

# David Bohm Society

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## For Truth Try Dialogue

By David Bohm. Date Unknown.

"Dialogue" comes from the Greek dialogos: Logos means "the word", or "the meaning of the word", and dia means "through" (not two—a dialogue can be among any number of people; even one person can have a sense of dialogue within him-or-herself if the spirit of the dialogue is present).

The image this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among us and through us and between us—a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding, something creative. When everybody is sensitive to all the nuances going around, and not merely to what is happening in one's own mind, there forms a meaning which is shared. And in that way we can talk together coherently and think together. It is this shared meaning that is the "glue" or "cement" that holds people and societies together.

Contrast this with the word "discussion", which has the same root as

"percussion" and "concussion". Discussion really means to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view. A great deal of what we call "discussion" is not deeply serious, in the sense that there are all sorts of things held to be non-negotiable, untouchable, things that people don't even want to talk about.

Discussion is like a ping-pong game, with people batting the ideas back and forth in order to win the game.

In a dialogue there is no attempt to gain points, or to make your particular view prevail. It is more a common participation, in which people are not playing a game against each other but with each other. In a dialogue, everybody wins.

The power of the group could be compared with a laser. Ordinary light is called "incoherent", which means that it is going in all sorts of directions; the light waves are not in phase with each other so they don't build up. But a laser produces a very intense beam which is coherent. The light waves build up strength because they are all going in the same direction, and the beam can do all sorts of things that ordinary light cannot.

Now, you could say that our ordinary thought in society is incoherent—it is going in all sorts of directions, with thoughts conflicting and canceling each other out. But if people were to think together in a coherent way, as in a dialogue situation, it would have tremendous power. Then we might have such a coherent movement of communication, coherent not only at the level we recognize, but at the tacit level—at the level for which we have only a vague feeling. That would be even more important.

"Tacit" means that which is unspoken, which cannot be described—like the tacit knowledge required to ride a bicycle. It is the actual knowledge, and it may be coherent or not. Thinking is actually a subtle tacit process. We do almost everything by this sort of tacit knowledge. Thought is emerging from the tacit ground, and any fundamental change in thought will come from the tacit ground. So if we are communicating at the tacit level, then maybe thought is changing.

The tacit process is common. It is shared. The sharing is not merely the explicit communication and the body language. There is also a deeper tacit process which is common. The whole human race knew this for a million years, but now we have lost it, because our societies got too big. We have to get started again, because it has become urgent that we communicate, to share our consciousness. We must be able to think together, in order to do intelligently whatever is necessary. The point is that this notion of dialogue and common consciousness suggests that there is some way out of our collective difficulties. If we can all suspend carrying out our impulses, suspend our assumptions and look at them, then we are all in the same state of consciousness. In dialogue the whole structure of defensiveness and opinions and division can collapse; and suddenly the feeling can change to one of fellowship and friendship, participation and sharing. We are then partaking of the common consciousness.

People will, however, come to a group with different interests and assumptions. They are basic assumptions, not merely superficial assumptions—such as assumptions about the meaning of life, or about your own self-interest, your country's interest, or your religious interest; about what you really think is important.

We could also call assumptions "opinions". The word "opinion" is used in several senses. When a doctor has an opinion, that's the best assumption he or she can make based on the evidence. The doctor may then say, "Okay, I'm not quite sure, so let's get a second opinion." A good doctor does not react to defend the assumption—if the second opinion turns out to be different, the doctor doesn't jump up and say, "How can you say such things?" That doctor's opinion would be an example of a rational sort of opinion, one not defended with a strong reaction.

Opinions can tend to be experienced as "truths", assumptions that we are identified with, and which we defend. But as long as we have a defensive attitude—blocking and holding assumptions, sticking to them and saying, "I've got to be right"—then intelligence is very limited, because intelligence requires that you don't defend an assumption. The proper structure of an assumption or of an opinion is that it is open to evidence that it may not be right.

Cultural assumptions are very powerful and you are not usually aware of them, just as you are not normally aware of an accent in the way you talk. Other people can tell you that you've got one, or if you listen carefully you might find it. But the accent is part of your culture. A great deal of your assumptions are part of your culture, too, and this comes out in relationship.

Krishnamurti said that "to be" is to be related. But relationship can be very painful. He said that you have to think and feel out all your mental processes and work them through, and then that will open the way to something else. And I think that is what can happen in the dialogue group. Certain painful things can happen for some people; you have to

work it all out.

This is part of what I consider dialogue—for people to realize what is on each other's minds without coming to any conclusions or judgements. In a dialogue we have to sort of weigh the question a little, ponder it a little, feel it out. You become more familiar with how thought works.

It isn't necessary that everybody be convinced to have the same view. This sharing of mind, of consciousness, is more important than the content of the opinions. You may find that the answer is not in the opinions at all, but somewhere else. Truth does not emerge from opinions; it must emerge from something else—perhaps from a more free movement of this tacit mind.

Dialogue may not be concerned directly with truth—it may arrive at truth, but it is concerned with meaning. If the meaning is incoherent you will never arrive at truth. You may think, "My meaning is coherent and somebody else's isn't," but then we'll never have meaning shared. And if some of us come to the "truth", while a lot of people are left out, it's not going to solve the problem. You will have the "truth" for yourself and for your own group, whatever consolation that is. But we will continue to have conflict. Therefore it is necessary to share meaning. Our society is incoherent, and hasn't done that very well for a long time, if it ever has.

There is no "road" to truth. In dialogue we share all the roads and we finally see that none of them matters. We see the meaning of all the roads, and therefore we come to the "no road". Underneath, all the roads are the same because of the very fact that they are "roads"—they are rigid.

There may be no pat political "answer" to the world's problems. However, the important point is not the answer—just as in dialogue, the important point is not the particular opinions—but rather the softening up, the opening up, of the mind, and looking at all the opinions.

The collective dimension of the human being, where we have a considerable number of people, has a qualitatively new feature; it has great power; potentially, or even actually. And in dialogue we discuss how to bring that to some sort of coherence and order. The question is really: Do you see the necessity of this process? That's the key question. If you see that it is absolutely necessary, then you have to do something.

We should keep in mind, nonetheless, that the dialogue is not only directed at solving the ills of society, although we do have to solve those ills. But that's only the beginning. When we have a very high energy of coherence, we might get beyond just being a group that could solve social problems.

Possibly it could make a new change in the individual and a change in the relation to the cosmos. Such an energy has been called "communion". It is a kind of participation. The Christians had a Greek word *koinonia*, the root of which means "to participate" —the idea of taking part in it; not merely the whole group, but the whole. This is what I mean by "dialogue". I suggest that through dialogue, there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively.

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