

Issue No. 24 - October 95

Dialogue and The Tao.

After the last meeting at the Swedenborg Centre Francis dropped in with a copy of a chapter of "Internal Growth through Tao" by Ni Hua-Chang. He thought it covered almost exactly the same ground we had been talking about at the meeting. It is about direct and indirect spirituality and the difference between spiritual support and spiritual development. Most religious activity, that of established religion, is indirect and offers 'external' support to adherents who are kept, as a result, in a 'holding pattern' whereas growth can come only from the development of spiritual independence through the direct route. This is a happy concurrence with the credo which heads this newsletter but I also found some interesting comparisons with Dialogue. The established religions, the indirect, represent the static. They are the consolidated gains of past growth but the price they pay is rigidity and loss of the dynamic from which they arose. They can no longer afford to challenge their assumptions and, therefore, become fossilised; shades of Pirsig and Spink.

Here is a quote from page 106-107:

"If I have a spiritual standpoint of my own, it is different from what religions teach. It is an attitude of, let us grow together in the sense of helping each other. By this I mean, the way to grow naturally is to help each other.....All people are students of each other if they are open to what is wise and good in other people."

I find this an accurate description of how I approach Dialogue although I had not formulated it in this way before. He/she also makes a comment on p.111 which further warms my assumptions about Dialogue:

*"It is my understanding that the principle of Tao is **harmonisation of all useful differences** and acceptance of the colourful variety in the human world. Spiritually, harmonisation and cooperation is the highest spiritual guidance of human people. It is above all religious divisions. Because it is universal spirit, it transfuses itself in all religions as their essence".*

This chapter also makes some interesting points on the need to become alive to our true nature and the deadening effect of memory on our otherwise wideawakeness. This I include as a commercial for future 'Seeing' workshops. Thank you.

Francis Chan

Issue No. 26 - December 95

December Meeting

The December meeting was the biggest we have had and, in anticipation of a multitude, I decided to experiment with a tent on the lawn. It seemed to work quite well. We talked of education and the fact that wonder seems so easily driven out of our lives. After the event, I had a strong reaction to the effect that we are not attentive enough to the process of Dialogue. I think we spend most of our Dialogue time in good old fashioned discussion. For example, whilst the general tenor seemed to be regretful about the absence of wonder and the wonderful someone asked the question, 'does life have to be wondrous?'

I thought that a particularly pertinent point and I withdrew from the 'flow' to contemplate it. By the time it had sunk in and I had watched the strong reaction of my assumptions wrestling with this notion I returned to find myself well downstream with no opportunity to explore this question in the group without persuading you all to row back up the river with me. So how can dialogue ever work if the real challenges evaporate in the speed of the movement? Or was it important only to me? It seems like a fundamental flaw in the process. Perhaps our insistence on not having an agenda, agreed subject of discussion or any form of coordination is becoming ritualised into a dogmatic obstacle to the dynamic.

On the other hand, the talk of wonder and 'magic moments' led to a number of such events on the day. I was reminded of Maslow's claim that when his students became interested in and enquired about peak experiences their frequency increased.

I wonder whether there is any non-personal indicator of the effectiveness of the process of Dialogue. Perhaps the frequency of the group, as a whole, falling into silence as opposed to individuals. Maybe Dialogue is just another mad idea that will never work?

I think another possible obstacle to Dialogue is the assumption that there is no way that intelligence can function other than through the rational, be it the individual or collective brain. In this scenario, thought comes to be regarded as "source" rather than expression of source and the idea arises that it is necessary to think our way through rather than see. I intend to devote an issue of this newsletter to "Why Dialogue doesn't Work". All contributions, for and against most welcome.

Donald gave me the following extract as an interesting commentary on the assumptions which may be lurking behind our group title which, you may recall, is taken from Traherne's poem 'The Anticipation'

Alan Mann

Issue No. 28 - February 96
Dialogue - Why doesn't it work!

In the December NOWletter I suggested that Dialogue was not 'working' and spoke of a future issue dedicated to exploring why this might be so. Well, this is it. I realise that it is not going to be to everyone's taste but the NOWletter started out as an extension of the Greville Street Dialogue meetings over three years ago and perhaps we are due for a stocktaking.

My background research for this edition turned up some interesting surprises. In particular, an article extracted from 'The Fifth Discipline' by Peter Senge, Chapter 12, Team Learning. Alex, who came to the December meeting, discovered the article when she was preparing her school at Glen Alice for start up at the end of January. It was circulated by NSW Dept of Education so there may be a wider acceptance of Dialogue than I thought. There will be references to it throughout. Geoff Miller then pointed out that the 'Dialogue' I had been thinking of as a fairly recent development has been around for over two thousand years. The summary of salient points which Gladney put together for Issue 16 in May 95 is also relevant to the enquiry.

The reason for doing the exercise at all was to make me look more closely at where our monthly meetings are going, (e.g., are we in a rut), to stimulate Dialogue about the quality and value of our enterprise and to find out whether changes are necessary. I am hoping you will think the question sufficiently important and interesting to give me some heavy feedback which I will include in future NOWletters thereby keeping the flow going between meetings. (All contributions are welcome but contributions on disc or typed up for scanning are doubly welcome - I am not a good typist) I already have a response from Terry O'Brien which concludes this edition. As an introduction to the various issues, I have provided a few background notes so that the more recent arrivals are clear about how we got to this point and the 'personal note' is intended to reveal my feelings about Dialogue so that you all get an idea about what I understand about my bias and to provide a target for some counter proposals. I

didn't feel very comfortable about numbering the sections but it will make it much easier for those of you who want to tackle particular points or add comment on specific issues.

Background

The first of the current cycle of meetings was held at the Wayside Chapel on 14th October 1992. It was attended by people who responded to the circulation of a list made by John Wren-Lewis following the visit of Douglas Harding in 1991. There followed a series of monthly meetings, at the Wayside, which gradually dwindled away to zero attendance. This was probably due to my lack of confidence in my ability to run Harding type experimental workshops.

Prior to this I had attended weekly meetings for many years at various locations on the Northern beaches. This was a group of people interested in Krishnamurti. A number of us from this group now turn up at the Greville Street meetings. I noticed, on odd occasions at the earlier meetings, we entered into an entirely different mode from that which usually operated. This pre-dated any theoretical knowledge of Dialogue but I now choose to interpret these experiences as Dialogue actually working, a movement out of discussion and into Dialogue.

About the time of the Wayside collapse I began to read a bit more carefully about what Bohm had been doing and I thought that perhaps Dialogue would provide a sufficiently neutral and creative format to carry on the enquiry. So that was the beginning. The first Greville Street meeting was on 9th May 93 and there is now a parallel development with five other Dialogue groups meeting in NSW.

A Personal note

This whole edition is really a personal response to Dialogue as we have come to know it at Greville St., and this NOWletter deals with my own feelings about it. In the rest of the newsletter I have tried to provide a 'general' or overall view of our meetings; combining what I find is happening with comment from others and a bit of research.

The perennial question is what is required for Dialogue to work and how would we know if it was working? Well, these issues are considered below in some detail but, as I am claiming that it is not really working in any of the groups I have been to, I should try to explain what my expectations are.

The Dialogue proposal is that, through understanding of thought in action, attunement or reintegration, usually attempted on a solo basis, in communion with nature, through meditation, etc. might be possible as a group or even as the basis for social interaction.

The Chinese ideogram in the last NOWletter gave me a clue to the missing ingredient. There are two things with which I have difficulty and which occur quite frequently in Dialogue. The first is a strongly held and strongly presented point of view which its proponent will not seriously allow to be questioned. The second is the outright rejection of a point of view which I hold strongly but which I am not presenting very convincingly. This seems to be the common experience.

It is easy to see these 'difficulties' as what I am at the moment of their arising. They are the effect of what I describe as 'external' causes; what some other person has said. It is much harder to see the causes as well as the effects as what I am. Until the environment is such that a complete identification or integration with what is going on becomes possible then I do not

think Dialogue has a chance. In the meantime, it continues to work at a personal level but rarely does the group come to the point where the process is given full rein

I think the purpose of Dialogue is to take us to the limits of relationship and then beyond. It is ultimately an attunement to totality - the creative movement - NOW. Unless I can abandon my separative self-interest to the interests of the movement itself Dialogue can not work. I think Dialogue is trying to point to why this is so but, in spite of our attendance at Dialogue meetings, we really don't want to know. We are much better at discussing it than doing it.

I Dialogue difficulties

When is Dialogue a Dialogue and not a Discussion

I wonder whether we allow for the possibility of Dialogue actually working. It seems so difficult that we inevitably drop back into the familiar and much more comfortable field of discussion. If the possibility of Dialogue is not allowed then it is certainly not going to happen. I thought Peter Senge's article handled this issue very well:

The discipline of team learning involves mastering the practices of Dialogue and discussion, the two distinct ways that teams converse. In Dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep 'listening' to one another and suspending one's own views. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time. Dialogue and discussion are potentially complementary, but most teams lack the ability to distinguish between the two and to move consciously between them. P Senge

He also makes a good point about the need for practice, challenging our assumption that Dialogue is a pretty obvious and natural way of going about things.

Baggage and Suspension

In most Dialogue meetings a subject arises. The enquiry then proceeds as a compilation and exchange of group knowledge as we take turns to put our past experience on the table, a sharing of our common knowledge. It is accompanied by a persuasive expression of particular viewpoints. This is the discussion phase and is OK as a first step but we rarely get beyond this stage, to the point of exposing and challenging our assumptions so that something new might have a chance.

There is also the question of philosophical baggage. The more committed I am to what I have seen before, the less likely that I am going to engage in Dialogue. My philosophical baggage will be driving me in the direction of discussion which always provides the opportunity to 'win' the philosophical debate or at least make a telling point. (*Senge defines winning as having one's point of view adopted by the group*)

We have given a lot of space at meetings to the question of whether it is really possible to suspend our most cherished opinions. It seems to me that this is absolutely essential. It is the most demanding of the 'ground rules' and the one which I find hardest to hold to. It is so tiresome to reconsider or consider afresh what I already 'Know' let alone admit that what I know might be the problem.

Purpose or no

I constantly hear that Dialogue has no aim, we talk of 'having no agenda'. It is explained as a free rolling enquiry without destination and that it gains its energy and even 'purpose' from an

absence of purpose. I think this is very confusing and one of the major reasons why it fails to deliver. Dialogue has a very clear aim. The movement of life is continuously distorted by the activity of our accustomed and unconscious thought processes. The purpose of Dialogue is to become aware of this movement and give us a taste of what life might be like free of our neurotic, non-stop commitment to self-interest. Where does the 'no agenda' claim come from? I recently re-read 'On Dialogue' and categorised the main subjects including 'purpose' and found that there is quite a lot to do with the 'plan and purpose' of it all. It seems that Bohm himself is the root of my confusion. Here are two quotes which I think capture the apparent contradiction.

But in Dialogue, insofar as we have no purpose and no agenda as we don't have to do anything, We don't really need to have an authority or a hierarchy. Rather, we need a place where there is no authority, no hierarchy, where there is no special purpose - sort of an empty place where we can let anything be talked about.

Compared with:

I'm suggesting that there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on Dialogue. That's what we're exploring.

Call it what you like, there is a vision underpinning Dialogue. the question is do we a) understand it and b) do we share it?

Facilitation or no

I find I have been far too ready to accept the no-facilitator approach. I think this only makes sense when the group is sufficiently clear about what is going on to become self-regulating. This is what Bohm says about it;

It may be useful to have a facilitator to get the group going, who keeps a watch on it for a while and sort of explains what's happening from time to time, and that sort of thing. But his (sic) function is to work himself (sic) out of a job. p10

I think our facilitator resigned before he'd even started to do the job. For example, the distinction between Dialogue and discussion needs to be made and maybe this is the main role of the facilitator until we all become accustomed to it.

One of my surprises was the following comment in Senge's paper. *Bohm identifies three basic conditions that are necessary for Dialogue:*

all participants must suspend their assumptions, literally to hold them 'as if suspended before us'

all participants must regard one another as colleagues

there must be a 'facilitator' who 'holds the context' of Dialogue

I thought Bohm's view was as expressed in the first quote I gave above but I am inclined to think that 1.4.3 might be the way to go. (When next we meet, would you quietly mention the word 'Nightingale', if we are unlikely to meet a brief note would suffice. Thanks, an explanation will follow.)

Perhaps the plan would be to start with a facilitator, selected on a rotational basis, and for the person concerned to fade into the group as the meeting progresses.

Self versus group

If Dialogue is adopted as a form of self-improvement then it can, by definition, never work. This leads us into the problems which have arisen when Dialogue is mistaken for psychotherapy. However, there is a paradox here because self-improvement is what it is really all about if self is defined more broadly than we usually allow. This explains my interest in Harding and why I think what he is saying is very relevant to Dialogue.

The 'effort' of placing group interest before personal interest would no longer be an effort if I could see my self as the process of the Dialogue and stop identifying as participator or observer of the movement. If I could see that what I normally regard as 'other' is Self, as no different, the concept of selfishness/unselfishness loses its meaning. There is just now and all that matters is to see/be it not to establish a 'myself' in relationship to it in order to get the best out of it.

What is your response, as the reader of this note, to the idea that what you normally regard as other is what you really are.

If the idea is dismissed as absurd then you have ended our Dialogue. If you say, well it seems absurd and in contradiction to the facts as I understand them, but the editor appears to be serious so I will continue to look at what he is saying as well as the assumptions which underly both my dismissal and his acceptance of the idea, then our Dialogue remains alive. The possibility of communion remains intact.

To be 'wrong' but of the movement is, I believe, more important than being 'right' but separate from it.

Socrates

When we were at 'Springbrook' in January we talked about some of this and Geoffrey Miller unearthed an article entitled "Notes of Construction Concerning the Socratic Method". It was circulated by Renee Weber at Pumpkin Hollow Farm in 1980. This article is an attempt to explain what is necessary for Dialogue to work and it is much closer to what I think Dialogue is about than what I have understood of the Bohmian talks and writings. I was perplexed to see it described as 'Socratic Dialogue' because I had thought the old Greek Dialogue was what Bohm describes as discussion. How wrong I was became clear when I downloaded a few references:

"Chapter one moves us away from a Socrates who is wholly concerned with the consistency of propositions toward a Socrates who is equally concerned with the value of the lives of his fellow Athenians. For after acknowledging that Socrates is aware of asking questions but not of using a technical method, the authors point out that he did not say that it is the untested proposition which is not worth holding but the unexamined life which is not worth living. Here is why Socratic Dialogue might well be characterized as getting a respondent to express the values by which he lives in propositions so that both his life and propositions can be tested. If a respondent can oblige, the importance of his method is then found in a man telling Socrates what he sincerely believes. So important is this rule that the process of inquiry is said to be left open in order that a respondent may amend or even withdraw the belief first stated or so that someone, initially ignorant of what he actually believes will later discover how mistaken he is. Indeed, it is this sort of self deception which not only will take the reader to chapter three and Socrates' psychology but especially to Gorgias 472b6 where Socrates

shows Polus how he fails to grasp what he, Polus, actually believes about the value of justice."

Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, Plato's Socrates. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Well, that was an eye-opener for me but I am surprised not to have found any acknowledgement of this previous activity in any of Bohm's writings. Has anyone else? The next quote is the conclusion of the Pumpkin Farm article.

*"Hypothesis (supportive of the Socratic Method)
In each and every person there is a state of consciousness that already knows, comprehends, Reality. Something already knows what governs everything in a disembodied form. Acquiring understanding (i.e., through the Socratic Method) is a process of recollection, a skillful means by which the original, archetypal patterning is revealing itself in subject and object, within oneself and outside - in another and in the world".*

There is a what I see as a major difference between Socratic Dialogue and our sort but that will have to wait.

*The current situation
Greville Street*

We plan to keep the Greville Street meetings going for as long as there is interest.
NOWletter

I am wondering about the NOWletter after May. I think it is worthwhile to continue if it offers an extra dimension to the meetings themselves. I judge its usefulness by how many contributions you send in, otherwise it is just me talking to myself again. I wonder whether we could widen its scope by cutting out the credo, sticking to Dialogue and making it the vehicle for all the Sydney Dialogue groups.

Special Interest Groups

One of the criticisms of the Greville St affair is that we sometimes get sidetracked into areas which are of interest to only a few of those present. I thought we might allocate the after lunch period, say from 2.15 to 4.30 to anyone with a particular axe to grind. For example, I might try a few 'Seeing' workshops for anyone interested.

Terry O'Brien writes:

Dear Alan, In response to your call for input about Dialogue - I couldn't resist....

I've become quite passionate about subject though it is difficult to explain why. There is a mixed attraction - partly mystical and partly challenging. The mystical appeals to my spiritual concerns which seem to guide me toward a less selfish outlook on life. The challenge is related also to those concerns in that I see Dialogue as a practical yet non-invasive way of shaking up my own and other people's irrational patterns of conditioning, thus clearing the way to a more holistic perception of life. I'm confident that Dialogue has a special purpose in the world, and its popular acceptance will be realised when its time has rightly come.

I share your frustration that we too seldom happen upon true DIALOGUE in the frantic, sometimes desperate rush to get our message across in a typical discussion. From counselling experience I've learnt that the need for self expression is extremely important to people. Expression is like sending out a probe to explore and confirm our world view. If that expression babbles out mindlessly then its value will be minimal, but if it unfolds with

attention to awareness of its cause and effect then its value can be profound and meaningful.

I wonder if the state of confused urgency that usually drives a conversation is not pervaded by existential uncertainty and fear of the unknown? That if we assume we can harness the unknown by either conceptualizing it or avoiding it altogether we'll feel more comfortable about it. I think this relates directly to the general reluctance of people to engage wholeheartedly in Dialogue. To do so requires a surrender of will, giving over to that which is intangible and uncontrollable. Fundamentally, it confronts the very nature of ego. For it to operate effectively requires each participant to have sufficient security in 'Self' and their world before they will even consider suspending their opinions in favour of a shared common platform.

Yet in both the Chatswood and North Ryde talks interest is gradually increasing and numbers are creeping up. Perhaps we are like the farmer who goes out at night and tugs at the roots of his crop, impatient and wilful for a successful yield. There seems to be a paradox about DIALOGUE (as with life!) - the very nature of its unpredictability excites us to unreasonable expectations of how it should work. Again we are confronted by our ambitions and humbled by our apparent ineffectiveness.

Perhaps we are as effective as we need to be just by the very thrashing around we are currently undergoing. Every infant has its teething problems and DIALOGUE, at least in Australia, still needs nurturing and care. In due course it will no doubt spring to maturity, encouraged by the energy and purpose of our enthusiasm.

Ultimately, it seems that only a single key is necessary for creating and sustaining active 'awareness'. When everyone involved has a serious appreciation for the value of awareness then that mysterious quality that is indefinable yet undeniable can proceed undeterred. With a conscious heed for the subtleties of self observation, inclusive of the group, we'll notice the assumptions - our own as well as others; we'll notice when we're listening or not; we'll notice the distraction of racing thoughts and we'll notice our inattention to the movement and sounds of the moment. We might then begin to realise a stillness peculiar in intensity. And if we eventually come to see the group as 'ONE' and know that we are not apart from it - then we'll really have a DIALOGUE ! Dialogue a spiritual enigma?

In reading over the proof of this letter - it occurred to me that I missed the most important point of all.

Relations between people, and in connection with the world at large is integral to our very 'being'. We can indulge endlessly in all manner of spiritual joyriding in our searching and reckoning the nature of the absolute but are we not in danger of missing or avoiding the most essential and necessary priority of daily living?

If we can't find our way to relating and caring for those we share existence with, what hope have we to expect or discover or know true love? I believe Dialogue is an effective means of dissolving those communication barriers that subtly prevent us opening up to receiving, giving and sharing love. By love I mean the notion of compassion that Krishnamurti refers to - which is there without asking.

Dialogue allows us the space to explore what is true . What is true must be, in essence, that quality we commonly define as love. Why should we ask for more when something as simple as Dialogue can lead us directly to that quality? Wholeness must surely precede imagination and what is true defies all imagination...

February Meeting

We had a smaller meeting this month and, as usual, I cannot recall too much of what happened. I would have let it all slide away but Erik challenged me to make something of it and I have a bit of space to fill, so here goes.

We wrestled with a question which Peter asked about the difference between feeling and emotion. After an extensive investigation we came up with a vague consensus that feeling was primary and emotion was the secondary expression. In the same way that thought is often an abstraction of experience so emotion an extension of feeling. Some thought the two words were interchangeable and as far as everyday usage is concerned there seems to be no useful distinction. (Later in the day we referred to the dictionary and found a circular definition in which each was used to define the other). Looking back on the day from the discomfort of the keyboard, I wonder why we didn't work out some way of feeling our way into it. After all, Dialogue is founded on feeling, or is it? Perhaps we did?

We then found ourselves in a similar situation with the words "knowledge' and 'understanding'. I promoted the idea that knowledge is fixed and understanding dynamic; that understanding arises out of the process itself rather than through the combination of pieces of knowledge supplied by various members of the group and lumped together as 'understanding'. Dialogue holds out a promise of the possibility of holding understanding in common - as a result of open enquiry. Open, because of our agreement to put aside knowledge as assumption for the duration of the exercise. The opportunity to tap, collectively as a group, into that which 'stands under'. (I'm not sure whether we agreed on this but that's the price you pay for getting me to do the dogwork)

It all sounds rather dry but it was a lively meeting and it is the process that counts and there is no way I can capture the process in these notes. I think part of our difficulty is the relegation of feeling to a low priority in life as we think our way along from day to day. So I found it a very interesting meeting. Getting a feel for feeling seems critical if I am to recapture my 'sense of presence'.

At the bitter end, when most of you had gone home a hard core of four remained tirelessly considering another key issue. What three books, films and CD's would you take if cast away alone on a desert island. I won't trouble you with the lists but I finally decided to tear mine up so that I would be free to write my own or, more practically, to relearn to enjoy the actual. This must be a cue for a quote, yes, here it comes:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

II.i.12 As You LIke It

Conclusion

I close this special edition with a request for feedback. I am sure my critique of Dialogue is riddled with mis-and-half understandings and I hope you will comment on these and let me have your thoughts on what needs to change, what doesn't and what I've missed out.

Issue No. 30 - May 96

DIALOGUE - DOES IT WORK?

The February NOWletter carried my note on the current state of Dialogue under the heading "Dialogue - Why doesn't it work!" with a request for comment, especially from those of you who disagree with my claim that it is not working. We had a reply from Terry in the February issue and this issue includes replies from Elsa and Erik. I have also had a bit of an insight into my dissatisfaction so I am having a second helping.

Elsa writes:

After reading Terry's response I felt I had none better. But, Alan, as you are serious about getting feedback - "heavy feedback" you write - I will respond to some points you made.

Under your heading "Purpose or no" (p. 2):

Dialogue has no aim, no agenda, which you find confusing. Bohm himself seems at the root of your confusion.

You give two quotes which you think capture the apparent contradiction.

One in which Bohm states "...we have no purpose, no agenda as we don't have to do anything....Rather we need a place...where there is no special purpose - sort of an empty place where we can let anything be talked about."

compared with:

"I'm suggesting that there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on Dialogue. That's what we are exploring."

I read that differently. One does not contradict the other. A possibility for a transformation does not come about by having a purpose or plan, or aim. It can come about when we do not have to do anything. To explore means just that - not being able to know where it will lead us. To be free of assumptions, goals. What we need, as Bohm states, is an empty place where we can let anything be talked about.

Is it possible that this is why Dialogue "doesn't work" (your words, not mine) at Greville Street? We do seem to talk a lot about Dialogue, its rules, how it should work, what it can lead to, instead of really Dialogueing.

Also on the subject of purpose and aim, you write:"... self-improvement is what it is really all about if self is defined more broadly than we usually allow." - I cannot be sure what you mean here with 'self defined more broadly'; you don't mean Self? Self can never improve Itself. And anyway even if I as self think I need improving, who is doing the improving and who is judging whether I am improving or not?

The things you have difficulty with (page 2) are:

1) 'A strongly held and strongly presented point of view which its proponent will not seriously allow to be questioned' - I could have missed something but I haven't heard this happening. Perhaps the problem lies in the "not seriously allowed to be questioned" part. Was the proponent questioned seriously enough, or did the momentum get lost by the mentioning of another topic? This is my difficulty: we either skip too fast to something else or we endlessly go around a topic, like for instance the emotion / feeling one, which you found lively, but to me could have been dealt with in a third of the time. We need not have talked about the meaning of the words - how we 'dealt' with feelings would have been more appropriate.

2) The second is the 'outright rejection of a point of view which I hold strongly but which I am not presenting very convincingly.' - Again, I never heard at the meetings I attended any "outright rejection". There has been intense probing so the questioner could try to make sense out of that which was not presented clearly. Patience is to me the key word here. If we really want to hear what the other is saying extra effort and / or quiet is necessary to get to know what the proponent is saying.

On the other hand, if you know you cannot present something convincingly you can't be surprised if you are misunderstood - the word convincingly worries me though. 'Clearly' would surely be the better word? We are not out to convince one another after all.

Maybe a facilitator would be a good idea to help prevent these difficulties?

You also say: "Until the environment is such that a complete identification or integration with what is going on becomes possible then I do not think Dialogue has a chance." (p.2 para 4) - I have trouble with the word 'complete' - Aren't you too hard here on yourself, the group and Dialogue, and isn't that setting pre-conditions for the process? For it is a process, not the pinnacle of achievement.

Dialogue already has a chance. We are there together at Greville Street aren't we? We are relating and at least trying to dissolve some communication barriers.

A stocktaking is a good idea, but let's not worry too much if we are still "thrashing around", in Terry's words! We could get too self-conscious or ambitious about the workings of Dialogue. Maybe at this stage we cannot suspend our most cherished opinions, which you state is "absolutely essential." It may in the end only become possible because the process of Dialogue has had an effect on us.

To end, Alan, with "lighter feedback"! Thank you for giving so much of your time. For the Newsletter, for being such a good host. For giving me so much stimulation and food for thought! Above all, thank you for sharing.

Elsa Harting.

Erik writes:

Alan, here are a few comments on your long and thought-provoking article in NOW.

You raise a lot of issues, and the Newsletter is probably the best place to discuss some of them, while others are maybe best talked about in Dialogue.

Something which we can do in the Newsletter is discuss what Dialogue is, what it might achieve, whether it works or not. It would be good if we could come to some agreement on this. To my mind, these topics tend to occupy us needlessly during meetings and hinder us practising Dialogue itself. We attempt to dialogue / discuss about whether we are dialoguing or discussing, endlessly looking over our own shoulder. Why? I believe it is because some of us feel that 'if only it is done properly' it will lead to greater awareness / enlightenment / expansion of consciousness of me or, preferably, the group. I think there is no point in worrying about that: it will be done more properly if we already have greater awareness, and not if not. We can only do things wholeheartedly, 'with all our might', if we do them for their own sake, not to gain something else. Greater awareness might be a result, it should not be an AIM. And I believe this is the spirit which Bohm et al. proposed for the Dialogue process. I have another quote from their 1991 "Proposal" which illustrates this:

" It is not concerned with deliberately trying to alter or change behaviour nor to get the participants to move toward a predetermined goal. Any such attempt would distort and obscure the processes that the Dialogue has set out to explore. Nevertheless, changes do occur because observed thought behaves differently from unobserved thought. Dialogue can thus become an opportunity for thought and feeling to play freely in a continuously engaging movement."

I really think this point is crucial to the whole endeavour - as long as we continue to focus on what we want Dialogue to do for us (individually or as a group), it will never live up to our expectations. In the same way in which an artist, I imagine, will not produce any satisfying art if the aim is money, fame or prizes. And who will say Dialogue is not a form of art, of 'group art'? And what individual will / can judge whether it is done well?

You will agree that we cannot Dialogue in a Newsletter, since there is not the opportunity to have the interplay of question, answer and explanation, examining of assumptions etc. necessary. So that I assume that your invitation for a response to the idea of "other is what you really are" (on p.3 of issue 28) is an invitation to Dialogue on it at a future Meeting? (That, by the way, is another thing we could do in the Newsletter: sow seeds for Dialogue, raise topics which might be examined in meetings.) As you say, even if the idea seems absurd to some, that is no reason to kill the Dialogue, on the contrary! All that is needed is the ability and freedom to examine our assumptions and prejudices, for and against any idea.

As a general comment, I have wondered who actually reads what is written in the Newsletter? Some of the writings have been quite provocative, but there usually has not been much mention of them in the Meetings. That seems a shame, since much thought must go into people's contributions. Would it be a good idea to set aside some Meeting-time for a discussion or Dialogue about matters raised?

Erik Harting

Alan writes:

It is clear from the foregoing that I am not communicating the nature of my dissatisfaction with the dialogue process. I recently enrolled on the van den Heuvel run email Dialogue and a contribution from a Finnish participant showed me what I was trying to get at:

Date: Thursday, 18 Apr 1996

From: Matti Vaaitinen
Subject: Understanding What It's All About

Among other things that I found very good and illuminating, Don wrote:

Often, in our group, the one quoted (generally without attribution) is Krishnamurti. And here, I am also notorious for leaping in with objections. It's not that I object to K or his thinking, but to the insistence of some that we listen to and take for granted certain proposals that they are unwilling to see inquired into and tested in the dialogue.

So far the only person quoting K has been me (Matti)- I mean the time I've been 'present' in this 'room'.(the email dialogue) However, I take Don's comment not to be pointed at me because he didn't object to my observation that 'proprioception of thought' and 'choiceless awareness' really are trying to convey the same meaning. --Which leads me to suggest the following:

I remember talking to David quite casually at the beginning of the Gothenburg Seminar in 1988 and one of the things he mentioned to me was the year when he and Krishnamurti discussed for the first time. It was in 1961. I remember the year as it's when I was born. I mentioned it to David, and I think we both found some humour in the coincidence. Anyway, the fact remains that David's interest in what K was trying to say (these days people seem to use the word 'teachings' which I, however, find a contradictory term in the light of K's teaching (see what I mean?!), and yet, K himself didn't object the use of that word) - David's interest to dialogue with K lasted more than twenty years! From this I conclude that David felt K had an insight to convey and that he indeed tried very hard to 'get it'.

What do we do in Dialogue? We talk. Most often it could be called a 'discussion' but something more is involved. What is it? Empathy? A good will? Yes, I take them for granted in a dialogue. One isn't put down for being stupid, or believing in something that the rest don't take to be true. Another difficulty is, how do we understand each other (or even ourselves!). Still, there's something more to dialogue. Let me ask one question: is this 'something more' a quality which is supposed to 'take place' as a result of good will, empathy and an attempt to understand the other person even if it requires the very strenuous job of leaving things 'in abeyance'. Is this 'something more' just a hypothesis or is it in fact a 'common' phenomenon between people who truly and deeply understand each other?

Let me put it differently: are we trying (if this were a face-to-face situation) something that has occurred many times before, or are we attempting something 'impossible' - something that hasn't occurred earlier in the history of human kind? I'm sure 'the flow of meaning' has taken place among a lot of people (including myself). It's rare, but it does happen. Therefore, the 'flow of meaning' can't be the answer to my question. It must be, then, 'proprioception of thought'. That's our 'goal' even though it can't be arrived at as a result of an effort. It comes if it comes. It is a hypothesis. If it emerges it'll be a new quality of the mind, but then again one could ask, whose mind? Mine or the group's?

Choiceless awareness or proprioception of thought, what do they mean (verbally)? The only way I can approach this question is through an example that David went over in seminars many times and that can be tested in real life almost every day. (But here I reverse the object.) Let's say I call somebody stupid. The other person becomes offended. The reaction

varies according to the context of the situation (some people might punch you, some find a few four-letter-words to shout back, some become quiet) but I think the *_movement_* of the reaction is always the same. To be hurt. To want to hurt back, one way or the other. Krishnamurti often said: do not react. I find this very interesting. He didn't mean 'don't *_fight_*' but something much more subtle. He meant: 'even if you reacted verbally or physically to other person's outrageous statement about yourself see or observe the whole movement of your reaction.

In other words, something goes into abeyance. I think if one does this often enough the possibility of *_suspension_* arises. Out of the blue someone calls me stupid but - instead of a blind surge of emotional reaction with which I identify myself - the whole reaction chain is immediately suspended.

So, all in all and *summa summarum* what I think dialogue is *_about_* is the following: it is an attempt to find out if choiceless awareness can arise in a *_group_*. To my understanding, what we do in a dialogue is a continuation of the dialogue that took place between David and Krishnamurti. What I'm saying is the opposite of what Don wrote above: we take for granted certain proposals and *_are_* WILLING to inquire and test the proposals in a dialogue. Dialogue *_does_* have a history.

Matti Vaittinen

FROM: Alan Mann, 100352,1663
TO: William van den Heuvel, Re: Copy of: Choiceless Awareness

Hello Conference

I reacted very positively to Matti latest on a number of counts. For me, the major aspect of Krishnamurti's teachings is the implicit teaching rather than the explicit. That is, the great monologues on love, fear, what is going on, etc., whilst interesting in themselves are secondary to what I see as his primary message which is to take as authority only what is revealed in the living moment, now. This strikes me as the essence of what we are calling dialogue and trying to come to grips with in our meetings and presumably in this email version of dialogue.

Matti concluded:

So, all in all and summa summarum what I think dialogue is about is the following: it is an attempt to find out if choiceless awareness can arise in a group .

I have never heard it expressed in these terms nor, in all my attempts to describe it, did I think of describing it in this way myself. But I think it is exactly right. Thank you Matti.