

INTRODUCTION

The Cosmic Dance of Dialogue

Dialogue—the mutually beneficial interaction of differing components—is at the very heart of the Universe, of which we humans are the highest expression. It's there in the basic interaction of *Matter and Energy* (in Einstein's unforgettable formula: $E=mc^2$ —Energy equals mass times the square of the speed of light), in the creative interaction of *Protons and Electrons* in every atom, in the vital symbiosis of *Body and Spirit* in every human, in the creative dialogue between *Woman and Man*, and in the dynamic relationship between *Individual and Society*. Thus, the very essence of our humanity is dialogical, and a fulfilled human life is the highest expression of the “Cosmic Dance of Dialogue.”

In the early millennia of the history of humanity, as we spread outward from our starting point in central Africa, the forces of Divergence were dominant. However, because we live on a globe, in our frenetic divergence we eventually began to encounter each other more and more frequently. Now the forces of stunning Convergence are becoming increasingly dominant.

In the past, during the age of divergence, we could live in isolation from each other; we could ignore each other. Now, in the age of convergence, we are forced to live in one world. We increasingly live in a global village. We cannot ignore the other, the different. Too often in the past we have tried to make over the other into a likeness of ourselves, often by violence. But this is the very opposite of dialogue. This egocentric arrogance is in fundamental opposition to the Cosmic Dance of Dialogue. It is not creative; it is destructive.

Hence, we humans today have a stark choice: dialogue or death!

Dialogues of the Head, Hands, and Heart

For us humans there are three main dimensions to dialogue—the mutually beneficial interaction among those who are different—corresponding to the structure of our humanness: dialogue of the head, dialogue of the hands, and dialogue of the heart.

The Cognitive or Intellectual: Seeking the Truth

In the dialogue of the head, we mentally reach out to the other to learn from those who think differently from us. We try to understand how they see the world and why they act as they do. This dialogue of the head is vital, for how we see and understand the world and life determines how we act toward ourselves, toward other persons, and toward the world around us.

The Illative or Ethical: Seeking the Good

In the dialogue of the hands, we join together with others to work to make the world a better place in which we all must live together. Since we can no longer live separately in this one world, we must work jointly to make it not just a house but a home for all of us.

The Affective or Aesthetic: Seeking the Beautiful

In the dialogue of the heart, we share in the expressions of the emotions of those different from us. Because we humans are body and spirit, or rather body-spirit, we give bodily-spiritual expression in all the arts to our multifarious responses to our encounters with life: joy, sorrow, gratitude, anger, and most of all, love. All the world delights in beauty, wherein we find the familiar that avoids sameness, and wherein we find diversity that avoids distastefulness.

Wholeness and Holiness: Seeking the One

We humans cannot live a divided life for long. If we are to even survive, let alone flourish, we must “get it all together.” We must live a “whole” life. Indeed, this is what the religions of the Western tradition mean when they say that we humans should be “holy.” Literally, to be holy means to be whole. Hence, in our human dance of dialogue, we must “get it all together,” we must be whole and holy. We must dance together the dialogue of the head, the dialogue of the hands, and the dialogue of the heart

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Business leaders used to emphasize the spirit of competition as driving their enterprise. Now they are more likely to exalt cooperation and team work as the way to success. Before reading further in this book, what is your assessment of the spirit of cooperation and dialogue among religions today?
2. The authors envision the universe as a “Cosmic Dance” and suggest that dialogue among religions is a way of participating in that dance. What other images, positive and negative, might describe interaction among religions?
3. Sometimes while dancing, we step on each other’s feet. How important is it to have a sense of humor while engaging in dialogue? Give examples.
4. The authors give us a stark challenge: dialogue or death! What is your response to this challenge?