

*In Celebration of Fifty Years of Voice Dialogue*

## THE ORIGIN STORY

by Sidra Stone Ph.D



This is a truly auspicious year for Voice Dialogue. It is fifty years since the first Voice Dialogue session! And I'm happy to say that the Psychology of Selves and the Aware Ego is alive and well as it continues to move into new lands and new languages.

And now – as the full Harvest Moon and Jupiter shine over Thera – it is time for the story of the very first Voice Dialogue session...

Hal and I were both practicing clinical psychologists in 1972 when I came to him to learn Roberto Assagioli's Guided Imagery, a new technique that had been introduced recently into the United States. Hal was a Jungian analyst interested in consciousness, and he knew about Active Imagination (which was a somewhat similar technique developed by Jung). I – as someone who viewed psychology from a pragmatic Skinnerian viewpoint – was fascinated with this new approach that allowed for something beyond scientific, objectively verifiable, psychology. So at that time, Hal and I were about as far apart in our approaches to the human psyche as any two psychologists could be.

We arranged for six one-hour sessions in which I would learn Guided Imagery. But we found ourselves delving deeper and deeper into discussions of psychology and of

our own contrasting internal processes.

And then one day we began to talk about vulnerability. Of course, neither of us had much access to ours. After all, we were mature, competent professionals and had spent our lives moving well past vulnerability of any kind!

I don't remember exactly how it happened, but during one of these discussions, Hal said, "Let's not just talk about vulnerability, I'd like to talk directly to yours." And I – originally from Brooklyn and therefore unable to resist a challenge – plunged right in.

There was something about Hal that allowed me to trust him – not an easy thing for me. As a cautious, and somewhat cynical, New Yorker, I was wary of these New Age Californians. But I had already allowed myself to sink into the Guided Imagery and the experience had been richly rewarding, so I decided to give this a try. Somehow – as he had for so many others – Hal held a space for me that was secure and safe.

I moved off the couch, sat down on the soft brown carpet, and rested my head on the big, comfortable coffee table in his office. I allowed myself to feel what was happening without trying to control it. There were fewer words after that.

*This article was found at: [www.voicedialogue.org](http://www.voicedialogue.org). Please visit us for more articles and other resources.*

I was no longer Dr. Winkelman, I was a very young child, open to the world around me and extremely sensitive energetically. My perceptions changed: colors were more saturated, sounds were more intense and I noticed things I hadn't noticed before. I found myself sensing the world around me rather than observing and evaluating it. Everything seemed clear and simple and I felt like an innocent child who could see what was happening around me – who saw truth and spoke it easily – like the child in the fairy tale who said, “Mommy, look, the emperor has no clothes!”

Long-forgotten memories emerged. I began to feel the sweetness of Hal where before I felt only the safety and the strength.

Like the little prince in the French children's book, *The Little Prince*, I could see with my heart. He described it beautifully: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

The experience was amazing for both of us! That was my Inner Child, and our first real experience of a self.

At our next meeting, Hal met his Inner Child. We went on to explore the many selves within us and then, the many selves in others. We perfected Voice Dialogue - our method for addressing these selves directly. It was an exciting time for both of us! We learned things we didn't know that we didn't know!

We learned how beautifully complex human beings were, and were able to enjoy the richness of this complexity. And we learned how to accept the confusing contradictions that new selves sometimes introduced to a previously one-sided system. Each new self we discovered felt like a new instrument that we were adding to our ‘orchestra.’

We observed how the selves acted in relationships. We discovered the Bonding Patterns – the archetypal patterns in all relationships, intimate and otherwise – when certain selves took over our interactions with others. These patterns behaved like the default settings programmed into our computer software. They did not reflect our “Preferences” or who we were. And we learned a basic lesson from this study of Bonding Patterns: “It is not just what you say, it is who says it!”

We noted the gradual emergence of something quite new: an Aware Ego that was able to embrace all the selves we encountered, even those that were irreconcilable. We

noticed that the more people learned about their own inner selves and the more they were able to embrace them, the more naturally compassionate they became towards others. And our way of thinking about consciousness began to change; it became richer and more inclusive.

With the emergence of an Aware Ego it was natural to experience a different consciousness and to move into new explorations of an even more expansive energy system: the Source Field. Hal wrote about his explorations in his article: “From Enlightenment to the Aware Ego Process to Source Energy”.

We shared the treasures we unearthed on these explorations with others. For many years we traveled the world and taught our work directly. And we recorded these discoveries in our books, our talks and our videos. These have changed form over the years. From the tangible formats of print books and reels of recorded tapes, to non-tangible digital formats, the messengers have changed dramatically. But the messages are deep, universal and human and they remain the same.

Although Hal is no longer here, his spirit remains in the joint work we began a half-century ago. There is a great deal of information available about our work and those that teach it on our website, Voice Dialogue International. There are a variety of articles that can be read or downloaded in our Reading Room, and print books, eBooks, streaming mp3s and videos that can be purchased in our Bookshop.

In this current world of uncertainty, polarization and shared vulnerability, people are discovering that our work is more relevant than ever. And they enjoy introducing it creatively into their own personal and professional lives. Here's to the next half-century with all its complex challenges and amazing possibilities!

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