

Chapter Eleven

BOHM'S RESERVATIONS

Over the course of two decades, beginning in 1964, Krishnamurti and Bohm engaged in 144 recorded dialogues. Many of these conversations occurred with one or two other individuals present and participating, or with small groups. Some of the dialogues, however, were conducted with Krishnamurti and Bohm exclusively. Among these were the dialogues mentioned in the preceding chapter, a dozen conversations conducted over a period of five months in 1975. At that time, Krishnamurti's work was organized and managed by foundations located on three continents, in America, England, and India. All publication issues were handled by a committee organized by the foundation in England. That committee regarded the 1975 series of dialogues as sufficiently interesting to warrant publication as a book. As a result, the dialogues were transcribed, edited, and prepared for presentation to the world.

This series of dialogues featured an effort by Bohm to elaborate upon a new vocabulary he had introduced into his conversations with Krishnamurti. Bohm was fascinated by the root, etymological meanings of words, and he considered it important to correlate these with the other elements of the overall philosophy the two men were exploring together. Among the terms he regarded as crucial were *truth*, *reality*, and *actuality*. By means of his analysis of the roots of these words—for example, *reality* is based upon the Latin *res*, or “thing”—he invested them with meanings that we do not ordinarily ascribe to them, but which he felt corresponded with Krishnamurti's work. In this perspective, *reality* no longer represents the familiar meaning of what is the case, or the way things actually are. Instead, reality is a construction of thought, and may or may not

correspond with the world as it is. Bohm prefers to reserve the term *actuality* for what is in fact the case; and *truth* represents a kind of distillation or special instance of actuality. He goes to some lengths to elucidate these distinctions, and Krishnamurti is receptive to his efforts. Partly for this reason, Bohm at times appears to be taking the initiative and guiding the course of the conversation. Anyone familiar with the two men and their work together would realize that Bohm is offering his ideas to Krishnamurti for their mutual exploration. But to an outside observer, this might not have been so clear.

Among the trustees of the Krishnamurti foundation in England, as well as a member of the publications committee, was Mary Lutyens, his official biographer, whose relationship with Krishnamurti is described in a previous chapter. In 1977, the edited transcripts of Bohm's dialogues with Krishnamurti, all set for publication, came to her attention. As she was a member of the publications committee, it is not clear why she had not seen the transcripts earlier. Perhaps, as she was not actively involved in the editing process, it was simply passed along to her and to others for final approval. In any case, when she read the edited transcripts, she objected strongly to their publication.

According to private correspondence I have received from a reliable source, Lutyens felt that the dialogues presented Krishnamurti in a manner that was not authentic. They were overly intellectual, in her view, and the vocabulary that Bohm was promulgating was not familiar to her and did not correspond with her sense of Krishnamurti's work. Above all, perhaps, she felt the dialogues presented Krishnamurti in the role of a student being instructed by Bohm, which would present a false image to the public of their actual relationship. She went so far as to count the number of lines spoken by each man, and she objected to the fact that Bohm spoke more than Krishnamurti. Among the members of the publications committee, Lutyens was alone in her objections, but she was adamant. She threatened to resign from any further role if the book went forward. More to the point, perhaps, she spoke with Krishnamurti and expressed her concerns to him. As a result, in the end, her opinion won the day. Portions of three of the dialogues were published in 1978, but some twenty years elapsed before additional portions were published,

and about half of the material is still not available in printed form.

There remained the delicate task of informing Bohm of what had transpired. Only Krishnamurti could do so, and he was evidently somewhat careless in the manner in which he handled it. Rather than sitting down with Bohm and discussing the matter thoroughly, he mentioned it rather casually at the end of a lunchtime conversation in the large dining hall at Brockwood Park. He offered as a kind of compensation that he and Bohm would conduct another series of conversations, and he assured Bohm that these would in fact be published. Krishnamurti's promise was carried out, and the ensuing series of dialogues, published under the title *The Ending of Time*, represents perhaps the most deep and comprehensive of all their conversations together. Nevertheless, Krishnamurti failed to grasp the impact upon Bohm of the decision not to publish the existing set of dialogues. He clearly miscalculated, for he seemed to think that Bohm was comfortable with this decision. But that was not the case.

It is probably no longer possible to understand fully the outlook of the two men with regard to this issue. However, I can confirm from my conversations with Bohm that the issue continued to bother him more than a decade later. Krishnamurti's philosophy devotes a good deal of attention to the inherent falseness of the image we each construct about ourselves. But was Mary Lutyens' objection to the dialogues that they suggested an incorrect image of Krishnamurti? Did she succeed in conveying this concern to him? If so, and if he was concerned about his image, was this not a contradiction with a central element of his teaching? For his part, Krishnamurti probably regarded it all as a somewhat secondary matter. His concern was not with what was published, but rather with what people actually understood. Moreover, he need not have had an image of himself to be concerned about how his work was presented to the public. It would be consistent with his stated philosophy not to be dependent upon anyone for his observations and insights, and if the dialogues somehow suggested otherwise, they would have been misleading.

A period of two or three years elapsed between the time Krishnamurti informed Bohm of the decision not to publish the series of dialogues

they had held, and the time he was able to make good on his promise to conduct a subsequent series that would in fact be published. During this interval, Bohm evidently developed a rather negative view of Krishnamurti and his work. These views were expressed in a few letters to a friend whom Bohm had reason to believe shared this attitude. The first of these letters is dated June, 1979, and the other three in January and February, 1980. The letters were written to Fritz Wilhelm, a fellow physicist, who was also quite familiar with Krishnamurti and his work.

Wilhelm had met Krishnamurti at the annual talks given in Saanen, Switzerland, and he was subsequently invited to come to Ojai to serve as director of an Adult Educational Center under the auspices of the Krishnamurti Foundation of America. The Center was formed almost simultaneously with the opening of Oak Grove School in 1975, and Wilhelm served as its director until 1980. Upon his departure, the Center closed and was not re-opened. The general intention of the Center was to provide a place where people could stay and explore Krishnamurti's teachings in a congenial atmosphere with someone who was thoroughly familiar with Krishnamurti's work. It was a rather challenging assignment, not one I would have been willing to assume. Wilhelm, however, did not seem daunted by it.

Since the Center operated in a manner ancillary to the school, I was fairly well acquainted with him and had numerous opportunities to observe him in casual as well as working circumstances. The school attracted a variety of interesting and intelligent teachers, and I was usually receptive to those who shared my interest in Krishnamurti's work and often formed close bonds with them. Wilhelm was not among those with whom I felt a sense of rapport. I took a sabbatical from the school from 1978 until 1980, but as I prepared to return, I was not surprised to learn that Wilhelm was leaving Ojai for a position elsewhere in California. Whether he left on his own initiative or was asked to leave was not clear to me, but Krishnamurti privately expressed to me some reservations about him.

Bohm, on the other hand, developed a close bond with Wilhelm, and so it is not surprising that he turned to him to express his reservations about Krishnamurti. In his letters to Wilhelm, Bohm leveled a series of

criticisms that were surprising not only for their attitude and substance but for the manner in which they targeted Krishnamurti personally. The overall theme of these letters is that Krishnamurti held a distorted and conditioned image of himself. Bohm maintained that Krishnamurti regarded himself as the embodiment of truth, so that his words and deeds were essentially infallible. Bohm suggested that Krishnamurti had absorbed the Theosophical notion that he was the World Teacher and uniquely unconditioned, ideas that Bohm dismissed as “nonsense.” (In the excerpt below, “that boy” represents Krishnamurti’s way of referring to himself in his youth):

The difficulty is, that if K is like all of us, a mixture of what is true and what is not, then we are compelled to treat K’s false aspects as inseparable from the living truth and thus we become deeply confused and enter into deep inner conflict. . . .

I would say that K was conditioned in a different way from most people, and this made certain insights possible to him, while he is even more caught in nonsense than most people in certain other areas (especially, when he thinks about “that boy”)

At present, one must say that the teachings do not go far enough so that a person who lives them will change fundamentally (and in fact this has happened to no one, not even to K, who is caught in his own nonsense).

In these letters, Bohm refers to the dialogues that were not published, and it is apparent how deeply he was wounded or offended by this decision. He makes it clear that he was apprised of the circumstances that led to this decision, including the fact that Mary Lutyens was instrumental in bringing it about. At one point he complains that he had “no opportunity” to discuss the decision with Krishnamurti, but that is difficult to understand, since his opportunities to interact with Krishnamurti were numerous. Elsewhere he acknowledges that the failure to address the matter more forthrightly was at least as much his own responsibility:

I accept, at the very beginning, that part of the responsibility for the breakdown of the communication is my own. One way in which this has happened is that I feel that K has dismissed and tried to push aside

my own work in science and philosophy in a way that is not justified, because I think it makes a significant contribution to what is being attempted by all of us.

Another issue that Bohm alluded to in these letters was a chronic pain he was experiencing in his chest. He attributed this pain to the “crushing” weight of conflict he felt due to his devotion to Krishnamurti and his work, coupled with the kind of reservations he was expressing in these letters:

K dismisses everybody and frequently says that nobody is doing anything—not at Brockwood, nor in Ojai, nor in Canada, nor in India. . . . For example, in India, he gave a talk in which he dismissed physics as “limited,” saying that he was glad that I was not present to hear him say it. . . . I have fears that the attempt to limit myself to what K says and to the work he wants to do is “crushing” me (literally, the pain in the chest).

As one who worked with Krishnamurti for ten years during this time period, it seems to me that Bohm was exaggerating in his assertion that K “dismisses everybody,” and so on. Moreover, the pain in his chest may have had little to do with Krishnamurti. A few months after the last of these letters was composed, Bohm experienced what was probably a heart attack, although it was misdiagnosed at the time. The following year, his symptoms became more acute, and angioplasty revealed that he required triple bypass surgery. Bohm underwent this surgery in England, in April 1981.

In a letter also written in February 1980, a few weeks subsequent to those already mentioned, Bohm repudiated, to some extent, his earlier criticisms of Krishnamurti, and he specifically asked Wilhelm to destroy those letters:

I think that some of my recent letters will give a somewhat distorted impression, as they emphasize the questions that I have been raising, and do not adequately convey my positive feelings toward K. A letter is always dangerous, as there is no way to correct false impressions, at least for a very long time. May I suggest that you destroy those letters, as there is, in any case, nothing in them that needs to be preserved.

The fact that Wilhelm did not destroy the letters, as Bohm requested, and instead made them available for publication, is a story in its own right.

The only available biography of Bohm was composed by his friend, the science writer F. David Peat. It appeared in 1997, five years after Bohm died, under the title *Infinite Potential: The Life and Times of David Bohm*. The book is well written and researched, especially with regard to Bohm's scientific work. In composing the present volume, I have relied upon Peat's work extensively. Shortly after the hardback copy of the book was published, Wilhelm sent Peat excerpts from the correspondence in which Bohm had expressed his criticisms and reservations about Krishnamurti. Peat considered these letters to be important and revealing, and he arranged for them to be published as an afterword to the paperback edition of his book, which was then in the process of preparation. In the afterword, Peat confesses his own misgivings about the personality of Krishnamurti and about Bohm's involvement with him, and he seems to regard the letters as a kind of confirmation of his own views.

What was not included in Peat's afterword was Bohm's subsequent letter to Wilhelm, stating that the letters gave a distorted impression and asking Wilhelm to destroy them. Bohm's final letter only came to light after it was discovered in a file sent by Wilhelm to Bohm's wife, Saral. I was engaging in an email correspondence at that time with Saral, Peat, and others involved in this work, and I will quote from Saral's description (March 26, 1998) of how the final letter was discovered, and why Peat did not include it in his afterword:

Now about David Peat's ignoring the contents of the letter from Dave where he asks for the letters to be destroyed. I have just spoken with David P. on the phone and he said that Fritz [Wilhelm] did not send all the letters to him but only a disk with excerpts. Fritz sent me the same disk and I can assure you that that letter was not on it. However when Fritz sent me the original letters for the archives there it was. . . . [ellipsis in original] it was a big shock to me.

I cannot understand, if Fritz had not wanted that letter to be seen why did he send it to me? I can only think that he had the letters in a file and he sent the whole file without looking through them. In any