

Issue No. 31 - Nov 96

Dialogue 'Does it Work'

(This is a response from the Millers to the exchanges which started with my contribution in NOWletter ? followed by rebuttals in the last two issues before we went into hibernation)

Dear Alan:

Thanks for your recent 'Now'. Sorry that I don't respond much (or at all, so far), but life is fairly busy for Shirley and myself these days and there does not seem to be a lot of time for anything extra. I don't always read the 'Now' letter fully straight away and sometimes not until some time later, so I missed your encoded message.

Regarding dialogue. In my experience with the group that we have meeting every two months, there is no dialogue, still only discussion. It is very difficult to have the conditioning of a lifetime become silent at meetings. We all seem to want to trot out what we 'know', and are thinking about what we wish to say while someone else is speaking instead of listening with attention. So the essence of dialogue, which seems to me to be listening, is absent. Our group does not seem to like pauses or silences during the meeting and so any gaps are quickly filled with communication of our knowledge!

Dialogue, I feel, is to communicate without drawing on what we 'know'. Listening with all our being (mind, heart and body) in stillness, without any previous knowledge interfering. Therefore with no judgment, thinking, labelling or reacting in any way. Also, communicating in words in the same way. Difficult, to say the least about it.

Dialogue seems to be similar to the experience of the old time painters or artists in the east, who studied and sat with the object that they were working with until they become one with it. Only then would they express their art, in painting, sculpture or whatever, but not until then. In this way we can have dialogue with a tree, person, or anything, and it takes place without thought.

As knowledge and thinking are always limited, narrow, very partial, dialogue would be a very desirable way of communicating, to help us understand and experience the fullness of living and deal with the problems of living.

So dialogue to me is difficult but a very worthwhile activity. Perhaps in our meetings there have been fleeting occasions when 'dialogue' has 'happened'. So, for myself, we aim to continue meeting and perhaps dialogue will unfold or occur occasionally.

Geoff Miller

Dear Alan: My thoughts on dialogue:

For me dialogue would be of greater value between two people at one time, rather than within a group, at least as a beginning. I have found more opportunity then to listen intently, with full attention and fewer distractions, to that which is being explored. I feel dialogue requires a strong degree of self-discipline to arrive at clarity of mind, which is not often reached in a group ... in my experience so far!

One needs to probe so deeply into the mind of the other to find what is truly meant and arrive, firstly, at a clear understanding ... then to continue an ongoing in-depth penetration into the very heart of the subject. In this way the process may clear some of the blocks in our thinking which arise from past conditioning and slowly then, perhaps, a comprehension deeper than understanding may arise from within, or beyond, ourself ... our consciousness ... whatever it may be called that is beyond our 'knowledge'.

To me this is the real process of dialogue. And the outcome? No longer any division between the two minds/beings/objects taking part in dialogue.

Shirley Miller

Mario Cayer's doctoral dissertation "An Enquiry into the Experience of Bohm's Dialogue".

Mario is Assistant Professor with the Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Studies, Laval University, Quebec. I heard about this study through the e-mail dialogue and wrote to Mario who kindly provided us with a copy for circulation amongst the group on the condition it is not copied in whole or part. I would like to add a further condition, that anyone who reads it gives me some feedback which I can pass back to the author.

The research provides a fresh perspective on what dialogue is about. It deals with such questions as why do people practise dialogue and addresses the difficulties of implementation - many of which we have wrestled with ourselves from time to time. It is particularly interesting in view of the fact that the last three issues of this newsletter have included contributions on the question of why dialogue does or does not work.

The method involved circulating a questionnaire for completion by 18 people who had been engaged in regular dialogue for at least three years plus supplementary input based on direct contact or correspondence with the participants.

As a result of the information he gathered, Mario has been able to classify the reasons for dialoguing in what he calls 'Dimensions of Dialogue'. These are defined and discussed at length in Part 3 which is both a summary of the findings and a suggested framework of understanding:

- Dialogue as inquiry
- Dialogue as conversation
- Dialogue as creating shared meaning
- Dialogue as collective meditation
- Dialogue as participatory process

I found this a very helpful model both as far as managing my confusion about dialogue is concerned and in dealing with the difference between my expectations and what others seem to think it should be all about. Each of the above dimensions is considered in detail and includes suggested references. The range of references was an eye-opener for me as it revealed a much wider context in which dialogue is developing than I had been aware of.

Part 1 of the dissertation deals with the research itself, Part 2 deals with the findings and covers such matters as 'Why Do They Practise Dialogue, Characteristics of Bohm's Dialogue, What is Missing?', Effects of the Practise of Dialogue, Difficulties Encountered in the Practise of Dialogue, Side effects Resulting from the Practise of Dialogue and The Facilitator's Role. In considering these questions, Mario allows the respondents to speak for themselves through extensive quotations from their replies. This is particularly interesting in view of our own struggles with the same issues.

I was about to conclude by saying that this model provides a coherent framework for tackling and overcoming much of the confusion and apparent contradictions which seem to

accompany dialogue and I think it will for me. However, I will include Mario's last paragraph in case I get too carried away by this prospect.

"One must not be naive and think that the presentation of this model will resolve all problems. No model can resolve problems. Models are a creation of the human mind. And when we grow attached to our models, to the creations of our minds, we then give up our capacity to create. The price is much too high. Let us hope that individually and collectively we have the courage not to become too attached to the creations of our minds and, consequently, keep our capacity to create. It is what the practice of dialogue invites us to do".

I am re-reading the dissertation after putting these initial notes together after which it will be available to reader number three.

Alan Mann

Issue No. 34 - May 97

Dialogue - Principles

This is the list of Dialogue 'principles' we hang on the wall at Greville Street from time to time to remind us of what we are supposed to be doing and not doing.

Dialogue - Principles

1 Not a debate

*2 An exploration of awareness through
enquiry into the process of thought*

3 Questioning not asserting

*4 Question assumptions:
of the speaker
and mine as they arise to meet the
speakers*

*5 Listening:
by suspending my point of view
by giving priority to ear over mouth*

*6 Group interest before self interest
Allow speaker to finish
Make space for all to speak*

*7 The process is more important than content
or outcome*

Dialogue - Why do people do it?

(Dialogue means different things to different people. The following is an extract from a summary in NOWletter 31, of Mario Cayer's doctoral dissertation which is now being circulated amongst Sydney dialoguers. Mario analysed the reasons people gave when surveyed as to their motivation for continued involvement in Dialogue groups. Ed.)

"An Enquiry into the Experience of Bohm's Dialogue".

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I conclude with Mario's closing paragraph:

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(Mario is Assistant Professor with the Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Studies, Laval University, Quebec.)

Why am I going to Dialogue today?

(Cherith Adams sent me the latest batch of comments on Dialogue from the Lancaster group which I hope to include in total with the next NOWletter. I extracted this one by Jill Robinson from the batch as it seems to capture the uncertainty most of us feel as well as the indefinable whatever it is that keeps us coming back for more Ed.)

Why am I going to Dialogue today, or any day, come to that? This question came into my mind as I settled down for my daily meditation practice. I like the people who go there very much and I seem to have been accepted by them. I look forward to seeing them once a month so is this why I go? Is it just that I am a lonely, middle-aged woman who wants something to do on a Saturday once a month? Well, it certainly feels to be more rewarding than some things I could be doing like housework gardening or shopping, and probably less expensive too! However, this month I could use the time to work on the project for my management

course as the deadline for this is looming nearer and nearer. And a whole day every month in my busy schedule takes some finding, so whilst there could be some truth in all of this, I'm not sure that it is really why I go to Dialogue.

I've been going to Dialogue pretty regularly for more than 18 months now and I'm still not sure I can say what it is about or why I go. It seems a bit odd to say that I go to sit with maybe 15 to 20 other people and spend a day enquiring into the meaning of life. And yet this is what it seems to be about for me and this seems to be the main reason I go. I feel that I have been on a journey, or at least searching, for some sort of truths about life for a long time, consciously for at least 15 years. A lot of that time has been spent reading and studying, in various ways, religion, psychology and philosophy and although I do know people with whom I can talk about these things in an open and free way, the opportunity to spend a whole day enquiring into what it means to be human seems such a gift.

That is not to say that I find Dialogue easy. On the contrary, I am often surprised at how difficult it is for me to make a contribution even when I feel I have something worth saying as well as how difficult it can be to hear what other people are saying, especially when that challenges my particular 'world view'. However, the opportunity to focus on the crucial issues of our day; to try to become more aware of the values, beliefs and assumptions out of which I live as well as learning about the values, beliefs and assumptions of others is such a fascinating process for me that I feel almost compelled to attend.

The word which characterises Dialogue best for me is probably FRUSTRATION! It can be an extremely frustrating process. For instance, sometimes the topic is extremely interesting but it is difficult to find a 'space' in which to express my views and opinions; sometimes the topic is fairly meaningless to me and I struggle to stay attentive. Sometimes, what another person says can touch me so deeply that I feel a strong connection and sometimes it is possible to acknowledge this and sometimes not. Sometimes I feel that I have not been 'heard' or understood or that another person has not been 'heard' or understood and that the Dialogue has gone off at a tangent which feels 'wrong' to me. Another huge frustration can be feeling that somehow we want to move deeper into our enquiry but that somehow we don't quite know how to do this.

Sometimes the group falls into silence or perhaps starts off in silence and this can feel very special. Personally I would value more periods of silence as this would give me more time to reflect on what is happening. It seems to me that Dialogue somehow exists in the gap between 'normal' conversation and meditation and even though it probably moves slower than 'normal' conversation, sometimes it feels that it is still moving too fast for me to keep up. Keeping my attention there for long periods can be very demanding and I find it ebbs and flows throughout the day. I do find it difficult to give my full attention to what is happening and formulate my own response. As a result, I am probably one of the quietest members of the group. I have recently been reflecting on whether Dialogue highlights personality traits such as introversion/extroversion and how easy or difficult it can be to behave differently in the group situation.

Apart from the formal Dialogue sessions, a lot can happen during the tea and lunch breaks as well as over the evening meal which we generally share together.

So although it is still not very clear to me why I do try to go to Dialogue regularly because I'm not sure I could honestly say that I enjoy it in the normal accepted sense of enjoying

something, probably because of the frustration involved I do get a sense of adventure and also of satisfaction from knowing that other people share the search, and that we can join together occasionally to try to explore our potential and deepen our understanding of what it is to be human in the late 20th century. Also I find that being involved in Dialogue is more than just sitting with a few other people one day per month. It has an effect on my life on-goingly, on my relationship with myself and with other people I come into contact with as I think that I appreciate more and more the complexity of life and how difficult and exciting this can be.

Jill Robinson

Dialogue & Change 1

(The following is a recent contribution to the email Dialogue conference by Don Factor, one of the early initiators of the movement. Ed.)

I guess I too had better come out of the shadows again. For a while now, other urgencies have kept me from playing seriously with all these ideas, but I do keep track. This stuff is important.

One point I want to toss in here is that, for me, dialogue does have a purpose. It is not a fixed one but rather involves something like a close examination and perhaps a dissolving of the structures that make humans think and act the way they do. I concur with Bohm and Krishnamurti that change is necessary and that it is urgent. The practice of dialogue, for me, is a means to that end.

To gather together and do dialogue can feel fulfilling and important - even pleasurable on occasion - and sometimes it is all these things. But I think that leaving it at that - as a practice that someone else's theory (Bohm's, or whoever) tells us will bring about increased harmony, coherence and creativity - isn't good enough.

Dialogue isn't just doing it. For me, the practice must lead to a search for a deeper understanding of the processes involved in human thought, in other words, of the meaning behind human interactions, not only with one another but with the world at large. And it may lead us to places where even our fondest beliefs - ie. those that we take to be the actualities if not the necessities of our experience and existence - have to be discarded. If proprioception of thought, for example, doesn't happen immediately, then let's see if something like it can happen on reflection. And if it can't let's look further, perhaps for another approach. Dialogue is not a competition to see who can live up to some preconceived ideal but an ongoing job of work for all concerned.

A process such as this simply doesn't happen all by itself. Risks have to be taken, difficult questions have to be addressed and the full panoply of our imaginations needs to be called into play. The project involves our intellects, our knowledge and our emotions. And all of it has to be fed back into an ongoing dialogue - it all has to be shared - because any meaningful transformation, if it is ever to occur, can only be a product of all of us and of all that we each have to bring to it. Whether we are confronted with blocks or dissatisfactions, anger or frustration, boredom or even illumination, it is all, finally, food for the dialogue which goes on and on.

I guess my need for this rant or lecture or whatever it is comes out of a reaction to some months of relative silence. But I am also saying these things especially to those who like to organise dialogues without participating in them, who say that they prefer doing dialogue

rather than thinking about it or, yes, debating it, or exploring and trying to extend the theory, and to those who think (perhaps only tacitly) that they already know what lies at the end of the road.

Dialogue, if it is important, is more than sitting in circles and talking and listening. It is nothing more nor less than a way of engaging the world whatever that might mean. And I for one would like to find out.

Don

Don Factor, Thursday 1997-03-13

Dialogue & Change 2

(This is an extract from my summary of a thesis by Cherith Adams of the Lancaster UK group. The full review, from which I have taken this extract, is in NOWletter 32. The dissertation itself is now going the rounds in Sydney.Ed.)

Who am I? A study of the impact of long-term participation in a Dialogue group on members' belief in, or sense of, individuality.

The study is an investigation into the impact of long term membership of a Dialogue group on members' belief in, or sense of, individuality. In her preface the author explains that the study is prompted by a long standing concern with the way that human society is behaving and that *"...whilst action is urgently needed, it will be prevented, or not very effective, if the underlying root of the problem, an inability to see the unity beyond individuality, is not tackled. The motive behind this research is to discover whether Dialogue groups can have any effect on our notion of individuality hence form some part of the solution to our human predicament"*.

In explaining the relevance of the study, Cherith concludes a section (p7) dealing with the intention in Dialogue with this comment:

....Dialogue can be seen as a bridge between psychotherapy, spirituality and social action.

Cherith describes her route to this enquiry through Systems Theory and her involvement in psychotherapy bringing her face to face with the consequences of a breakdown in community. She starts off by looking at Dialogue groups and provides a comprehensive literature review which I found very illuminating. The method involved interviewing five long term dialoguers, three men & two women from the Lancaster group, selected by a blind system she devised, and getting eleven others to complete a questionnaire and autobiography. On completion, the collected questionnaires and autobiographies were returned to all participants for further feedback.

The results take the form of a discussion which is categorised under the following headings:

- 1 The participants' belief in individuality before joining the group.
- 2 The effect of early experiences in Dialogue on the sense of individuality.
- 3 Changes in belief in, and sense of, individuality after long-term membership of the group.
- 4 Changes in members' lives as a result of changes in their perception of individuality.
- 5 Disturbance and unconscious factors.
- 6 Reasons given for the change in belief in, or sense of, individuality brought about by Dialogue.

The discussion draws on extensive quotes of the participants and these should be read to get a real feel for the enquiry and outcome. In her conclusion Cherith says *"....The result of the*

study should be taken as very provisional, but the general concensus of the research group is that participation over a lengthy period of time (i.e. over a year) deepens and expands awareness around the whole notion of individuality, involving an ongoing unfolding of the meaning of the concept of individuality. This deepening of understanding for most members of the group has produced at least some change in their sense of being separate individuals, reflected in changes in their internal perceptions and in their behaviour in relationships".

Dialogue & Change 3

(This is a note from Don Factor, which points to what Bohm had in mind about change:)

When Bohm proposed these ideas he took them very seriously. He had a purpose. It may have been subtle but it wasn't simply "an exploration... not for the purpose of stopping something, or starting something or getting somewhere." If I understood him at all, he was deeply concerned about the situation that humanity was in and therefore he needed to give that situation his attention. I believe he wanted to do something about it. To, at the very least, make a contribution to humanity's survival.

He felt an urgent need to address what he called the fragmentation and pervasive incoherence that dominated human activity. For him, dialogue and proprioception and suspension and ideas like "thoughts and felts" and so on, were simply possible modes of addressing a serious problem that was leading mankind down the road to its own destruction. It was much more than just an exploration with no particular purpose. Rather, as he put it, it was part of an attempt to reach a place that was upstream of the source of the pollution.

He felt that if we could get there and see the meaning of that polluting source and really see it with some passionate intensity, that in itself could bring about a change of meaning which would also, of course, be a change of being. Maybe I'm just projecting my own desires on him, but I don't think so. A lot of this is all there in his texts.

Don Factor

Dialogue & Change 4

I find the Dialogue meeting nearly always works as an effective medium of change. If the principles outlined on page 2 above are observed and allowed to guide the group, then change is inevitable for, in following them, I have adopted a basis of relationship which does not normally apply in my everyday life.

By 'surrendering' to the group priorities I weaken the grip of ego and make it more likely that 'being' or 'what is' will prevail. This happens quite frequently at the personal level but I suppose the real issue is whether it comes about in the group as a whole; so that we get a 'free flow of meaning' or reach together that 'place upstream of the source of the pollution'.

The Dialogue environment fosters an interactive clarity which seems more relevant to living than my normal 'isolated' approach. I think the key lies in the capacity to shift from my normal state of consciousness which is based on thinking-knowing to a state of mind which is predominantly seeing-apprehending. That, I think, is the essential change.

Alan Mann

At the July meeting we talked about meaning and the possibility of shared meaning. We wandered and there was even a suggestion that there is no such thing as meaning. I subsequently listened to a tape on the way up to Glen Davis from which I extracted the following notes.

Editor

(From David Bohm's talk at Oak Grove School - Sunday Dec 2 1990)

Thought is more cultural and social than individual.

Dialogue

dia = through

logos = word or meaning

Picture meaning as flowing through people - what is between us.

If you have two people you may say there are two points connected by a dotted line showing their relationship or the other view is a solid line ending in two points. The relationship is the main thing and the people are the extremes of it.

Just as thought separates the process, the self, into the subject and the object, the observer and the observed, when we are really in communication (communion) a oneness arises between people as much as inside the person.

The word dialogue is not commonly used in this sense but is usually used to describe what is better described as negotiation or discussion.

What does it mean to really communicate?

Culture the 'shared meaning' which holds a society or group together. The need is to come upon the meaning which is common. Assumptions act as reflexes. They are very powerful because they are assumptions of necessity. powerful because they are collective; they form the basis of our culture.

Watching and staying with the movement, for example, of anger we see that this watching is far more important than resolving the issue which gave rise to the anger. The enquiry leads to the deeper meaning the meaning of the whole thought process.

The elements or aspects of meaning are: significance, value and purpose.

Something which has great significance for me is given high value and value is the energy which leads me to do something about it. The value flows out of the perception of the meaning and the purpose arises out of the associated necessity. (necessity itself is a sort of meaning)

Thought gives, imposes meaning which may be incoherent because of reflex responses. We must sustain the meaning of dialogue for it to work, Failure to perceive the meaning of dialogue is a cultural blockage, which obscures the higher order fact of the meaning of and need for dialogue.

You cannot start from the purpose because the purpose arises from the clear perception of the meaning and necessity for dialogue. To start with the purpose is to put cart before horse. Can we have an insight into the necessity.

The first thing for any group to do, if it is to succeed, is to share meaning.

The vision of dialogue is the possibility of a shared insight. There is a level of contact in a group in which the electro-chemical process in the participating brains may actually function as one mind, become attuned, as one body. If we can all listen to all the opinions and suspend them without judging them then we all have one mind. We are of one mind with the same assumptions-content. So the differences, at that moment, are secondary. The point is that you have in some sense one body one mind. It does not overwhelm the individual the individual may have another assumption and share it with the group. It is not important whether you agree or not. No pressure to agree or disagree. We don't have to agree that a particular thought is right but see it and what gives rise to it.

The vision of dialogue is to share the meaning which underlies or gives rise to assumptions not to agree on a set of assumptions. Impersonal fellowship arises from this sharing of meaning. By seeing the meaning we will then begin to feel the value of it and then establish the purposes which may help us bring us towards it.

Dialogue might lead to a shared insight, a perception that we share the material process and that the material process we share is far more important than the thoughts which separate us.

Extract from David Bohm talk

From Cathy Lo

"One Who is Basely Timid"

Finally the long-awaited D-Day arrived. It had been creeping its way upon me just **too** slowly.... (But then I should have remembered that old unwritten law:- that to which you look forward the most, becomes invariably something of a let-down.)

Once you get the bug, Dialogue becomes a bit of an addiction. I had been eagerly gobbling up any and every available session over the past year, and was delighted to stumble upon yet another venue, in yet another trendy inner-city location. To top it off, the organisers were to conduct a special dialogue session at my monthly network meeting. I couldn't wait! At last the evening arrived. We were asked to visualise an occasion when we'd felt really heard, and to describe how it felt. The leader wrote all our expressions on the flip-chart. We were to just let it go wherever it ledto leave a gap between our interventions....the Chinese character for "listen" was on the whiteboard.....

Silence, as is its wont, became so rapidly a substitute for itself - so many compulsive words dribbling out, about something which barely emerged at all. Five seconds on average, then so many words, words, words, to banish it away. Where was the exquisite discipline? The ruthless suspension of assumptions. The courageous challenging? The quivering knife -edge dilemma of 'will I - won't I' - "do I **really** feel compelled to speak?" - the pounding pulse probing process, the ego in an agony of imminent self-torture?

So, smug and self-contained, I remained aloof. But wait.....The sharp-witted, deep-thinker, (the spunky-chunky-hunk with the pony-tail), dared to probe the possibility of saying something unacceptable:oh good value!.....this thing is starting to hot up! (he didn't actually **say** anything unacceptable, mind, but it was a tantalising thought just the same).

Sadly, we were all just too nice. And me - I was just a coward. The best I could do was whimper rather petulantly (in the debrief period), that of course we had focused on content to the exclusion of process, and that I couldn't agree with the leaders on how well we'd done - ouch, even that oh-so-mild-mannered criticism brought a cascade of self-deprecation.....

"Stars, hide your fires - Let not light see my black and deep desires. . . "

(... oh well, at least there's always next week.....

"Till then I'll sweat, and seek about for eases;

And, at that time, bequeath you my diseases.")

Cathy Lo

Finite - Infinite

Written by David Bohm for the memorial service for Malcolm Sagenkhan. The piece was also read at Bohm's own memorial service, held at Birkbeck College

In considering the relationship between the finite and the infinite, we are led to observe that the whole field of the finite is inherently limited, in that it has no independent existence. It has the appearance of independent existence, but that appearance is merely the result of an abstraction of our thought. We can see this dependent nature of the finite from the fact that every finite thing is transient.

Our ordinary view holds that the field of the finite is all that there is. But if the finite has no independent existence, it cannot be all that is. We are in this way led to propose that the true ground of all being is the infinite, the unlimited; and that the infinite includes and contains the finite. In this view, the finite, with its transient nature, can only be understood as held suspended, as it were, beyond time and space, within the infinite.

The field of the finite is all that we can see, hear, touch, remember, and describe. This field is basically that which is manifest, or tangible. The essential quality of the infinite, by contrast, is its subtlety, its intangibility. This quality is conveyed in the word spirit, whose root meaning is a wind, or breath." This suggests an invisible but pervasive energy, to which the manifest world of the finite responds. This energy, or spirit, infuses all living beings, and without it any organism must fall apart into its constituent elements. That which is truly alive in the living being is this energy of spirit, and this is never born and never dies.

From Infinite Potential

David Peat's biography of David Bohm -p322

Article from Terry O'Brien

'I celebrate the man who knows nothing'

What kind of man was he, recorded by Plato to have been summoned to Delphi to sojourn with the gods - 'You are the wisest of them all Socrates' - 'But how can that be?' he replied, 'I know nothing.'

What innocence, what simplicity, what complete integrity he displayed, and his name has endured across several thousands years. Acknowledged as one of the great founding thinkers

of our western civilization, he proclaimed nothing about himself to be special, he just questioned everything - especially established thoughts and ideas, the paradigm of his era.

How then do those of today, self proclaimers who imply an authority based on some assumed state of 'enlightened' superiority, shape up in contrast to a man who would reject such a claim unless scrutinised beyond all possible delusion? To me they pale into insignificance, legends in their own fantasies desperate people attempting to cover up complex complexes with sophisticated, flowery compositions of persuasive theories and philosophies - (There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy . . . ' Shakespeare's Hamlet).

Often speaking in soft deliberate intonations with carefully placed pauses and punctuations to assure the sheep that flock to them of their 'sincerity'. Yet behind this facade I suspect they are 'control' driven - bent on bending others to bind to their brand.

Sad they are, though destructive in their obsession to perpetuate cycles of domination and subservience - thus the irresponsible attract the irresponsible and so must dance a tango together. I remember a tape of a Krishnamurti talk (if pressed I could locate it) - *'If a man says he knows what truth is, distrust him completely! Such a man does not know . . .'*

The true colours of the self proclaimers become obvious when they come under pressure (though many are cleverly skilled in elusive ways to avoid or deflect probing questions.) The subtle contempt in their tone and words reveal a closeted shadowy state. They panic and stumble clumsily, threatening all manner of spiteful retribution when confronted with the probing, yet honest, enquiry of latter day folk of even temper, humble by nature and widely acknowledged as well intentioned. It is to them that I look for dialogue. Not to be patronised with platitudes and anecdotes, but to think together, enquire together, and on occasion, gain insight together.

It is my belief that only those who know nothing, empty of will and open to truth can explore, learn and 'live' the ever new wisdom of an eternal mystery. Those who imply they have a hold on it are simply caught in a web of their own deceit.

I take responsibility for the above letter as 'my' opinion. It may be accurate, it may be inaccurate. It may be partly right, partly exaggerated or partly wrong. I believe open honest dialogue, as 'equals' is the only sure way to test its truth. I am always willing to acknowledge my faults and learn from mistakes. I have difficulty in respecting those who can't (or won't).

Terry O'Brien

Issue No. 39 - November 97

The Consequences of Dialogue

(Alan Mann on Terry O'Brien's night seminar)

Terry organised a big dialogue gathering at the Well Being centre in North Sydney 'Dialogue - What is its Practical Meaning? About 65 people attended. There was a spread of specialised interests representing groups involved in community activities which might find dialogue helpful.

These people introduced themselves and described what they did. We then split up into three groups for about 45 minutes of dialogue followed by a break and a final one hour session with

everyone involved. It went well, surprisingly well in view of the fact that many were meeting Dialogue for the first time.

In the final session I found myself listening to the speakers and agreeing with what they said although many of the statements were contradictory. I wondered what was going on. Am I totally without discrimination; bending to whatever point of view is being expressed, truly "a feather for every wind that blows". This was followed by a sense that although this was illogical it was actually happening. As though whatever was spoken was what I was at that moment; my consciousness at that moment simply what occupied awareness free of my opinions and reaction. The reaction as judgement, opinion, belief, etc was available but unlike my normal consciousness it was not responding automatically. It had to be deliberately brought into a field of awareness completely occupied by the speakers words. My opinions no longer came unbidden.

Later, after the meeting, I found myself back in automatic reponse mode as I discussed some aspect of the night's events. Congratulations to Terry on the successful outcome of what must have seemed a fairly risky enterprise.

Alan Mann