



BOOK LAUNCH

ON DIALOGUE by David Bohm

National Library of Iran, Teheran on 14 June '26

Message from Peter Garrett, June 2026

Salam. Salam alaikum.

It is an honour and a pleasure to add my voice to the official book launch of "On Dialogue" by Professor David Bohm. Thanks to Professor Mustafa Malekian for the translation of the book into Farsi, and thanks to Mrs. Daeipour and her colleagues for their hard work in publishing the first book for the Endless Path of Dialogue Institute. I wish I could be with you in Tehran at the National Library of Iran, but at the moment I am in Spain, writing and having a short holiday with my wife.

I'm pleased to add a few thoughts to your gathering. It's most appropriate, in my view, that this first book is a book by David Bohm, and that the subject is On Dialogue. This is where it all began with David Bohm, and so I think it's a fine choice. I could add a bit of context. The book comes from recordings of different seminars held by David Bohm in the United States. I had the chance to work with him over quite a few years, so I could add a little context to the book, perhaps.

For example, my first meeting with David Bohm I think is quite interesting and quite symbolic in a way. With others, I was organizing a conference at Warwick University in the UK, and the theme was integrity. My colleagues and I were thinking of integrity to be the moral and ethical uprightness of individuals. Talking with David, he had a broader idea than that. He spoke of integrity as being the way the cosmos is held together, a significantly wider scope than we'd been thinking about. I was very impressed with the way he comfortably moved between the individual and the cosmos and back again, searching for the underlying way in which everything is ordered, which was his real great interest.



He didn't see the underlying order to be static or fixed. He saw it to have an unfolding and enfolding nature, and some of you will know he called that order the Implicate Order. The metaphor he liked we talked about early on (and also you'll find it in the last book of his, published posthumously), was the description of the acorn and the oak tree. An acorn is a seed, the seed that becomes the tree, the oak tree. If you think about it, the acorn doesn't become bigger and bigger to become an oak tree. An oak tree doesn't look like a big seed. Something else happens. In the same thinking of David's, what happens is the environment, the earth, the air, the warmth, the moisture, unfold through the seed. They are informed by the DNA in the seed, and the environment unfolds through the seed to become an oak tree, which is a very different way of looking at things.

The oak tree, in turn grows and matures. After many years, it bears fruit in the form of acorns, that produce many more oak trees. Eventually it ages, dies, falls to the ground, and it is enfolded back into the earth. So, here's a little metaphor for unfoldment of the environment through the seed, into the tree, and back into the earth, and that's a fine way of talking about an unfolding and enfolding universe.

He had the idea that we don't experience the world as unfolding and enfolding all the time. It's more natural for us to think about a tree as an object. But have you ever seen a tree growing independently of the environment? It sounds absurd to say it. You might buy a Christmas tree in a pot or something, but trees are part of the environment. They're not independent. But something has happened with our thinking where we think of separate objects. From thinking of trees as separate objects, it is easy to think of sawing them up into planks of wood to make money, without regard for the impact on the ecology.

We think of ourselves as being separate. It is what he called a widespread fragmentation of consciousness. In fact, everything's interconnected. Thinking about things as being separate has led us a lot of trouble trying to put things back together again. So, we began our dialogues. You'll know we sat in circles and talked together. We didn't need an agenda. What we're trying to find out is how does this separate kind of thinking arise? Where does it come from, this fragmentation in consciousness?



We realized that thinking is a present activity, and thought is memory from past thinking. The same with feelings. We have a few immediate emotions or feelings, and then we have what we have felt in the past. You'd think that would be a resource rather than a problem, but the problem lies in the fact that memory acts faster. The thought arises faster than the thinking. Before I've had a chance to think about it, I already have a disposition towards what's happening in this fragmented way. So, in our dialogues we realized we needed to introduce another element, which is how to become aware of what's going on in our consciousness.

We used the metaphor of the body, where we have what we call proprioceptive awareness. Proprioception means if I look away, I know I'm raising my hand, I know I'm lowering my hand, I know it's up or down. How do I know that? I have a feeling inside about the movement of my body. What we were looking for was something similar in our thinking, in our feeling. So, we were exploring the difference between the immediate assumption of memory and thinking. The immediate felt that came up or that we have felt in the past, and what we're now feeling. This was the new element that David Bohm brought in, the interest in proprioception.

To do this, we introduced a practice called suspension. Suspension is a practice where I describe that process internally to be able to see it and recognize it. If I don't recognize it, I will find I hold onto my separate idea and I defend it. I'm right, you're wrong! With suspension, I say 'my first impulse is to say, "No, that's not right. You've got the wrong idea.'" Using suspension, I say that, and I say, "But perhaps I need to think a little more about what you're saying. I may be right and you would learn. Maybe you're right and I would learn." But do I need to immediately defend my position? No. I can inquire into it.

And the dialogues became a wonderful flow of inquiry, quite penetrating inquiry, very revealing. I don't think we'd realized how we had been really living automatically, hardly living consciously. So, we started to live far more consciously.

How do we know we're making progress? Partly because of the flow that emerged, where we could see common understanding emerging in the whole group. And partly at an emotional level, what we called koinonia.



Koinonia is a feeling of fellowship. It's a feeling of being part of the whole. Not fragmented out separately, not disjointed, but part of it. And of course, we realized that to change some of the problems we have in society, we have to enable people to feel they're part of what's happening. People feel isolated and look after themselves and their own interests.

So, it's not so much that dialogue is about good communication. We need good communication, but it's more that we feel part of the whole and participate in it. That's the most enriching and intelligent way to proceed. This is more or less where we were in the book that you're launching, *On Dialogue*. When David died in 1992, I'd had eight years to work with him on developing this theory and the underlying ontology of dialogue.

I think David would have been amazed to hear how the practice developed. Within 10 years of his death, I was working in the largest industrial site in the UK, introducing dialogue to leaders, managers, and trade unionists who were in a miserable fight together. And who would think that you could take dialogue and enable people to start to inquire together, learn from each other, and find the best way forward, all participating in one process? My colleague Jane Ball, whom you may have the chance to meet in the future - I worked with her in very large organizations, in prisons, in commercial organizations, in government.

Where we would like to go, and I'd love to hear your thoughts and see if your resources could contribute to this, we'd like to extend things so that we work at a social level. We know we can never have peace without dialogue. The question is, do we need to kill people before we get to the dialogue? Do we need to go to war, violate each other in the way that we do? It seems that we have a need to make dialogue so much more available and easily understood, so that we can bypass war and start to deal with our most significant differences through dialogue. So that's where we'd like to go.

And for today, I congratulate you on the publishing of this book. I look forward to seeing many more in the future. Well done, the endless part of Dialogue Institute!

Thank you.