





**Nish Dubashia**

# **The Unity of Everything**

A Conversation with David Bohm



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I dedicate this book to

David King

for his tireless work over decades

as we together explored

and tried to make sense

of the human mystical experience

Adi Da

for showing me

that all historical traditions

are just branches

of the One Great Tradition

and to Shilpa

for travelling with me

and always supporting me

on this strange journey

that we call our life

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## Bibliography

**In some sense man is a microcosm of the universe; therefore what man is, is a clue to the universe. We are enfolded in the universe.**

**- David Bohm**

## PROLOGUE

In 1984, while a Mathematics student at Warwick University, I began to seriously practice Buddhist meditation under the guidance of various Buddhist monks who would periodically visit the university, a practice that would continue unabated for the next thirty-four years.

At this time, I also discovered the writings of the Indian mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose teachings bore a strong resemblance to what I was learning and experiencing as a Buddhist. Krishnamurti's descriptions of what he referred to as "choiceless awareness" mirrored almost exactly the techniques of Buddhist meditation (vipassana and zazen) that I was practicing.

*"Observe, and in that observation there is neither the "observer" nor the "observed" – there is only observation taking place." - Jiddu Krishnamurti ( "Fear and Pleasure", The Collected Works, Vol. X)*

As a student of Applied Mathematics, I had a basic familiarity with the concepts of quantum mechanics, and I began to notice certain similarities between some of the findings of quantum physics and some of the insights and teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, the school of Buddhism to which I was the most attracted.

For example:

*“All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter.”*

– Max Planck (Originator of Quantum Theory)

Soon after this, I discovered the writings of David Bohm, one of the greatest living physicists and quantum theorists, who was developing a theory of reality in which, like Krishnamurti had already asserted, the observer and the observed were deeply interconnected, and like in Mahayana Buddhism, the whole of the manifest universe emerges or arises out of a deeper order of reality or wholeness in which both consciousness and matter find their common ground.

*“In the enfolded [or implicate] order, **space** and **time** are no longer the dominant factors determining the relationships of dependence or independence of different elements. Rather, an entirely different sort of basic connection of elements is possible, from which our ordinary notions of space and time, along with those of separately existent material particles, are abstracted as forms derived from the deeper order. These ordinary notions in fact appear in what is called the “explicate” or “unfolded” order, which is a special and distinguished form contained within*

*the general totality of all the implicate orders” – David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order. p. xv.*

David Bohm has been described as one of most significant theoretical physicists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bohm worked for many years as a professor at Princeton University, where he worked closely with Albert Einstein. In addition to physics, Bohm became deeply interested in the nature of consciousness and the role of thought in creating human conflict. His work in this area was developed even further as a result of his friendship and subsequent interactions with the Indian mystic Krishnamurti, in whose teachings Bohm saw insights quite compatible with those he was developing in quantum physics.

Based on my study of Eastern mysticism and Western Neoplatonism, I was already developing my own model of how mystics see reality. In this model, the whole of reality emerges out of a primordial non-dual Ground or Source of All Things. This Wholeness of Reality is then split into two by the action of human awareness, which creates a dualism between the observer and the observed in its perception and experience. Out of this twoness emerges the entire world of multiplicity, of separate things and events in space-time. And when we take this multiplicity too far, and create parts of the whole that are not really separate or separable (such as human races or religions) we create fragmentation,

which leads to a crisis in perception and violence and division in the world.

The spiritual quest could be seen as the reversing of this process of descent whereby the Ground ends up being fragmented in human consciousness, by means of a process of ascent whereby fragmentation, then multiplicity, then dualism, and finally even wholeness are healed and returned to their Source as Ground in human enlightenment.

The process of descent could thus be seen as consisting of essentially five levels or stages:

1. The Ground of All Being, the Source of All Things.
2. The Whole of Reality, seen as a Boundless Unity.
3. The Primary Dualism: Observer vs. Observed.
4. Multiplicity: Things-Events separated in Space-Time.
5. Fragmentation: Illusion as Multiplicity goes too far

In reverse, the process of ascent could be seen as consisting of four essential stages:

1. The ordering of thought, fragmentation is

healed

2. Profound awareness of how we create sense of self
3. The healing of the self-other dualism in Unity
4. Going beyond even Unity itself, back to the Ground

Once I was reasonably confident that this model had something useful to say, I wrote a paper describing the model, explaining the different levels or stages in more detail, and showing the extraordinary correspondences that seemed to exist between this model and the models of reality described by many different philosophical and spiritual traditions throughout history.

I then, rather audaciously, sent the paper to David Bohm at Birkbeck College in London, confidently expecting never to hear from him.

To my astonishing surprise, I received a phone call at home from Dr. Bohm a couple of months later inviting me to meet him at his London office to discuss some of the ideas in my paper in more detail.

What follows is the transcript of our discussion.

I dedicate this transcript to my friend David King for his tireless work over decades as we together explored and tried to make coherent and intellectually defensible sense of the human mystical experience.

And I cannot thank the late Dr David Bohm, one of greatest scientists of the twentieth century, enough for sparing a couple of hours of his valuable time to speak with me, an ordinary and relatively insignificant Buddhist meditator and student of mysticism. He is deeply missed.

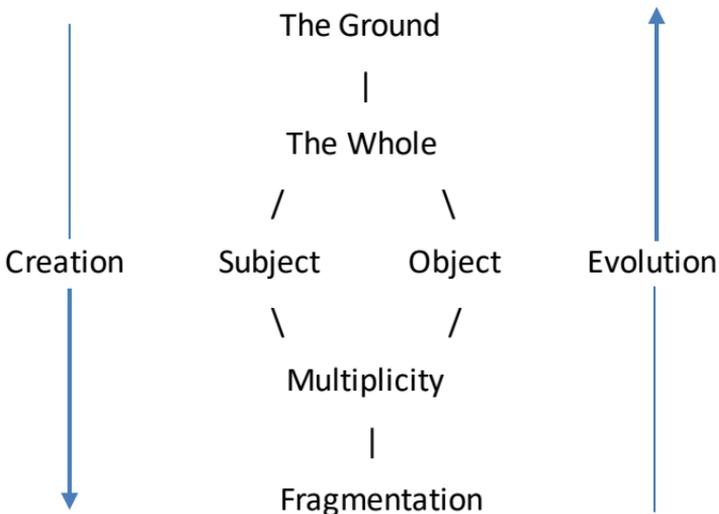
- **NISH DUBASHIA**

## INTRODUCTION

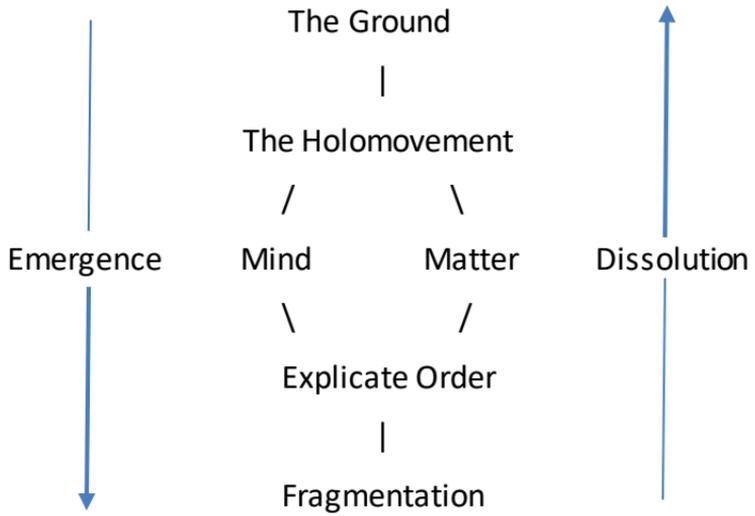
### A DIALOGUE WITH DAVID BOHM

This dialogue took place on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1991 at Birkbeck College, London. The model discussed and referred to is produced below for reference, and is in the form it took from May 1990. It has since been substantially revised, in part from insights gained during this meeting.

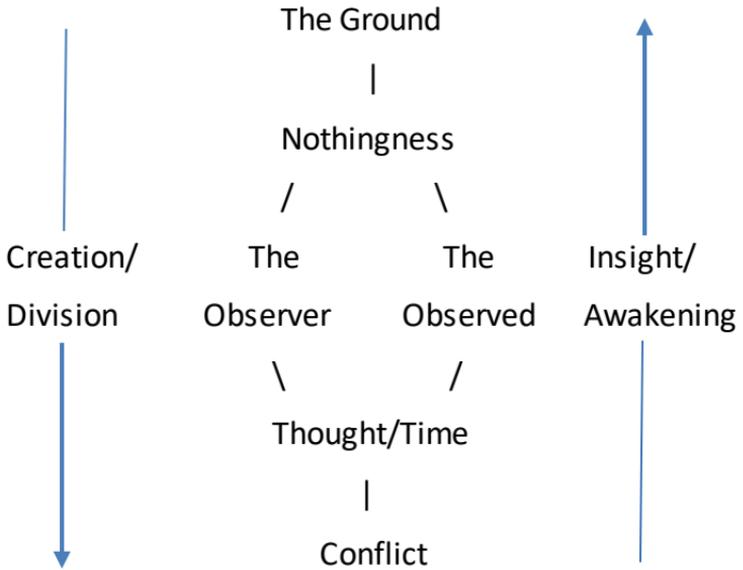
#### THE MODEL:



**THE MODEL APPLIED TO THE WORK OF DAVID BOHM:**



**THE MODEL APPLIED TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF KRISHNAMURTI:**



## PART ONE: THE PART AND THE FRAGMENT

NISH DUBASHIA:

*First of all, could I begin by thanking you for sparing the time to see us? Could you make any initial remarks on the general model described in the manuscript that I've sent you?*

DAVID BOHM:

Well, you seem to have developed a coherent scheme, and you've shown that all these approaches fit into your scheme. Many such attempts are incoherent, but yours seems to be quite coherent.

DUBASHIA:

*A good way to proceed with this discussion may be to look at each component of the model separately, and also look at how they relate to each other. The distinction at the bottom between multiplicity and fragmentation is very much one that I have derived from your own work. To put it another way, the two levels represent the distinction between the part and the*

*fragment. Could you perhaps say something about this distinction? Can we make it clear what this distinction is?*

BOHM:

Well, parts are parts of a whole, whereas fragments are just arbitrary divisions that are not related to each other or to the whole. Parts of a machine all fit together, but if you smash it you would produce fragments. When thought creates abstractions which have been carried too far because of fragmentation, it takes the abstraction as the thing itself. Things that are not separate are treated as separate. They are not really parts. Like the fragmentation between countries. People come to believe that the boundaries between countries really exist, and say "This is my country." But these countries all depend on each other.

One can take a similar attitude to the organs of a body.

All such abstractions should be made with a 'dotted line' so that we don't take them too seriously. Instead we draw a solid line, and fragmentation arises. The thought process takes itself too literally.

*DUBASHIA:*

*So, can we say that the distinction between a part and a fragment is not just in the division itself, but in our attitude to that division?*

BOHM:

Yes. We have a fragmentary attitude. To distinguish a part makes sense if the divisions are natural in some way. We know that such natural divisions exist in nature, right? But if we take something that is not materially broken into parts, and say that it is broken into parts, then those parts lose their connection to the whole and we have introduced an incoherent way of thinking and acting in relation to the whole. Thought just smashes things up. People are guided by fragmentary thought when they smash things up.

*DUBASHIA:*

*The distinction between the part and the fragment – is that analogous in some way to Krishnamurti's distinction between technological and psychological thought?*