

**Next Meeting  
17 March 96**



**Issue No. 28  
February 96**

**Meetings are held at 10am on the third Sunday of every month at 81, Greville Street, Chatswood and are open to anyone interested in the possibility of working out whether, through the process of DIALOGUE, transformation of consciousness, awakening to what we really are, or whatever we want to call it, can come about.**

### **Dialogue - Why doesn't it work!**

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

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

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

tackle particular points or add comment on specific issues.

### **Background**

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

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

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

### **A Personal note**

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

The perennial question is what is required for Dialogue to work and how would we know if it was working? Well, these issues are considered below in some detail but, as I

am claiming that it is not really working in any of the groups I have been to, I should try to explain what my expectations are.

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

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

It is easy to see these 'difficulties' as what I am at the moment of their arising. They are the effect of what I describe as 'external' causes; what some other person has said. It is much harder to see the causes as well as the effects as what I am. Until the environment is such that a complete identification or integration with what is going on becomes possible then I do not think Dialogue has a chance. In the meantime, it continues to work at a personal level but rarely does the group come to the point where the process is given full rein.

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

### I Dialogue difficulties

#### **When is Dialogue a Dialogue and not a Discussion**

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

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

*two and to move consciously between them. P Senge*

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

#### **Baggage and Suspension**

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

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

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

#### **Purpose or no**

I constantly hear that Dialogue has no aim, we talk of 'having no agenda'. It is explained as a free rolling enquiry without destination and that it gains its energy and even 'purpose' from an absence of purpose. I think this is very confusing and one of the major reasons why it fails to deliver. Dialogue has a very clear aim. The movement of life is continuously distorted by the activity of our accustomed and unconscious thought processes. The purpose of Dialogue is to become aware of this movement and give us a taste of what life might be like free of our neurotic, non-stop commitment to self-interest. Where does the 'no agenda' claim come from? I recently re-read 'On Dialogue' and categorised the main subjects including 'purpose' and found that there is quite a lot to do with the 'plan and purpose' of it all. It seems that Bohm himself is the root of my confusion. Here are two quotes which I think capture the apparent contradiction.

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

Compared with:

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

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

#### **Facilitation or no**

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

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

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

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

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

*all participants must regard one another as colleagues*

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

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

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

#### **Self versus group**

If Dialogue is adopted as a form of self-improvement then it can, by definition, never work. This leads us into the problems which have arisen when Dialogue is mistaken for 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 underly both my dismissal and his acceptance of the idea, then our Dialogue remains alive. The possibility of communion remains intact.

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

#### **Socrates**

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

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

472b6 where Socrates shows Polus how he fails to grasp what he, Polus, actually believes about the value of justice."

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

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

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

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

### **The current situation**

Greville Street

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

NOWletter

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

Special Interest Groups

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

### **Terry O'Brien writes:**

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

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

I share your frustration that we too seldom happen upon

true DIALOGUE in the frantic, sometimes desperate rush to get our message across in a typical discussion. From counselling experience I've learnt that the need for self expression is extremely important to people. Expression is like sending out a probe to explore and confirm our world view. If that expression babbles out mindlessly then its value will be minimal, but if it unfolds with attention to awareness of its cause and effect then its value can be profound and meaningful.

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

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

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

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

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

Relations between people, and in connection with the world at large is integral to our very 'being'. We can

indulge endlessly in all manner of spiritual joyriding in our searching and reckoning the nature of the absolute but are we not in danger of missing or avoiding the most essential and necessary priority of daily living?

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

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

*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.*

*Il.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.

## REGULAR DIALOGUE MEETINGS

NORTH RYDE  
1 Avon Road  
First Saturday of the month  
12.30pm  
Barry Hora (043) 622 843

CHATSWOOD  
81 Greville Street  
Third Sunday of the month  
10.30am  
Alan Mann 419 7394

ROSEVILLE  
3, Shirley Road  
Fourth Saturday of the month  
2.30-4.30pm  
Peter Marjot 014-826-740

SYDNEY CITY  
484 Kent Street  
Second Saturday of the month  
2.30pm  
Barry Hora (043) 622 843

NOWRA  
134 Kinghorne Street  
Every Wednesday evening  
7pm  
Terry O'Brien (044) 438 353

HUSKISSON  
Jericho Cafe  
Every Sunday afternoon  
2.30pm  
Terry O'Brien (044) 438 353

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