

## COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION

“All of this is part of collective thought – people thinking together. At some stage we would share our opinions without hostility, and we would then be able to think together; whereas when we defend an opinion we can’t. An example of people thinking together would be that somebody would get an idea, somebody else would take it up, somebody else would add to it. The thought would flow, rather than there being a lot of different people, each trying to persuade or convince the others.

In the beginning, people won’t trust each other. But I think that if they see the importance of the dialogue, they will work with it. And as they start to know each other, they begin to trust each other. It may take time. At first you will just come into the group bringing all the problems of the culture and the society. Any group like this is a microcosm of society it has all sorts of opinions, people not trusting each other, and so on. So you begin to work from there. People talk at first in a perhaps rather trivial way, and then later less trivially. Initially they talk about superficial issues, because they’re afraid of doing more, and then gradually they learn to trust each other.

The object of a dialogue is not to analyze things, or to win an argument, or to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions and to look at the opinions - to listen to everybody’s opinions, to suspend them, and to see what all that means. If we can see what all of our opinions mean, then we are *sharing a common content*, even if we don’t agree entirely. It may turn out that the opinions are not really very important – they are all assumptions. And if we can see them all, we may then move more creatively in a different direction. We can just simply share the appreciation of the meanings; and out of this whole thing, truth emerges unannounced — not that we have chosen it.

If each of us in this room is suspending, then we are all doing the same thing. We are all looking at everything together. The content of our consciousness is essentially the same. Accordingly, a different kind of consciousness is possible among us, a participatory consciousness — as indeed consciousness always is, but one that is frankly acknowledged to be participatory and can go that way freely. Everything can move between us. Each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it. We can call that a true dialogue...

Thus, everybody is quite free. It’s not like a mob where the collective mind takes over — not at all. It is something between the individual and the collective. It can move between them. It’s a harmony of the individual and the collective, in which the whole constantly moves toward coherence. So there is both a collective mind and an individual mind, and like a stream, the flow moves between them. The opinions, therefore, don’t matter so much. Eventually we may be somewhere between all these opinions, and we start to move beyond them in another direction – a tangential direction – into something new and creative.”

- David Bohm  
On Dialogue, 1996