

If there is a goal perhaps it should manifest first as attention - not content. The primary objective of Dialogue is to develop a new, heretofore unknown, at least to most of us, state of awareness and perception of increasingly subtle movements of thought along with the underlying assumptions which hide this movement of normal consciousness. This freedom from the limitations of our normal state, with all of its conditioning, has the potential of expanding indefinitely to include the world or universe we live in. A secondary goal or benefit is the emergence of a less mechanical and more intelligent relationship to knowledge itself, which may radically alter our perception of the value of content.

Any response we make to others or the environment, which is routine, mechanical or habitual may result in unintended results or conflict, especially in a rapidly changing world. Technology has dramatically increased the destructive consequences of our behavior, so much so that we are rapidly exhausting the biosphere from which we emerge - unintentionally. Without a fundamental change in our relationship to knowledge, the prospects for humanity appear dim.

An alternative is to hold knowledge as a proposed basis for future action rather than as an absolute or fixed formula. This suspension of fixed formulas, implied in all assumptions and beliefs, maintains an element of doubt or of curiosity, which opens the possibility for something new to emerge, which may be more intelligent than habit. At the very least we have introduced a new possibility where before there was none.

It has been proposed that the majority of what we consider thinking and thought is little more than a series of automatic reflexes - past memories being triggered by a present challenge or stimulus. This flow of habitual reflexes occurs so quickly that we become aware of its movement only after it has taken place. The implication being that - rather than authoring our thoughts, these habits of mind or reflexes are authoring us. More disturbing still is the observation that there is little intelligence in habits or reflexes. The original experience, which gave rise to a memory, may have been the response of intelligence but once that response or action is frozen as memory it loses the learning capacity of true intelligence.

When a child first learns to walk or talk there is little in the way of complex memories to interfere with learning. Direct perception and learning is unmediated by past memories. Ideally, the response of memory would emerge only when needed, freeing attention to engage, learn and respond intelligently to both the actual and the past.

As the complexity of memory is built up however, the number and power of past images increase, including the images we construct about our self. Soon the gravity of conditioning becomes stronger than the subtle movement of intelligence and learning.

Our attention is drawn inward rather than expanding outward. With the development and practice of language, the dominant trigger for memory, the weight of the inner world increases. The past displaces the present and learning narrows.

With time past memories become so compelling that there exists little or no attention to see either what is actual or sense the habitual mental processes which are unfolding. We become completely enchanted by the inner play which we call thinking or thought.

The important point is to realize that this perpetual flow of inner images operates mechanically, most often without awareness of what is internally generated and what is not. To develop this awareness we must step out of the flow, which is why Bohm suggested, no facilitator, no agenda, etc. The dis-ease created by these simple devices help make the invisible - visible. Suspending and questioning assumptions takes us deeper by revealing the hidden prejudice or prejudgments implicit in our beliefs, including the belief in an independent self. Dialogue participants serve each other first by triggering these hidden prejudices and by suspending or questioning them silently or with the group. Even then the mind remains stubbornly rooted in its habits, struggling at every challenge to remain in or return to the comfort of the past, to the known, which renders the truly new and creative illusively out of reach

It is from this position that most questions regarding the process and progress emerge. The intellect, having idealized a possibility, projects it into the future and then strives to become that - while remaining right where it is. Chasing the ideal, which is one of our most cherished habits, quickly becomes frustrating which triggers even more individual and collective habits to reveal themselves. At some point however, finding little that satisfies the ideal, participants drift off, enchanted again and again by the inner play of personal images which draw them comfortably back to the known which increases the frustration. Expecting the process to bring about some idealized state, participants feel cheated, frustrated, and even angry when, try as they may, they remain right where they have always been.

There exists another possibility, one in which the ideal of progress, tips, rules and techniques are suspended (which is where the process begins) while remaining increasingly attentive to both the inner and outer movement of unfolding meaning.

This attention, without the projected ideal, brings one closer to the original state of learning where the infinite and intelligent patterning of the brain/mind resonates directly with the present moment. No longer hindered by false pursuits, the mind becomes innocent, sensitive and intensely alive.

Being free from the limitations of the known, this new attentive state perceives directly the movement of thought as it is triggered by the dialogue (proprioception).

Touch the Future
Are We There Yet?
Reflections on Dialogue
By Michael Mendizza

Such a mind, being free to move in new and creative ways, is capable of perceiving new patterns and relationships, as they emerge from memory or as original insights, which can be offered to the group to deepen and enhance the dialogue. As more participants step into the unknown the potential for insight and dynamic creativity increases which actualizes the ideal, which earlier led to such frustration. Near the end of his life, Bohm questioned why Dialogue seemed limited in its effectiveness to develop and sustain the deep changes in consciousness he hoped would emerge. One suggestion was that participants fail to integrate the states of attention and awareness promoted by the process into their daily lives. Clearly the point of practice is for practice to end. Dialogue is such a practice.

The mind must be new before new perceptions can emerge. The responsibility for bringing about this new mind remains with each participant, not with the process.

Krishnamurti raised the question: What is the role of knowledge and time in the transformation of the human mind? Clearly knowledge and time are the conditions which transformation (and dialogue) hopes to transform. The question points to a new state of perception, which is capable of insight. At its most basic level, discovering this state is the first and most critical aspect of the dialogue. In a similar way Krishnamurti suggested that we must bring a quiet mind into the meditation room - not expect the room to quiet the mind. First things first.

END

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