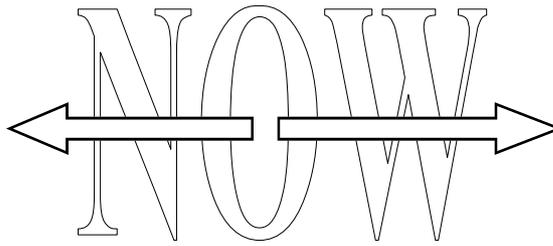


**Greville Street Meetings**  
**15 August 99**  
**19 Sept 99**



**Issue No. 55**  
**August 1999**

**FOCUSING SESSION**  
**SATURDAY 7 AUGUST**  
**Greville Street**

**Krishnamurti Gathering - Springbrook Qld**  
**30 & 31 October - Arrive night of Friday 29**

**Theme - 'Who/What am I'**

**For further info ring - 1800 633 727**

<b>CONTENTS</b>		<b>Page</b>
<i>(Responses to David Clouston's article - Are we in a Rut? in Issue No. 54)</i>		
<b>What is the point of dialogue?</b>	<i>Gary Hipworth</i>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extra Category</b>	<i>Alan Mann</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>Seeing and 'Pure Consciousness'</b>	<i>Lucian Loren-Rymaszewski &amp; Joel Agee</i>	<b>4</b>
<b>Notes on 'Buddhism without Beliefs' by Stephen Batchelor</b>	<i>Alan Mann</i>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Quality of Awareness</b>	<i>Peter Crook</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>Focusing Meeting</b>	<i>Saturday 7 August</i>	<b>9</b>

**Editor's note,**

*David's challenge on the issue of Dialogue has stimulated some responses and thanks to all of this month's contributors. I appeal to readers who are generally content to listen rather than speak through these pages to consider letting me have your thoughts from time to time. Either on what you find agreeable or disagreeable in the Nowletter or maybe a few notes on some book, article or issue you feel is relevant.*

*The Focusing meeting is a new departure and the first meeting is well subscribed with only a handful of places left, see page 9.*

*The Nowletter appears between 10 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. Contributions from readers are considered the most valuable content so please think about letting me have your views, experiences, discoveries and responses .*

**Annual Subscription \$12**

### What is the point of dialogue?

I was very interested in David Clouston's article, "Are we in a rut?", and coincidentally, "Who am I?" by Donald Ingram Smith, both in issue 54. In fact, Lyn Willmott's article, and Peter Crook's article also involved individual consciousness and thinking about oneself. The "self" and the possibility of change seem to be at the centre of most of our concerns.

About four years ago, I put the following questions to myself, and the answers came to me as "insights", not as knowledge. The difference between the two kinds of learning? Knowledge is made up of concepts, which are "bits" of reality. Then we have to try and add the "bits" together to get the whole story. But reality keeps on moving, and so all that we achieve is a limited, and fragmented and historical view of the total picture. This is a big problem, because I could spend a thousand life times accumulating more knowledge and getting absolutely nowhere.

Insight happens NOW, and does not involve concepts or "bits" of reality, but sees the whole story unfolding and changing. How do we do this? We have to learn a whole new way of learning. We suspend judgement about what we are seeing. We learn how to look without ideas. We don't name anything that we are looking at. We simply perceive the whole process, in one go! But we have to be extremely sensitive about our subject. We have to start from the unknown, (not the known!) and admit truthfully to ourselves that we really don't know what the "me" is. We only think that we know. Then we observe the workings of the self, in relationship with the daily challenges that will inevitably come along. This does not need a dialogue group, but it obviously could happen in such a group. Then we relax and wait. We either get it, or we don't get it. If we get it, we understand the falseness or the truth about something. This deep knowing enables us to be finished with that particular situation. We drop it like a hot potato. Life moves on. We are now in a new situation of not knowing. To summarise, "Knowledge informs; Insight transforms".

I am asking these questions for myself, because I cannot answer them for anyone else. Why? Because my daily experiences and life are unique from any other person. I am a fragile, living organism, with an advanced brain (?), and I am programmed by my genes and my mind to favour self-preservation and self-perpetuation. If I am going to change radically, then my "identity" program will want a bloody good reason, because a radical change, of my consciousness, is a form of death. Fear will stop me going through a terrifying transformation, if my whole organism, including my intellect, does not see that it is a sane, life-affirming thing to be doing.

### WHY DO I WANT TO CHANGE?

I want to lead an honest, truthful, free, joyful life,

without any fear of death, or underlying anxiety – every day! I am very discontented with my life as it is, with its never-ending inner conflict, constant search for something better, confusion, boredom and sense of separation from my fellow human beings. I want the whole truth about myself – for its own sake, and without a sugar coating. I see the same violence, conflict and disorder in the world. Maybe they are both part of the same problem. Then I ask another question? Am I really being honest about my motive? I had to wait for an insight. Perhaps I am kidding myself. But the answer came back – this is my true motive – I really am prepared to go to the end of the road. Something deep inside my guts is saying that I am not living freely and truthfully, and this is causing problems in the external world.

### WHO AM I?

I must start here. I must understand my conditioning as a human being, not a plant or an animal. I am a conceptual being. I am full of ideas about life. I have been conditioned by society to see reality in a particular way. When I understand my conditioning, and I have to go into this in some detail first, I see that words (concepts), language grammar and structure are the keys to understanding the structure of myself. In particular, the straight line, one thing at a time, nature of my language, as in subject-verb-object, with "me" at the centre of this world, has been reinforced in my brain a million times since I was born.

My reality has been created, literally, and given meaning by the power of words, symbols, and the linear sequence of events. The self-concept is at the centre of this invented world of symbols, and uses memory and "freedom to choose" to reinforce its own existence and sense of immortality.

If I observe this mental process very carefully, I see that there is a flaw in the process. I have been taught to believe in progress – that in time I can become a better person, perhaps a perfect, moral being. If I believe this "belief" then I drive myself to become a perfect being, and this self-image is used to measure my progress. But I get continually disappointed with myself. If I am really honest, I can see that I can never attain this ideal image, or even get close to it. In fact, there never was any permanent evolving entity. I am really playing a "language game" that is only making me more and more confused, and full of contradictions. My shocking insight? "There is no psychological or spiritual evolution". I am truly a figment of my own imagination. I am responsible for my own inner turmoil, and my growing mental baggage, by continuing to believe in, and make a continuous daily mental effort at becoming somebody. I fear coming to an end as a self-concept! This is not an intelligent response if I want to meet the challenges of life in a free and spontaneous way. The psychological "me" fears death, not the death of the physical body. I can't

really fear what I do not know. I fear the loss of the known. I have discovered for myself that all the ideas about there being seven stages of cosmic evolution, or that I can have an ecstatic spiritual union with the supreme XXX, is so much codswallop – it is just more work of the imagination – read ego.

#### WHAT CAN I DO?

I, the self-concept, the intellect, the psychological “me”, can’t do anything. It can only see that it has a certain place in the scheme of things, (practical, knowledge matters) but must really cease to exist as a belief system in psychological matters. It must stop becoming “somebody” and simply learn to go with the flow of life, and nature. The shocking truth hits me – I really don’t know how to live this way! I am like a young child, without a formula, because the old formula has looked at itself in the mirror, and seen its own limitations. It really is now ready to keep quiet on matters of choice, and personalities. I feel myself dying. I can’t do anything about it. I am in a state of shock. I go through the motions of daily existence. I feel terrible. But I also feel sane for the first time in my life.

#### LOOKING BACK

I now see, with hindsight, that a transformation occurred of my consciousness, the very moment when I understood, for the first time that psychological evolution was a false game, an illusion of the mind. The whole organism had an inner “feeling” that the unknown was the Truth, and was life-preserving, in the whole sense of that word. The working out of this process is ongoing, and may never end. The amount of conceptual conditioning in my organism is staggeringly huge. Residual “me” is still trying to justify its re-invention, albeit in a “better” form.

#### SO WHAT IS THE POINT OF DIALOGUE?

For me, the only question worth truly understanding is, “Who am I?”. Everything else follows. If the members of a dialogue group suspend all judgement and impersonally inquire into this question of identity, who knows what might transpire. It would be to understand the nature of the “me” in the mirror of relationships. What tools do I/we have to undertake this task? Knowledge and insight? What is insight? How does it work? What is the essence of a human being? What is a concept? What is my real motive for seeking the answer to these questions? Am I prepared to be ruthlessly honest with myself and every other person in the group? Truth liberates – but only if I seek the Truth, for its own sake.

#### CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

I now understand why thought cannot find Truth, or merge with a “higher universal consciousness”. Thought is an invention of the human mind, limited and good at concentration, and grasping at objects, one

at a time. But because of its very nature, it can never know the unknown reality, which is moving, dynamic, and alive right at this very moment. How does this unknown reality come into being? It is already here! Thought has taken over the driver’s seat, created its own “marks on paper and noises in the air”, and dominates every conscious moment of one’s existence. Thought, “me”, must understand that it is the problem, and wither away psychologically, of its own accord. That is the reason why I cannot help any one else see their own limitations as a self-concept. It means the death of themselves, the one thing we cherish above all else. What “nutter” would die voluntarily? A “false” nutter that really does see its own falseness.

For me there really is a universal consciousness, or language that we all share, with each other, and with every life form, perhaps with every rock, and atom. It is an integral aspect of you and me, and we can’t seek it. It is already here. I call it simply “silence”. Not the silence in which thought is still active, but the silence of “no-thought”. My dog just looked at me, and without a word, asked me for some “tucker”. I have to go. Love to all

*Gary Hipworth*

#### The extra Category

I was interested by David’s comments on dialogue and his questioning of “whether or not we are holding the meetings in the appropriate spirit.” I think it is an excellent addition to the never ending dialogue about what dialogue is really all about. His analysis of our commitment to and willingness to let go of our levels of identification was fascinating and here is a reminder of what the table looks like with his identification levels as a percentage on the right:

1 Theories	0%
2 Ideas	10%
3 Opinions	60%
4 Facts	85%
5 Experience	100%

I read the percentages as an arbitrary but reasonably accurate assessment of how strongly I identify and, therefore, how willingly I let go of a particular category. As I was considering David’s ladder of commitment, it struck me that there is another category which follows experience and which I would describe as ‘experiencing’. I define ‘experiencing’ as what is actually happening in the meeting. It is whatever in-forms consciousness at any particular moment as opposed to experience which is the residue or memory of past activities. So I now re-write the table as follows:

1 Theories	0%
2 Ideas	10%
3 Opinions	60%

4 Facts	85%
5 Experience	100%
6 Experiencing	0%

You see that I have allocated zero identification to this additional category in the belief that present experiencing is regarded as ephemeral and insignificant compared to categories 3, 4 & 5 which are being continuously dredged up in our dialogue exchanges to bury any chance of category 6 getting a toehold. I am all too ready to let go of what is happening, my experiencing, in favour of what I already know to be 'true'. As David pointed out, categories 1 to 5 can provide a cage of separation from what is actually going on. And more importantly perhaps, they lock me into an idea of my self as separate and cut off from all 'other' rather than in and of the process which is revealed in experiencing.

My argument is that if dialogue is to function in the spirit of 'letting go' and 'enabling the new' then the one category which we should be happy to identify with 100% is Category 6. That is, the flow of the meeting. Whatever is going on and whoever is speaking is what I truly am, in terms of awareness, at that moment. And, paradoxically, I have to be prepared for 100% letting go of whatever enters this stream if I am to 'enable the new'.

We have been told by a number of people over recent years that group dialogue doesn't work. What they usually mean by this is that we rarely if ever find that the group as a whole is 'in dialogue'. This criticism, I think, misses the point as it focuses on change occurring in 'others'. Dialogue always works for me when I focus on the change that matters which is always 'right here'. And it occurs immediately when priority shifts from the cage of knowing, categories 1-5, to the seeing/experiencing of category 6.

*Alan Mann*

### **Seeing and 'Pure Consciousness'**

*One of the recent 'Look for Yourself' e-mail exchanges has been about the question of whether we can affirm 'pure' consciousness, a consciousness free of content, or whether consciousness is always given in terms of what it is conscious of. Whether consciousness and content are inseparably entwined or if there is some better explanation. There are advocates of both major points of view on the conference and I was particularly taken with this response from one of the participants who is also a Nowletter subscriber.*

*(One of the best references which covers both viewpoints on the consciousness question is Chapter 13 of 'A brief History of Everything' by Ken Wilber. Editor)*

My personal experience of Seeing, and my understanding of what many other teachers including

Douglas Harding, Richard Lang, Krishnamurti, Ken Wilber and Alan Watts have been saying about it, is that it has little if anything to do with the "pure conscious experience". In fact, Seeing is not any particular state of consciousness. If it was, it would be just something that comes and goes like all the other contents of awareness.

I have never had an experience of pure consciousness, so I don't understand its relevance. Evidently you (another email contributor) have during meditation - I'd be interested to hear more about it. But I am sure I have experienced Seeing. Seeing is what is happening now when, as you read these words on your computer screen, without any need to change your focus, you also take in your whole field of vision. Perhaps your hands are below your computer on your desk, with one holding your mouse, and your field of vision is filled with many objects of various shapes, colours and sizes. The shape of your field of vision may not be precise, but if it's anything like mine it's roughly a fat horizontal ellipse. Now imagine that your field of vision is an elliptical window. And now, without imagining anything, without relying on your memories or preconceptions, pay attention to what looking through this "window" out at the world is like. Is there anyone or anything looking out through the window? Is there anything outside the window? Is there anything apart from the window?

When I look through this "window" I see that what I used to think about myself is wrong. I used to think that I was a body moving around from room to room, from to street to street. But now looking through this window, my hands are just part of the window, just part of the scene. I used to think that my mind, which I thought was inside my head, with all its thoughts, desires, feelings and impulses, was the most important part of me, the "real" me, in a sense. But now looking through this window, when I pay attention to the question "who is looking through the window?" I see that there is no-one, nothing this side of the window. Where I am, who I am is this mysterious "Nothing", and my mind with all its distracting contents is again just part of the window, just part of the scene. And where I thought I had a head growing out of my body, I see that at the moment all I have is a pair of hands extending into arms which disappear into the edges of the window. In fact, it is more true to say that I have hands, a keyboard, a computer, a cluttered desk, a wall with a clock, and many other things. My body is momentarily and mysteriously absent, replaced only by a body sense, and various body-sensations, all somewhere in this window. I am much larger than I thought I was. I include everything I am aware of, but I am none of those things, not my body, not my mind. I am also much less than what I thought I was, with my mind arising like everything else in this lack of qualities that I am.

Seeing doesn't involve any change in consciousness, it is just seeing what is already here now. Just paying attention to the No-thing I am does have some remarkable effects for me, though. For example, I am thrown back on the incredible beauty of the world, a beauty that includes all the apparent ugliness. Of course, I was well aware of this beautiful world before, but I have found that in many ways instead of seeing my surroundings, I was often pre-occupied by my mental state. For example when I'm in a supermarket if my attention is taken up with what I need to buy, what I'm going to cook, etc., I see very little. But if I simply look, it's like I've never seen a supermarket before, and it makes it easier to shop, not harder. Sometimes the effect might be somewhat drug-like, but any effect is just a side-effect, not Seeing itself.

This No-thing I am is of no interest whatsoever. Without form and featureless, it is devoid of any mystical revelations, secret knowledge or beatific feelings. I think many people skip over Seeing because they are expecting something extraordinary of that nature. Of course, it can be accompanied by all sorts of feelings, but the feelings are just the contents of awareness. All the interest is in your ordinary thoughts, feelings and sensations. The wonder of Seeing is perhaps not so much Seeing itself, but just living your ordinary life.

*Lucian Loren-Rymaszewski*

*Lucian asked me to make it clear that what he says above is part of an ongoing dialogue and isn't intended as a fixed position.*

*Extract from a later contribution from Joel Agee*

I thought Stuart Dole's description, a few days ago, of standing on a footbridge over a lagoon, seeing the waves on the surface, being aware of the unseen tide beneath his feet, and then being called away by his son, was a beautiful illustration of what I was trying to get at.

I just thought of another way to approach it.. I'll describe my own process, my difficulties, etc. I hope this will be clearer.

I like the name of our list, "look for yourself." If it were "see yourself," it would not only be less witty, it wouldn't make sense. Both logic and intuition tell me that it is not possible to see my self, because there can be no such thing.

The (Harding) experiments reveal that absence on the sensory plane. Nevertheless, instinctively, I am convinced that I exist, and the experiments don't put that conviction into question. They merely locate the "I"-sense here, where I see no thing, rather than there, in my bodily appearance, and that's where the inward enquiry stops. That troubles me. For example, as I perform the finger-pointing experiment, I notice the

pleasure that accompanies the word "imperishable" ("Me, imperishable? I'll buy it!"). The scoundrel ego has found a new refuge.

Is this clear emptiness "who I really am"? Of course not, it's something I see. Therefore I am not that. Who am I then? It's a rhetorical question, because I know that the only true answer is silence. But I don't know it well enough. A new identification pops up: "I am nothing and everything." It feels true. But is it? It's just another thought.

At some point, the "I"-sense evaporates. The brain is still, alert, there is only seeing and hearing. A crow caws outside my window and for one thrilling moment that is all there is. Everything falls into place. I feel a profound confirmation, and when I ask myself what has been confirmed, the honest truth is "I don't know." There is a sense of depth in that, deeper than thought or emotion, and also a feeling of happiness and freedom. Am I ready to let this "don't know" guide my steps? I don't know.

If this method of inquiry were not self-frustrating, I would consider it a waste of time.

*Joel Agee*

**'Buddhism without Beliefs'** by Stephen Batchelor

I came upon this book as the result of reading an article in the Fall/Winter '98 issue of 'What is Enlightenment'. (that particular issue is sub-titled 'Does anyone know what they are talking about?' - good question.) It was an interview by Andrew Cohen of the author, Stephen Batchelor who did seem to know what he was talking about. There are several examples in the interview of Andrew introducing questions relating to Batchelor's views on the Absolute with the intention, it seemed to me, of getting some affirmation from Batchelor of his own, Andrew's, understanding of what the Absolute might be. I was intrigued to find Batchelor gently rebuffing these attempts and I include the following quote as an example:

Andrew Cohen: Your own feeling, though, is that you question the notion that the Buddha put any emphasis on the significance of an absolute or transcendent dimension. (Andrew had just quoted a few excerpts from the sutras including this well known one:

*"Monks, there is that which is not born, not become, not made, not conditioned. Monks, if there were not that which is not born, not become, not made, not conditioned, there could be made known no escape from that which is born, become, made, conditioned here. But since, monks, there is that which is not born, not become, not made, not conditioned, therefore the escape from that which is born, become, made, conditioned is made known.")*

Stephen Batchelor: Yes, my own reading of the text—

and I know that there are passages like the ones you mentioned—is that those are, in balance, fairly marginal comments that are actually at odds with the thrust of the Buddha’s message that speaks to me. So while I see those passages, as I said, as having inspirational value, I personally can’t take them literally because I feel that they would put Buddhism back into the context of religious experience that we find, say, in the Upanishads which for all its beauty is not something that I think the Buddha was endorsing.

This brief exchange captures the spirit of the interview which is available on the Moksha Foundation Home Page or in the magazine itself, see above. I think of it as a meeting of the Gnostic and Agnostic. I found it the most interesting article in that issue of WIE which included quite a number of big guns. So I read and then bought the book and here are a few notes. I suppose I am deeply attracted to Batchelor’s outlook because he so clearly expresses what I see as the fundamental issues. Maybe another way of saying that he confirms my prejudices! This is not a review, I don’t know enough about Buddhism to provide a review but I know what I like and I have pulled out a few excerpts from the book and made some comments on the issues that seemed relevant to the interests of the Now group.

The book opens with a one paragraph summary of the Buddha’s first discourse after his awakening in which he explained that he had ‘understood anguish, let go of its origins, realised its cessation, and cultivated the path’. Batchelor says the Buddha was not a mystic and did not claim esoteric knowledge. However, over time there has been increasing emphasis on Absolute Truth described as ‘the Deathless’, ‘the Void’, ‘Nirvana’, etc., and the Buddha’s matter-of-factness has been reduced to holiness and the recommended Dharma practice, in many cases, to a religion. ‘Buddhism’, he explains, was intended to be something to do not something to believe in and what the Buddha awoke from was the sleep of existential confusion.

The Buddha did not present himself as a saviour but a healer. Dharma practice, which is the essence of the message, is to do with practice not with belief’ and is more akin to ‘artistic creation than technical problem solving’. The claim is that practice will lead to authentic vision which has no need for belief. The author says that awakening was a common occurrence among those who listened to the Buddha and acted on what he said. It was not regarded as a big deal. However, as Buddhism became institutionalized as a religion, awakening became fairly rare. This gave rise to the question of whether awakening is close by or far away and Batchelor suggests that it is indeed close by but also requires supreme effort to realize.

The principle of agnosticism runs strongly through the book and he explains that this was also an underlying

aspect of the Buddha’s teaching. He defines it in T.H. Huxley’s terms “Follow your reason as far as it will take you and do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable.” The book explains the loss of this hard-edged practicality and the drift into religiosity and looks at Dharma practice shorn of accumulated dogma.

In the chapters on anguish and death Batchelor suggests reflective meditation as a way of becoming attuned to our mysterious being and I realised that, for me, Dialogue, in everyday life, or in groups is an important part of such a practice. On the tricky question of rebirth he suggests there is an alternative to belief or non-belief and that is to acknowledge that we don’t know and observes:

*Agnosticism is no excuse for indecision. If anything, it is a catalyst for action; for in shifting concern away from a future life and back to the present, it demands an ethics of empathy rather than a metaphysics of fear and hope.*

I found myself parting company with the author on the question of meaning and resolve. He says that Awakening is the purpose that enfolds all purposes and claims that “Life is neither meaningful nor meaningless. Meaning is given to life by language and imagination” and “For life to make sense it needs purpose.” Well, language and imagination are not separate from life and it could be argued that the creative unfolding of everything is meaning in action. Such a strong claim seems to conflict with a truly agnostic position.

In the chapter on friendship I found a marked correspondence with my attitude to Dialogue so I will quote at some length.

*We are participatory beings who inhabit a participatory reality, seeking relationships that enhance our sense of what it means to be alive. In terms of dharma practice, a true friend is more than just someone with whom we share common values and who accepts us for what we are. Such a friend is someone whom we can trust to refine our understanding of what it means to live, who can guide us when we’re lost and help us find the way along a path, who can assuage anguish through the reassurance of his or her presence.*

and

*These friends are teachers in the sense that they are skilled in the art of learning from every situation. We do not seek perfection in these friends but rather heartfelt acceptance of human imperfection. Nor omniscience but an ironic admission of ignorance. We should be wary of being seduced by charismatic purveyors of Enlightenment for true friends seek not to coerce us.....*

and

*And these friends are our vital links to a community that lives and struggles today. Through them we belong to a culture of awakening, a matrix of friendships, that expands in ever wider circles to embrace not only "Buddhists" but all who are actually or potentially committed to the values of dharma practice.*

In considering how often communities tend to develop into large hierarchic and authoritarian bodies:

*This process is not inevitable. It is also possible to imagine a community of friendships in which diversity is celebrated rather than censured. In which smallness of scale is regarded as success rather than failure. In which power is shared by all rather than invested in a minority of experts. In which women and men are treated as genuine equals. In which questions are valued more than answers.*

The sections on the Path, Awareness and Becoming contain no surprises and the section on Emptiness would sit well with those of us interested in headlessness.

*"Emptiness" is a starkly unappetizing term used to undercut yearnings for such consolation. Yet ironically it has been called into the service of such longings. Shunyata (emptiness) is rendered into English as "the Void" by translators who overlook the fact that the term is neither prefixed by a definite article ("the") nor exalted with a capital letter, both of which are absent in classical Asian languages. From here it is only a hop, skip, and a jump to equating emptiness with such metaphysical notions as "the Absolute," "the Truth," or even "God". The notion of emptiness falls prey to the very habit of mind it was intended to undermine.*

*Emptiness is as devoid of intrinsic being as a pot, a banana, or a daffodil. And if there were no pots, bananas, or daffodils, there would be no emptiness either. Emptiness does not deny that such things exist; it merely describes how they are devoid of an intrinsic, separate being. Emptiness is not apart from the world of everyday experience; it only makes sense in the context of making pots, eating bananas and growing daffodils. A life centered in awareness of emptiness is simply an appropriate way of being in this changing, shocking, painful, joyous, frustrating, awesome, stubborn, and ambiguous reality. Emptiness is the central path that leads not beyond this reality but right into its heart. It is the track on which the centred person moves.*

One of the aims of dharma practice is to lead us beyond the realm of ideas and into the dimension of felt-experience. Understanding the philosophy of

emptiness is not sufficient and we have to get into the wordless language of feeling to loosen our emotional knots which keep us bound in the illusion of freedom based on an isolated selfhood. And another of its purposes is the intriguing notion of sustaining our fundamental perplexity 'within the context of calm, clear and centred awareness'.

I found another gem in the chapter on Freedom which addresses one of my old hobby-horses, that of backsliding.

*Freedom can be both recovered and lost again. Awakening is the recovery of that awesome freedom into which we were born but for which we have substituted the pseudo-independence of a separate self. No matter how much it frightens us, no matter how much we resist it, such freedom is right at hand. It may break into our lives at any time, whether we seek it or not, enabling us to glimpse a reality that is simultaneously more familiar and more elusive than anything we have ever known, in which we find our selves both profoundly alone and profoundly connected to everything. Yet the force of habit is such that suddenly it is lost again and we are back to unambiguous normality.*

In the concluding pages Batchelor talks of the required transformation not in terms of self or world transcendence but one of self and world creation. Our idea of a static self is the main obstacle to realizing our unique potential as a human being. If we can dissolve this fiction we are free to create ourselves anew. The idea of the world as an alien reality composed of discrete things is likewise the primary obstruction to world creation.

*In dissolving this view through a vision of the world as a dynamic and interrelated whole of which we are an integral part, we are likewise freed to engage with the world afresh.*

There is some talk of using the imagination to effect the transformation, imagining ourselves in other ways. I have some trouble with this as I am conditioned to interpret calls for more imagination as cranking up the conceptual machinery with all the very imaginable consequences. I would feel much more comfortable with perception as the basis for change but Batchelor clearly doesn't think that is enough. He says that the genius of the Buddha lay in imaginative translation of his vision into terms sufficiently universal to inspire future generations throughout the world. I understand his position on this to be that, face to face with the unknown and/or reality, there is a need to find imaginative expressions which are true to the vision.

*Yet by suppression of the imagination, the very life of dharma practice is cut off at its source. While religious orthodoxies may survive and even prosper for*

*centuries, in the end they will ossify. When the world around them changes, they will lack the imaginative power to respond creatively to the challenges of the new situation.*

In the concluding chapters he discusses the future of Buddhism which he feels/hopes will continue to provide a culture of awakening which engages with society by way of small scale autonomous communities rather than large institutions managed by autocratic leaders.

I found it a fascinating read. There is so much which has a direct relationship to issues that have surfaced in recent editions of the Nowletter with regard to 'seeing' and 'effective and ineffective dialogue. I feel we also need a Christianity without Belief, an Islam without Belief an Atheism without Belief, etc. and pondering on this made me wonder whether the logical outcome for Batchelor himself would be a 'Batchelor without Buddhism' but I expect he would point me to the need for Dharma practice. In the exchange with Andrew Cohen, Andrew questions him about the title which leads to a revision:

*Stephen Batchelor Yes, good. The expression "Buddhism without beliefs" is not meant to suggest that beliefs are completely dispensable in every sense of the word "belief." One still has to believe—if one is doing a practice, for example—that it has value, that it's worthwhile,.....\_So "Buddhism without dogma" would perhaps be more precise. I don't think it really matters, you see, what one's metaphysical views are, because the practice of Buddhism, as I try to make clear in the book, is to my mind a practice of freeing ourselves from certain psychological delusions.*

I think it is an important book and if you try it out I recommend reading both the book and WIE article. There is a section, in the book, covering sources and notes but no index again - very slack!

*Alan Mann*

*Buddhism Without Beliefs. - A Contemporary Guide to Awakening by Stephen Batchelor. Published by Riverhead Books, New York*

### **The Quality of Awareness**

*This is the third of a series of five short articles by Peter Crook which are appearing serially in the Nowletter.*

I wonder if you have every thought about or pondered on the question of how you pay attention to something? Have you ever noticed how you hear something - the sound of someone's voice, the sound of the wind, the birds singing? How do you listen? Is it a casual listening, only giving energy to what you hear if it directly relates to you, to your self-interests? Or do you give your total attention, which is all your

energy, mind and heart, your senses, to what you are listening to? I wonder if you have ever looked at this in yourself.

What is the quality of energy you bring to everything you do? As you read this line, are you looking and reading with all your energy, looking totally with your eyes at the page, looking into the words to sense their true meaning? Or are you aware of the sound of thinking in your head while you read. Which means you are not looking but are distracted by your own interpretation, your conditioning of what you think these words mean. Can you look at this page, or for that matter at anything - the tree, the clock, that bird, and your wife, son - without hearing a sound inside of yourself? Can you look at this page now without thought?

The depth of attentiveness which you bring to anything before you releases a quality of energy which has movement unique unto itself. When we are alert and attentive to every sound we hear, to everything we see, a great mutation occurs. A seeing and understanding of life that is totally new, fresh and unpolluted by our mind's past conditioned content.

You have to look at this absolutely by yourself. No one in any shape or form, no priest or guru, no book or philosophy, can show you how to be attentive. you must look for yourself. If you are at all interested in this then we can take a look at this together. No one is telling you how to do anything. But you put this question to yourself. Ask yourself, to see absolutely by yourself, how do you pay attention to everything you do?

If you are not interested there is no point in reading on. Because you must give energy, everything you have, to this question of how you are relating to everything.

Again, as you read this line are you looking at the words or listening to your own thinking? Have a look, watch carefully, if you are listening to your inner voice, give careful attention to the sound inside your head for this sound you hear is your thinking, your conditioning. Can you read this line without the sound of your own thinking? See how much energy you must give to this. You are doing this totally on your own. You don't need someone to train or teach you all about how to watch your own mind, just do it, *now*.

When you give this much attention to everything, there comes into you an immense energy from no direction, it has a quality of aliveness.

Most people are so obsessed with themselves, thinking about and analysing how they feel and what they are thinking, that they are unable to hear what is being said to them or see what is happening in front of

them.

How do you listen to something? Do you listen to the sound of someone's words or are you listening to your own thinking (the voice in your head)? Don't answer! Just watch how you listen to someone. Do you always refer back to think about yourself, analysing every feeling, emotion and thought that comes to your awareness? Can you watch your thoughts and emotions without thinking? I wonder. Don't ask anyone about this, but give your energy to find out for yourself. If you do, is there a passion in you, some vitality to find out by yourself. Or is it easier to go to someone else to ask them about how to be still within to be free of all your pain, the past, the fear, the anger and all the rest of it? Ask yourself this question. Find out if you can. Watch yourself very carefully.

Become a light unto yourself. Begin to enquire into what is happening inside yourself. Enquiring is not thinking about what is happening, but looking. With passion and energy bring a quality of attention to what you find. If you find anger, look at it - bring all your energy to it so that it reveals itself to you so you can understand what anger means all by yourself.

Enquiring is listening and looking with all your senses. Why don't you listen or see what is happening to yourself? Are you too busy listening to your own mind and responding to this inner dialogue? How

much time and energy do you give to listening to your own thoughts - analysing/ thinking about yourself, busy telling everyone about how you are, what you think and how you feel, always coming from your self-interest?

The quality of attentiveness which has its own intensity of awakefulness cannot be cultivated. It is not within consciousness. You cannot make yourself be attentive. If you (the mind) try to understand, practise and prepare yourself for silent attentiveness, you are playing a dead-end game. You either are attentive or you are not. If you are not, find out why you are not. Look at everything with this quality of attention until there is nothing left to see but what is happening before you. This silent passion and intense quality of attention is selfless action - Love in Action. The doer and the looker (the "I", "My", the "You" the sound of a voice inside your head) disappears. There is only the sound of silence.

Are you thinking about this now? Are you looking at your own thoughts, hearing a sound of words in your head? I wonder.

*Peter Crook*

## **FOCUSING - Saturday 7 August**

The focusing session mentioned in the last Nowletter will take place on Saturday August 7 from 10am until 1pm.

*We will start on time so please don't arrive late.*

The facilitator will be Marian Nisbett. We have an upper limit of 12 for the group and there are three remaining places. **Please let Margot know if you want more information or would like to come (02) 9419 7394.**

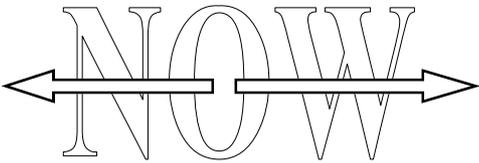
To refresh your memory, here is the background note we provided in the last Nowletter.

Focusing is a gentle body-centred process which can be used to bring clarity and freshness to life issues. Based on research into successful personal change, it is a skill that helps us befriend our emotions and maybe unstick some blocks.

“When you pay attention to this body-knowing with interested curiosity, positive change, insight and physical release can occur.”

Based on research at the University of Chicago in the 1960's, studying tapes of hundreds of therapy sessions, certain patterns emerged and the findings were used to successfully predict which clients would be able to make changes in their lives.

Eugene Gendlin determined to teach these skills, and developed Focusing. You can use the skills of Focusing with a facilitating partner or on your own. Like most self-awareness skills, they are quite subtle and require practice, but the results are worth it.



If unable to deliver please return to:

**81 Greville Street, Chatswood 2067**

<b>DIALOGUE MEETINGS SYDNEY AREA</b>				
<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DAY OF MONTH</b>	<b>MEETING PLACE</b>	<b>TIME &amp; CONTACT</b>	<b>Phone Nos.</b>
Clontarf	First Wednesday	49 Peronne Avenue Clontarf	7.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379 0415 410 127
City	Third Saturday	Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379 018 410 127
Chatswood	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd) Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
Clontarf	Fourth Sunday	49 Peronne Avenue Clontarf	11am Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379 018 410 127