

Bohm Dialogue

Bohm Dialogue or Bohmian Dialogue is a form of free association conducted in groups, with no predefined purpose in mind besides mutual understanding and exploration of human thought. It aims to allow participants to examine their preconceptions, prejudices and patterns of thought. Bohm dialogue was developed beginning 1983 by David Bohm, Donald Factor and Peter Garrett. Bohm published his views on dialogue in a series of papers between 1985 and 1991.

Bohm Dialogue (often referred to simply as Dialogue by its proponents) is conducted in groups of 10 to 40 people, who sit in a single circle, for a few hours during regular meetings or for a few days in a workshop environment. Participants "suspend" their thoughts, motives, impulses and judgements – exploring and attempting to "think together" collectively. According to the proposal, Dialogue should not be confused with discussion, lecture, discourse or debate, which, says Bohm, all suggest working towards a goal rather than simply exploring. Meeting without an objective or agenda is done to create a "free space" for something new to happen.

David Bohm:

Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively. We haven't really paid much attention to thought as a process. We have ENGAGED in thoughts, but we have only paid attention to the content, not to the process. Why does thought require attention? Everything requires attention, really. If we ran machines without paying attention to them, they would break down. Our thought, too, is a process, and it requires attention, otherwise its going to go wrong....

In such a dialogue, when one person says something, the other person does not, in general, respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person. Rather, the meanings are only SIMILAR and not identical. Thus, when the 2nd person replies, the 1st person sees a DIFFERENCE between what he meant to say and what the other person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his own views and to those of the other person. And so it can go back and forth, with the continual emergence of a new content that is common to both participants. Thus, in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to MAKE COMMON certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that two people are making something IN COMMON, i.e., creating something new together. (from *On Dialogue*)

It seems then that the main trouble is that the other person is the one who is prejudiced and not listening. After all, it is easy for each one of us to see that other people are 'blocked' about certain questions, so that without being aware of it, they are avoiding the confrontation of contradictions in certain ideas that may be extremely dear to them. The very nature of such a 'block' is, however, that it is a kind of insensitivity or 'anaesthesia' about one's own contradictions. Evidently then, what is crucial is to be aware of the nature of one's own 'blocks'. If one is alert and attentive, he can see for example that whenever certain questions arise, there are fleeting sensations of fear, which push him away from consideration of those questions, and of pleasure, which attract his thoughts and cause them to be occupied with other questions. So, one is able to keep away from whatever it is that he thinks may disturb him. And as a result, he can be subtle at defending his own ideas, when he supposes that he is really listening to what other people have to say. When we come together to talk, or otherwise to act in common, can each one of us be aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that 'block' the ability to listen freely?

References

- *On Dialogue* by David Bohm, edited by Lee Nichol, London 1996, Routledge. ISBN 0-415-14912-6

(Source: Wikipedia)