

Issue No.13 - 10 October 94

Dialogue Questions

1. The principles of DIALOGUE, as summarised in the last edition, require us to suspend our own points of view and put the group interest before our own.

If in the course of DIALOGUE you say something that really sets me on my heels. that is, a basic assumption is challenged - what do I do? Do I leave it and, in the group interest, re-focus on the progress of the discussion or do I try to come to grips with the 'internal' confusion even if it means abandoning the group enquiry? - Ed.)

Margot's Puzzles

I am interested in the way 'ego' works, in the NOW group and elsewhere, and how it affects what we say and how we react to others.

"Dialogue" occurs most readily, we believe, when we listen attentively; we accept what we hear; we restrain our need to rush in with an account of our own experience. This is a difficult exercise for me because I mostly believe I am right.

All of this implies a need for the ego to be contained as much as possible. By ego, in this context, I mean an individual's need for her/his world view to be seen as the definitive one. It stands to reason that there are as many world views as there are individuals in the world, none of them necessarily better or worse than any other. It is my ego which allows me to think that my world view is better than anyone else's.

I am trying to make a link between the ego and the validity of what people say in an area where the ego is inextricably bound up with an individual's world view. Or so it seems. My problem is that I am unable to take seriously a person who believes in the suspension of ego, but who acts in an ego-driven way. I first encountered this dilemma with Krishnamurti, whom I have seen talking on video tapes. K used to preach absence of ego, and at the same time was manifestly vain and ego-driven on occasions.

So two things puzzle me:

1. The way some people seem to be locked into a world view which does not allow for the existence of other, presumably equally valid, world views.
2. The way some people preach the suspension of ego but behave in an ego-driven way.

Margot Mann

(In discussing the above at Glen Davis another interesting question came up:

2. Most of us are prepared to suspend our opinions in the interests of the process of DIALOGUE but are we also prepared to change them?

I thought you might be interested in DIALOGUING our way through this question and/or No 1 opposite - Ed.)

Issue No 14 - 1st November 94

October Meeting

Several of the questions canvassed in the October newsletter came under review at the last meeting. We had the opportunity to inspect the clay feet of U G Krishnamurti as part of our ongoing guru

verification campaign but the issue which really brought the meeting to life was the question of whether we are prepared to change. It seems that most of us, but not all, see the need to suspend our opinions in DIALOGUE but actually abandoning opinions is a different kettle of fish. Someone suggested that even suspending a strongly held point of view is not really possible or desirable. As the group

interest is in the possibility of mind change (see above), what was going on?

A challenge was made that we, as a group, are not serious enough. There is a levity in our approach which mocks the gravity of the enquiry. Seriousness understood as an academic underpinning of views by reference to the published opinions of "great" minds" present and past and the application of academic method.

The exchanges became increasingly heated. The lack of seriousness charges gave rise to counter charges that the 'serious' were confusing reliance on external authority, knowledge and learning with seriousness.

One member claimed to have seen through the hypocrisy and closed-mindedness of the group and had just decided never to attend another meeting. This generated strong responses from people who thought this a gross misrepresentation of what was going on.

My response was a mixture of confusion and anger; the confusion arising from perplexity that a regular attender could have such a negative view of the group. Also the thought that the view might be wholly or partly justified. The anger arose from the way in which the rejection had been expressed which I thought unnecessarily offensive. I felt like suggesting the complainant put the decision into effect immediately but realised this was an opportunity to see how the group handled its first major conflict.

The DIALOGUE continued. The group persevered and it became clear that one side of the discussion was unable to suspend let alone drop their assumptions under any circumstances. We should have taken the early warning more seriously. Given that the serious ones were not prepared to suspend their point of view, They were asked why they had joined a DIALOGUE group and continued to come to meetings. In the hope of converting us perhaps to the point of view that can not be suspended? Or were they group junkies? This line of enquiry led to more heat and drove some of us into the kitchen and the preparation of a calming soup.

After lunch, the DIALOGUE continued on a more even keel with the 'frivolous' faction taking the initiative in trying to effect whatever reconciliation was needed to keep the group together. I showed a copy of the letter from Jim Findlen in the USA Dialogue (to be sent out in early November) to the person who had decided to leave - it 'resonated.' Who knows where all this might lead over the next few days or weeks. Will the serious return for more or are they already seeking less prickly pastures. At least the group responded in a way which held to the openness of DIALOGUE, did not sink to personal abuse, and so leaving the door wide for the disgruntled to return. In retrospect, the lack of 'seriousness' charge may have been triggered because the group was not serious about the agenda of those who complained.

On the other hand, I have heard two comments made recently to the effect that the DIALOGUE group is, or is in danger of becoming, too intellectual.

Is this so? Could those who feel this way bring it up at a meeting? Does this complaint arise from the way we approach the blockages and obstacles to clarity? Are we too analytical, too much in love with sound of our own thinking to become serious enough about DIALOGUE? Is that what the serious ones are trying to say? If so, what alternative, non-intellectual form could the enquiry take?

Alan Mann

A letter from Glen Davis, 29 October 94

Dear Donald,

I thought I should record our meeting on the 27th because it turned out, for me, to be a wonderful example of DIALOGUE actually working. We didn't set out to have a "DIALOGUE" but somehow it came about. The following is my story of the morning. I realise yours might be quite different.

(It was different - Donald's view of the day follows mine -an interesting example of how different DIALOGUE can be for participants at the same session).

We started off by reviewing the November Newsletter and this led to discussion of the Sudden v Gradual business and Gladney's report and commentary. I think, at this point, we were considering how the gradualist approach provided a "respectable" way of avoiding the issue by permanently postponing the necessary action or handing the responsibility to gurus, churches, belief systems, etc.

This reminded me of a recent experience. Early one morning the previous week, I had been thinking how reluctant I am to do the simple thing, how much easier to complicate it all by reading, thinking, writing Newsletters, etc. I decided to put Kafka's recommendation to the test. After about an hour, the following occurred:

*If we stop long enough for 'what is'
To operate on what we have become,
Instead of the other way round,
What we really are will be revealed.*

All quite obvious and straightforward but also too simple for the 'left brain only' approach which is the way I am programmed to operate.

Our duo-dialogue continued by looking at this and I mentioned Traherne's affirmation of desire, which I have always felt to be fundamental or true in spite of Buddhist insistence that desire is the root of suffering. Coincidentally, you had been reading "This Matter of Culture" and drew my attention to a comment by K. (p216 and 217) in answer to a student's question on how to become desireless, Krishnamurti says,

".....What is desire? It is energy is it not?the problem is not how to curtail energy, but how to maintain and increase it, how to make it independent and continuous - but not at the behest of any belief or society - so that it becomes the movement towards truth, God. Then energy has quite a different significance. As a pebble thrown into a calm lake creates an ever widening circle, so the action of energy in the direction of what is true creates the waves of a new culture. Then, energy is limitless, immeasurable, and that energy is God."

As we were talking, I saw the desire, not as my desire but, in Traherne's words, God's desire. To use K's words, not my energy but THE energy, the movement of "What is". And this extended the Kafka-Omega Group* insight and deepened my understanding of "it is in the perfection of creation that we are engaged".

It seems as though "What is" desperately desires our participation.

So this morning's meeting turned into a very effective DIALOGUE. It did not lead to a change of view in a total and final sense but it re-presented and integrated earlier insights at a deeper level and thereby weakened the grip of the separative world-view I carry as a shield before me.

To the extent that this happened there was change. This summary fails to communicate the significance of what happened. I don't think it can be communicated, it can only happen.

This, for me, is what DIALOGUE is about. A way of going deeper instead of merely going further. And to revert to a comment made earlier in our DIALOGUE, about the introduction of Traherne, Krishnamurti and other outsiders to the enquiry. What they have to say has absolutely no relevance to the DIALOGUE except that poets have often expressed insight with greater clarity than most of us are capable. Their expressions, however, are meaningless unless the insights have already arisen in one's own enquiry. Their statements have no value as authority.

It is as though the forerunners have created an insightful language. We can qualify to speak this language only as the result of sharing the insights, not by merely learning the words. And the wonderful thing might be that we do already understand the meanings of this language, in its totality, but at a level we are determined not to explore. (Perhaps we should DIALOGUE this. It seems to follow naturally from the above.)

Alan Mann

Donald re-membered what he said as follows:

A Duo- Dialogue at Baringa - One outcome of our dialogue was a series of glimpses into the meaning of desire.

The teaching, in most Eastern Religions, has been the denial of desire; the reason given is that it is the prime cause of humanity's woes and transgressions and the major distraction away from the true path to THAT whatever it is we assume to be sublime ecstasy, ultimate freedom, etc.

Yet, the desire to do good or to refrain from evil is also desire. Indeed, any longing to do or to be anything other than what I am now is "desire". Are such traditionally accepted urges undesirable? Can our inquiry or any search for change be condemned as desire? Is the desire to change society or transform myself false?

We probed the multiple facets and directions that ever-changing and often contrary desires take. For instance: a desire to be quiet and alone is soon followed by a yearning for activity and company, the longing for freedom is countered by desire for security. To go on pursuing these sequential opposites without probing their common, underlying source is a kind of madness and a perpetuation of duality. And yet, this is our habitual practice to pursue each successive, ephemeral urge and appetite, or sorting through our many hoped-for goals and allotting our priorities. What madness to waste my very life by scattering my energy (in every direction) on passing desires in the hope of coming upon Real Fulfilment (abiding wholeness, happiness, etc.) why permit still further fragmentation of energy on such a confused way of living?

Why not stop, wait watch? Be the observer of my actions rather than the driven actor? Would it be possible to allow all energy to gather in my body-mind? to permit my transient desires to dissolve their force into one whole movement, one single desire say for "Enlightenment in my daily living". I saw, of course that this would mean: Being the observer of whatever comes into consciousness. It means watching my habitual, ever-changing yet ever re-occurring urges. It means realising that my ultimate fear is : that unless I keep on setting up goals that I hope and believe I (and humanity) can achieve I am, at base, nobody, nothing. And, being a self-conscious entity - the fear of not being anything more than an organism, similar to every other living creature on earth and subject to the same natural laws, is too daunting, too impossible to contemplate. To question ourselves might

mean the realisation that all humanity's and, so, all our own work and effort may be a tremendous illusion leading us nowhere.

Such a possibility is too challenging to be permitted to enter consciousness. It must be denied. To question humanity's superiority, control, achievements, to suggest that all the struggle has been in vain is unthinkable. Our accomplishments are so obvious, doubt has no place. So goes our thinking. And yet, and yet....the ever onward, ever upward ego ascent of humankind may be a myth, a mistake. Through our labours the whole world as well as our civilised institutions are out of kilter. The tumbling chaos of nations and societies world-wide exposes a vast delusion, destructive on a massive scale. The time is here to question the unquestioned, traditional (and now almost unconscious, because habitual) beliefs in our future. It is always the future results of our labours that drive us on.

What we - all of us - are doing now is the real domain of dialogue. Focused Desire, in the sense we talked about it yesterday is into what is happening now.... enquiring into the meaning of enlightenment in daily living. All else is illusion. *Donald Ingram Smith*

Issue No.17 - 1st February 95

Expectations

Sometimes, between meetings, people who come to the NOW group talk about their responses to what happens at the meetings.

I think it is interesting, but probably not surprising, that we seem to bring a wide range of expectations to the group. Some of the reasons why we come could be:

- * to meet people/fellowship
- * to learn something
- * to share something
- * to teach something
- * to enjoy ourselves
- * because we are interested in the possibilities of enquiry
- * for lunch/to socialise
- * to have our ideas confirmed/tested
- * to see if anything grabs us
- * to see if the aim of the credo is realistic/can happen

It is likely that a person will have more than one reason for coming to the group. When s/he gets there, s/he may respond in one or more of the following ways:

- * it's too unstructured/structured
- * the topics discussed aren't "spiritual" enough
- * we aren't making any progress - what hope is there of transformation?
- * there are too many people with too much "spiritual baggage" who want to impose their own agendas
- * there are too many people who lack a "spiritual" or philosophical background to have a meaningful discussion
- * Dialogue never works: no one listens; no one suspends deeply held beliefs
- * I am not learning anything
- * there is too much/not enough reliance on external authority
- * we have to start at the beginning every week to accommodate new/different people
- * the same people tend to hold the floor/never speak
- * the level of discussion is not very profound/too intellectual
- * too many people lack a serious commitment to transformation - they just come to enjoy themselves

* we should have a model for a Dialogue group.

It seems that there are as many different expectations of the NOW group as there are people who attend. Maybe you can add to these lists. I find it interesting that what some people see as highly significant and useful, others see as an obstacle. Do you think the wide range of expectations is a problem for the group? Do you think any of the above reasons for attending, or responses to what happens, are better or more relevant than the others?

Margot Mann

Issue No.19 - 10th May 95

To Model or not to Model

We are faced with a dilemma. After two years of promoting the suspension of belief systems, established opinions, at least for the duration of our meetings, we are finding ourselves in a rudderless chaos which means we have to start off from the same position every meeting. This is particularly the case with new members or visitors. Also, going over the same old ground every time can become very dull for the regulars.

It has been suggested we adopt some sort of agreed neutral model as a framework from which to work. In the same way that we use a common language. Can we use, as a basic code, what we have previously agreed about 'reality' and 'consciousness' or 'mind'.

Recent meetings have indicated a formula which might work, the Wilber "double triangle" which suggests the following simple model:

Reality

Comprises: the physical, the mental and the spiritual.

Consciousness

Comprises three modes:

the pre-rational, the rational and the trans-rational.

which have as their respective proper concern the physical, mental and spiritual.

By way of further description of the three modes of consciousness, can we accept that each has its own way of knowing and experiencing reality.

The pre-rational has sensory knowledge of the physical world. the rational has knowledge of logic, concepts and ideas (including beliefs and religious dogma).

The trans-rational has direct, contemplative, intuitive knowledge of Reality, God, 'the Ground of Being, the 'Over-Self -direct knowledge of Spirit by spirit, which cannot be expressed in rational terms and is said to flow from the sustained practice of contemplation, 'listening', emptying the mind of thought and/or 'seeing'.

Erik Harting

Group Need

Gladney put me on the spot about what I mean by my regular references to 'group need'. When we started the meetings I thought we might be creating an opportunity for something new to come about. The idea was that we might find a way in which the present moment provided revelation in relationship not just a meeting point for the past experiences of the people involved.

It cannot happen if we come together in the same spirit that prevails at normal social events such as lunch parties or business driven management or problem solving meetings. The adoption of the

principles of DIALOGUE seemed to provide the necessary differentiation because it creates, or should allow, the development of an awareness of what individual action is necessary and unnecessary in relation to what is happening in the group. The communal direction which the enquiry is taking as opposed to the pressure of individual reaction to what is happening. This is what I mean by group need. The extent to which we recognise and respond to this need determines, I think, the effectiveness of the process.

Alan Mann