

When Was the Last Time...

Russell Bishop

When was the last time you had a ***conscious conversation***? A real conversation? One where both of you were conscious, truly conscious?

If you have experienced a truly conscious conversation, have you longed for more of them, more often? If so, how do you get there again? Is it up to someone else? Is it up to you?

Several years ago, Charlie Smith and I met at a friend's 75th birthday celebration. We quickly connected at multiple levels, both intellectually and experientially. The experience was as effortless as well as it was engaging. We were truly sharing with one another – beyond ideas and information, into a deeper space of connection – so much so that we decided to continue our conversation on Skype, meeting at least weekly for a several months.

At one point in a call that again took us into a great sense of depth and connection, Charlie posited a question: “*What makes these conversations so special?*” Without a moment hesitation, I found myself saying: “*Because these are conscious conversations.*” We both looked at each other through the screen in a state of obvious recognition of a truth revealed – not formed or hypothesized by either of us, but simply recognized as what's so. Perhaps fitting of our backgrounds in psychology, we were both experiencing and exploring a “gestalt.”

For me this observation sprang from a place deep inside, a place where he and I were truly connected. We were involved in sharing awareness, experiences and ideas with one another. Sharing. Truly sharing. Neither of us engaged in trying to convince the other of the “rightness” of our ideas, awareness of experience. We were simply exploring together.

This shared experience led us to create a workshop together we called, *Conscious Conversations*, to which we invited a handful of friends from around the world. Most were strangers to one another who came together in Irvine, California for a weekend of *conscious* exploration, discussion and experience.

The experience was magical, very much like what Charlie and I had been experiencing in our Skype calls. Literally within the first half hour, our fellow participants began commenting that they had never become so close, so intimate and so aware of others in such a short space of time. Clearly, something was up, or perhaps we were “up,” discovering something that had been hiding in plain sight.

So, what happened? What happened between Charlie and me? What happened between this group of 15 participants? What was it that was “hiding in plain sight?” What made these ***conscious conversations?***

All manner of answers exist for these rather simple questions, each of them “right” in their own context, none of them whole or complete. Unless, of course, they are each whole and complete. Each and every one a gestalt.

Perhaps the “trick” is to move beyond any one story or explanation and into the “invisible” that connects them all.

Borrowing from a bit of science: there are radio waves present right now no matter where you might be reading this. Just because you and I are not seeing or hearing the radio waves does not mean the radio waves aren't there. It just means we don't have radio tuners within us. However, if we can turn on a radio tuner, we can hear the information that was already present and continues to be present even when we turn off the tuner. And, if we have multiple tuners, we can hear multiple communications all happening simultaneously.

My experience suggests that a ***conscious conversation*** has more to do with adjusting an inner “tuner” than with the information or data shared. An old Buddhist question that comes to mind: *Are you listening or simply preparing to speak?* When we are present with one another, truly conscious, we may find that we can “attune” to something that is present beyond the capacity of our minds and words to formulate or describe, and yet palpable nonetheless.

Dictionaries often define “conscious” as having attributes of awareness, perceiving, noticing, etc. all associated with some aspect of “controlled thought.” Merriam-Webster tells us that “consciousness” means: *the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself.*

Some physicists exploring the nature of reality hold that there is an interconnectedness between all things. That interconnectedness could be what we mean by “conscious” or “consciousness.”

In an article on the work of David Bohm published by [Science & NonDuality](#), we find an interesting approach to the question of what it means to be conscious, of what constitutes consciousness:

Bohm conceives of consciousness as more than information and the brain; rather it is information that enters into consciousness. For Bohm consciousness “involves awareness, attention, perception, acts of understanding, and perhaps yet more.”

These are more a set of opening questions than answers to those questions. What is it that constitutes a “conscious conversation” for you? Perhaps it is worth starting with a couple of intriguing questions about how you relate to your own self, to your own awareness, to your own consciousness.

Have you ever had a thought you wished you weren’t thinking?
Have you ever felt an emotion you wished you weren’t feeling?
Who noticed?

Have you ever had something go awry and wound up slapping yourself on the side of the head, exclaiming “I knew it!”?

Have you ever had something work out miraculously and wound up slapping yourself on the side of the head, exclaiming “I knew it!”?

What’s the difference between *I knew it* when things went badly, and *I knew it* when they went great? In both instances, you did know it – early on. Perhaps the only difference is that you paid attention one time, and not the other. Perhaps it’s simply a combination of awareness and your willingness to follow or explore that awareness, sense or intuition?

Could awareness and willingness to explore constitute a critical aspect of being conscious? Maybe awareness and willingness are what allow us to truly connect with another, to engage in a truly conscious conversation?

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