For the most part mainstream discussions of vulnerability regard it as a problem to be solved (it is really those parts of us which are in charge that regard vulnerability as a problem). Actually, vulnerability is an experience not to be missed. It is sensitivity not weakness.

A samurai is walking through the woods on a moonless night. He senses the presence of another samurai and raises his sword. Suddenly he can no longer sense the other samurai and he knows he is about to die.

### **Consequences of disowning vulnerability**

When vulnerability is disowned we do not protect it consciously and the vulnerable child still gets hurt, even though we are unaware of it. The plans we make, the strategies we employ, the behaviours we demonstrate and the way we relate are more dependent on protecting vulnerability than we know. This has serious consequences over a whole range of life issues.

### **Illness**

When we have strong pushers the urge to overwork is strong. Keeping busy and doing lots of things is a useful way of avoiding contact with vulnerability. We ignore tiredness and wear the neglect as a badge of honour. We can get over-tired, stressed out and sick. The experience of vulnerability when it is disowned can be frightening and anxiety-making which may even lead to us burying our concerns under even

more work. Yet injuries to vulnerability continue to occur. Disowning is no longer the same as protection.

### **Lack of intimacy**

The strong parts of our personality often stand between us and our deeper contact with other people; they are supposed to. Relationships which lack intimacy tend to waste away; the relationship may still be there but the intimate contact is not. Knowing about our vulnerability and being willing to share it are essential to ongoing richness in relationship.

### **The politico-corporate-media circus**

There is no clearer example of the perils of disowned vulnerability than our reactions to the politico-corporate-media circus. Spin doctors in politics, media and advertising are experts in manipulating us through disowned vulnerability. First they make us anxious and afraid of being inferior, unloved or attacked. Then they give us the solution — their solution: everything from toothpaste to deodorants to giving up civil rights to support the fight against terrorism to outright invasion of other countries.

If you know about your vulnerability you can take care of it consciously. Otherwise, it will be cared for unconsciously or automatically by others.

This state of affairs, being competent in the world through burying vulnerability, has a shelf life (if we are lucky). When the use-by date is up Voice Dialogue is the go-to technique.

## eChapter 2.7 - The Pivotal Role of Awareness



The development of an Aware Ego Process depends pivotally on awareness. Awareness is also called mindfulness, non-judgemental awareness, the witness or just paying attention.

Awareness is the ability to observe without judgement or a call to action, to adopt a neutral perspective with respect to one's life, to be neutral in observation. The very idea that there can be watching without judgement is extremely novel for many people.

A torch beam is a useful analogy: it illuminates without reaction. Another one is standing on a bridge watching the river flow underneath. A third one is a projector screen that accepts all films yet is unchanged by the films themselves. A by no means final one is a window that allows sunlight through without deviation. Prior to the emergence of awareness we have experiences, notice them and sometimes reflect on them. These activities are done by the primary selves. This is not what I mean by awareness though it is difficult to see that until awareness itself arises. The mind, a primary self for most of us, observes incessantly. Additionally, many of us are brought up not to judge. We identify habitually with a strong accepting voice. With these Primary Selves the person will often refuse to judge, finding it frightening and 'wrong'. This is also not awareness, just identification with one side of a polarity - accepting - and repression of judgement and reaction.

The first step in the development of awareness is often the conscious, deliberate development of a witness or a witness state. We intentionally develop the capacity to attend, a new tool. At this stage it is natural to say there is a witness or that I am developing mindfulness. It's like a new personal quality. This opens up the possibility of several new kinds of insight and action.

- We begin to witness the primary selves, as well as their behaviours. This means we can let the contents of experience be. Seeing the rules rather than being the rules provides a breathing space for control and correction to subside and curiosity to develop.
- This transitional arrangement allows a virtuous circle to develop as awareness, curiosity and innovation (as new options in moving, sensing, thinking and feeling become available) co-evolve.

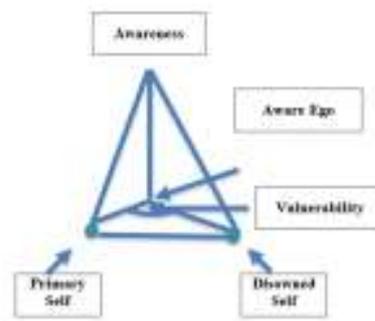
We continue a discussion of awareness in the next section.

## eChapter 2.8 - Exit From Form: the Aware Ego Process

In Voice Dialogue the facilitator is assisting the client to continue the development of the provisional ego as an Aware Ego, a broader sense of identity. For example, George is learning to position his Pleaser in a broader sense of identity which includes assertiveness.

The building blocks of Voice Dialogue, summarised in earlier sections, can be brought together into a simple conceptual system. The diagram below shows this simple structure. The opposites are called Primary Self and Disowned Self. For example, thinking and feeling or doing and being but there are many, many possibilities. The Aware Ego Process allows us to accommodate both in an expanded sense of self.

There is a fifth element, linkage, not shown in the diagram. As one's degree of separation from the world diminishes linkage with other humans, with other sensate forms, indeed with the world, seen and unseen, begins to develop.



The golden Buddha is a rhetorical device to show the connection between the Aware Ego Process and a more traditional symbol of wholeness. The awareness looks on without wavering, the vulnerability is held with great gentleness in both hands, and the embrace of the opposites forms a base, which is not easily destabilised. The purpose of Voice Dialogue as I have expressed it is the development of an Aware Ego.

The Aware Ego Process takes on several roles at different stages of our development. At first it releases us from the grip of the explicit ego, the habits that define 'I'.

Spiritual traditions often emphasise another dimension of development. These approaches define the limitation, the distortion, as the ego itself, whether functional or not. So the ego becomes the barrier that is holding us back not the solution to the barrier that is holding us back. At a later stage the Aware Ego Process allows us to be freed from the grip of ego itself; not free from ego, as the sense of self does not disappear, but free from exclusive identification with a separate sense of self. The Aware Ego Process also plays a very important role during those episodes in which we drift into an encompassing awareness and then fall out of it and have no idea what has happened or what to do about it.

The essential issue is that once we identify with an ego we experience ourselves as separate from the (rest of the) world whereas we are actually not. Ego development is simultaneous with the creation of apparent duality, the experience of an objective

world 'out there' and a subjective world 'in here'. All the lesser dualities are offspring of this duality. The Aware Ego is a significant step to removing or diluting these barriers and is an elegant summary of even more.

To go further in terms of the model and actual individual development it is useful to see awareness as encircling, as a sphere (ensphering), all the activities which take place within it. It may be just beyond my draughtsmanship skills. But I am not so sure. The Aware Ego Process, from this broader perspective is an expression of the ability to acknowledge form, formlessness and the One which is both and is beyond both. The diagram might then represent individuals awakening to their true nature, watching form arising from formlessness; individual consciousness recognised not as separate but as one centre of many through which the divine as divine explores its own infinite nature and expresses its infinite creativity. This is divine relativity.

Some nice physical models help to see this: the dispersion of white light through a prism produces colours - a rainbow. White light passing through a slit produces diffraction: patterns emerge where there were none. Schrödinger, the great physicist, influenced by Eastern views on the fundamental nature of reality, was clear that his formulation of quantum physics, the wave equation, had room for potential but indeterminate outcomes and actual, specific outcomes once there was somebody to observe them.

## eChapter 2.9 - Judgement

Even an introductory chapter on Voice Dialogue would be seriously incomplete without a section on judgement because, rather than a characteristic that must be suppressed or eradicated it is a royal road to consciousness.

The simple truth is that our primary selves judge our disowned selves when we see them in others.



They can judge harshly. It is this behaviour that often gets us into trouble with our friends these days as judgement is to be condemned (pardon the irony) or met with the charge of hypocrisy (as our friends notice that we do the very same thing).

I want to focus in this brief section on another manifestation of judgement as it provides an easier guide to progress. Sometimes we judge another person very positively, so positively in fact that we start to feel inadequate. This combination is a sure guide of a disowned self. It is the inner critic this time who does the comparison and finds us wanting.

An example being worth a thousand analyses I can summarise one of my own.

Many years ago when I was working in London the Tate Gallery put on a Picasso exhibition. I was just starting to feel the power of Picasso's art and took myself off one lunchtime to see it. For twenty minutes I was thrilled, astounded, mesmerised. Then I started to feel a little sad. I persisted.

After 45 minutes I had to leave depressed and distressed.

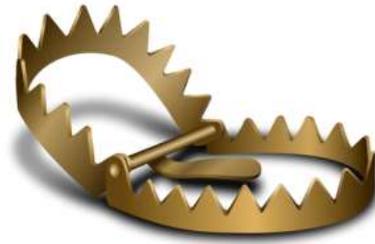
What was this about? I loved and love Picasso. I was beginning my career as an economist and was fully identified with rationality. Passion, emotion, love, instinctuality, spontaneity - all the foci of Picasso's work - were foreign to me; that is, disowned. So I was feeling more worthless by the minute as I saw the fruits of his expression.

I didn't have to become a painter to embody these qualities. I did need to honour them in myself. As I carried out this transformation I could call on these qualities as appropriate. I can also look at Picasso with great admiration without feeling ill!

And by the way embracing does not mean acting out. It is access to a wider identity that counts not flipping to the other side.

## eChapter 2.10 - Some Traps For The Unwary

The Aware Ego Process is subtle and intriguing, conceptually and experientially. It can be misunderstood.



- The Aware Ego Process is the unfolding of consciousness. It is not a self, a part, a voice or a sub-personality. It is the process of standing between opposites that may eventually lead to standing beyond opposites.
- In Voice Dialogue, a technology for awakening, we find out who we are by finding out who we are not. It is not essential, though it may be useful, to be prescriptive on the nature of ultimate reality. Voice Dialogue offers an invitation to find out for ourselves.
- I can have an Aware Ego Process with respect to one set of opposites and no Aware Ego Process with respect to another pair of opposites. I may have lived much of my life identified with the Pleaser (In fact I did). When I separate from him, and develop an ability to set some boundaries I have an Aware Ego Process relative to the pleaser/boundary setter pair of opposites. If I am still identified with the mind honouring feelings may still be difficult. There will be no Aware Ego Process in that dimension.
- An Aware Ego Process can disappear. The process of conscious coordination often does disappear. If my vulnerability is injured and I do not notice my primary selves will rush in to fulfil their time-honoured task of looking after me when I cannot. I may see this happening, or more likely will see it afterwards. I will need to separate once again from my primary selves to re-establish an Aware Ego Process.
- The Aware Ego can live with ambiguity. There is no need to reconcile opposites. Inner diversity is inner diversity. Reconciliation, a creative synthesis, may take place but it is not necessary. Living through an Aware Ego Process is so dynamic and creative that many shifts can happen. An Aware Ego is able to hold the tension of the opposites.
- An Aware Ego has no agenda. If there is no longer a right decision there is also no longer a wrong decision.
- If you think you have an Aware Ego you probably don't. To 'have' an Aware Ego Process means to be in touch with both sides. To be in an Aware Ego Process is to feel the energies of both sides, honour them, make choices, and to take disappointed selves with you.
- An Aware Ego Process is in touch with vulnerability. Vulnerability is characterised by a sense of openness and sensitivity. Therefore, intuition is available. It is also in touch with awareness, so it stands on the threshold between the space of consciousness and the contents of consciousness.

## eChapter 2.11 - Voice Dialogue and the Spiritual Path



The evolution of consciousness sometimes proceeds by spiritual experiences. 'Spiritual' refers to the formless, absolute, unchanging dimension of reality and when used in this sense it is opposite to form, the relative, changing part of reality. It is common to fall into a trap of finding one to be more significant than the other.

The Aware Ego Process is very helpful here as it embodies the principle that there is no need to choose one or the other side of a polarity, or to establish a hierarchy or indeed to demand reconciliation. The spiritual path may then become the development of an expanded sense of identity, which can dance with form and formlessness.

When people have begun to experience presence, awakening or enlightenment it will in all probability be partial and episodic. A sense of elation can be followed by a sense of disappointment. There may be the sense that 'it' needs to be found again, and a frustration that comes from realising that the search is not working; even as it is realised that searching is in itself a characteristic of separation. None of these reactions signify a fall from stillness. In fact there is no experience that can invalidate our true nature. There is only ever a perceived or apparent separation from stillness. Disappointment and frustration arise in stillness but that is scant comfort at the time!

Hafiz writes exquisitely about these experiences.

### **My Sweet Crushed Angel**

You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
Trying to hold hands with the Beautiful One.  
You have waltzed with great style,  
My sweet, crushed angel,

To have ever neared God's Heart at all.  
Our Partner is notoriously difficult to follow,  
And even His best musicians are not always easy to hear.

So what if the music has stopped for a while.  
So what, if the price of admission to the Divine  
Is out of reach tonight.  
So what, my dear,  
If you do not have the ante to gamble for Real Love.  
The mind and the body are famous  
For holding the heart ransom,  
But Hafiz knows the Beloved's eternal habits.  
Have patience,

For He will not be able to resist your longing  
For long.  
You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
Trying to kiss the Beautiful One.  
You have actually waltzed with tremendous style,  
O my sweet,  
O my sweet, crushed angel.

A fascinating issue is what primary selves do with a spiritual experience. A moment of enlightenment is easily co-opted to expand and strengthen the very rules the ego lives by. The mind will be tempted to be wise, the control side to impose rules, the pleaser to be very accepting of diversity, the pusher to devise training methods and a centre, the world server to provide compassionate assistance to all.

A Voice Dialogue facilitator can assist the client to sit in awareness, to acknowledge that the Aware Ego Process involves standing between formlessness and form, that presence is not the opposite to anything, certainly not action and certainly not sadness. Indeed awareness is presence once awareness is no longer attached by an umbilical cord to the ego experiencing itself as separate. Then awareness is no longer claimed as 'mine'.

The client also notices that there is still plenty of undigested provisional ego to explore; especially separating from the primary selves who have commandeered/co-opted the spiritual experience!

### **Example - A Surprising Synchronicity**

The Aware Ego Process is often assisted by dreams. When one's identity boundary connects rather than separates information can come from anywhere. Here is a dream of a client that trued up his development in very synchronistic circumstances.

The dreamer (the name for the character in the dream who takes the role of 'I') is arriving at the airport. A parcel had been left for him to pick up and as he does he is arrested. The parcel has drugs in it although this was not known by the dreamer. He is put in detention immediately. His clothes are taken and he is given prison garb and a blanket. He is taken into a long room where he is to be interviewed. At a desk on the other side of the room is the woman who is going to interview him. She is very, very busy, and does not acknowledge him. Throughout the whole day he is not summoned for an interview. He gets more and more anxious.

On the second day he is still not summoned. He sits in his chair and waits. He begins to form an idea: if he can gain liberation even in detention he will be free. There is no confinement for an enlightened person. He enters into a deeply introspective state and begins to inhabit a being state, a presence in which his anxiety disappears, he is not waiting and wondering if and when he will be called. On the third day it is the same but deeper. He is without concern.

At this point the dream ends and the client wakes. It was a powerful dream and he is still very much identified with the dreamer. He has had awakening experiences before and this time it is very strong.

The client goes to his laptop. He has a teleconference scheduled for the morning. There are two emails one from each of the participants that say they don't know about the teleconference and have no record of making an appointment. He is uncomprehending about how this could have occurred and embarrassed. He looks through his past emails and they are right — there is no record of the appointment!

Then it hit him. As he woke up he was identified with one part of the dream, the liberated part. But there is no liberation from one side of a polarity. He had completely ignored the hard-working woman who kept her head down, filling in forms, taking phone calls and carrying out interviews. The structure of the dream give a very strong hint that the woman 'over there' is a disowned self, so it is no surprise that he identified with the blissful self which seemed to hold the key to enlightenment. The emails showed him how much he needed to honour that doing part! Liberation is not withdrawing from the world in a trance state, however, powerful and however blissful. It honours form too.

The emails were being written in other countries and time zones as he was dreaming. How did a dream and an experience on the internet collude to produce a powerful lesson for him? I don't know but let us not get distracted. His powerful experiences, one blissful, the other embarrassing, were enough to wake him up. He can continue to embrace form and formlessness as the play of consciousness continues in his life.

## **eChapter 2.12 - Unfinished Threads and Loose Ends**

The purpose of this chapter has been to summarise a method, Voice Dialogue, for the development of the Aware Ego Process. There is hardly an area in life it does not illuminate. In the second part of the book I use the Aware Ego Process for exploring health, relating, organisational and leadership issues and climate change.



Voice Dialogue, being experiential, is compatible with a psycho-spiritual approach to consciousness, the emerging science of neuroplasticity and the emerging evidence of epigenetics.