

Issue No. 21 – July 95

The May meeting started with a question Margaret D raised two meetings ago. This was whether, in agreeing the existence of physical, mental and spiritual components, i.e., the pre/trans framework, we could justify the inclusion of the spiritual and, if so, why. I'm doubtful whether we advanced this enquiry very far but we followed some interesting side-issues including whether we can separate teachers from their teaching and whether it is possible or desirable to be concept free. I never know how others feel about a particular meeting and tend to judge them by my own experience. On this occasion I was compelled to redraft my assumptions on the value of concept and review my dogmatic rejection of 'shonky' gurus. This I choose to see as evidence of 'Dialogue' in action. Margaret is going to put her response together and I hope to include in the next letter. Barry H. feels that there is 'unfinished business' which is blocking us and sent me the following comment: What started as an opinion from my collective observations at the previous meeting led to a dialogue with myself. The description of this activity as dialogue is, of course, my assumption. As thoughts were being put together in mind, as a framework of how I would express the opinions I had formed at the Sunday meeting, some questioning started. Is there another way of communicating? What is headlessness? My view of the group having unfinished business was formed by my two-eyed seeing and by filtering the incoming messages by listening through my ego hearing aid. So, yes, my head was indeed present at the meeting and limiting the thoughts that formed the opinions. Another question:- Is the I needed in true communion and headlessness? Although the speakers at the meeting were interesting, it came across as a for and against debate. Not quite a full-on discussion with winners and losers but still a debate. This falling back into debate is what I mean by unfinished business. Discussion enlarges the gap of separate opinions and lacks collectiveness. (Collectiveness does not mean acceptance. What does it mean?) Dialogue may be a PROPOSAL of how to tackle this unfinished business.

Barry Hora We are making good progress towards 'Seeing' workshops and the Nohead email conference is a very interesting and lively forum. Apart from what I find to be very stimulating exchanges I 'met' someone else, Chris McLean, who attended the Douglas seminar in 91 and who has already run a workshop. I am hoping we will see him at our monthly gatherings. Last month's issue of this letter included most of the USA quarterly Newsletter. This is a major copying job and I don't think I can maintain this on a regular basis. In future I will make my copies available at Greville St and Ryde meetings unless anyone has a better idea.

Ryde meeting

Ryde meetings continue on the first Saturday of every month and continue to be well attended. Barry plans to add a monthly meeting to be held at the Theosophical Society rooms in Kent Street. This will provide a convenient venue for people living in Sydney and South and easy access by public transport. Alister Hardy Society After all our talk about the possibility of joining the Alister Hardy Society, following Margaret A's suggestion, I find that Halcyon is already a member. She left me a copy of the Alister Hardy Lecture for 1994 by Lord Rees-Mogg from which I lifted this story, he says: I have, myself, had quite an interesting experience which shows one of the ways in which mind works. I went to my doctor thirty or forty years ago because I was feeling a bit deaf in one ear and he found my ear had lots of wax in it and syringed my ear out. And immediately after, but only lasting for a very, very short time, I could hear with a singular acuteness. I had aural high frequency. I could hear my suit, and it sounded like canvas rubbing together in a gale; it was making an enormous noise. And my mind then adjusted the noise down, having turned some knob up as it were, when I was half deaf because of the wax. It had to turn the knob down when it would be very unpleasant: I can't go through the rest of my life hearing these sounds at this volume. And it seems to me likely that there is a similar process of a reduction of our contact with the "Other", in order to allow ordinary life to proceed. This has echoes of the Colin Wilson approach we looked at a couple of issues back and the JW-L story. The idea of turning down the "Other" knob has interesting applications to the "Headless Way".

Bees of the Invisible.... Enid continues to remonstrate gently with me about my promotion of the idea of a needy God. This in response to my endorsement of Traherne's concept of humanity as the means of returning to the creator the fruits of its creativity and the belief that god is highly desirous of our participation in this process. I think Blake's "Eternity is in love with the products of time" is expressing the same understanding. Is this just a romantic Western notion or does it appear in Eastern thought as well? I'm sure I could find parallels in Hindu scriptures. What about the Bhagavad Gita? Buddhism might prove more of a challenge and that, perhaps, is the source of the resistance. But what about our new friend Thich? The connecting link between Western and Eastern spokespersons of all ages is their emphasis, often in the midst of great misery, on the essential wonder and joyousness of being. This is something from which we become estranged; we have learned to turn the joy knob down. We talked about the parable of the prodigal son at the last meet. I think this is the real meaning, the love of creation for its constituents, the misunderstanding arises from the idea that we are separate from God rather than an expression of God. Tom said it much more clearly: His name is Now His essence is all Act..... His name is Now His nature is for Ever None can his creatures From their maker sever The difference between West and East is that when we come to the point when words are more likely to confuse than clarify, the West keeps talking or writing in the hope of some

miraculous breaking of the conceptual barriers. "Where trusting heart and mind are not estranged, Words fail, and cannot tell of THAT which has no yesterday, tomorrow or today." This much loved quote is I think from the same being who said "The purpose of life is to see", very Hardingesque, and Seeing is, I think, what Tom means by returning the creation to its creator. All very simple really, but in his words 'we are out of frame'. My desperate search for supporting, Buddhist evidence was rewarded by this quote from "Zen in English Literature" p261. The aged Komachi, in Sotoba Komachi, says, Though I too am a withered tree of no worth, my heart has flowers that may be offered to the Buddha. Perhaps the use of the word god is the problem. Elsa found this contribution from Rilke in the latest ATPA journal "We must try to achieve the greatest consciousness possible in our existence, which is at home in both unbounded realms, inexhaustibly nourished from both...The true figure of life extends through both: there is neither a here nor a beyond, but a great unity, in which the beings that surpass us, the 'angels' are at home...We of the here and now are not for a moment hedged into the time-world, nor confined within it...we are incessantly flowing over and over to those who preceded us...We are the bees of the invisible; we deliriously gather honey of the visible, to accumulate it in the great golden hive of the invisible."

Seeing

There is a lot of seeing going on. Donald sent a couple of pieces from California where he is up to his ears in Krishnamurti centenary activities and Dialogue meetings. I continue to wrestle with my particular worry and had just completed item 3 when Don's letter arrived. Item 1 - Donald This evening, an hour ago, came a sudden realisation that when I want to achieve whatever I happen to desire, be it worldly or spiritual, I need time and effort to gain that end: thus do I predetermine a "gradual" approach to the production of that goal. It is this very way of looking (and so seeing) that perpetuates and strengthens my enslavement to time and self-perpetuation. The very placing of my present objective "out there", as though it were away from me, at a distance, and so requiring effort, practice, time to get it reveals the falseness of that perception and that process. Seeing this, understanding that seeing is ever immediate, (i.e. now) and so, timeless, is to be aware that perception is always sudden, in the sense that it can only occur NOW-HERE. And so, the wiping away of 'the idea of time' as a means to calculating and using methods for achievement permits direct perception of all that is going on in the mind, allows depth and clarity and the real possibility of an "Ah, yes! That's it!", sudden insight.

Item 2 - Donald

I was watching small children in a pool in the river below the Matilda dam near Ojai and saw that a child learning to swim involuntarily fears that it might sink; a large expanse of water has not been its experience, nor is it sure of its own buoyancy. Awakening to LIFE on land is like learning to swim in water and to enjoy the wonder of being alive without it going through the frantic thrashing about in an effort to stay afloat or make a living. Learning to swim, like learning to live in calm awareness, means neither being afraid to act nor wilfully determined to get the experience. Healthy, confident swimming or living depends on a primary awakening - that capacity is inherent in human beings, in each one of us. Trust it!

Item 3 - Alan

My hang-up is the transitory nature of 'seeing'. The fact that it seems to be so easily overtaken by the self-centred vision of life. I have long thought this to be the result of trying to put 'seeing' into a context of time; the failure to see that time is in the 'seeing' not the other way round. If this is so, any expectation of a continuity of seeing is absurd. When a moment of seeing is enough, the problem is no more. The idea of continuity of seeing is the attempt of the ego to take over. To establish the new skill as another reinforcement of its self. For this reason, I am uncomfortable with the use of the word seer to describe humans open to seeing. We are the 'seeing', the 'seeing' is not something we are doing. Seeing is what we are, not what we do? Is that so? For me, stabilisation of the 'seeing' may follow abandonment of my obsession with stabilisation which, I now 'see', is to do with sustaining a continuity of seeing. When the problem is seen, it is seen to be me - as usual. If there is a stopping in the moment of seeing, content with that, an opportunity may exist for timelessness to expand. Finally, an insight into my condition. I saw myself as a man with good eyesight wandering around with closed eyes pestering everyone I meet with the question of why I do not see. There's none so blind as those who will not see. (Where from that quote? It is most appropriate)The earliest version I can find is John Heywood, Proverbs, 1546 who said: Who is so deaf or blind as (is) he That wilfully will neither hear nor see? The following is an extract from a recent exchange on the Nohead Conference and is written in response to a question about practice which I now cannot find. It is very interesting in its own right but also underlines the dangers we face when trying to capture these matters in words, covers an aspect of Dialogue we rarely touch and introduces a new friend. I had to shrink it a bit as I was limited to what is left of page 4.

Truth being what it is, it can't be practised - it includes the practitioner. It's just how it is - profound, mysterious, still, silent, full of potential, or whatever we discern about it - it can't be grasped. So what is it we <do>, we who practice the way of <Seeing>? What sort of effort is involved? And, Who's doing it? The self that I find that <does> things is all outward display - the ceaseless display of appearances (phenomenon), in a dynamic continuum with the so-called <not-self>. Isn't it on this level that what we call attention, so important to our practice, exists? (I like

Bohm's word, if I've understood it correctly - <holomovement>- for this dynamic continuum.) However, as a number of you have so nicely expressed it this week: at the centre is a vast, unfathomable Emptiness. Now, and here's my offering to the discussion: isn't there a danger - a danger supported by language - of creating a <something> out of this intelligent mystery? We step into the realm of Spiritual Ego - a something inside separate, though related, to the outside. For example, isn't there a danger of taking the language too seriously when we say - as is natural and proper, when held lightly - "What I am is the space that contains all things." (Most of us can relate to this description, eh?) In fact, is there a difference between the space and the phenomena; between the container and the contained? Isn't the difference only apparent?

Chris McLean

Issue No. 22 – Aug 95

July Meeting I was instructed by the meeting to record some key points but now cannot find the notes. All I can remember is that we found ourselves sacking the pre/trans fallacy. And this after putting it on the payroll following painstaking assessment and evaluation of its relevance and qualifications at several earlier meetings. It was agreed that those who find it a useful tool will continue to use it and those who don't will continue to look cross whenever it is mentioned. There has been a flood of letters and contributions this month for which I thank you all. The newsletter is only worthwhile if it is used by everybody to share views and experiences and thereby sustain the DIALOGUE. The latest crop of letters raises many interesting points and underlines what I see as a problem with present arrangements. That is, a lot of really interesting, important and sometimes controversial angles which pop up in the correspondence or at meetings are not followed through. Does this indicate the need for a bit more structure or more meetings, any ideas? Mishka has a long and interesting article in the Autumn issue of 'Philosopher'. I have a copy here if anyone would like to read on the 20th. We again discussed the parting with Mishka and John and we found afterwards that 'The Celestine Prophecy' material which John Marjot provided was very relevant to the question. See Margot's commentary below.

Letters Letter 1 - The reason for your Dialogue meetings, it seems to me, is for its participants to enquire whether there is a possibility of a dissolution of the barrier to enlightenment, God, the eternal Now, a realm of non-duality, call it what you like. If, instead, you were to enquire into the nature of the place from which this question arises, you may find that instead of an answer to that enquiry there will be a resolution of the tension from which it appears, and that the question itself then collapses and falls back into its own source, as it were. The desire to know about the possibility of an end to a world of duality merely enhances who we think we are. Only in the absence of an enquirer can non-duality come into being. Thus, instead of adding a something to ourselves, that is to say, knowledge of a way to achieve non-duality, we must lose something, namely, the need to enquire and to know, a demand nurtured by the questioner, the "me", the false ego. In the ensuing repose, rest or - perhaps more accurately put - death of ourselves lies the resolution of duality. As another Dane once put it at his death: "The Rest IS Silence". Mogens Holt

Letter 2 Re USA Quarterly, a suggestion: would it be possible to pay for a copy and postage on the USA Newsletter when you consider them to be of particular interest OR, otherwise, for each one regardless? If so, cost please. (Details for DQN direct subscription below) As for seeing: Bravo for comments, "item 3 July letter - time is in the seeing not the other way round....." to take this further, seeing, listening and learning can only ever be secondaries. They are never fundamentals for, without something to be seen, heard and learnt we are caught in a dream of illusion in which the ego is the dreamer and creator of time. Donald's metaphor (item 2 July) of "awakening to life being like learning to swim" is the ego's perception within time, an observation from the perspective of separation, as is the term capacity, which also invokes time. It is probably nit-picking to single out Chris McLean's reference to a "Spiritual Ego" but the term worries me, though this could be a question of semantics since the self as Ego is undoubtedly "all outward display". From direct observation and experience I question that there is any "dynamic continuum...not self", but rather a shattering of "the container and the contained". When the ego sleeps, the not-self wakes: they cannot co-exist. The urge to know through seeing, listening, learning is possibly a universal Ego Test like putting nuts inside a cage so the monkey puts his arm through the bars to reach them. The more nuts he collects the more he is caught unless he learns to open his fist and let go. The real monkey trick may be to not merely still the chattering of the brain, as they attempt to do in the East, but to halt the greed and the grasp of its long reach altogether. We need to kill the monkey (ego), no matter how it squirms and tries to escape. P.S. The nuttiest part of all this is not very hard to grasp: in order to communicate this my ego needs to be invoked or, more specifically, communication-invocation-ego-time are elements in a circular movement. Participation in this particular dialogue is reincarnation right NOW! Last night, in regard to my earlier insight into where we are AT (body position - longitude, latitude and altitude) it occurred to me, en passant, when the latter is truly understood, the state could be regarded as be-attitude meaning supreme

blessedness....interesting, eh? (At this stage of being -obviously - beatitude does not refer to the ego's posturing or brain fixations we normally call 'attitude'. Rome Warren

Letter 3 For those belonging to the "just listening" school of thought (perhaps that should be of non-thought), the following parable may be of interest and/or relevance:

There is a convention of balloonists, who are seriously discussing the pros and cons of various designs and types of balloon, intending to fly as high and free as possible. The meetings, while very worthwhile, are naturally showing up design limitations. This is particularly disappointing to one gentleman, who finally loses patience with it all and shouts: "You are all wasting your time! Why don't you just LEVITATE". Erik Harting

Letter 4 A couple of extracts from a letter from Enid after her return from a retreat at Sassana House in the Blue Mountains. The discourses dwelt a lot on parallels between Christian and Buddhist teachings and I felt very at home in this area. It was also asserted that the Dialogue between Christians and Buddhists now was very valuable and enlightening. Quite a bit of time was given the Gnostic Gospels especially of St Thomas - the doubter - indicating that doubt was good, a pre-requisite to experiential (or existential knowledge). And, I thought this would be of interest to you in view of your July NOWletter, item 3 on 'time': Jesus said "pray without ceasing", but you can't pray without ceasing. But you can pray now. The Buddha said "be mindful all the time", but you can't be mindful all the time. But you can be mindful now. Enid Jenkins

Why are we here? At the Dialogue meeting on June 18 Enid posed the question which I know has been asked before, - why do we come here? This set me pondering. When Alan first told me about the Dialogue group my husband, Vaughan, had recently died and weekends tended to have a more lonely feel to them than weekdays. Here was somewhere to go. I liked Margot and Alan and I guessed the members of the group would be interesting and intelligent people. I know a little about Krishnamurti but the other names mentioned were new to me. It was some time before I even discovered that some were still alive while one lived in the 17th century. Although Alan lent me a fair bit of reading on what Dialogue is, I still don't really understand it and therefore feel I can't fully contribute. This is a dilemma as obviously the group can't be interrupted every time a new person comes, to explain what it is all about. Each month I pick up a few gleanings, either from the discussion or from the newsletter but I still feel in a fog at times. I sometimes sit and wonder whether other people have a clear idea of the goals and method of dialoguing. I thought it had a lot to do with listening and yet members, including me, frequently interrupt, which shows we are not truly listening but busy forming ideas in our own heads. One of my private concerns has been that the discussion is too 'headlevel' and not enough 'gutlevel' but after reading the article by Don Factor in the June Newsletter I see that David Bohm's intention (at least) was "to make Dialogue a conversation among equals everyone's ideas, opinions, or theories would be taken seriously but also be vulnerable to challenge and enquiry".

Why do I continue going? Because I find it intellectually stimulating. It widens my horizons and introduces me to new ideas. I enjoy the company, the food and the feeling of being part of a gathering that is more than just social talk. I like the fact that, while it may be preferable to attend every meeting there is no compulsion about it.

In a haphazard sort of way I am looking for a more spiritual dimension to my life. Dialogue is certainly not the whole answer but it may be a part of it. Halcyon Evans

Review & Comment The Celestine Prophecy by James Redfield (Bantam Books, 1994) is described in the blurb as "a book that captures the spiritual moment". It is certainly flavour of the month. "Reading like a story of high adventure", Redfield promises the reader the "in depth effect of a spiritual parable". The prose is often tedious and cliched: the unnamed narrator repeatedly suffers chills along the spine, knotted stomach, and freezing ("I froze").

However amongst the pulp fiction presentation there are some ideas, which if not new, are offered in a different way and which may have some relevance for the group discussions we have been having about the nature of dialogue and the way male and female energy interacts within the group. (Refer Alan's comments in a recent NOWletter.) Also in the context of energy, there are other points of interest in a discussion on the way groups function.

Redfield (in the persona of Karla Deez) suggests that "we're all stuck at the stage when we are still looking for our opposite-sex energy outside of ourselves". This most clearly manifests when we "fall in love" with someone of the opposite sex; we get a burst of euphoria and energy and thus begins a "classical co-dependent relationship" of two people looking for their other halves to make a whole, and such an illusion of completeness always breaks down into a power struggle. This struggle is part of Redfield's wider thesis that energy is something human beings spend their lives

trying to steal from others in order to become whole, or at least feel better. He maintains that this phenomenon is the source of all wars and conflicts. I'm not sure how the energy balance achieved by falling in love with someone of the opposite sex applies to lesbians and gays: maybe we are all capable of becoming addicted (Redfield's term) to a sexual partner who balances our male/female energies. But it is a dangerous practice because the relationship becomes controlling as the energy runs out. "Getting rid of this habit [of stealing energy] isn't easy", Redfield says, (or more correctly Father Sanchez says) "because it's always unconscious at first. The key to letting it go is to bring it fully into consciousness, and we do that by seeing that our particular style of controlling others is one we learned in childhood to get attention, to get the energy moving our way, and we're stuck there. This style is something we repeat over and over again. I call it our unconscious control drama." There is further explication by Sanchez, who points out that everyone manipulates for energy either aggressively, directly forcing people to pay attention to them, or passively, playing on people's sympathy or curiosity to gain attention. The order of dramas is: intimidator, interrogator, aloof and poor me, and although some people use more than one in different circumstances, most of us have one dominant control drama that we tend to repeat, depending on which one worked well on the members of our early family. Once we see our drama, Sanchez assures us, we can begin to get clear about who we really are.

Once we get clear about who we really are, we will be able to learn to interact consciously when in a group. Julia says: "Some people get inflated when in a group. They feel the power of an idea and express it, then because that burst of energy feels so good, they keep on talking, long after the energy should have shifted to someone else. They try to monopolise the group. Others are pulled back and even when they feel the power of an idea, they won't risk saying it. When this happens, the group fragments and the members don't get the benefit of all the messages. The same thing happens when some members of the group are not accepted by some of the others. The rejected individuals are prevented from receiving the energy and so the group misses the benefit of their ideas."

This last sentence is intriguingly at odds with our discussion at the last meeting, when we were talking about the possibility of group members who are rejected, either overtly or covertly, actually gaining energy in such a situation, because the need to be rejected is one of their control dramas.

More wisdom from the good Father Sanchez: "In a truly functional group ... the idea is for every member's energy and vibration to increase because of the energy sent by all of the others. When this occurs, everyone's individual energy field merges with everyone else's and makes one pool of energy. It is as if the group is just one body, but one with many heads. Sometimes one head speaks for the body, sometimes another. But in a group functioning this way, each individual knows when to speak and what to say because s/he truly sees life more clearly." Margot Mann Acknowledgments to Peter Marjot, who gave Alan a summary of Redfield's energy thesis, which inspired me to read the book. (Editorial intrusion. The final paragraph is a good description of what I think effective DIALOGUE is about - Bohm's 'free flowing meaning'. AWM)

Making Something of No-thing This is an extract of a contribution to the NoHead conference by Richard Lang and was prompted by the piece by Chris McLean which appeared in the July NOWletter and which he had earlier sent to the conference.

RE: recent postings about "the little man," the ego's pernicious attempts to "possess" "the void," etc.: Isn't something like an infinite regression operating here - in the sense that any thought about the ego is already the ego's doing, regardless of whether it's a "bad" obsessive kind of thought or a "good" I-shouldn't-be-thinking-this kind of thought.....

Chris - I've thought somewhat about the theme you were discussing a couple of days ago - the danger of making this nothingness into a very great Nothingness - a subtle kind of something. I think that every so often I realise I have done just that! Not really, deep down, because of course nothing can make this nothing into something. But I get involved with an image, an idea, a concept, and then stuck with it. The idea of the void for example, which effectively separates me from the world! Finally I look again, and see nothing here, not even the idea of an idea. But for a while I have fooled myself.

I like what you say about the paradox of practice, and your teacher's encouragement to live This, to embody the Void. I remember a phrase of D.T. Suzuki's from one of his Essays on Zen: 'the long maturing of the sacred womb'. And yet there is nothing to do, nowhere to go, and no-one doing or even not doing!

Actually, I will take the liberty of quoting myself here! since you asked if any one of us had meditated over the issue of 'thinging' the void. I put together and published a 'kit' which contains a booklet, audio tape, paper bag and

card-with- mirror, and in one section of the booklet on 'Staying Awake To Who You Really Are', I raised some of the difficulties we may come across. One of these difficulties was "Making a 'Thing' of the Void". Here is what I wrote.

The Void is nothing, but when we talk about it and give it a name, particularly names like Awareness, True Identity, Self, God, then we are in danger of making nothing into Something. This is as illusory as seeing your head or anything else on your shoulders, and probably more dangerous. The Self becomes a subtle way of inflating the self. I become attached to the name, the image. The idea that I am headless, clear like space, becomes a subtle barrier between me and the world. I withdraw into my 'nothingness', my divinity, away from the world. But my True Nature is not a 'thing' separate from the world. If your head is replaced by anything, it is not replaced by 'nothingness' but by the world. There is nothing here separate from the world, no barrier dividing you from it, behind which 'you' exist. The way to deal with subtle notions that seem to make a 'thing' of yourself at centre, however great or small, is not to attempt to repress them. That only re-enforces them. Attend to them, and see that it is idea there to no idea here. You are free of them at centre. They do not 'thing' you. Richard Lang

Spirituality One of the matters raised at the last two meetings is the question of what we mean when we use the word spiritual. I came across this 'definition' which is from the final chapter of William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience".

Summing up the in the broadest possible way the characteristics of the religious life, as we have found them, it includes the following beliefs:

1 That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance; 2 That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end; 3 That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof - be that spirit 'God' or 'law' - is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world. 4 A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism. 5 An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.

I take it to mean that a spiritual view of life might include all or some of the above.

Experiments We plan to devote 90 minutes after lunch, at the August 20 meeting, to experiments designed to demonstrate beyond question what you really are. Not simply as father Sanchez would have you but as you really, really are.

Announcements Next NOW Group Ryde DIALOG Group Theosophy House DIALOG Group DIALOGUE Weekend

Issue No. 23 Sept 95

Thank You

For your contributions which are becoming increasingly controversial, a wonderful broth of assumptions!

Change of Date

The October meeting will be on the **fourth Sunday, 22 October**. In November we revert to the third Sunday which is November 19.

August Meeting

The August meeting started by reviewing our reasons for starting the group and reminding ourselves that we first formed after the 1991 visit of Douglas Harding with the aim of continuing the enquiry through direct experience of what is happening rather than trying to see through the eyes of teachers, gurus and so on. We drifted away from this objective as I didn't have sufficient confidence in my ability to run workshops. We then adopted Dialogue which allowed us to draw on a wider circle of interest and to talk about it instead of or as well as doing it. There are now a number of pure Dialogue groups available as a result of Barry H and Peter's pioneering work so perhaps it is time for the Greville Streeters to revert to our roots. This seems to be indicated by recent signals such as the resurrection of the magazine "Share It", the

establishment of the NoHead Conference which in turn revealed that Christopher McLean, who has already run a workshop, is living in Balmain.

My initial comments suggest that this would involve a movement away from Dialogue but, on reflection, I think the result would be quite the opposite. If constant awareness of the assumptions which underlie our thinking and actions is the major objective of the Dialogue process then, to understand the assumptions about who or what we are, would appear to be the first thing we should do. I think we could claim the alternative name of "Primary Dialogue" for what is often referred to as the Headless Way.

Gladney is organising a one day seminar at Ourimbah on the 15th October (details below and this is the reason for the October meeting being moved to the 4th Sunday) which will include a session on 'Seeing' experiments. We tested a few of them at the August meeting and I have summarised the feed-back in the hope of improving the delivery on future occasions.

1 Different personalities seem to require different approaches and this is, presumably, the reason for the range of experiments. there are about 28. We need to make sure that our mixture is as broad as possible given the time limits. We will try some of them out at future meetings.

2 People sometimes find it hard to understand what we are talking about. This indicates a need for clarity in presenting the background and precision in carrying out the experiments.

3 The biggest obstacle seems to be the difficulty of removing knowledge from the equation of what is 'actually going on'; to put aside concept for the period of the experiment and rely solely on what can be apprehended. (I thought this would be an easy thing for Dialoguers to do. I also thought the use of Zen as explanatory background would be the best lead-in but this might assume a wider understanding of Zen than is the case).

4 An expectation that the result will be extraordinary, in the peak experience sense, rather than extra ordinary.

5 The idea that it must be one or the other rather than both . That is, seeing includes the 'me as object' option. (See correspondence, etc., below.)

6 Rejection of the AS IF - AS IS paradigm.

7 Packaging of the whole business as 'headlessness' is a major hurdle. Capacity, openness even facelessness do not generate the resistance which 'headlessness' seems to arouse.

8 So what? "I already know I can't see my head - thanks for nothing.

Enlightenment?

Peter sent in a article on enlightenment which challenges the assumptions which appear to underlie the concept. I thought I would defer his full contribution to the next issue so that we could look at his questions at the next meeting without the benefit or pressure of his answers. He summarises his material as follows:

The Ten Demandments

1 What is enlightenment?

2 How do we know it even exists?

3 Why should we want it?

4 Do we really need it?

5 Why do we need it?

6 When should we seek it?

7 How should we seek it?

8 Where should we seek it?

9 How do we know if we've found it?

10 What do we do with it when we've got it?

A Supplementary Note to the 10 Demandments.

Nicoll (Psychological Commentaries, Vol.1, p.156) talks about 'levels of being' and 'objective consciousness'. Man's existence can be seen as a progression from level to level up a ladder of increasing understanding (consciousness), until man's highest possible level of development is attained, that of objective con or 'seeing things as they really are'. If we equate 'enlightenment' to reaching increasing levels of 'seeing things as they really are', perhaps we have a paradigm which can underpin our discussions.

Under Nicoll's (or rather, Gurdjieff's) system, those on a lower level simply cannot comprehend those on a higher level. Furthermore, those on a higher level can be considered relatively enlightened vis-a-vis those on lower levels. Again, those on lower levels seem to have an inbuilt yearning or instinct for the higher levels, i.e., we 'know' they exist

in pretty much the same way as we know anything (concrete or not) - we 'feel' we do. (If this seems somewhat airy-fairy, this is still a pretty 'fair-y' description of how we 'know' anything at all!)

This might go a little way towards answering 'what is enlightenment?' (perhaps it is rising up the ladder of successive levels of consciousness) and 'why do we want it' (we may have a built in desire for it, even though - by definition - we cannot understand what we desire, because it is always on a higher level!) It doesn't, however, help us much with the aspect of 'how do we get it?' or 'how do we know when we've got it?' (unless you assume we will just 'feel we know'. After all, we 'know' what we feel, no one else can possibly 'know' what we feel, and vice versa (I think).

Peter Marjot

I have persuaded Peter to lead what should be a very interesting DIALOGUE into his questions at the next meeting>

Lay off the ego

In two of last months contributions the ego came in for its usual pasting. Mogens referred to false ego without explaining the difference between true and false ego and Rome said that ego and seeing could not co-exist.

The ego it seems to me is a perfectly respectable and true aspect of being with a very important part to play in our survival and relationships. Why do we think happiness depends on its extinction?

The falseness which I think Mogens is referring to arises from my identification with ego and consequent failure to see myself for what I truly am. The ego isn't false, it is just out of place. Mogens suggests we look at where the question arises. In my case, it arises when the ego becomes aware of this mistaken identity and begins to understand its own limits. It seems inevitable that it should then ask 'what is really going on?' Until the question is put or unless an ego-threatening crisis arises, nothing happens. I remain in my semi-coma. The awareness that I am half asleep allows the possibility of an awakening.

There is also an implication that awakening to the actual involves the destruction of ego. Why should this be so? The wider awakens surely includes the narrower. If I really see as I am, what is going on will undoubtedly include ego activity of one sort or another. After her original dismissal of co-existence Rome acknowledges the paradoxical need for it. We still need to communicate, catch the train, etc. Only I don't think its paradoxical they are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, Rome has strong support from Gladney in his contribution below.

"Sitting quietly, doing nothing....." is, I agree, often the intelligent action but not always and not in all circumstances. Am I correct in sensing an element of 'spiritual correctness' in this constant ego-bashing.

Alan Mann

The Humble Moment

I heard someone say the other day "Buddhism doesn't distinguish between a lower self and a Higher Self, between a lesser and a Greater Self" and I found myself mentally adding (politely) "this far have your studies been useful, and as yet no farther". *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, one of the most sacred books in the sanctuaries of Buddhist students, was known to, some say compiled by, Aryasanga. In various passages in it distinctions are sketched between lower and Higher, lesser & Greater 1) power, 2) self, 3) life, 4) light, 5) soul, 6) sense, 7)memory, 8) journey, 9) paths, 10), vehicles.

Perhaps a quote or two will illustrate: "56. The self of matter and the Self of Spirit can never meet." ..."90. And now thy self is lost in Self, thyself unto Thyself, merged in that Self, from which thou first didst radiate."

I haven't been able to find any traditional Buddhist material which speaks of a lesser & a Greater Time. But one contemporary Tibetan Buddhist, whose meditational efforts seem to have been successful, has written (since 1977) of different kinds of "time". Here are some extracts*:

Techniques -- attempts to force the issue, to improve, control, or achieve -- cannot arrive at the insight. ... the whole idea of a technique is to give the ego, the self-image, a *sequence* of lower time moments that it can set into motion -- what people properly call a 'course of action'. This is rather self-defeating if our goal is to open to the immediate *presence* of higher time.

Is there no way to prepare for being 'within'? There is no one *to* prepare, & nothing to do, yet in a way preparation is important. What has to be prepared is precisely the insight, initially the attitude, that there's no continuous self who has to do something.

If we fix ourselves in time -- time moves, eroding those positions to show that they are intrinsically artificial. Time is not like a machine, with internal structures constraining it toward a preferred mode of operation. It is utterly boundless, open, & flexible. Nothing is forbidden to it; its lucency permits all varieties of expression.

(Great Time says 'I see no lesser time', having incorporated lesser time comfortably in a fraction of itself. Lesser time says 'I see no Great Time', having separated itself off from Great Time.)

Each point in time offers the same possibility of contact with Great Time ... There is no fundamental taint or characteristic which marks some points as lacking this Great Time dimension, or prohibiting contact with it, while marking other points as having this dimension.

If everything is seen to be unoriginated ... then what time is this?

*(from the writings of Tarthang Tulku)

Editorial intrusion. I had never heard of Tarthang Tulku until last month and now, not only Gladney, but Chris, Heinz and members of the NoHead conference are suggesting I catch up. This is what prompted the initial suggestion that I would benefit from his approach. From the Journal, 19 April 95:

19 April

I was walking down the arcade from Grace Bros into Chatswood Mall yesterday when I had a bit of an insight into a time dissolving trick. I was thinking about my view of time. I have a vague visual image of time stretching "ahead" to an indistinct conclusion; a time horizon. The analogy fails close examination because whereas the true horizon never gets closer this one clearly does. I realised that my perspective was changing, the view ahead has been shrinking in proportion to my age. I have been unconsciously adjusting the range as I grow older. The "distance" to the horizon is measured in years. I have a spatial image which is stepped out in time. This led me to consider what would happen if, instead of carrying this image in consciousness as a given aspect of reality, I gave it some close attention. So that is what I have been doing. This may be the long sought "trick" for seeing off time. It involves bringing this background assumption into attention and "looking" at it. What happens?

What is seen is what is there. The trick involves asking the mind to look at what it thinks is there but is not there at all. As a result of this unaccustomed attention, the timeview evaporates, one sees only what is. The full series might involve the Harding finger followed by the time trick.

It is not that I disagree with Tarthang Tulku or Krishnamurti or Rome Warren or anybody else. The point is that I cannot see how it is possible to agree with them, in any meaningful way, until I have seen what they have seen; until it is first and not second hand.

Puzzle of the Month

Who said this:

"It is all here; everything is here and we simply acknowledge that it is here - the essence and the substance of all there is. What we call spirit and what we call matter are one, and tha All. I don't like to talk about "spiritual" and "material" as if they were different or opposed....."

Clue - 20th Century American

Issue No. 24

Meetings

The last meeting considered the challenges posed by Peter's ten demandments but came nowhere near covering the issues raised or reaching any conclusions. There is enough meat in his questions to keep us busy for months. A couple of side issues have also kept a few of us busy. These were the questions of whether "headlessness" is an acceptable description of what is actually going on and whether Douglas Harding is promoting the return to a pre-personal level. If there is room in this letter I will include a few representative excerpts of the discussion. The Dialogue meetings which Barry and Peter are running at North Ryde and Kent Street continue to be well attended. Gladney coordinated a workshop for the Gosford branch of the Theosophical Society on Sunday 15th October and included sessions by seven people who are involved with the Now group in one way or another. The next event on the calendar is the Dialogue weekend at Springbrook which Donald is coordinating. He returned last week and I have asked him to give a report on his international dialoguing to the next meeting. (Sunday 22nd Oct) Thank you for your letters and contributions of all kinds.

Direction

In the last letter I suggested that the development of the 'straight' dialogue groups by Barry and Peter leaves us freer to revert to a more 'Seeing' oriented approach at Greville Street. This was our original reason for coming together and although it is 'harder' it is probably also the ultimate dialogue. If, awareness of the assumptions which underpin our actions and attitudes, is what DIALOGUE is about, then understanding the difference between what I think I am and what I really am seems to be fundamental to any effective dialogue process. Otherwise it is an assumptionfest with conglomerates of assumptions, posing as individuals, agreeing or disagreeing about their ideas and opinions.

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 become fossilised; shades of Pirsig and Spink.

Here is a quote from page 106-107:

"If I have a spiritual stand point 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!

Letter 1

For me The Ten Demandments (a marvellous title) were fascinating although I immediately annihilated them! The core, of course, lies in the first which really defines itself by use of the word 'enlightenment' -'in light'. 2. We cannot know it exists unless we either experience or witness it.

Since I've been lucky (or quirky) enough to both see and experience it, all the rest become non-questions except for those who have ideas about it as a state of consciousness with no relationship to physical manifestation.

While initially I perceived it (as an idea) I think it was perceived as 'being aware'. When I 'disappear' and am seen by others as Light there is nothing to be aware. I, the thinker, ego, am 'gone', this is so, there is nothing to know, want, need, seek, find, get. Even the words dissolve and what am I left with? Nothing remains but a tantalising resonance in memory: "what really happened?".

The Gurdieff system is bound by measurement (as all systems are) and traps people into their own ideological systems of 'higher', 'lower' and other levels. Even the metaphor of progressing up a ladder is misleading. If anything, we need to go lower - deeper down into the essence of being instead of being seduced into by ideas, beliefs and teachings which are always 'out', 'up' there - somewhere else - instead of right here.

In regard to the 'false ego' - the ego is false in regard to being an actual entity. It and seeing cannot co-exist because the ego 'sees' only the world it - the thinker - has created. In other words, Alan's identification with ego may preclude him from insight into his true self, i-dot/soul which does exist beneath the ego's obscuring blanket of thought. awareness of being half-asleep is a window in the blanket - and my perception of Alan is someone with a small ego.

Probably I have clouded the issue in regard to 'co-existence' and certainly I'm not interested in ego bashing. so far as I am concerned I love mine. After all, it is my own creation and, if I didn't love it, I would change it. In the material world of commerce, everyone's ego plays an important role. When needed, it springs to life and, in this sense, is co-existent in the same human form. the paradox is that it cannot function, has no life of its own, when 'the other' emerges.

I have not before encountered Gladney's Buddhist quotations but last year wrote a piece on "The Self in Search of The Self". The self "ego" can, of course, never encounter Self (Spirit) and it is a sensing of this that makes people "ego-bash", because self thinks it is Self which makes self Self's greatest enemy.

Spirit and matter are one because ALL matter is manifested from the unmanifest. Self can exist without self: self cannot exist without Self. Once this is understood, every mystery falls into place and there is no longer any drive toward seeing the small puddles and thinking they are the Ocean! Understanding that all matter is the creation of consciousness is probably

the easiest 'Spiritual Exercise' anyone can undertake once it is seen that ego is more than a bunch of reactions and ideas searching for meaning and an illusion of self-perpetuity. The Self is - and has no search.

I wonder whether it may be clearer to suggest the i-dot is owner-occupier of the body but, being 'shy', resides in the basement or in the outer garden (aura). The ego is a lodger who takes over subtly, then invasively until - to all outward appearances - the ego believes itself to be the sole occupant. Intellect usurps the power of control, and is not even aware there is a secret occupant longing to reveal its presence. All its signs, signals and messages are ignored, until...? *Rome Warren*

Letter 2

A Final Communique -To Whom it May Concern

I have come from the unknown into the known and after a while shall go back to the unknown. During my stay in time and space I am the helmsman of a vessel, my body, taking me on an Odyssey called life.

Throughout this sojourn I see it as my task to learn as much about nature and the spectrum of the human condition as my faculties and interests will allow while taking care of my physical needs and discharging the responsibilities that come my way in a proper manner.

I do not while away the precious time and effort seeking to find out about the unknown - and thus the unknowable - in spite of the lure from gurus, spiritual masters, messiahs or other false prophets imploring me to find enlightenment, transformation of consciousness, the kingdom of heaven or freedom from the known.

Instead, I see the need to free myself from my imperfections, whatever they may be, in order that I may dance with rapture because I am alive here and now. And I find that this is the only enlightenment I need. *Mogens Holt*

Letter 3

In contrast to sophisticated modern discussions of whether we are in time or time is in us, I was interested to come across a pre-Einsteinian view. In "The Diary of a Welsh Clergyman", the writer, Joseph Jenkins, concludes 1886 with -

"When I farewell another year I am mindful that it is we who are on the wing not time. Time is a standard element in nature. Time was before chaos. It was divided by man into years, seasons, months and hours. Devices like clocks and watches do not measure time; they move as they record but time does not move".

These sentiments are in line with ones expressed by Henry A Dobson in "The Paradox of Time":

'Time goes' you say? Ah no!

Alas, time stays. We go.

Margaret Armstrong

Issue No. 25 – Nov 95

Apology

To Margaret Armstrong for referring to her Welsh Swagman, in the October NOWletter, as a Welsh Clergyman.

October Meeting

I thought the October meeting a bit of a disaster but for three people at least it was one of the better gatherings so I have finally given up trying to assess whether they 'work' or not. I had a stiff neck which might explain my negativity. I had forgotten everything about it but Erik & Elsa reminded me that we talked about joy. This arose from the "Closed Eye" experiment. At one point in the experiment we are asked to consider emotion and whether it is possible to summon emotion without the image of the circumstances from which arises or to which it is attached. It becomes clear that emotion comes and goes like everything else and has no life other than as an extension of what causes its arising. Yet, during the experiment, it is not unusual to experience joy. This seems to arise in the awareness of the underlying emptiness, no-thing. So we considered whether joy was of a different category from the other emotions. Since then it has been pointed out that the opening to emptiness can, just as easily, give rise to another emotion without apparent cause - fear. So it appears we have not followed this one far enough. Apart from Isaak Walton, there are no lengthy contributions from you this month so I'm afraid it is a solo run. Pen to paper please!

Weekend Seminar at Springbrook, Qld

This is a personal note and not an attempt to report on the whole affair. About thirty people attended. It was a two day, weekend seminar held on the Miller's rain forest property just over the Queensland border. The Theosophical Society have recently, added accommodation to their Convention facilities which adjoin the property and in which we stayed. The theme was 'The Future is Now' which we changed during the first session to 'Is the Future Now'. As usual, we went through an initial shambles of misunderstanding but began to come together during the last session. The best part, for me, was when we split into smaller groups. Donald nominated me as a group facilitator for which I was not very grateful at

the time. I found myself in a group with Jenny Howe, John Scott, Michael ? and David Barnes. John and Michael had been very stropy in the big group mainly and I was not looking forward to facilitating such a forceful duo. We were looking at "The Search" Jenny said the search was designed to take us away from rather than towards the truth. Michael was keen on being clear about the total activity of the self and realise that we can bring nothing of real value, in this context, from the past to this moment and John said we had to die and our unwillingness to do this self-dying doomed us to the search treadmill. David facilitated gently and I listened to my assumptions about the group disintegrating. John told an anecdote about K's visit to Sydney in 1960?. After unsuccessfully trying to ask a question at several meetings he waylaid him in a corridor and popped it. It was:

"are you saying Sir, that there is no quantifiable reality?"

K took his hand in warm affirmation. On a different occasion, he asked him another about what was necessary with regard to others and it was made clear that you can only sort out yourself.

We tried a couple of the experiments which were not very successful but, once again, we learned more about what not to do. The hole in the card exercise needs care to make clear the difference between the empty fullness of the hole and the empty fullness of seeing.

In the final, combined session I had a strong sense of the need to realise that we confuse seeing with thinking and that it is possible to live from either seeing or knowing or both at different times. They are both necessary in different circumstances. The problem arises when we use either mode in inappropriate circumstances or if we insist in living from knowledge at all times. I also had a strong feeling that it might be possible to sidetrack all this plodding analysis, dialoguing and videotape watching by sidestepping into direct experiencing.

In the afternoon of the last day when nearly everyone had left I was wandering around with Barry Hora trying to spot a Koel. We saw a movement at the top of a tall Eucalypt where a big white cross had been fixed and then the head of Victor Shevchenko who called us to come over. So, over we went, Barry, Margot and me. Victor introduced himself as a religious fanatic and then demonstrated this by showing us the house he built which is painted with life size angels and biblical characters. The whole upstairs is a chapel. Apparently Victor was a deacon in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church but de-frocked when he joined the TS. Nevertheless he re-frocks himself every morning for a 1.5 hour service he officiates at in the chapel. His garden is a riot of flowers, fish ponds and vegetables. He insisted we stay and have a traditional vodka with him. I thought this would be interesting as liquor is banned from the TS premises where we were staying across the way. All was explained when the 'Vodka' turned out to be grape juice. We listened for an hour as he told us his life story which is an amazing tale of incredible hardship as a boy in the Ukraine, his escape from Russia and eventual emigration to Australia and his adventures here. He is full of energy, love and gratitude. The very engaging Victor Shevchenko, he reminded me of Traherne.

After dinner we had a bit of a chat about the weekend. David Barnes, Terry O'Brien, Margot, Barry and me. David said he maybe we are already enlightened. I said that I was sure this is true but the question for me is, as it has been for many years, why do we not realise it? Later, the following morning I thought 'no', that implies an ego which has broken through, already realised which could not be possible because identification with ego seems to be the root of the problem. I suggest as a more accurate description of the situation:

Enlightenment is what we are, our true nature. This is realised when identification with ego, our second nature, ends. Then, how does this identification with ego, which seems to be endemic to the species, cease? What is involved in seeing the fundamental Iamness as it really is rather than what The 'I' thinks it is? That last question may contain the answer. It is a question of experiencing oneself subjectively not objectively as 'I' but subjectively as 'capacitie'. Two Trahernisms in the one report - too much?

The basement of Geoff & Shirley's home houses the Krishnamurti reference library and research facility. It is beautifully put together and a very peaceful place. They have a CD reference system for finding out what K had to say on just about every subject and in what book, audio or video tape to find it.

The Ten Demandments

Peter's ten demandments generated a lot of activity both at meetings and in recent NOWletters. His method of presentation suggests a profound scepticism about the subject of enlightenment although it is not clear whether he rules out the possibility altogether or whether he is challenging the mystique in which it is usually packaged and the guru gobbledygook in which it often finds expression.

The value for me in this has been the way it has exposed the assumptions which underlie the whole business. I thought I would use this edition to identify what the enlightenment DIALOGUE has opened up for me in the hope that it might also summarise what has been happening in general.

The assumptions from which I believe the barriers are constructed seem to be: we cannot work it out for ourselves but need a guide, guru or teacher, it is something that will take a long time or intensive disciplined activity of some kind to achieve, there is really nothing we can do, it is a matter of grace or crisis. I think all three are false assumptions and can be demonstrated to be so.

If there is such a state then it would have to be broader than one's normal state of consciousness. otherwise it would be constant and, consequently, obvious to the point that no question would arise.

It is not, it seems, readily apparent for most of us so, if it exists at all, then it must be obscured in some way. The best way to resolve the issue would be first to demonstrate the actuality of it in some way and then reveal the mechanism by which it is obscured.

Peter's second question was - what is it? The answer to this question is crucial because it determines the outcome of the quest. If is answered in the usual way we get a description of a cosmic fireworks display and a supernatural rather than a natural phenomenon. If, on the other hand, we describe it as a natural state which is accessible and obvious we are told that we don't know what we are talking about and that such a view is simplistic rather than simple and that enlightenment could not possibly be so straightforward. Why not?. If it is not simple, obvious and accessible here and now where could it be and what could it be. The blockage is the tall tales of heroic 'realisations' we have swallowed over the years. We all want to emulate St Theresa! Seeking the most flamboyant manifestations we overlook the constant, ever present manifestation which is simply what we truly are.

How do I know this to be true? Well, I don't. The idea that it is something we can know about and, therefore, acquire is another stumbling block. Enlightenment is revealed not in 'knowing' but in 'seeing' or apprehending. It has no continuity in time and seems to involve awakening or falling into from moment to moment. It is a matter of living not of knowing and a case of once seen always forgotten.

The assumption that is an attribute which can be acquired rather than 'what is' or what I really am, gives rise to the absurdity of 'practice' as a route to where we already are .

The idea that it ever present rather than desirable and to be sought after is the ultimate threat to all that my ego-centredness holds dear, i.e., progressive improvement, a future goal, postponement, all of which justify continuing identification with the self. Peter's question of why should we want it points to the greatest obstacle of all which is that I don't. It is much more exciting to talk about, write about than actually BE. And, I'm having far too much fun being 'endarkened' than risking the consequences of embracing the possibilities of my fundamental emptiness.

A few months ago, one of my guides told me, in response to my description of what I thought enlightenment was about, "well, if you don't mind me saying so, what you describe is rather low level enlightenment". That demonstrates my point very well; take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves. All that is required is that we awake to the low level, blindingly obvious and highly accessible end of the spectrum the rest will take care of itself, or not as the case may be. The important bit is the beginning we can grasp not an end out of reach.

In the manner of the effective polemicist Peter concludes by answering his own questions. He offers the Nicoll formula of increasing levels of understanding continuing until we see things 'as they really are' and with the ascent charged by an inner drive rather than egocentric motivation.

I am uncomfortable with the levels concept because it tends to put the discussion into a time frame. The living, being and seeing of what we are at whatever 'level' we happen to be at is what I understand enlightenment to be about.

I hope there is sufficient disagreement with the above to provide fuel for the next DIALOGUE meeting.

Gratitude

Some of you will recall how much taken I was with Thich Nhat Hahn's insistence on how important it is to enjoy our non-toothache. Browsing through the bookshelves the other day I came upon this:

Well, scholar, having now taught you to paint your rod, and we having still a mile to Tottenham High Cross, I will, as we walk towards it in the cool shade of this honeysuckle hedge, mention to you some of the thoughts and joys that have possessed my soul since we two met together. And these thoughts shall be told you, that you also may join with me in thankfulness to the Giver of every good and perfect gift for our happiness. And that our present happiness may appear to be the greater, and we the more thankful for it, I will beg you to consider with me how many do, even at this very time, lie under the torment of the stone, the gout, and **toothache**; and this we are free from. And every misery that I miss is a new mercy, and therefore let us be thankful.

Isaak Walton

(Thich Nhat Demidenko?)

'Seeing' and /or Apprehension

Gladney has pointed out that the use of the word 'seeing' in relation to the 'Headless' experiments, etc., can be very misleading particularly when apostrophes are not present. I agree and think that 'apprehension' in the sense in which it is used by Traherne is far better. Gladney has gone a step further as follows:

Alan, You have chosen to use the word "apprehension" and I mentioned it is a good word. Below is an extract from a paper by David Ray Griffin on another subject, and you may be interested to see how he uses the same word, and the shorter 'prehesion'. He too regards it as fine word; its modern revival seems to date from the writings (1925-1935) of Alfred North Whitehead, who hung a lot of his philosophy on it.

,51, "The idea that our basic way of apprehending the actual world beyond our own experience is nonsensory prehesion, so that sensory perception is a secondary, derivative form of perception, shows how we can know many things that we presuppose but that cannot be known through sensory perception." p254

"Finally the doctrine that we have a mode of perception more basic than that which is mediated through our physical organs explains how we can apprehend those nonphysical realities we call values, such as truth, beauty and goodness."

Gladney Oakley

However, the Harding-Traherne usage is based on the "lay hold of" aspect of 'apprehension' combined with an immediacy based strictly on what is given. Experience is admissible only as 'direct experiencing' and not as memory or concept brought from elsewhere. Traherne called it "right apprehension", presumably to avoid the inclusion of knowledge and I think what you point to as 'prehesion' - *the action of grasping with the mind; mental apprehension OED* - is getting close to it.

Issue No. 26 – Dec 95

November Meeting

We had a mini-dialogue at the end of the November meeting - when most had left. I think it was Graeme who questioned whether it is meaningful to talk of timelessness when duration seems necessary for anything to happen at all. I won't attempt to summarise the discussion here. I recall it seemed to be resolved for me in the moment but it keeps popping up so maybe it would be a good subject for a full Dialogue meeting.

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 sourcer 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 Traherner's poem 'The Anticipation'.

Law & Spirituality

From the August 1929 issue of The International Star Bulletin - Vol 1, page 9. The following extract is the last six paragraphs of this piece.

Liberation is neither in the future nor the past. It is not something to be attained in some distant future nor does it lie in the past under the control, under the domination of those who have already attained. I maintain that the now, the eternal now, holds the entire truth. The past is the ever changing present and to that past belong birth, renunciation, acquisition, and all the qualities that you have gained.

The past will not solve your problems nor establish harmony within yourself; so you look to the future which becomes for you the great mystery. The future is the mystery of the 'I', the 'unsolved I', because whatever you have solved of the 'I', of the self, is the past. So whatever you have not solved is the future, and hence a mystery. The future will always remain a mystery because the more you enter the future, the more mysterious it becomes and the more you are held within it.

The establishment of inner harmony is to be attained neither in the past nor in the future, but where the past and the future meet, which is now. When you have attained that point neither future nor past, neither birth nor death, neither time nor space exist. It is in that "now" which is liberation, which is perfect harmony, to which men of the past and men of the future must come. You, who aim at bringing about that harmony in the future must realise this eternal moment.

To me, the future is not at all important neither is the past. What is of utmost importance is what we are in the now. Your ideas, your love, your whole being must live in the immediate which means that you must put your theory into practice now. It matters what you are "now", in what manner you live and treat other people, not what you are going to be in the future. Who cares what you are going to be? The seed that has life in it wants sunshine and rain immediately not in some distant future - by then the seed may be dead.

That eternal moment is creation. I dislike to use the words 'active' and 'inactive', 'dynamic' and 'static' - pass the words by and see in them something potent. If you do not live in that eternal moment, you are dead to the self, to the 'I', to the immensity of life. Unless you free yourself from all outside authorities, conventions, rights and wrongs, philosophies and religions, you can never come to that immediate now, which is creation.

To be liberated, to live in that realm of the eternal, to be conscious of that Truth, means to be beyond birth and death - because birth is of the past and death is in the future - beyond space, beyond the present and past, and the delusion of time. The man who has attained such liberation knows that perfect harmony which is constant and eternally present; he lives unconditionally in that eternity which is now.

Jiddu Krishnamurti

Enlightenment

As an extension of his campaign to get to the bottom of this troublesome issue, Peter has produced a glossary of the terms most frequently used to describe enlightenment. In addition, he has pulled out a few descriptions of breakthrough experiences. He has also attached an analysis of the Enlightenment spectrum we talked of in the last NOWletter. It is too long to include here but copies are available on request from Peter or myself.

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The space between breaths, between notes, between thoughts, is enlightenment. One can act from this but not in it. Show me a single 'guru' whose life, in and out of relationships, has been perfection and, only then, would it be logical to question this perception.

Probably the greatest barriers of all to overcome are the traditional concepts of time and place, and also the radical difference between reality and actuality. Once these are 'clear' so is everything else.

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"Given Being's endless play, there is no fixed way to 'get' this fulfilment, since it is too 'near' to 'get', and is so ever-present that no particular approach is necessary or possible. There is no way for us to walk out of this fulfilment -it is always spontaneously arising.

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(By way of introduction - Thomas's comments follow a NoHead discussion on the monstrous or evil aspect of human behaviour which was prompted by the assassination of Rabin. What was our reaction, what had 'Headlessness' to say about it, etc. I thought his contribution a very eloquent expose of the arrogance which seems to underpin the usual responses. The assumption that we, the problem, are also the solution.)

Remarks prompted by recent observations on "monstrosity":

In the interests of stimulating thought, maybe even shifting viewpoints, I act again as Lucifer's Lawyer. It seems to me that one's perspective on "evil" and such is one in which a little humility is in order. In other words, nothing reveals cosmic presumptuousness more quickly than the scope of one's formula for "saving" humanity from itself. What I mean by this is that there seem to be two scales of interpreting existence: the Big Human mode, and the Little Human mode. The first of these is that (quintessentially Western) viewpoint, that makes us out to be free agents subjected to some kind of testing in this life - whether one sees this, in a traditional Judeo-Christian sense as having to answer for oneself at the Final Exam, or whether one sees it in an existentialist/secular sense of having responsibility to base one's presumably free actions on the exercise of intelligence, mutual self-interest, etc. In either scenario, one presumably recognizes the presence of evil or whatever you want to call it, and does what one can to avoid participation in and propagation of it oneself, in the first place, and apparently does what one can to extend the benefit of one's practice to others, on the presumption that if everyone behaved as I did things would be just ducky.

What I called the Little Human mode, which in the West has often been viewed as unconscionable passivity in the presence of suffering, might also be seen as deriving from a more complex view of the cosmos, or at least a view of a more complex cosmos, in which the apparent causal connections of things rarely pertain at the next level of perception. This viewpoint does not mean that one necessarily stands back and accepts any and every behaviour (this has nothing to do with Nietzscheanism). Compassion and recognition of the principle of reaping the fruits of one's actions still apply.

The difference I am trying to get at is seen more on the level of a "worldview," or opinion about what others, or Humanity in general, ought to be doing, and this is what I mean about lacking humility, namely presuming that one's intellect or conscience is vast enough to comprehend the unfolding of It All and make prescriptions for it.

There's an assumption hidden under here that the Creator, Gaia, Nature, the Tao, Mr. God, or whatever is either a screw up or a sadistic testmaster that gets its jollies by creating puny creatures, sticking them into a puzzle and watching them squirm out of it (or not). I find both of these interpretations repugnant in the extreme.

Let me attempt an example. Common "thought" has it that here's global warming going on, caused by misguided Human endeavour, and it's imperilling the planet itself, which presumably waits like a dumb lump for enlightened Humans to come to its rescue by behaving themselves. Isn't just another (back-door) version of the old-fashioned (presumably deplorable from a Green point of view) notion of Christian "stewardship," as in go forth and subdue everything you can and have charge of it? What if What Is, which evidently pre-exists or comprehends or is the condition of possibility of Human life, isn't as dumb as it looks, and in its unfolding requires Human shenanigans just as it requires cockroaches and the fungus that grows on Hummingbird beaks if otherwise well-intentioned people don't take care to boil and replace the solution in their feeders. We have example evidence of the genius, elegance, and wonder (sorry but I can't find a word grand enough for it) of What Is, and I fail to understand the pretension of the view that it needs to (and can't) save itself from one of its small phenomena (us), or that it is dumbly awaiting us all to save from ourselves, in other words, from its own carelessness in letting us bring it to such a pass. Or is this part of the Big Test, namely that the necessity of acting consciously or facing destruction is providing the friction to evolve the species to a higher plane?

I realize the risk of misconstrual to which I expose myself here. I'm not advocating passivity or tolerance of warfare and genocide, etc. I don't think I'm offering any opinion on such things (by the same token, I don't participate in them, either). Rather, I'm offering an opinion on what passes for thought and conscience, and what I think is a necessity to be unemotional and rigorous about examining unarticulated assumptions that underlie it. An exaggerated opinion of oneself and one's species wears many costumes - the old Crown of Creation business. In other words, is one's sense of morality and a simplistic notion of cause and effect really what one wants to identify as the highest part of oneself?

In short, then, I don't see that David's detached recognition of the factuality for him of assassination makes him a monster. Rather I think that the self-declaration or accusation of monstrosity itself is presumptuous and counter-productive. Another way to say this would be that the whole contemplation of one's stance vis-a-vis a presumed "evil" is another kind of objectification of oneself that is counter to all present evidence.

("If everything's right side up in this world, I want to be upside down in the next." - Mulla Nasrudin)

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As a post script to the article by Thomas, I include the following extract from Microcosmos quote (Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution) by Lynn Margulis & Dorian Sagan provides an example of the earth taking care of itself long before we started to contribute to the processes.

The oxygen holocaust was a worldwide pollution crisis that occurred about 2 billion years ago. Before this there was almost no oxygen in the earth's atmosphere. The earth's original biosphere was as different from ours as that of an alien planet. But purple and green photosynthetic microbes, frantic for hydrogen, discovered the ultimate resource, water, and its use led to the ultimate toxic waste, oxygen. Our precious oxygen was originally a gaseous poison dumped into the atmosphere. The appearance of oxygen using photosynthesis and the resulting oxygen-rich environment tested the ingenuity of microbes, especially those producing oxygen and those nonmobile microorganisms unable to escape the newly abundant and reactive gas means of motion. The microbes that stayed around responded by inventing various intracellular devices and scavengers to de-toxify - and eventually exploit-the dangerous pollutant.

Issue No. 26 – Dec 95

November Meeting

We had a mini-dialogue at the end of the November meeting - when most had left. I think it was Graeme who questioned whether it is meaningful to talk of timelessness when duration seems necessary for anything to happen at all. I won't attempt to summarise the discussion here. I recall it seemed to be resolved for me in the moment but it keeps popping up so maybe it would be a good subject for a full Dialogue meeting.

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 sourcer 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 Traherner's poem 'The Anticipation'.

Law & Spirituality

From the August 1929 issue of The International Star Bulletin - Vol 1, page 9. The following extract is the last six paragraphs of this piece.

Liberation is neither in the future nor the past. It is not something to be attained in some distant future nor does it lie in the past under the control, under the domination of those who have already attained. I maintain that the now, the eternal now, holds the entire truth. The past is the ever changing present and to that past belong birth, renunciation, acquisition, and all the qualities that you have gained.

The past will not solve your problems nor establish harmony within yourself; so you look to the future which becomes for you the great mystery. The future is the mystery of the 'I', the 'unsolved I', because whatever you have solved of the 'I', of the self, is the past. So whatever you have not solved is the future, and hence a mystery. The future will always remain a mystery because the more you enter the future, the more mysterious it becomes and the more you are held within it.

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Issue No. 27 – Jan 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 why this might be so. Well, this is the one. 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 overdue 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, rediscovered 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 was aware of. There will be references to it throughout.

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.

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 are 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.

1 Background

The first of the current cycle of meetings was held at the Wayside Chapel on ? 1993. 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, at the earlier meetings, on the odd occasion, 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, the 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 with Dialogue 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 ?????? and there are now two additional Dialogue groups meeting in Sydney with some cross attendance.

2 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 heading 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 communal life.

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 discussing it not doing it.

1 Dialogue Difficulties

1.1 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 this Dialogue is a pretty obvious and natural way of going about things.

1.2 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.

1.3 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 the 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.

1.3.1 *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:

1.3.2 *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?

1.4 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 function is to work himself 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:*

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

1.4.2 all participants must regard one another as colleagues

1.4.3 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 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.

1.5 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 psycho-therapy. 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 underlie 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 more important than being right but separate from it.

2 The current situation

2.1 Greville Street

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

2.2 NOWletter

I am wondering about the NOWletter after May. I think it is worthwhile 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.

2.3 Special Interest Groups

One of the criticisms of the Greville St affairs 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 2.30 to 4.30 to anyone with a particular axe to grind. For example, I might try a few 'Seeing' workshops for anyone interested.

3 Conclusion

I close this special edition with a request for feedback. I am sure the above is riddled with mis and half understandings and I hope you will both comment on these let me have your thoughts on what needs to change.

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.

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..... 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

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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 psycho-therapy. 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.

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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.

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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...

Terry O'Brien

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.

Travel

Enid is off to Paris again and Alan & Margot are going to Lord Howe Island for a week to celebrate Margot leaving TAFE.