

Exploring the Mystery

The idea for our Touch the Future Dialogues began years ago, listening to two friends as they talked together. One was a scientist the other was called a teacher, philosopher and a mystic. David Bohm and Krishnamurti had known each other for many years when I happened along in 1978. There was something vast, perhaps even impersonal, about their relationship. The flow of ideas moving between them was important, but more important still was the actual experience of two minds looking in the same direction, with the same energy, at the same moment. This shared attention gave shape to their relationship and both were changed by it. They were passionate to inquire, to find out, to reveal some new aspect of the unknown - of the mystery.

Each challenged the other, not to prove a point but to encourage this adventure they were sharing. They watched themselves as they watched the other, listening, fully present, with great respect and friendship. There was intensity, a seriousness that filled the air. It often left them drained, yet they came together many times and over many years to explore this state.

Consider what takes place when we think we know something - anything. What happens to this magical state to which David and Krishnamurti were so drawn? Our attention collapses. It contracts into a comfortable sphere floating somewhere between our ears and waits, like a genie in a bottle, for some challenge, some question, some ounce of true curiosity to free it again. This is what knowledge does to the natural - expansive inquisitiveness of the human mind. Somewhere, sometime, long-long ago, we got stuck and became enchanted with all the things we already know, leaving little or no energy to venture into the mystery.

Most of us are brimming with data and possessed by the past. Some of what we know came from books, newspapers or the evening news, perhaps from a friend, our mother or a well -intended teacher. The vast majority of all knowledge, some say as much as 95%, was not learned in school or on the job, it came from direct participation and intimate contact with the world. True or false, everything we have ever experienced is there, sloshing around, creating its own relative order and meaning. This knowledge then superimposes its collection of past feelings and images over the immediate sensory experience pouring in from the here and now.

Reality is the distant past which we inherited, our own past with its projected future, all the information and misinformation we absorb from media, the impressions we feel from others, plus everything they tried to teach us in school, not to mention our dreams, the sounds, colors, our breath, heart beat, all blending into a single, fluid perception, moment by moment. No wonder we are so confused!

While speaking in 1981 David Bohm said, "We are faced with a breakdown of general social order and human values that threatens stability throughout the world. I suggest that existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach... the very means by which we try to solve our problems, is the problem. The source is within the structure of thought itself."

Dialogue does two things. It reveals the flawed structure which causes our thoughts, feelings and behavior to be so confused and with this revelation comes a quality of attention and perception which is clear, true. Dialogue brings us to the edge of the unknown, closer to the mystery and it opens the door.

While Professor David Bohm is best known as a theoretical physicist, he has also held a long interest in the nature of thought & consciousness and how they affect both the individual and society. His published works include: Quantum Theory, Causality and Chance in Modern Physics, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, Science Order and Creativity, Changing Consciousness and Thought as a System.

I am most interested in Dialogue because it holds open the possibility of creating a completely new relationship with knowledge itself. It reveals the limitations, prejudices and inevitable conflicts implicit in what we know and simultaneously points to a quality of attention and awareness which is not limited, not confined to the known, and this opens the door to something new. It opens the door to a state of perception which may actually discover lasting solutions the challenges we all face. All of this, and more, much more, is implied in Dialogue as proposed by David Bohm.

Why did Bohm, a world class scientist, give so much energy to this process?

Many people, in different parts of the world, are working with group processes they call dialogue. They do it differently and have different ideas about it. David Bohm however, made a series of observations into the nature of thought and the active quality of knowledge. He suggested that both the structure and the content of thought is not, as most of us feel, individual. Rather he saw it as a collective process which we inherit from our culture. He felt the underlying structure of thought was universal, and causes humanity to think and behave in rather limited, often incoherent, conflicting ways. The difficulty he felt was that this underlying structure of thought was hidden by a subtle, yet powerful defensive system, which prevents our seeing the flaws and limitations of our own thinking.

Dialogue, as he proposed, is a way to reveal these limitations and lessen their impact on our individual and collective behavior. It is this change in consciousness that makes Bohm's approach so unique, challenging and powerful.

In *Science, Order and Creativity* he describes: "Creative play is an essential element in forming new hypotheses and ideas. Thought which tries to avoid play is in fact playing false with itself."

"Play, it appears is the essence of thought. This notion of falseness that can creep into the play of thought is shown by the etymology of the words illusion, delusion, and collusion, all of which have their Latin root *ludere* meaning to play. So illusion implies playing false with perception; delusion, playing false with thought; collusion, playing false together in order to support each other's illusions and delusions."

This also implies a state of perception and communication which is playing true with itself and with others. Therefore, from Bohm's perspective, dialogue is not a tool for simply improving communication. It is not a tool for healing, at least not in a conventional way. It's not an arena for personal catharsis. It is not a problem to be solved or a brainstorm where the flawed infrastructure of thought is again masked by new forms.

Dialogue is a space where we may see the hidden assumptions which lay beneath the surface of our thoughts, assumptions which drive us, assumptions around which we build organizations, create economies, form nations and religions. David suggested that these assumptions, presuppositions and prejudices imply great pressures which become habitual. These mental habits drive us and prevent our responding intelligently to the challenges we face every day.

Why is giving attention to thought as a system so important?

David often described thought as a reflex, a knee jerk reaction which happens without our will or conscious attention. Our memory is filled with clusters of mental images or bits of knowledge which have been laid down and buried beneath our conscious awareness. We feel as though these clusters of knowledge are passive, waiting for some act of will to call them into action. We find however that these hidden layers of knowledge are not passive at all, but very active, able to trigger all sorts of mental, emotional and physical actions without our doing anything to calling them into action.

It may be more accurate to say that much of our thinking is becoming aware of this mechanical activity of knowledge. More accurate still, we might say that this movement we call thought actually creates the impression that there is a thinker thinking. Krishnamurti and Bohm suggested that the thinker and the thought are two sides of a single coin, that they are the same movement. Dialogue helps us to explore this possibility by causing the brain to move in new directions. Habits are broken. New possibilities emerge.

If seeing the structure of thought is the goal, what do we talk about?

At one level, the content of a Dialogue is irrelevant. What matters is how this hidden infrastructure is being expressed and revealed by each person, each moment. For this reason there is no fixed agenda. No problem to be solved. There are no fixed time limits, no set number of people, though experience suggests that between 15 and 35 may be an optimum number. To limit the group to a pre-selected topic, or to try to find a solution to a given challenge implies a set of assumptions and habits of mind, which Bohm hoped to call into question.

Having no agenda is extremely frustrating for many people. Why spend time discussing things for no reason at all? Waste of time they shout - and yet, to do such a thing, as frivolous as it may seem, may put one in a completely different frame of mind, which is the whole point. Seeing the frustration is the point. Being aware of the inner struggles which springs spontaneously from our ridged mental habits is the point.

Whatever is actually happening, in us and outwardly expressed by the group, is the point. It is all a clear reflection of the layers, upon layers of contradictory drives and assumptions that blind us all. Like some forms of meditation, Dialogue can awaken new states of perception. The more we practice or play with the process the more sensitive and aware we become to the trap we are in and what it feels like to be free.

With no agenda, it soon becomes apparent that the group is going no place in particular, which immediately calls into question the need for a leader or facilitator to tell how to get there. Yes, here is another assumption, another habit that shapes and limits our perception. Realizing that we are all influenced/trapped by the same basic patterns, that we are equally conditioned and controlled by the powerful, hidden infrastructure of thought, then who among us can we trust to lead us out of darkness?

Turning to a leader, demanding a facilitator, is just another habit that blocks our immediate and intelligent perception of what is actually taking place.

It diminishes our responsibility, narrows our sensitivity and awareness, reinforces the patterns which Dialogue hopes to reveal. Here again is a strong source of frustration for many people. In Dialogue the responsibility to remain awake and sensitive is shared by all. With patience and practice, there is usually one or more who can offer intelligent course corrections as the Dialogue unfolds. With a new group it is helpful to have a facilitator to offer guidance, though the goal is for that roll to diminish as each member of the group takes responsibility for the process. Rather than being completely embedded in thought, as most of us are, dialogue helps flag our mechanical impulses so we and the group may observe them more closely.

David suggested we could suspend the automatic impulses knowledge creates. Imagine suspending our hidden impulses and holding them in the center of the circle so we, and the group, could appreciate how we share the same limitations. What is usually experienced as personal suddenly becomes common. Revealing the physical, emotional and intellectual impulses associated with thought opens the possibility of yet another quality of attention. David often used proprioception, the subtle awareness of our body when we move it, as an example of this new awareness. Move your hand and you know where it is, even with your eyes closed. This awareness happens without thinking and there is no time lag in the feedback. It is immediate and Bohm suggested that we could develop this same sensitive perception of the movement of thought. This implies a state of attention and awareness which is immediate, without thinking, that is conscious of the mechanical movement thought and knowledge. So, Dialogue offers us a suspension of our automatic impulses and brings into play this subtle awareness of the movement of thought.

Lee Nichol used the following to describe how suspension and proprioception work together.

"Let's say someone in the group says something disgusting. Having suspended this strong reaction, we are not quite running on automatic. We at least have our eye on it. But the point is to have a deeper experience than just holding it up and looking at it. Having suspended a strong impulse, we need to bring it back into the body, and as it comes closer and deeper into our awareness, we let ourselves feel it more fully. We're watching the relation between our thoughts, feelings, our body, blood pressure, adrenaline, our whole state of consciousness and the movement of the group with a quality of attention that is not driven and controlled by thought. Suspension puts it out there where you can look at it.

Proprioception pulls it back where you can become aware of the complete experience, as it actually is in the body, rather than as just an idea. There may be no other way to truly understand these explosive states of energy other than by being fully in them."

There are certainly other aspects of the dialogue process but these are a few core issues that may be overlooked, factors that David Bohm felt were most critical if we are to use this process to bring about a fundamental change in consciousness, which he hoped would plant the seeds for a new culture.

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