



*Hellerwork Ink interviewed Miriam Dyak, Voice Dialogue facilitator from Seattle, senior staff member at Delos, Hal and Sidra Stone's training center, and author of *The Voice Dialogue Facilitator's Handbook, Part I*, published in February, 1999.*

VOICE DIALOGUE FACILITATION: *Exploring New Ground*

Interview with Miriam Dyak, of Seattle,
Washington, USA, by Hellerwork Ink

HW Ink: We hear that Voice Dialogue has really changed in the last few years—what are some of the most significant new developments in the work?

MD: I can think of three really big changes. The first one is a major rethinking of the structure of Voice Dialogue facilitation itself, one that puts the fundamental focus of the work on the development of the Aware Ego process. In fact where we used to talk about “The Psychology of Selves,” we now talk about “The Psychology of the Aware Ego.” We’ve moved away from spending a lot of time exploring the experience of the selves and now hold that exploration in a larger context. If I talk with a client’s Responsible Self, for example, my reason for doing so is to help my client separate from that primary Responsible Self and develop an Aware Ego in relation to it. I’m talking with the self, but I’m doing it to support the Aware Ego, not just for the sake of experiencing the energy of the self. And then, because my focus is on the Aware Ego, I would spend a lot of time talking with the client in the Aware Ego place, helping him/her to become more familiar with functioning in the Aware Ego. A goal of the work then becomes—and this is a second big change—teaching the Aware Ego how to gracefully manage and balance the energies of the selves. A third important development is a stronger focus on separating from the primary selves and a de-emphasis on working with disowned energies, especially in the beginning of the work.

HW Ink: It sounds as if Voice Dialogue facilitation is still essentially the same, but working with the Aware Ego process has deepened and become more grounded.

MD: The essential nature of Voice Dialogue is still the same, but we now have many more years of experience to help us see what works well and what doesn’t. Hal and Sidra Stone, the creators of Voice Dialogue, have found that the emergence of the Aware Ego is the essential core of the work, and changes that come through exploring the selves won’t really hold without that. Without an Aware Ego, there is nothing (or nobody) available to make use of the information provided by working with the subpersonalities. Without an Aware Ego we are completely reliant on our operating ego (the central group of primary selves that forms our personality), and decision-making sooner or later reverts to these dominant primary selves. In other words, we’ve found that it’s not enough to initiate an Aware Ego process, we have to spend real time in the Aware Ego and create a new habit of using an Aware Ego if we expect it to be available to us outside of a Voice Dialogue session in our daily lives.

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HW Ink: What you're saying is true of creating changes in the body too. This is why in Hellerwork we emphasize the subject's developing new habits of centeredness, balance and self-awareness, so that they can create new patterns of living which support and hold the changes that Hellerwork makes in the physical body.

MD: That's an excellent analogy. We may come at it from different angles, one from the starting point of the body and the other from the starting point of the psyche, but we're concerned with the same question: How do we integrate and ground change in ourselves? How do we create real evolution rather than just a lot of dramatic upheaval that may ultimately revert back to the same old patterns? The third significant development in Voice Dialogue work that I mentioned, that of putting a lot more emphasis on separating from the primary selves and not working directly with the disowned selves, has a lot to do with avoiding this kind of disruptive upheaval in the psyche, and instead working quietly to support the shift into a functioning Aware Ego. We've realized over time that approaching the disowned selves directly (at least at the beginning of the work), can be very counter-productive. This is a significant modification in Voice Dialogue work that has greatly enhanced both its effectiveness and its safety. While it can be very interesting and exciting to explore lots of different energies, bringing out deeply disowned parts can make the primary selves very uncomfortable and resistant. Worse yet, it often creates what we call a "primary self backlash." By keeping our focus on working closely with the primary selves and creating clear separation through Aware Ego work, we strengthen the subject's ability to perceive and experience their everyday reality through the Aware Ego place rather than by reacting directly through the selves. This can make a really big difference in the way we go through life—after all, we already have a huge amount of experience living life from the somewhat restricted viewpoint of one self or another and of being bounced back and forth between them. What comes out of focusing on the development of an Aware Ego process is a new ability to create an ever-widening space at center where we can have real choice about what energies to include in our personal expression and when to use them.

HW Ink: I know that the Aware Ego develops in relation to opposites. How do you manage to create separation from these opposites if you only facilitate primary selves and avoid working with the disowned selves?

MD: That's a rich question that has quite a few answers. Let me begin by saying we've found that we can often approach the disowned energies more easily, safely, and effectively from the protection and centeredness of the Aware Ego place. For example, you might work with a client who has a very strong "nice person," a Pleaser, who doesn't ever allow them to express any irritation with people much less any outright anger or rage. Let's say this client is a woman and we'll call her Jill—just because it's easier to talk about a real person with a name. The stress of being nice all the time may

show up in Jill's body, it may show up in her dreams. It's very likely that it will show up as Jill's disowned anger outprojected on a friend or partner or child who is angry all the time. The primary self—the Pleaser—is not going to like it at all if you ask to talk with some part of Jill that is really angry. The Pleaser has been doing everything it can to keep what it perceives to be dangerous (anger) suppressed, stored in the body, projected out onto others, or confined to the Unconscious. But, after separating from the Pleaser in the Voice Dialogue work, it becomes possible for Jill to connect with its opposite disowned self through the Aware Ego, feeling the anger (at a distance) without having to risk going fully into that energy.

Another way to facilitate opposites without threatening the primary selves is to work with opposite primary selves. Most people tend to think of opposites as extreme polarizations of each other, but actually opposites exist along an entire continuum of energy so that some “opposites” are in less extreme contrast to each other than others. These less severe polarizations are easier to approach in Voice Dialogue work because they are allowed into the primary self system while the extreme ones are outcasts. If you continue working with Jill, you may find that even though her Pleaser doesn't want her to even think about getting angry at people, she is able in certain situations to take a very strong stand in defense of others, sticking up for a child or a friend in an unfair situation. A certain amount of righteous indignation is allowed in Jill as long as it's for a good cause and not at all selfish. Helping Jill to separate from her Pleaser and from its less extreme opposite, the part that defends others, can quite amazingly loosen up the tension between the Pleaser and the deeply disowned angry part(s) as well. You might think about it like the trim tab on a rudder of a large ship—the trim tab is a tiny little rudder that is easy to move and as a result the giant rudder begins to move easily as well. But if you were to try to move the big rudder directly you'd meet a huge amount of resistance.

There is a near magical quality in this more subtle way of working. You do what may seem to be a rather ordinary facilitation with a part that isn't such a big threat to the primary self system, and you find that it helps profoundly to disengage a much more deeply disowned energy further down on the continuum of opposites—and this is without even having to approach the difficult or dangerous energy directly. By working gently and gradually on the edges of the disowned territory in this way (instead of plunging in to the deep end of the pool), we honor the concerns of the primary selves and we also strengthen the Aware Ego process at the same time. When the work develops to the point where the primary selves begin to relax and to trust the Aware Ego to start taking care of some of their responsibilities, then it becomes easier and more effective to approach the disowned selves.

HW Ink: So you do eventually work with the disowned selves?

MD: Eventually we do, but only if doing so is organic to the process and contributes to the unfoldment of the Aware Ego. I usually let the Unconscious direct the work in this area—I let the subject's dreams or events

in their life tell me when it's okay to approach a disowned self. I think that practitioners in many modalities follow this same wisdom. Certainly I've experienced the extraordinary effect of a skilled bodyworker whose hands really "listen" to my body, respect the armoring (the primary selves) and then are able to work to release that armoring when the timing is right. I've also, unfortunately, experienced the opposite approach where someone has been determined to break through my tension and force me to let go. Of course that can be very traumatic—and often our protection just gets stronger.

HW Ink: I imagine from my own experience that being able to work in the kind of intuitive or "tuned in" way that you are talking about has a lot to do with the second development in Voice Dialogue that you mentioned, learning to manage and balance energy. Could you talk more about this aspect of the work?

MD: I would be delighted to because I personally find this to be the most exciting part of Voice Dialogue facilitation. The other aspects we've been discussing are essential because they give us the means to work more effectively with the Psychology of the Aware Ego and the Voice Dialogue method. However, working with energetics and training the Aware Ego to manage energy takes us beyond learning to be better facilitators and gives all of us, facilitator and subject alike, the means to live and relate on a deeper level in the world.

One aspect of learning to manage energy grows directly out of the work with the selves and the Aware Ego. In facilitating the selves, we have the subject physically move into a subpersonality. When the subject moves to another spot in the room and becomes say a Responsible Father, or an Inner Critic, or an Adventurer, what actually happens is that they move into the energy of that inner self. This is a wonderful process for initiating a separation from self, but it's hard to use in real life. If you're in an important business meeting, for example, you can't really say, "Excuse me while I move to another chair and go into my entrepreneur self." Instead you need to be able to call in the energy you need, bring it in to you, instead of having to go out to find it. A lot of the new Voice Dialogue work focuses on teaching people how to do this -- how to be aware of your different selves/energies, how to invite those energies in when you want and need them, and how to adjust their energetic "volume" appropriately to a particular life situation. When we learn to do this, we have much easier access to our inner selves and much more mastery of our energetic expression. The more I can consciously regulate my own energy and channel the energies of the selves through an Aware Ego, the less I have to fear that some part of me will come in and unexpectedly take over or that another part of me won't be available when I need its energy to act effectively in a particular situation.

HW Ink: How do we manage our energy in relationship with other people?

MD: That's the other area of energetics where the Stones have really broken

new ground. Their earlier work on bonding patterns, the way our selves interact in relationship, has taught us all so much about the way relationships are created and how they play out. Their new understanding of “linkage,” the underlying energetic connection that can enliven all human interactions, really gives us a picture of the “invisible” part of relationship, the energy that is behind our actions and words. Becoming aware of linkage (or the lack of it) and learning to link consciously through the Aware Ego (instead of just experiencing energetic connection and disconnection through the selves) makes it possible for us to be deeply intimate with others and at the same time maintain healthy boundaries. Being aware of linkage is a real eye-opener for everyone, or perhaps we could say that it lets us see a whole new layer of reality in relationships that was previously invisible. I think this is especially essential for all of us who work as Voice Dialogue facilitators and Hellerwork practitioners, because the quality of linkage, of energetic connection we have with our clients profoundly affects the depth of the work we do.

HW Ink: Do you talk about the energy dynamics between practitioner and client in your new book, and can you tell us a little bit about what *The Voice Dialogue Facilitator’s Handbook* contributes to Voice Dialogue work?

MD: Thank you for asking. Definitely, a big focus in *The Voice Dialogue Facilitator’s Handbook* is on the energetic relationship between facilitator and subject. The book is full of sample facilitations and in each one I’ve endeavored to describe the energetic shifts, the body changes, the silences, the way the energy in the whole room changes, as well as the words that are spoken. I’ve already had very positive responses to this from practitioners in other modalities as well as in Voice Dialogue—people are excited to finally have descriptions of an incredibly important part of working with people, something that they were often able to feel but perhaps didn’t have the language to describe. I think another important contribution of *The Handbook* is that it is really the first text written specifically for the facilitator, for the practitioner—I wrote it so we would all have something to refer to after the trainings, something designed to anchor and expand our understanding of facilitation and examine the challenges of doing this work. *The Handbook* outlines the ground rules of Voice Dialogue work, it explores energetics in depth, and it illustrates all the different structural components of the work—what happens in a Voice Dialogue session, step by step by step. In addition, the last section of the book explores “locating the self in the body,” as well as working with silence, with dreams, and with channeling the energies of the selves through the Aware Ego. My hope is that by providing an upbeat and grounded foundation for the facilitator, it will open the door to a lot of new exploration and creativity in Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of the Aware Ego.

The Voice Dialogue Model of Consciousness:

1. **The awareness level** which stands outside of us observing the selves and does not take action.
2. **The selves** (also called parts, subpersonalities, energies) which are immersed in living, the level on which we experience life. The primary selves have grown up with us our whole lives, taking care of our early survival, our identification as individuals, and our success in the world. These are the “primary” selves which form the core of our personality, our “operating ego”—in fact we think of them as who we are. Other “disowned” selves have experienced a lifetime of repression, becoming evident only when we lose control and act contrary to character, or more commonly when we project these disowned qualities out onto others, usually those we either overvalue or deeply dislike.
3. **The Aware Ego** which stands between opposites, makes choices based on information from the awareness level, and once developed can bring in the appropriate selves or energies in each situation. (The Stones compare the Aware Ego to a symphony orchestra conductor who knows all the parts and calls on each instrument to play at the appropriate moment in the performance.)

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