

PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL ENERGIES:

A Voice Dialogue Teaching

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Having enough connection and commonality versus having enough differentiation, individual process. This is one of the most common and confounding struggles we have in our relationships with others. It's the challenge in our differing needs for union versus autonomy and how we express those needs energetically in the world.

This short article is meant to give you a description of how the qualities of these two very different principles express themselves in us. As we begin to apprehend what it is that's essentially motivating our behaviors, we can better appreciate both ourselves and others.

The principles of Union and Autonomy co-exist within us as mutually arising opposites, like yin and yang. They can be seen as principles of nature that express themselves in the psyche as well. The types of archetypal sub-personalities that express these principles have been named Personal and Impersonal selves by Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone, founders of the Psychology of the Aware Ego and Voice Dialogue.

Generally, Personal selves are those parts of us who are oriented towards establishing and maintaining a sufficient level of connection, warmth, proximity and togetherness while Impersonal selves are those parts of us who operate to establish and maintain sufficient distinctiveness, respect, boundaries, and autonomy (self rule). Typically, in patriarchal cultures, men are more socialized to express the Impersonal and women, Personal. This is modified however, by one's personal family dynamics and early childhood experiences.

These two systems of psychic energetics, give an overall tone to all the other roles or inner selves we might identify with. Consider for example a doctor who is strongly identified with being a "Healer" in life and how this inner part, when expressed through Impersonal energy, is felt very differently than if it were expressed Personally. Impersonal Healer is concerned with maintaining strong energetic boundaries with his patients, empowering them with accurate information and good technical care, and believes that the patient is ultimately responsible for the consequences of her compliance. A Personal Healer is concerned with making a strong energetic connection with the patient to better relate to her and to make sure the patient knows she is cared for. This doctor likely feels that it's important to consider how the patient feels, that she doesn't feel all alone with her medical concerns and that she can always approach her doctor with her concerns. If the patient is remiss in medical compliance, the Personal Healer archetype in the doctor likely feels that he could have done a better job helping the patient be compliant. Consider how any archetype (such as Parent, Child, Leader, Teacher, Sensuality, Mind) is modified when it's expressed with an aim to merge and connect versus an aim to differentiate and hold unto itself.

The Personal and Impersonal energetics can be expressed on a continuum anywhere from "zero to one hundred" in terms of intensity. The more intense the expression, the more threatened the felt need, or principle* underneath it is felt to be. It is helpful to consider Union and Autonomy as two opposite, basic conditions that we must have sufficient experience of.

In terms of the selves, we have Vulnerable selves who directly sense how

well those conditions are being met. When a condition (or, need /principle) is not sufficiently met, a Vulnerable self suffers. The suffering of the vulnerable self is what activates the patterns of behavior that are meant to lead towards the fulfillment of those under met needs and principles. We call those patterns of behavior the Power selves. (* See the “7 Principles of Nature and Psyche” from The Benefit of People Who Bug You book by this author.)

EXAMPLES OF COMMON SUB-PERSONALITIES

Here are some of the selves (some positively described, some negatively) that operate under the auspices of either the Personal and Impersonal Energies. These are just ideas, certainly not all the ways in which your personal or impersonal energies will manifest.

| PERSONAL | IMPERSONAL |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Pleaser | Mind |
| Caretaker | Professional |
| Confidante | Private |
| Social Mayor | Socially self-reliant |
| Conformer | Individualist |
| The Busy-body | The Cold Fish |
| Mind Reader | The one who sedates others |
| Helpful | Delegator |

Try adding more examples from people you know, famous movie or TV characters or your own tendencies.

As we develop in life, from childhood on, our personality tends to lean primarily towards one of these two poles. This is a consequence of the intersection of whatever our basic nature is as a unique human being and the pressures of family and societal demands. Most of us are patently unaware of the possibility of having a choice around these opposites; we just identify with the one we live through and either we yearn for or are repulsed by the opposite. Imagine if instead, you could choose between this and that, depending on the current conditions you were in. Sometimes, you'd still choose this. Other times, you might choose that. Still other moments, you might creatively find a way to express “Thit or Thas”!

DESCRIBING IMPERSONAL ENERGY

When we are operating from Impersonal energy, we experience having a comfortable sense of everyone’s uniqueness, validity and a feeling of respect. We enjoy a sense of knowing our tastes, having an individual style, our own rhythms and our own direction.

When our uniqueness and autonomy feels threatened in some way, the attributes of Impersonal energy gets stronger. The more Impersonal we get, the more we tend to be in our head and the less perceptive we are about other peoples’ feelings. We feel that we are not inherently responsible for other people’s feelings or issues, they are. We trust in and believe that others are ultimately and capably responsible for their own experience.

When conditions lead us to behave more Impersonally, we become more

protective of our own needs and concerns by effecting boundaries and we are even less observant of the needs and concerns of others. This may show up as establishing physical distance, stiffness, formality, being circumspect or detached. We value respect for others and ourselves. It's not that we don't like others, it's that we are more tuned into what our own needs and directions are. Strong Impersonal selves feel most comfortable with a sense of insulation from the influence of others.

With Impersonal energy, we can say no to someone, easily and without guilt. When we are even further over on the Impersonal side, we are adamant. We may actually be hard to find and unavailable. A signature basis of this whole energetic system is that we feel entitled to ourselves.

From this stance, we would neither concern ourselves much with other people's affairs, perceiving it as meddlesome and invasive, nor do we like to be inquired of.

The downside is that when we live from this energy exclusively, other parts of us get very lonely. We are isolated.

When we are overly identified with Impersonal Energy, rigidly protecting our boundaries, our contact with those who have strong Personal energy of any kind is challenging and even threatening. What is the painful vulnerability we are striving to avoid? Feeling invaded or overwhelmed by their feelings, ideas, needs or will. We fear being robbed of our unique distinctiveness. This is the suffering our Vulnerable self feels when delineated autonomy is insufficiently met.

PERSONAL ENERGY

Remember, what motivates the power of this system of selves is how well our basic need for connection is being met. The more its not, the more pain some Vulnerable self in us feels. And that suffering is what unconsciously sets into action the Personal Selves.

On a scale of 1 – 10, when we are operating from Personal energy around a 1 or a 2, we have an ambient sense of connectedness, without any urgency to it. We feel a sense of interest in getting to know and experience others. Our focus of attention is on 'how are we doing.' When the other person, or the shared experience of "us" is happy and well, we feel safer and more at ease.

As we move over more strongly into this energy (3 – 5), we feel more desire to connect, to meld. We feel more in tune with how others are feeling, more sensitive to the needs of others. We care. We feel love, affection, concern and an impulse to make contact with others; ultimately this is a way of taking care of "us". We may perceive ourselves as heart-centered.

We would inquire into others, because we DO care and we want others to know that we're interested in them. Ultimately, caring for others is a way to establish and maintain contact; it protects us from feeling alone and insignificant.

As we turn up the dial to a 6 and above, we become more empathetic, if not outright telepathic. We know how others are feeling, because we sense that we feel it too.

From here, we wouldn't say no, we want to find a way that works for everyone. Making everyone happy is a priority. Our happiness is contingent on

the happiness and wellbeing of the “Other”. Selflessness is a virtue.

In this Personal energetic system, we can feel passionately for others, if not love for just about anyone. We feel good knowing that others feel good in our caring presence.

The downside is that we live for others approval and so we can't do anything that could risk disapproval. We lose touch with our experience of our own body, our own style, our own preferences and direction.

When we are overly identified with Personal Energy, and our connections are rigidly maintained, we are trying to protect ourselves from a specific kind of painful vulnerability. Being in contact with those who have Impersonal energy, can initiate the suffering of feelings of abandonment, rejection, insignificance or being ignored. We want “You” and “I” to exist merged, in a singular presence called “Us”, an “Us” that would insulate us from our own solitary, and potentially isolated existence. Life feels empty, meaningless and even dangerous without others to connect to.

ANGER AND FEAR

When someone who is identified with the Impersonal energies begins to get fearful and angry, they might say “I'm fine, leave me alone.” “I don't want to talk about this anymore.” They're attempting to strengthen their boundary. When that person is really angry they slam the door as they leave, or they hang up the phone on you, and they don't return your calls. They break connection. When it's really strong serious, they never want to speak to you again. You're history.

When someone who is identified with the Personal energies gets threatened, they want to talk about it. “Let's process this and work it out.” They're attempting to strengthen the connection. If they're really angry with you, they're yelling, in your face, sputtering! When they've reached the end of their rope with you, they might use physical contact to make the connection. In either case, both of these people will also punish the other with strong judgments. “The problem with you is that you just can't leave things (hidden message: me) alone!” or, “The problem with you is that you won't deal with reality!” (hidden message: us)

EXERCISE

You can easily get a feel for these two energies through a simple exercise done with at least one other person. I often demonstrate this in group settings by asking for a volunteer. Since I'm teaching about Personal and Impersonal energetics, I first inform my volunteer that it won't involve physical touch, and that he should participate by responding to me in whatever way feels natural.

Then, as I continue talking, I slowly but surely walk closer and closer to my volunteer until I am nearly an inch away from his body. As I'm doing so, I'll ask the group to notice how they feel. “Does anyone feel uncomfortable with how close to Bob I've moved?” Usually, everyone enthusiastically nods. “Notice how when I'm this close to you, Bob, that your experience of yourself dissolves into an experience of ‘us’. What is your impulse to do right now?” Or, I may point out that Bob has already begun to protect his boundaries of experience because he has looked away, or shrunk back from me. Bob might say that he wants to move away, or tell me to move back, or he might have even already put up his hand

to stop my forward progression into his space. We'll all notice too, how soon it was that Bob responded to my incursion. I'll ask Bob if there's anything else he's done to maintain his sense of personal space. He might volunteer that he's solidified his energy field such that it feels less permeable. "It's like when I'm on a crowded bus; I just create a strong "wall" all around me."

The second part of the group exercise is that I'll back away, this time, far beyond where I had originally been standing. Now I'm far away from everyone. As I talk through this part of the exercise, I'll ask the group to notice how disconnected they feel from me when I'm not close enough. I might further demonstrate this by not making eye contact, or turning my body slightly away from everyone. Or, I may, from a normal distance, direct all my comments to one person in the group, and ask the rest to notice how they feel energetically about me, now that I'm not ever looking or communicating directly with them.

This exercise gives participants an immediate feeling for the energetic nature of Personal and Impersonal energies, beyond the conceptual knowledge.

Let's take another look at how Personal and Impersonal energies can be expressed. Again, we tend to have formed habits that obliterate our experience of choice and free will.

INWARD AND OUTWARD

Both Personal and Impersonal Energies operate in two ways, ways that I'll simply call Inward and Outward.

Some examples of "Outward Impersonal" energy would be someone who is comfortable setting boundaries by establishing or extending them. They make declarative statements. "I prefer apples to oranges." They can say no. "No, I don't want an orange." They set time boundaries. "I have 10 more minutes and then I'll have to go." (and they do) They set space boundaries. "Would you move over? You're sitting too close." "Right to here is my property line." They put their hand up, palm outward, to tell you to stop moving any closer. They set emotional boundaries. "This is how I feel." or, "That's not how I feel." They set mental boundaries. "This is what I think." or, "I don't believe in that idea." They set behavioral boundaries. "This is what I will (or will not) do." Energetically, this person feels like they either have a firmness to them, a wall around them or that they are unbudge-able. They experience themselves as 'solid and clear'. Their energy field is like Teflon, nothing sticks, or like rubber, you bounce off them. It can even feel prickly, like a cactus. Again, these energies can be expressed on a scale of "one to ten."

Examples of "Inward Impersonal" energy would be someone who is most comfortable by withdrawing themselves from what doesn't suit them. This is the other way of preserving the integrity of their own experience and preferences. They leave the offered orange untouched. When they've reached their time limit, they withdraw their attention, leave, or space out. Spatially, they move backwards or over, change seats, or leave the room. Sometimes, they move out of state! Emotionally, they don't offer their feelings, not even to correct an erroneous assumption by another. They don't proffer their ideas. They go ahead and do their own thing, without needing to seek approval, concordance or permission from others. They consider themselves "private". Their energy field might be like mist,

you just can't get a hold on them. It can be like the cloak of invisibility, or you see them, but it feels like they are anywhere from one to a million miles away.

Looking at "Outward Personal" energy, in terms of behavior, we see someone who extends themselves in order to establish and maintain connection. They can surrender the details in favor of connection. "Apples, oranges, it doesn't matter. I'll have whichever is easiest for you." They don't let time interfere with connection, making whatever time is necessary, especially if they believe the other person needs or wants them to. They reach out to make physical contact (touching) & proximity. "Good" eye contact is important. They feel it's important to share their feelings, ideas, plans, and activities and to solicit them from others. They seek ways to plan activities together with others. They actively work to create a shared sense of agreement. They experience themselves as "givers". Their energy field feels like it's exuding, extending. It gives off a pressure, gently, like the warmth of the sun feels on skin, or heavily, like being deep under the pressure of water.

"Inward Personal" energy, has the quality of being empathetic. They can "tell" that you want them to have that orange and that you want the apple. They can sense how much time others need and they adjust to meet it so that a sense of connection is preserved. They absorb the energy of others. They sense and feel the emotional tones of others and integrate them as part of their own inner reality. They're easily moved by the experience of others. They are eager to understand what the other person thinks and believes; they give it weight. They pick up on what the other person is meaning, easily. They are good "Helpers" knowing almost before you do, what you'll need next, or want to do next. It's their attentiveness to and watchfulness of the experience of others that helps them to anticipate what's next. They experience themselves as 'receptive'. They are sensitive and pick up on what's going on around them; their energy field is like a sponge, sometimes it's sticky, like Velcro.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INWARD AND OUTWARD

Think for a moment how ultimately handicapped a person is, if the only way to set a boundary is to always stand up for it. The Inward style is unavailable to that person. As animals, we long ago developed instincts to help us protect and maintain the safety of our boundaries. We have the potential of the 3 F's: Fight, Flight and Freeze. Each of these can be more appropriate than the others, in a given situation.

What if the lessons you learned from childhood were that you're only supposed to Fight (Outward) and that fleeing (withdrawing) is "cowardly" and "unassertive"? You'd be unable to protect yourself sufficiently if you were in the presence of someone who was unable/unwilling to perceive and respect your stated boundaries.

Or, what if your socialization process led you to conclude that the only way to maintain your boundaries is to create distance (Inward Impersonal)? If people don't know what your boundaries are, they are more likely to inadvertently overstep them. Having enough Outward expression is akin to what animals do when they mark their territory. "Here's my edge. I am here. Don't come further."

What if you only know how to do Outward Personal? You'd be all giver

and no receiver; imagine how depleting that would ultimately be. You'd also be dependent on other people being capable of receiving and acknowledging that they'd received something from you in order for you to satisfy your sense of connection to them.

What if you only know how to do Inward Personal as a way to experience your connectedness to others? You take others in, but don't reach out. Others don't necessarily share your sense of connection. You may feel very intuitively aware of and responsive to others, but others may actually feel unrelated to you, since you're unlikely to volunteer your experience. You're reliant on others to share or make themselves available to you in order to satisfy your need for unity.

Ideally, as we go through life, we develop and reclaim the missing opposites. We are able to more skillfully and freely choose to relate to others with sufficient boundaries and connections. We can more skillfully and freely choose to move inward or outward with our energy. This ideal is not a static, 50/50 state of 'balance between opposites', nor is it a perfectly realized state. This ideal will always manifest differently from moment to moment, since we live in a continually changing environment. We need to be able to relate with awareness and choice (that is what it means to be 'skillfull') to the current context we're in, not just relate habitually from the patterns we absorbed in childhood. We accomplish this by first recognizing what attributes are missing, and we are gentle with ourselves as we learn to imperfectly gain them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Psyche, as expressed through the living, material universe is subject to the conditions of physical nature itself. Impersonal and Personal, Inward and Outward—are all dualistic principles that are expressed in nature. Everything in nature is simultaneously interconnected and unified, and everything has its own distinctive individuality. Trees, clouds, rivers, mountains, storms, elements—all are both individual and unique, connected and part of continuous, uninterrupted expressions. Everything has an implicit and an explicit reality.

Awareness of these natural variations in how Psyche seeks to express itself allows us a fuller range of discovery. Moving through and beyond the social conditioning we received as children necessitates rediscovering our full Natural potential.

What if Nature gives each of us, for the sake of analogy, 52 cards (potentials) at birth? Then, our social conditioning says, well, since you are male (or female) you don't get to play these 6 cards here. Also, since you're of this ethnic origin, you don't get to play those 4. Because you're born in this country/state, don't play those 5. Since you're from the (name your cardinal direction), you really shouldn't play these 3. At this economic level, you won't be needing these 4 cards either. And because of this religious system you were born into, you will (go to hell, be reborn as a goat, get bad karma) if you ever play these 10 cards and you must always lead with these other 3 cards here, no matter what the game, no matter what is 'trump'.

If you're lucky, by the time you're 5 or 6 years old, you'll have maybe 20 cards you're 'allowed' to play the game of life with. And those 20 cards are exactly the cards you need to play the game that your family/culture of origin is playing. I

can guarantee you however, that by the time you're in your 30s and 40s, you're already starting to lose the game of life if you haven't brought back more of the cards from Nature's deck to play with. Personal and Impersonal, Inward and Outward are 4 of the cards that Nature plays with, that are your birthright. Enjoy discovering what the other '48' are!



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