



*The*  
VOICE  
DIALOGUE  
NEWSLETTER

# From the Editor:

## Welcome to the second

issue of the Voice Dialogue Newsletter. There are six articles in this edition, and the practitioners who wrote them are as diverse as their material. The topic that links them all is the teaching of Voice Dialogue, and the ways in which we do this.

Dorsey Cartwright, from Austin, Texas, reflects upon teaching Voice Dialogue in Israel. She was there twice, and hopes to return again. Her article is called, "Challenging and exhilarating."

Catherine Keir is from Seattle, Washington. Catherine has written about her special exper-

tise, "Energy Awareness: From the mundane to the invisible dance." I found her article to be both profound, and challenging. I think it's worth reading and rereading.

Sasha (Alex) Lessin is teaching in Maui, Hawaii. He uses a different technique to work with the Aware Ego, and he has called his article "Channel Your Voices With the Aware Ego." I enjoyed visualizing him working this way.

J'aime ona Pangaia is from Portland, Oregon, but her article is set elsewhere. "Observations of an American teaching Voice Dialogue in Thailand: Cultural Consid-

erations," describes her experiences. J'aime is reflective in her writing, and painfully honest: she explains what worked, what didn't, and what she learned from her experiences in Thailand. She hopes to return there to teach again next year.

I met Sondra Rosenberg at a Renfrew Center Conference in Philadelphia. She attended my presentation of Voice Dialogue for eating disordered clients, called "Meet the Selves Who Eat." Sondra was intrigued by Voice Dialogue, and came to New York City to study at the New York Voice Dialogue Institute at our Training for Mental Health Profession-

als. Sondra took what she had learned, integrated it into her Art Therapy sessions at Renfrew, and produced this fascinating article, "Birthing the Monster: The Transformation of the Demonic Self through Voice Dialogue and Art Therapy."

Mary and Rob Disharoon, from Petaluma, California wrote the final article, "Our Voice Dialogue Retreat Week-end." They describe a retreat, which they hosted in May 2007. Apparently, it was very successful, and they anticipate holding it again.

**We hope that you enjoy these articles, and that they will inspire you to submit your own work to The Newsletter.**

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# Challenging and Exhilarating

Dorsey Cartwright

**I have had the privilege** of teaching Voice Dialogue in Israel twice. The first time was in 2003, when I was a part of the Israeli Marriage & Family Association Conference. I returned last spring to teach a group of Imago Relationship Therapists. I have found each training experience to be both challenging and exhilarating.

Each teaching experience encountered the intensity and directness of the Israeli Primary Self systems. I was challenged during the first training when a group came up to me to tell me that they were frustrated about the structure of our training. And they told me what they wanted done differently. It was exhilarating because, in honoring their requests,

we had a richer and more alive training.

When I returned in 2007, I was once again challenged by the Israeli participants early in our training. This time, a group of Israelis were very upset because my partner, Neil Meili, was also facilitating during the workshop. Neil is not a “credentialed” therapist. We know now that there were many factors that contributed to their reaction. But the lesson that was learned was that it is important, (at least with this group), to provide a certain groundwork. In this case, to discuss the fact that Voice Dialogue facilitators are not certified, and that many of our best facilitators are not psychotherapists.

It was exhilarating in several ways to work with this particular group.

They were completely primed to go for the Disowned selves, and the vulnerable and wounded children. It was a delight to hold the line with them, and to help them experience the power of working with the Primary selves, and creating linkage with the Child selves from the Aware Ego. They were so bright, and so committed to learning, and they got it.

For me personally, having been reared in southeast Texas, my Southern Belle has often kept a band-aid over my mouth. With this group, my more blunt selves had the enlivening freedom to come out, and push against others, without anyone yipping about hurt feelings or becoming aggressive.

Martha-Lou Cohen joined us for the last two days of the training.

It was wonderful having her there as another teacher and facilitator. And on a personal level, she was able to help us sort through some of the dynamics that were occurring during the workshop that were triggering some of our selves.

Lastly, Neil, and I got to participate in a gathering of Israeli couples and Palestinian couples (and their families) as part of an Imago event. While we were not there to do Voice Dialogue, we could certainly see the dynamics of the Primary selves/ and the Disowned selves of each culture. Our hope is to introduce Voice Dialogue to this community in 2008.

# Energy Awareness:

## From the Mundane to the Invisible Dance

Catherine Keir

### **CULTIVATING ENERGY AWARENESS**

In the 1970s I began experiencing energy with awareness, when I was a professional actor in San Francisco. As a member of a group called Actors in Transformation, I realized then that the power of energy is expressed through connection. We rehearsed, keeping in mind the idea that an awareness of space was complementary to our work. We became conscious of the space between each other; also, we were aware of the space between our body and objects, noting that everything is energetically based and relates through space. Since then, I am of the opinion that we can widen our view of the underlying currents we all have available to us when we are willing to cultivate

our energy awareness. When I began observing Hal and Sidra demonstrate selves and the Aware Ego Process energetically, I marveled at the shifts so clearly visible before me.

### **ENERGY AWARENESS FACILITATES CHANGE**

Voice Dialogue is essentially energetic. An Aware Ego Process needs the energetic experience assisting so that we can separate from selves. If I don't include the energetics of the self in the dialogue, I soon forget what I discovered in the session. When I facilitate and match the energy of selves in another person, I feel our connection when I am tracking them in their process. I help myself to do this by exploring and embracing those selves in my own psyche. Manifestations in a self are palpable and vibrate

as vocal tones, gestures, use of the eyes, state of the nervous system, an indirect or direct mode of expression, emotions, etc. When I hear/see these expressions, I invite people to shift into a self. Voice Dialogue technology shows us there is order in what we have felt as a chaotic undercurrent. It does this by witnessing and honoring the energetic patterns. People have a desire for change. The selves that carry their possibilities may be unfamiliar to them and evident to me via the energetic expression that slips through in the session.

How do we become aware that we are talking and not feeling the energetics? One thing to do in facilitation is

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## FROM PAGE 4

to ask the self what it is experiencing. Sounds simple, and yet we can get accustomed to talking without checking in to our feeling levels. We have to practice verbalizing the sensations and acknowledge whatever other senses are involved during the dialogue. Our unconscious waits patiently for us to become energetically sensitive. When we do, as though a door opens, we have access to more selves.

## CHANGE HAPPENS AT A CELLULAR LEVEL

My everyday mind alone hasn't the capacity to change my life. If I want change I must learn to negotiate with my cellular energy in the form of selves. In truth, what we were in childhood went in and became fact. Rules are laid down to tell us we are OK when we feel this energy and not OK when we feel that energy. This data remains as it is. To help me see these selves, my unconscious attracts both easy and difficult interactions from the outer world. They come in the form of support, feedback, judgment or confrontation.

Having these outer relationships as a mirror of the inner gives me information about who I am. I can embrace and love my experience, and communicate my appreciation to my unconscious for bringing me what I need.

My willingness to practice Voice Dialogue can harmonize my desire for conscious choice with prior programming that my cellular body accepted long ago. I, personally, get in the water, splash around, feel the dangers and learn to trust by getting to know the territory. Others may go in 2% and come back out with what they need. Each style has its merit. The key is to know for myself, what is my individual way of discovering choice. The subtle sensorial levels, which I am calling energetics are what need to be contacted and felt, no matter what the style.

I find that my biology automatically protects me with Personal energy. That's what it learned to do and that's what it does. No questions asked. With repeated Voice Dialogue facilitations, I learn how this self affects me. Then in everyday life, when I become aware

of this, I open up my breath and I recognize my perceptions have been diminished by the beliefs expressed by that self. My fuller perceptions are returned to me. I can once again pick up subtle and not so subtle clues from within as well as outer impressions that are constantly coming towards me from my environment.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TOPOGRAPHY OR THE SELVES

In my years of work, Voice Dialogue has assisted me in organizing my relationship to my unconscious. I know that my Primary self is to one side of me, my Disowned to the other, my Child is underneath and I am in the center. When I have followed this map, I have been led through an energetic movement that offers understanding between me and the selves and their power in my unconscious. In order to establish this relationship in the direction of growth, I need to feel the energy of the self.

## HAL'S DEMO: USING ENERGY AS A TOOL

Because of the significance of energetics in Voice dialogue, we must teach this aspect of the work. The way Hal does this is helpful for me. His exercise when he is teaching energetics is simple. (I invite you to practice once a week for a few minutes and see what results you get.) We learn energetics by contrast. He asks us to be aware of two directions of energy moving through us. A vertical movement of energy descends, through our spine, and allows us to feel our weight on this Earth and even direct our energy so that it penetrates into Her core, a real connection. Earth energy as well moves up through our feet. Trusting our spine allows us to be in touch with our body and feel secure. Then Hal asks us to sense the horizontal plane of the energy of selves on each side of us. These experiences strengthen the Aware Ego Process. When we choose to balance opposite selves in conflict, we are given an opportunity to feel the heat that comes from inner disagreement. This

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

## FROM PAGE 5

heat can forge a center. Certain selves carry an energetic that makes it easier to show the shift between two sides of a pair of opposites. Personal and Impersonal; Doing and Being; these strengthen the conscious experience of energetics.

### PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL

First, let's focus on Personal and Impersonal. For me, the Personal self is primary and based on survival as a child, encouraged from both family and community. When I was introduced to Impersonal it was a no compute, so to speak. Then my job became clear. I had a training period ahead of me to work with my Personal self who is habitually protecting me by being open. She believes that there is no other way in which to do so. This belief is cellular. Discovering the true mainline into my disowned self, the Impersonal, came from life experience.

### A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

This finally happened after 5-6 years of practicing

Voice Dialogue energetics. I attended a dinner party with a group of friends and acquaintances. I was bubbling along in my Personal when I felt a communication from someone dear to me that hit me like a Ninja whack. Shocked by the impact, tears of hurt began to arise. Out of seemingly nowhere my Impersonal whispered, "I'm here. Stop everything, including eating, feel into your core and refrain from speaking until you re-stabilize. Give all your attention to me so I can wrap you in my energy. Trust me; no one will even notice you've stopped interacting." Up until then, an experience of my Impersonal energy was an exercise. I had been laying the groundwork for the split second when I found my Impersonal in the perfect moment of need. Inside the shield of this wrapping of my Impersonal, I was free to comfort my child. This event began my journey with the Impersonal.

### LUNCH DATE: TAKE ONE

In theatre we call upon life's moments to re-awaken the energy of a self in the form of a character. Hal teaches us

about energy by creating a scene for us that assists us in exchanging Personal and Impersonal with our partner in a dyad. Example: I extend my energy because this person is someone I am having lunch with whom I enjoy. Time runs out, I have to leave; I withdraw my energy and am very Impersonal. Then I change my mind and move back into Personal. Finally, I really have to leave and bring in Impersonal. During this, my partner receives the energetics as I shift back and forth. These scenes are effective in trainings; people giggle and have fun relating with each other. We originally learned these energetics in our relationships, so we recreate these environments as exercises. We learn consciously what is happening between us.

### SIDRA'S DEMO

Sidra, when working with one archetype, Aphrodite has demonstrated energetic shifts from warm to cool. An Aware Ego Process brought the energy of this sensual pattern through the Personal energy which she described as sensations of a warm, personal nature between her and

the other person. Then she brought Aphrodite through the Impersonal energy, describing an experience and sensation of spaciousness and glowing feelings with no hooks or agenda, a cooler energy.

### VULNERABILITY: THE OTHER SIDE OF POWER

It is essential we energetically understand the vulnerable ones. My experience of vulnerability in this work has been beneficial and helped me separate from my Child selves so that I can be in relationship to them. I can feel their feelings with them, and at the same time, take action in life and when necessary, bring in the Impersonal through an Aware Ego Process to support my strength. When I am facilitating a Vulnerable self, I sometimes invite the person to be with their Child from the center. They may move back and forth from the center to a Vulnerable self and energetically shift from being with the Child to being the Child and back again. This creates a chance to know

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## FROM PAGE 6

that this self has heard and seen the presence of the Aware Ego Process. The protection from the Primary self does not require relationship with the child. Their protection often involves hiding vulnerability. For the Child, an Aware Ego Process is the fulfillment of a promise made long ago that if the Child endured the difficulties of life, someday someone would show up who really appreciated it, just the way it is. This kind of connection is fully energetic.

## DOING AND BEING

Doing and Being seem easy to teach. In a fast paced culture such as the one I live in, Doing is usually primary. This is the self that keeps us moving, writing lists, multitasking, it relates well to things and focuses on time. When my attention is on getting things done, my contact with others is limited.

Being is like looking into a new born baby's eyes and relating with pure simplicity. What this self gives us is a capacity for openness, a kind of vulnerability that is free of

wounds and interference from other selves. People find these distinctions through facilitation with each self as to what it truly is energetically.

## SOME PERSPIRATION

When we work with these selves in a class exercise, people are divided up into pairs, sitting, facing each other. I ask them both to move into a Doing self and they interact from this energy. Their first connection is with what they do and the importance of projects, activity, errands, time lines and results. There is a feeling of focus in the room. They may feel passion in relation to doing but other emotions are not present or are secondary. I ask everyone to move back to the center, separate and experience a kind of neutrality. Then they both move to the other side and feel Being together, usually in silence. Sometimes they talk about what is happening

## LUNCH DATE: TAKE ONE

right there in present time, sights, sounds, senses; a feeling of pleasant connection. They move back to the center, feel

neutral and share their experience. This exercise gives people a greater experience of energy than just talking about it. It also gives both people an opportunity to sit in the center and sweat a little. Another quality of energy that is important in my exploration is the Instinctual energy that comes from our reptilian brain. Let me give you a vivid example of an experience I had in the 1970's. I lived in a house with a 6-foot boa constrictor snake belonging to a housemate. I admired her power, grace, sensual movements. I saved her life that winter after she had crawled out the window and nearly froze to death. Beating the bushes, I eventually found her hidden beneath the porch. My Doing was in charge and my Personal was fully convinced that she and I had bonded. One sunny, spring morning the entire household was in the back yard along with the coiled snake and the dog, barking in the background. I bent over her. Her perception of me as a threat was not in my Personal energy's understanding. She began to strike. I didn't see it; my body did. The action

became a mysterious, primal dance; her moving forward and me moving back. All I saw was her head six inches from my face as we traveled in sync. This type of instinctual energy is pure, rapid action. My instinctual, as the great intelligence that it is, seized the day. Getting to know this energy through the experience with this snake gave me a reference for recognizing it in other situations. This is a self that is acting on the basis of pure, unconscious, instinctive protection.

## CONNECTION

Connection is at the heart of energetics. Having an energetic connection with selves gives me more opportunity to change my life than if I just have a mental picture of them. Working with selves in relation to an Aware Ego Process gives me new options. Every day when I wake up, I can feel into the conversation of the selves that appear. Then I choose.

# Channel Your Voices With an Aware Ego

## Instructions for Guiding Partner

Sasha Lessin Ph.D.

### Read your partner the cues

aloud. Exception: read words in square brackets [like this] silently. Give your partner a few breaths' time to respond aloud where you see asterisks (\*\*\*) . If your partner doesn't respond to a cue-sentence, pause several breaths and read the cue again.

Address your partner's voices respectfully, appreciatively; do not push their limits. Use these cues as suggestions; feel free to improvise. Start now, reading aloud:

Sit on this cushion; it'll be the position for your Aware Ego, the place from which you hear all your inner voices.

Tell me about one of the main voices (like

Intellect, Critic, Pleaser, Pusher) you present to the world. What's this voice like and what does it do for you.

\*\*\*

Shift your cushion to a new position, a position for that Primary, that main voice. [Wait till your partner actually moves; use the name (eg: Critic) your partner uses for the Primary, where you see the word "Primary" below].

Hi. Embody that Primary voice and tell me who you are and what your job is.

\*\*\*

When did your life start? How long have you been around? What's your history as [partner name]'s Primary?

\*\*\*

Tell me, Primary, what vulnerable voices you protect?

\*\*\*

What contributions have you, as [partner name]'s Primary, made to [partner's name]? What would you like to be acknowledged and appreciated for?

\*\*\*

Thank you, I liked talking with you. Would you let [partner's name] return to the Aware Ego position?

\*\*\*

[Wait till your partner moves.] Hi, Aware Ego. Tell your observations on the voice you just embodied.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9



## FROM PAGE 8

\*\*\*

(Over).

Tell me about another of your voices or subselves (eg: Instinctual One, Creative Voice, Playful Kid, Sexpot, etc.).

\*\*\*

Move your cushion to a position for that voice. [Wait till your partner moves.] Become this second voice, Voice 2. As Voice 2, say how you are, what you do for [partner's name]. Then tell me the main events in your life with [partner's name] and what you'd like to be appreciated for.

\*\*\*

Thank you, I liked talking with you. Would you let [partner's name] return to the Aware Ego position?

\*\*\*

Hi, Aware Ego. Tell me about a 3rd voice that [partner's name] has.

\*\*\*

Move your cushion to a position for that voice. [Wait till your partner moves.] Become this voice, Voice 3. As Voice 3, say how you are, what you do for [partner's name].

Then tell me the main events in [partner's name] life and what you'd like to be appreciated for.

\*\*\*

Thank you, I liked talking with you. Would you let [partner's name] return to the Aware Ego position?

\*\*\*

[Wait till your partner moves.] From your space as Aware Ego, describe a 4th voice, Voice 4. Become it and say who you are, what I should call you

\*\*\*

what you're like

\*\*\*

what you do

\*\*\*

what you'd like to be appreciated for.

\*\*\*

If a vulnerable or instinctual voice would like to you to know something, but it or your protective voices would rather not have you identify with and embody it, just tell me about it from the Aware Ego position.

\*\*\*

When your partner has spoken as each of the voices (or described

vulnerable voices from the Aware Ego position) for which you have time, say] Stand behind me, facing the spaces you occupied for your voices as I summarize the things you said as each. Feel each voice's energy from the perspective of neutral observer. [Summarize what your partner said in each space.]

Return to the Aware Ego place and tell me what you learned.

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\* Based on Stone, H. & Winkelman, S., *Embracing Our Selves, and Embracing Each Other* both 1989, New World Library: San Rafael).

# Cultural Considerations:

## Observations of an American teaching Voice Dialogue in Thailand

### J'aime ona Pangaia

#### In November and again

in February of 2006/7, I was invited to present to a large group of about 80 or so Thai people at their workplace in Bangkok. The setting was a corporate training room and my sponsor and translator was their company CEO. He had been doing individual training in Voice Dialogue with me when he traveled to the US on business. He was eager to introduce Voice Dialogue concepts to his employees and, particularly, to his key work team. His goal was to reduce judgment in the workplace.

Since the whole workshop was to be simultaneously translated, I wrote up a script of the workshop for two reasons. First, I needed to help myself stay on track during the

breaks in my delivery (which would allow time for the translations). I knew that I would be deviating from the script, but this way, I knew I'd be able to return to the development of my basic conceptual framework. Second, I gave a copy of the script to my translator so he could review it ahead of time to clarify any concepts that he might be unsure of how to translate. We were both keenly aware that not only linguistic, but also cultural translations would be necessary. Thailand is a developing country still, with a philosophical base rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which are resting on a lively base of animism. Concepts of self and relationship stem from a very different core than in the West. We both knew that bringing Voice

Dialogue and translating would need a sensitive bridge to these factors.

My first appreciation of how I would need to teach differently came the night before my presentation, when I was reviewing with my host and his wife my plan for the day. I indicated that I would teach for short bits in the morning then take breaks periodically to field questions from the group. That way, I could get a sense of how the presentation was being received. In the afternoon, we would do a large group exercise.

His wife looked uncomfortable for a moment then she volunteered, "That probably won't work; Thai people will never ask a question." At my quizzical expression, she continued. "There are two

reasons. First, it would be considered insulting to the leader or teacher for someone to ask a question publicly. To question like that implies that the teacher is incompetent at presenting information. A public question would be seen as pointing out the teacher's failings for all to see, and would be seen as an attempt to humiliate. Additionally, it's seen as bad manners to call such attention to oneself. Asking a question for yourself when you are a member of a group implies that you are more special, more important than everyone else. That's considered childish behavior."

After mulling this over, I suggested an alternative. How about if I broke the large group into smaller

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

## FROM PAGE 10

groups, and asked them to discuss what had been presented for 10 or 15 minutes? Then, they could come up with questions on the material which they thought might lead the whole group towards a better understanding. They could nominate a spokesperson from their individual groups to present the question. My host and his wife approved; that's how I did it and it worked beautifully. When invited to break out into smaller groups, I suggested that they arrange themselves into peer groups where they felt most comfortable. There were no groups that included their own supervisors in them, and that allowed for greater safety and frankness.

The next morning, I was introduced to the large group, in the Thai language. As I looked around the big circle, I saw a sea of yellow. It was Monday, and it turns out that Thai people have been celebrating their King's birth by wearing yellow ever since the 50<sup>th</sup> grand anniversary of his coronation (which also occurred on his

birthday), 5 years ago. In Thai culture, every day of the week has its own color, and the color of Monday is bright yellow. Bangkok is an immense city with millions of people. As I was driven over to the corporate headquarters, I saw yellow on nearly every person on the busy streets except tourists or those in some type of official uniform. This represents a clear expression of the type of group unity that is valued by the Thai primary self-system.

After I was introduced, I began with a question to get my bearings. "I've been invited to come introduce you to a way of looking at our relationships with others, and to help reduce negative judgments in the workplace. The work I teach comes from psychology, and I wonder first, how many of you have ever taken a psychology class before?" I knew from my host that most people in the room had a four-year college degree. After a few moments, one person tentatively raised her hand. Wow, I thought, only one in 80! I went further, trusting my translator to make the proper terms. "How many of you know

what psychology is?" Four people raised their hands, including the first woman.

I went one more step, following a hunch. "How many of you know what meditation is, and practice it?" They quickly all raised their hands. Great! "What I'm going to be introducing to you today is based on a philosophy in the West, called 'psychology.' This is one of our ways of developing our awareness of who we are, and how we are in the world. It helps us, like meditation does, to loosen our attachments to those ideas of ourselves so that we can develop a better relationship with ourselves, our families, our friends and with our communities. Here in Thailand, the foundation for meditation and awareness practice is Buddhism, a spiritual practice. In the west, the foundation for our practice of awareness is called psychology, which is secular and is generally healing oriented – not religious. There are many forms of psychology in the west, and I'm here to introduce you to one of them."

From here, I proceeded to lay out a very practical talk about character

development – the Selves, how we get identified with them, and what we lose when we become so identified that we lose contact with the other options that could be there for us. They readily understood the material. The first question that came from a group was, "How do we regain access to those disowned selves?" I led them through an exercise from my book, "The Benefit of People Who Bug You," so that they got a clearer idea of why those selves were disowned, and what they lose as a consequence.

In Thai culture, the role of 'teacher' enjoys a lot of privilege. Between being a teacher, a guest and a Westerner, I had high status. There was an invisible (to me) set of rules that were to be followed as a consequence. These rules included things like where I was to sit at a dining table, who I should sit next to, and where I was to sit in the car. These things were known to all but me. I inadvertently created some discomforts by sitting in the wrong place, interrupting the proper placements of the rest

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

## FROM PAGE II

of the group. I allowed myself to be resettled, much to everyone's great relief! On the other hand, my food was ordered for me at restaurants (in great abundance), and I was also given a handler to take care of my incidental needs. I had brought a long-time student of mine to Thailand from the US to assist at the retreat training. At a certain point, I realized that she was considered in some ways by the Thai workshop attendees to be personal assistant, something akin to a special servant.

Unbeknownst to her, she was being assessed for how faithfully she was fulfilling her assumed role. She was to anticipate, be attentive to my needs, and not call attention to her own. I saw a resonance between how the Patriarch expects women to take care of men, and the role between teacher and assistant or student. In this way, I experienced being treated with the privilege that men are granted in Thai culture.

The last observation I'd like to share is my experience of facilitation across language differences. My one-day

workshop was followed by a two-day teaching, and a facilitation retreat with a smaller group of participants. The prerequisite was that they had to have attended the one-day workshop and they had to be fluent in English. I had done a Voice Dialogue facilitation with my host's wife at her request. She spoke English, but not fluently. Her husband was on hand to offer translation as needed. It was very difficult to maintain any energetic linkage when she struggled for words, or redirected her attention towards her husband for language support. Additionally, we both had to work hard to comprehend each other's meanings, an intellectual effort that itself undermined any energetic linkage.

During the retreat, I prefaced the facilitation period with an acknowledgement of several essential facts: we had different native languages, and that there might be problems for the subject (who was being facilitated) to communicate in a foreign language. In addition, we also had very different cultural experiences. This

would require us to go much slower as we both sought to reach a shared understanding of the part that was being facilitated, and how it operated. The foundational rules of how relationships happen are different in Thailand than they are in America. The facilitators would have to be particularly careful not to assume what a self meant. The person being facilitated would have to realize that what might seem like obvious statements to them were not obvious to us. We would be asking a lot of follow-up questions. With this explanatory introduction, the facilitations were much easier. We also decided not to allow any translations during the facilitations, even though the facilitations took more time and there was more word sleuthing.

The most helpful attitude I found I could have as an American teacher in Thailand was to assume nothing. It was important to be as willing to learn from my hosts as they were willing to learn from me. Over time and with further inquiry during my future trips there, I'll learn how this work has been integrated. My sense

is that the familiarity with Buddhism, with its emphasis on awareness/ meditation practice allows for a foothold for western psychology and in particular, Voice Dialogue. They share a goal of detachment from identification with selves, although the ultimate application is different. Voice Dialogue cultivates choice, experiencing and mastering one's energetic capacity and bringing an Aware Ego process to our relationships. Buddhism is a spiritual path that asserts a set of moral precepts and a practice (meditation) that aims at alleviating suffering and attaining enlightenment 'for all sentient beings'. I felt that the Thai people I taught were able to utilize the experiences and insights they gained from Voice Dialogue without it competing in any way with their spiritual beliefs. They related to it as a practical way to see themselves and relate to others with less judgment – a great first step

# Birthing the Monster:

## The Transformation of a Demonic Self Through Voice Dialogue and Art Therapy

Sondra Rosenberg, ATR

### In my work as an art therapist

with bulimic women at a residential eating disorder treatment facility, I see many images of demons and monsters. The patients invariably describe these monsters as “evil” and insist that they must be banished and killed in order for recovery to occur. These are the monsters that go on endless binges, that enact bizarre rituals around food, that lash out at loved ones, that self-mutilate, that steal and sneak around. Ask a bulimic woman to draw her hunger and you will likely see one of these fire-breathing creatures – endlessly devouring and yet never satisfied.

After seeing countless images like this, I started to wonder about these monsters. Where did they come from? What did they want? Why did

all of these women seem to have them and feel so thoroughly at their mercy? Did recovery really require that they slay them, and if it did, how exactly do you slay an inner demon?

In *Embracing Our Selves*, Hal and Sidra Stone (1989) define demonic selves as “instinctual energies that have been disowned over time and have become destructive (p. 67).” We experience these selves as grave dangers to our stability and tend to imagine that they originated outside of our psyches. We feel ourselves “possessed” by these energies, attributing to them actions that we would never ordinarily commit or sanction. Because we find them so reprehensible, we do everything in our power to repress them, but find that the harder we try

to keep them at bay, the stronger they become. We certainly do not “honor” these selves, and as the Stones caution us, “the selves we do not honor grow inside of us in unconscious ways, gaining power and authority (p. 25).”

This study looks at the case of Marianne, an 18-year-old bulimic woman who came in for treatment the summer before her freshman year of college. She was an immensely gifted artist, and through the modality of art therapy, was able to express her inner conflicts with astounding precision and beauty. She was also able to use her gift for drawing in the service of healing and transforming the monster to whom she felt relentlessly enslaved.

Marianne brought to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

### FROM PAGE 13

our individual art therapy session two images that she had drawn for her outpatient therapist. They depicted her concept and experience of her eating disorder. She explained that she felt she had an angry monster inside of her that often tears its way out and attacks her, via binges and episodes of self-inflicted violence. Together we explored and reflected on her visual expressions.

The first image (Figure 1) shows Marianne as a girl on the cusp of womanhood with a raging, fetus-like monster in her abdomen. Her hands rest on her belly like an expectant mother, trying perhaps to contain the creature within. Her head hangs down in defeat, the expression showing signs of both sorrow and pain. The right and left halves of the face convey very different emotions – the down turned mouth and closed eye on the left suggest deep sadness, while the right side is set in a glowering sideward gaze that shows traces of bitterness and defiance. Her body is young and slightly awkward, with long pre-adolescent limbs, newly protruding

breasts and soft pink shadings that contrast the angularity and anxious energy of the black lines that define the form and boundaries of the figure. The abdomen appears to be in horrible pain, as the monster restlessly presses out with its sharp claw-like fingers, its body contorted in anguish and its teeth bared.

In the second image (Figure 2), the monster has broken out of its confinement within the girl's body and has grown enormous. Its rage fully embodied, it dangles the now doll-like girl from marionette strings by its gaping, aggressive mouth. The boundary of the monster's body is undefined, marked by chaotic scribbles and boundless energy. The girl hangs lifeless from the strings, completely at the mercy of the creature, who does not seem to be taking pleasure in its assault, but acting from a place of uncontained agony and desperation. This limitless, unsatisfiable need to devour matches Marianne's description of her nightly food binges. These binges provide a liberating release of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

## FROM PAGE 14

pent-up feelings, a space in which anything that is desired can be taken and consumed, but a space that is simultaneously terrifying and dizzying, as all boundaries and structures dissolve.

I proposed to Marianne that we engage the monster – talk to it and find out who it is, what it wants and how it feels. This required that she enter the image and give voice to the creature. At first, the dialogue replicated and adhered to insights that Marianne had gleaned from therapy – the idea that the monster/eating disorder is fueled by the suppression of her emotions. The monster spoke of accumulating energy by absorbing the girl's unexpressed feelings until it was strong enough to claw its way out and attack. It identified itself as a critical voice that emerged when the girl was very young. It recalled attacking the girl with comments such as, "you're bad," which in middle school became "you're fat." When the girl believed it, it grew more powerful, feeding on the erosion of the girl's self-esteem. It wasn't until high school that the monster

acquired enough power to actually break out and physically attack.

As the dialogue went on, the tenor of the monster's words shifted from a somewhat intellectualized and theoretically-infused understanding of its function to a more nuanced emotional expression. It voiced the anger it felt toward the girl for being locked inside and constantly stifled. This sounded very much like the resentful anger of a child toward its mother. When allowed to voice these feelings, a sense of underlying sadness and hurt rose to the surface. The monster said that it knew the girl would be better off without it and that once the girl learns how to attend to her own feelings, it would disappear. It sounded certain and resigned to the idea that this outcome would be "for the best." This turnaround, from feeling itself to be the powerful aggressor in relation to the girl – telling her she is "bad" and attacking her – to the expression of an underlying belief that it was really the bad one, was the beginning of a new insight. The monster felt completely devalued

and parasitic. The initial persona was perhaps invented as a hardened defense against feelings of annihilating vulnerability and shame.

Following the dialogue, Marianne shared her feelings and associations. She recalled always feeling "bad" as a child, convinced that Santa Claus would not deliver presents to her at Christmas time. She also described her fear of her mother's anger growing up and her belief that she was responsible for it, that if she could change herself then her mother would be happier and kinder and everything would be better. She became well versed in hiding her own feelings and assuming personal responsibility for the feelings of her mother.

I offered Marianne some of my own reactions to the dialogue, commenting in particular on the conflicted feelings of the monster – its anger, but also its frustration, sadness and shame. I told her that despite the havoc that the monster wreaked when it was able to emerge, I felt sympathy for it. Marianne was receptive to this perspective, so I continued. I recalled that the monster identified

itself as a "part of her" and wondered if this part had always been so monstrous or if perhaps it had become this way over time. Was it possible that it was one of those unloved parts that became hostile, as Robert Bly (1988) described? I shared the quote with her – "Every part of our personality that we do not love will become hostile to us" (p. 20) – and encouraged her to consider what might belie the monster's rage and aggression.

Up until this point, Marianne had never questioned her insistence that the monster was the cause of all her problems and needed to be banished in order for her to live. Now she was beginning to recognize that the more she tried to suppress it, the angrier it became and the harder it attacked. I encouraged Marianne to question the relationship between the girl and the monster – how might it be different? What would happen if she let it out and interacted with it? She appeared thoughtful and answered truthfully that she did not know. I urged her to draw a scenario in which this occurs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

## FROM PAGE 15

Marianne worked steadily until a sequence of four images emerged (Figure 3). In the first, the girl withdraws her hands from her abdomen in a gesture of relinquishing and condonation. Her figure is surrounded with thick energy lines and cross-hatching, suggesting a surrender into the dark unknown. The little creature, appearing devious, pokes half of itself out of her body, steadies itself with hands and foot and looks to the left, as if checking to see if the coast is clear.

In the second image, we see the girl appearing more womanly, a yellow light infusing her body. She places both hands on the wound-like opening from which the monster sprung and focuses her energies inward. The monster is off to the right, partly shrouded in shadow and shielding its face in fright from the bright yellow light that the woman seems to radiate. Next, we see the woman kneeling down and extending an arm to the monster, who now appears quite vulnerable and inert. Her expression is one of fondness and



**Figure 3**

compassion. Both figures are now awash with color. In the final image, the transformation is complete. The monster is now a little girl who holds her mother's hand as they walk off together. The woman has embraced her child and accepted the responsibility of both motherhood and womanhood.

Marianne was taken aback by this remarkable turn of events, given her previous belief that the girl's well being was dependent on the destruction of the monster. I asked her

once again to give voice to the monster, to walk me through the story from that perspective. She described her feeling of surprise upon being released. She was not sure what to do, as this had never occurred before. Standing out in the open like that was scary and unfamiliar. The light was stark and bright and the woman was healing herself. She described feeling sad when the woman extended her hand because it was unexpected. She felt vulnerable and more human. I prompted

Marianne to voice the little girl's feelings at the end of the sequence – what was it like for her now? What did she want from the woman? She expressed a desire to be taken care of, attended to and not neglected. I asked about her anger. She said that when she got angry she wanted to be listened to, heard and understood.

The killer rage of the monster had now been re-contextualized as the strong feelings of a young child that needed care, containment and soothing. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



## FROM PAGE 16

mother did not try to sequester the child and was not annihilated by her anger and so the child could learn to modulate her feelings and experience her own value. Interestingly, the needs expressed by the girl – to be taken care of and attended to – were the same ones that the monster initially projected onto the mother, believing this could only occur at its expense.

The first two images that Marianne created of her eating disorder simultaneously depicted her relationship with her actual mother and the relationship with herself that grew out of the dynamics of that conflicted primary bond. She had, in fact, internalized the relationship so completely that she experienced herself as comprised of two separate beings – the idealized mother and the bad child. She had, of course, identified with the idealized mother and regarded her child-self as a greedy, dangerous monster, capable of overtaking and destroying the goodness

of the mother. This was illustrated quite clearly in the second picture, where the repressed oral-aggressive forces of the child/monster emerged and reduced the mother to a lifeless marionette. Marianne had learned that her own needs and hungers are so dangerous and forceful that, if she were to express or satisfy them, she would find herself totally motherless, i.e. without safe boundaries of any kind. Marianne's insistence that the child-self was bad, was in fact a monster, led her to the conclusion that it must be eradicated. What she did not recognize was that by continuing to disown the energy of this self, she was enabling it to grow more powerful and more demonic inside of her. The Stones write, "In an attempt to eradicate these rejected selves, we make them much stronger by driving them into the unconscious where they are free to operate beyond our control" (p. 23). For Marianne, this operation had manifested as binge eating, a frenzied attempt to override maternal injunctions and satisfy her bottomless hunger for love, comfort

and validation. She experienced this as both exhilarating and terrifying. Following the binges, the mother paid the price for her child's reckless actions and had to compensate by purging the excess consumption through exercise. This perpetuated both mother and child's belief that the child was bad, treacherous and destabilizing.

Because the child had been branded "bad," she was never trusted to "come out" and undergo a healthy process of separation and individuation. Instead, she festered within the symbolic body of her mother's judgments and became distorted over time. The Stones use the analogy of a caged animal's pent-up rage and frustration to describe the etiology of a disowned, demonic self:

If an animal is kept locked in a cage for many years, it will become wild. If the door is opened inadvertently, the animal comes out raging. From this, its keeper inaccurately concludes that the animal is inherently dangerous. But this is not necessarily so. The danger is, at least in part, a result of the long

imprisonment. (p. 138)

One way in which Marianne's inner child came out raging was through acts of self-injury, specifically cutting. This could be understood as an act of retaliation against the introjected mother who had imprisoned and degraded her.

Through the process of voice dialogue and image making, Marianne was able to reclaim the disowned energy of her inner child and essentially give birth to her own vitality. For this healing process to occur, she had to listen to and honor the feelings of the self where her demonic energy was constellated. The transformation of that self was facilitated by and concordant with the transformation of the introjected mother. We see them change together in the drawings – while the mother transforms from a troubled, angst-ridden adolescent to a compassionate and self-possessed woman, the monster transforms into a little girl. This mutual healing is depicted beautifully, as the figures soften and fill with color. Marianne fundamentally shifted her understanding

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

## FROM PAGE 17

of the relationship between these two selves. Previously, mother and child were in opposition to one another. When the mother neglected her own needs, the child was negatively fueled, growing monstrous and destructive; when she took care of herself, the child disappeared. Now, they no longer exist at the expense of each other, but in union with one another. The mother is not afraid of the child's needs and vulnerabilities; she has the capacity to care for her while still attending to her own needs. To get to this she had to trust that she would not give birth to a destructive force. When the child receives her mother's love and kindness, she is no longer frightened and

enraged. She implicitly receives permission to be a child and feels secure that she can show her feelings without the risk of destroying her mother or herself.

Though Marianne admittedly did not understand on a cognitive level what happened during the session, she did feel that an important shift had taken place. It had never occurred to her that the "monster inside," the part of her that went on unconscious food binges and engaged in self-injurious behaviors, could actually be of great value to her. However, when given the space to allow her own healing to take place, she instinctively knew exactly what needed to happen. She knew that only in love could the monster become human.

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# Our Voice Dialogue Retreat Weekend

May 25-27, 2007

Mary and Rob Disharoon

## Fifteen Voice Dialogue

participants gathered at our house in Petaluma, California from Friday through Sunday. They were Catherine Keir, Judith Hendin, Martha-Lou Cohen, Dorsey Cartwright, Neil Meili, Shakti Gawain, Sandy Stevens, Iudita Harlan, Alice and Jamie Simmonds, Monica Elde, J'aime ona Pangaia and Jason Bennett. In addition, another 5 people joined us for dinner and an introductory group circle the first evening. They were Dona Diftler, Karen Olshansky, Karen Thomas, Ann Dobbertin and Susan Filley.

The gathering was loosely led by Mary and Rob Disharoon in terms of providing the location and

setting and arranging the schedule and leadership for meals, group circle, and up to 8 hours of Voice Dialogue sessions either facilitating or being facilitated. There were four, 2 hour blocks of time that were used for either one long session (1 1/2 or 2 hrs) or two shared sessions (1hr each). Participants were able to freely choose who they wanted to trade sessions with or gathered beforehand to be matched with someone. Some of us chose to watch sessions, or enjoy the time in some other way. We set up a sand-tray so the participants could recreate their session with the symbolic miniatures and we also had art supplies available.

One afternoon, a number of us went for a hike in a nearby oak woodland that was particularly energizing when followed with a swim and time in the hot tub. Several of the campers swam laps each morning and some walked the labyrinth and did yoga outside. We started Saturday and Sunday with a 2 hour group circle where participants could pick a card from our "Pair of Opposites Selves Cards" and discuss the card, their dreams, their sessions, or anything else they felt would be of interest.

We used our home on 2 acres and had 7 lovely and private outside meeting areas for sessions with more inside the house. We

set up tents and camping sites in a redwood grove on our property. We provided the food, primarily through a local caterer. One of our goals was to keep the cost down, especially for those who had to cover their expenses flying to the West Coast. We offered the camping alternative for those who wanted it and charged just for the cost of the food. The cost for this type of gathering can really be quite reasonable when handled in this manner.

Our intent was to provide this minimum structure, but otherwise have a "leaderless" gathering of experienced practitioners who would take care of themselves

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 20**

## FROM PAGE 19

and their individual needs. No one had to do anything other than to respect each other and the environment. We asked those present to leave their Career Pushers, Teachers, and Psychological Knowers at the front door and everyone cooperated with that request. People decided who they wanted to have their sessions with, selected the private area they would work in, and decided whether to facilitate or be facilitated – and that all seemed to go very smoothly. Everyone was particularly respectful of each other and their process.

We tried to create an Aphrodite-like setting in our yard and in the outside session places in particular so there were lots of flowers and wildlife, along with symbolic yard statues throughout the yard. Our property also has a fieldstone labyrinth that Mary designed and we built by hand.

We believe we succeeded in meeting our goals of providing a setting for community and a chance to give, receive or watch many Voice Dialogue sessions within a short time period. And in preparing

for this retreat weekend, our relationship enjoyed an enhanced linkage as we thoroughly enjoyed readying our yard for this event and loved what the anticipation of it helped us create.

### **WHAT WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY:**

We would not again hold a future gathering on a holiday weekend as the Friday afternoon traffic from the San Francisco Bay Area to our home (40 miles) was horrendous, and hardly conducive to an easy transition into the Aphrodite.

Instead, we would open our house and especially our yard and outside activities to our guests beginning at noon on a Thursday with a casual dinner that evening. This day would be primarily a day for letting go of our Pushers and busy lives and connecting with the spirit of our property, while providing an opportunity for social interaction. Anyone would be free to rest or just kick back in the sun or shade as they desired. Rob would be happy to take anyone on a short or longer hike that day if they wanted some exercise after traveling.

The gathering would

continue through the next two days, with a group circle each morning and two 2-hour blocks of time each day for Voice Dialogue sessions, interspersed with free time. We'd conclude the retreat after dinner on Saturday night so that people can have all day Sunday to get back to their homes.

We would hold the gathering earlier in May and do our best to minimize it conflicting with either the Colorado Convergence or any trainings at Thera. That also makes it more likely that the Bay Area hills would still be bright green and lush (a special treat) and our yard awash with Spring flowers and color (with the chances of an overly hot day much less.)

We also would lighten the meals and make them healthier. We'd have water, drinks, fruit and healthy snacks on hand throughout the day. We'd use only paper cups for hot and cold drinks on which we would mark our names and arrange for a common place to store them. We'd hire a housekeeper for a couple of hours a day and write out some simple house rules so everyone could pitch in to help keep the place clean.

We'd look into a renting

a porta-potty for at least the campers and getting a shade canopy for the group circle.

We would set a schedule for meals, group circles, and sessions and stick to it even if someone can't make it on time. We would urge the participants to be on time for the 2nd and 3rd day lunches and dinners and group circle so as to maintain our continuity without having too many rules and restrictions.

All in all, the changes would not be too significant and we would be able to fairly easily again host a gathering like this in the near future. Also, we feel that this basic format could be easily adapted to be used elsewhere around the country, regardless of the setting. Finally, we truly believe that this is a good model for building community and doing our own personal work with some of the best facilitators in the world.

Our thanks again to those who attended and made this a wonderful weekend together – everyone was great.

With our warmest thoughts,

Mary and Rob Disharoon