

**The Tibetan Book
of the
Undivided Universe
David Bohm's Quantum
Philosophy of Wholeness
In the Light of
Buddhist Metaphysics**

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Introduction:

Bohm's Quantum

Worldview - a 'Radical'

Buddhist Meditation?

After watching the film about the life and work of David Bohm, 'Infinite Potential', I joined the discussion group that was associated with the film. I had decided to interrupt work on my sixth book in a series on the subject of quantum physics and Buddhist philosophy, this one was to be called *The Quantum New Age*, an exploration of the excesses and absurdities of quantum New-Age fantasies and also an exposure of some quantum subtle materialist deceptions which are advanced in opposition to New-Age excess. The interruption was inspired by the film and was in order to write this book about the important ideas of quantum physicist David Bohm in the light of, Buddhist metaphysics.

I posted a couple of chapters that I was able to write quickly, due to the large amount of research I had previously done to be used in current and future projects, to see what kind of feedback I might get. I was surprised when one of the members commented that he thought it is worthless engaging in such research and one should just 'be', so to speak. I wondered why someone with such a view would bother to join a discussion group. But, upon further reflection, it was also a reasonable question to ask, given that the right motive was involved. Luckily, I had recently read a book which offered a very cogent answer. The following is taken from the introduction to *Adorning Maitreya's Intent: Arriving at the View of Nonduality*:

In the *Cula-Malunkyovada* Sutta, for instance, in the parable of the poisoned arrow, the Buddha tells a disciple that metaphysical speculation can be a dangerous waste of time by likening it to a soldier wounded by a poisoned arrow who refuses to be treated until he knows everything about the arrow and the soldier who shot it. ... Why, then, one might reasonably ask, has the tradition produced this gigantic collection of writings of a philosophical nature? ... in the context of the Buddhist tradition, philosophical argumentation has a soteriological function. It is an aid to liberation designed to remove confusion about the path and reality itself. ...¹

According to this point of view, then, it is necessary to have some degree of metaphysical insight in order to have a direct insight into the nature of reality.

I have spent many years in research and writing about the interconnections between quantum physics and Buddhist metaphysics. For me clarification of what in Buddhism is called the 'view' - our intellectual understanding of the nature and functioning of reality - has helped my practice, meagre as it may be!. And the development of Bohm's ideas is particularly relevant here because of the way that his attempt in 1952 to create a more 'realistic' and deterministic 'classical' quantum story had the seeds of its own dissolution within it, which led automatically in the direction of wholeness. This is a fascinating story which I have focused on in the second chapter of this book. I do not think it is a story which has been told in quite such a detailed fashion

elsewhere.

For me, the very writing of this book has been a kind of ‘analytic meditation’ in the sense that it has made me far more aware, at a deep level, of the truth of the interconnected nature of the process of reality. According to Acharya Lama Tenpa Gyaltzen:

...when we do analytical meditation, which involves effort and reasoning, it is very important to be mindful that one’s awareness remains in the center of one’s body. Otherwise, we will just engage in a superficial conceptual investigation rather than in genuine analytical meditation. When your mind is resting and clear, proceed to the analysis. How do we conduct the analysis? We select an appropriate example of the object of analysis and examine it using our reasoning.ⁱⁱ

Applying such a procedure to the ideas of David Bohm can have great benefit!

In the practice of the Buddhist *Lamrim*, the path to enlightenment style of meditations, there are two phases in the meditation process. First the meditator must generate through ‘analytical meditation’ a deep mental conviction or feeling regarding the meditation topic, the precious nature of human birth for example, and once a mental image of the conviction-feeling is generated it is then held in focus single-pointedly with fixed meditation.ⁱⁱⁱ I have found the research and subsequent exposition of David’s Bohm’s thinking in the context of Buddhism to be like a very extended and deep ‘analytical meditation’ which has given me what seems to be a deep insight into some important aspects of the nature of the process of reality. It is my hope that the reader may experience something similar.

The Dalai Lama has made some very clear endorsements of the view that there are close links between Buddhist metaphysical insights and the discoveries of quantum physics. For example:

Broadly speaking, although there are some differences, I think Buddhist philosophy and Quantum Mechanics can shake hands on their view of the world.^{iv}

And:

... there is an unmistakable resonance between the notion of emptiness and the new physics. If on the quantum level, matter is revealed to be less solid and definable than it appears, then it seems to me that science is coming closer to the Buddhist contemplative insights of emptiness and interdependence.^v

And a recent report tells us that according to the Dalai Lama:

Spirituality Without Quantum Physics Is An Incomplete Picture Of Reality.^{vi}

And, as the Dalai Lama considered Bohm to be “one of his his scientific gurus”, we can only conclude that the ideas of Bohm must have deep significance for the Buddhist worldview. As I began to explore the terrain it quickly became apparent that Bohm’s

insights, embodied in works such as *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, contain great significance for Buddhist metaphysics, and also vice versa. We shall see that this is particularly true for the Buddhist *Dzogchen* (“Great Perfection” or “Great Completion”) and *Yogacara-Vijnanavada* (Consciousness-Only) worldviews.

The Radical Dzogchen practitioner and ‘anti-philosopher’ Keith Dowman appears to be uncompromising in his emphasis on the very limited role that intellectual analysis and discourse, and even structured practice, can play in describing and pointing towards ultimate experience. Perhaps he is an inspiration for anti-intellectual followers of Bohm! He writes:

...elaborate meditation - and along with it all ‘spiritual practice’ - is superfluous. If spiritual practice is ultimately useless, so also is dogma and cant, whether it be rational and humanistic or religious and apocalyptic . Buddhist belief systems that define a specific starting point, an elaborate path and goal, for instance, provide dogma tailored to the requirements of adherents ... on a graduated path spiritual materialism infects the minds of well-intentioned people susceptible to attachment to the intent of coherent oral or written soteriological teaching. Radical Dzogchen, free of belief, cannot be dogmatic, indeed it is entirely pragmatic in that the view arises spontaneously in response to the requirements of every unique moment.^{vii}

The term ‘view’ here refers to the core understanding of the nature of the process of reality. Dowman is indicating that within the more establishment-focused gradualist modes of Buddhist practise the ‘view’ actually becomes occluded because of an excessive reliance on conceptual modes of analysis. Perhaps, it might be expected, then, that Dowman would not have a much time for ‘quantum mystical’ insights. But this is not the case:

‘Quantum mysticism’ has provided useful metaphors that move the rational mind towards acceptance of the anomalous phenomenology of nonduality. ... When we are told, for example, that the electron, which revolves around the nucleus of the atom, moves in and out of different orbits without apparent cause..., leaving no trace of its previous revolution, our rational intellects may space out and a moment arise adventitiously when the nature of mind can shine through and an existential understanding of ‘nonabiding’ may arise.^{viii}

Here Dowman indicates how an appreciation of a quantum fact can open up an opportunity for a person’s mind to make its own nonconceptual ‘quantum leap’ in order to instantaneously perceive a deep existential truth about the process of reality.

It is in this sense that I consider the explorations of this book may be thought to be a kind of ‘radical’ Buddhist meditation. For example, Dowman indicates that contemplation of one particular quantum phenomenon, the quantum orbit ‘jumping’

without continuous jumps, may lead to an opening of the mind to understanding its own nature. The same situation is, to my mind, operative to some extent within the development of Bohm's thought.

We have already noted that Bohm's 1952 attempt to try and produce a 'realistic' account of quantum reality, an attempt to expunge some of the quantum 'weirdness' from quantum reality, produced an internally unstable system of thought which contained the seeds of its own necessary further development. It is the details of the inner movement and endpoint of the move from the 1952 'pilot-wave' theory to the later spacious quantum view of 'wholeness', as explicated in Bohm's book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, which provides us with an analytic 'meditation' which can also open one's mind to the spaciousness of the interconnected universe and the spaciousness of primordial Mindnature which forms its inner nature.

Mindnature, the primordial field of the process of reality, is described in the excellent book on Buddhist Dzogchen *Unbounded Wholeness: Bon and the Logic of the Nonconceptual*, a book, as its title indicates, which is fully resonant with Bohm's later perspective:

Being wholly uncontrived, mindnature neither improves upon enlighten-ment nor becomes flawed in samsara. Always present in all beings, it is the abiding condition itself, otherwise described as unbounded wholeness.^{ix}

The story of the necessity of internal development of Bohm's thought towards its final 'undivided universe' universe-view is just one part of the 'radical meditation' that is involved when we explore the details of Bohm's thought and its interconnections with Buddhism, especially Dzogchen.

The interconnection between Bohm's perspective and that of Dzogchen in particular is spectacular, and moving between the two metaphysical arenas to savour the mutual resonance is certainly a spur to a meditative frame of mind, an opening of mental spaciousness as described by Dowman above. For example, the resonance between the overall worldview and themes, although expressed in different idioms, from *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* and the wonderful Dzogchen text translated and presented with the title *Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bon and the Logic of the Nonconceptual* is remarkable. The resonance between these two books is the subject of the final chapter of this work, preceding chapters explore many other significant connections between Bohm's ideas and Buddhism.

In particular, we may highlight the notion that the dualistic world of the appearance of matter and the functioning of embodied mind derives from a deeper, mind-like, potential mind-energy source. Here is a passage from Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*:

The new form of insight can perhaps best be called Undivided Wholeness in

Flowing Movement. This view implies that flow is, in some sense, prior to that of the ‘things’ that can be seen to form and dissolve in this flow. One can perhaps illustrate what is meant here by considering the ‘stream of consciousness’. This flux of awareness is not precisely definable, and yet it is evidently prior to the definable forms of thoughts and ideas which can be seen to form and dissolve in the flux, like ripples, waves and vortices in a flowing stream. As happens with such patterns of movement in a stream some thoughts recur and persist in a more or less stable way, while others are evanescent. The proposal for a new general form of insight is that all matter is of this nature: That is, there is a universal flux that cannot be defined explicitly but which can be known only implicitly, as indicated by the explicitly definable forms and shapes, some stable and some unstable, that can be abstracted from the universal flux. In this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances. Rather, they are different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement.^x

Here we find some central significant Bohmian themes of the essential wholeness of the process of reality, mind and matter as arising from a deeper common source, the arising from this common source of relatively autonomous forms, including sentient beings, which take part in the flux taking place within the totality of interconnected wholeness.

Similar themes can be found to be significant within Buddhism in general and Buddhist Dzogchen in particular. Thus, in *Unbounded Wholeness* we read:

...this wholeness, which cannot be totalized or bounded, is thoroughly compatible with diversity. Indeed, diversity, though ordinarily considered the antithesis of unity, is here offered as proof that unbounded wholeness exists. Being so diverse, and constantly changing besides, means that unbounded wholeness admits of no defining characteristic or stable identity, in this sense it is indefinable and unspeakable. ...

Mindnature, clear light which is this wholeness,
Primordially not a substantial thing,
Primordially clear conscious open awareness
For me to say “This” is unfitting.

...

The inability to describe unbounded wholeness in any one way ... dramatically testifies to wholeness’s decentered multiplicity and thus to its incommensurability with conceptual limitation. Unbounded wholeness can, and must, be called both definite and indefinite; this is the principle of wholeness.

...

Definite and indefinite ... here turn out not to be a mutually exclusive binary.

Likewise, other dyads such as Buddhas and sentient beings, conventional and ultimate, or conditioned and unconditioned are all ... “facets of wholeness,” not mutually exclusive ... indefiniteness ... as an evocation of multifaceted reality, continuously brimming with shapes and colors even as it remains an unmitigated whole.^{xi}

And the following passage is taken from another Dzogchen work *Everything is Light*, translated and introduced by Keith Dowman:

The zero-dimension awakens in zero-appearance. The sole holistic sphere of dharmakaya blends with the undivided field of appearances into an elixir that shines like sunlight in the sky. ... The field that is cognized by the zero-essence is the spaciousness of reality, the dharmadhatu ... without center or periphery, without top or bottom, without any spatial bias. ...unchanging matrix of unelaborated spaciousness. ... The basis of an inconceivable field is itself inconceivable, and so no fixed concept can arise in pure presence ... The nondual subjective and objective aspects comprise the spontaneity of the self-envisioned field, which is invested by the clear light of present awareness. ... the elixir of spun essence is the vision of present awareness that is like magical illusion.... In that way [is] related the nature of ultimate spaciousness to awareness of the interconnected universe.^{xii}

As we shall see, by moving between such clearly deeply related perspectives, one from a Western scientific-philosophical context and the other from the ‘mystical’ Buddhist Dzogchen metaphysical spirituality, sometimes with specific detailed interconnections, each throws light upon the other and thus deepens and widens the metaphysical viewpoint. In this way, the following chapters do constitute a kind of extended analytic meditation. Whereas many attempts to connect quantum phenomena with spiritual traditions do so in a piecemeal and limited fashion, taking scraps of quantum evidence to weave a quantum-mystical ‘new-age’ type worldview, Bohm’s later vision interconnects with and embraces the Buddhist Dzogchen mystical view in particular in a much more thoroughgoing and comprehensive manner.

In this context, Hee-Jin Kim’s description of the Zen master Dogen’s attitude to philosophy and enlightenment is perhaps apposite:

Dogen viewed the philosophical enterprise as an integral part of the practice of the Way. ... if and when intellect was purified and reinforced by the samadhi [meditation] of self-fulfilling activity. Our philosophic and hermeneutical activities were no longer a means to enlightenment, but identical to enlightenment itself, for to be was to understand - one was what one understood. Thus the activity of philosophizing, like any other expressive activity, was restated in the context of our total participation of in the self-creative process of Buddha-nature.^{xiii}

And Kim gives a direct quote from Dogen, a quote also appropriate to the thought of David Bohm:

The monastics of future generations will be able to understand a non-discriminative Zen based on words and letters, if they devote efforts to spiritual practice through words and letters *and words and letters through the universe.*^{xiv}

The italics are mine, their significance will, I hope, become clear during the course of the following explorations.

i Adorning 2

ii <https://nitarthainstitute.org/2020/01/10/what-is-analytical-meditation/>

iii <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/lam-rim-meditations-and-deity-practice>

iv

<http://conscious.shift.over-blog.com/2017/04/dalai-lama-spirituality-without-quantum-physics-is-an-incomplete-picture-of-reality.html>

v Dalai Lama, H. H. (2008)

vi

<https://awaken.com/2019/07/dalai-lama-spirituality-without-quantum-physics-is-an-incomplete-picture-of-reality-2/>

vii Dowman 19

viii Dowman 22

ix Unbounded Wholeness 3

x Wholeness 14

xi Unbounded Wholeness 54-56

xii Dowman 66-68

xiii Hee-Jin Kim 99-100

xiv Hee-Jin Kim 100