



Consciousness and Discontinuity

Remarks by Deepak Chopra at *Be The Change*



Academy President Rinaldo Brutoco and Academy Fellow Deepak Chopra at the Be The Change conference in London last month.

Editor's Note: Amidst the recent burst of interest in quantum theory, numerous thinkers from disparate fields have tried to unify subatomic phenomena with human systems (such as the conduct of business) with shifts in consciousness. For example, the business works of Harvard Professor Clayton Christensen on technological product discontinuity, and Geoffrey Moore's classic Chasm series are in part descended from sociological studies on the diffusion of innovation conducted by [Everett M. Rogers](#).

This notion of discontinuity rests in part on the connectedness and impacts of seemingly unconnected events. Popular and professional literature advises businesspeople to alter their perception of reality so they may reckon with the heretofore unseen around us.

In these impromptu remarks offered in London last month at the Be The Change conference, Academy Fellow **Deepak Chopra** examined the role of discontinuity with regard to consciousness and the role of business in the world. He also offered several techniques that would facilitate executives (and other people) to elevate their levels of consciousness and deal with the discontinuity that pervades our lives, our professions, our markets, our planet and, indeed, the universe.



*Introduction by Academy President **Rinaldo Brutoco**:*

My dear friend to the right, who has been a Fellow of the Academy for over a decade is someone we all know by reputation. Most, if not all of you, have read one of the 36 books he has published. Some of you have probably seen him on the Larry King Show frequently. In forming whatever impression you get of Deepak this afternoon I am sure you have already come to the conclusion he is a very bright and gifted thinker. He is a man of great depth, tremendous vision, and extraordinary commitment. He is more than a physician, he is a metaphysician. He is more than a physicist, he is a metaphysicist. Most importantly, the thing I would like to share with you about this, and what makes me particularly grateful to be with him tonight, is that the man I know in private is the exact identical man you will see tonight in public. It's a wonderful statement about the quality of his commitment to what we're going to create together, that he is here totally as he does at all times for the Academy, without benefit of any fee whatsoever. He came tonight because he would like to help, if he can, catalyze a conversation in you, and with you, that we think will end up being the change.

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First of all I want to thank my friend Rinaldo for bringing me to the World Business Academy, a world that I had never been exposed to. I was just amazed at the kind of practical things that Rinaldo and the World Business Academy were doing in the world of material existence, the world of business. It opened my eyes and actually helped me join the board of a Fortune 500 company on the NY Stock Exchange. We are working together as part of the governance committee and, frankly speaking, I am learning a lot.

Over the years the way I have lived my life is that I have explored the world of consciousness, but haven't ever worried about practical consequences, and yet somehow nature, God, the luminous mystery of existence has supported whatever I've done. When I interview (These days I am preparing a book on leadership in the business, corporate and political worlds.) one of the things I ask people is, "What make you so extraordinarily successful?" Without exception, after they say the usual things, they all say one of the following:

"God was on my side."

"I happened to be lucky."

"I happened to be in the right place at the right time."

"It seemed like I was in a state of grace."

"Nature supported me."

"It was a series of coincidences."

"There was a lot of synchronicity."

{**Ed. Note:** At this point Deepak related an anecdote about his first arrival as an MD in the United States and his transient infatuation with buying objects on credit.]



A Definition of Consciousness

It took three or four years to recognize that I had become a superb technician who knew everything about the human body and a terrible healer because I knew nothing about the soul. Slowly things turned around. And here I am talking to you about soul or spirit. Over the last 30 years we've seen a lot of really good understanding of what consciousness is, and I use the word "consciousness" synonymously with spirit, with the essence of our existence, with being, with life, with awareness – they are all in a way synonymous.

There is an ever-present witnessing awareness in you, and in that awareness thoughts come and go. A thought comes and then it goes. In that awareness emotions come and then they disappear. In that awareness perceptions of the world come – you see things, hear things, taste, smell, all of that – they come and they disappear. In that same ever-present witnessing awareness the molecules of your body come and go. Your biology comes in certain ways, acts in certain ways, and then disappears. In that same awareness social interactions come and go. In that same awareness you experience all kinds of environments; they come and they go. And everything that we call an experience, whether it's perception or cognition or moods or feelings or biology or social interaction or environments or forces of nature that we deal with – all these things are in a way impermanent, transient behaviors of the universe that happen in the ever-present witnessing awareness that we call our "soul."

When you were a baby, that presence was there. You had a different body, you had different emotions, you had a different personality, you had different thoughts, but the presence that's there now was there when you were a baby. It was there when you were a teenager. It's there now. It'll be there when you are an old person. And if you really, really become intimate with that presence, then you will recognize that even birth and death are transient behaviors of the universe in that presence.

That presence is something that exists outside space-time. It is transcendent and imminent at the same time. It has no beginning in time. It has no ending in time. It has no edges in space. It therefore cannot be either created or destroyed. In the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna says, "Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot wet it. Wind cannot dry it. Weapons cannot shatter it. It has no beginning. It has no ending. It has no edges in space."

I would ask you sometime to look at Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time* where he says that we live in a universe that in its essential reality has no beginning in time, has no ending in time, and has no edges in space. And if you try and conceptualize that, it's impossible. Your mind will reel in bewilderment, because as soon as you say there is a beginning, then your mind says, "What's there before the beginning?" As soon as you say there is an end, your mind says, "What's there after the ending?" As soon as you say there are edges in space, then you ask, "What is there after the outermost edge?"

Our new science is actually stranger than we can think. The great wisdom traditions have taken to the same point for thousands of years. They say if you can think about something, if you can perceive it, if you can experience

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it through your five senses, if you can conceptualize it, and visualize, then it's *not real*. [This is] because it's a transient behavior of something you cannot conceptualize, but without which there would be no conception...something that you cannot visualize, without which there would be no visualization. Something that you cannot perceive through your senses, but without which there would be nothing to perceive. Something that you cannot touch or feel, but without which there would be no touching or feeling. And that one thing is what we today in our world call "consciousness," which we are trying to wake up.

There is a very interesting story of the Lord Buddha when he was dying, and one of his disciples, Ananda, stood there and said, "So, who *are* you? Are you God?"

And Buddha said, "I am not God."

He said, "Are you a prophet?" Buddha said, "I am not a prophet."

He said, "Are you a Messiah, a messenger, etc.?" And Buddha said no to all these questions.

And finally Ananda said, "Who *are* you?!" and he shook him.

And in his deathbed, the last words that the Buddha uttered were, "I am awake."

Awakening To Discontinuity

That is what we are doing here, waking up to our essential reality. Today it's not necessarily all the time through philosophical, esoteric metaphysics, or trying to understand Eastern philosophies. Rather it can be through the window of science itself. It you stay with the current terminology of science, one of the words that you are going to hear a lot about is a word that is creeping up into the scientific literature both in physics and the world of consciousness and that word is "discontinuity." So if you are going to write down one word tonight, write down "discontinuity."

Scientists are telling us that the world appears to our senses to be continuous experience, but actually it's a discontinuity...that the world is only perceptually an experience of continuity. In reality it's a discontinuity.

A good example is to try to understand that if you go to see a movie, the movie on the screen is a continuity. When you go to the projection room you realize that the movie is actually a series of still frames with little spaces in between...there's a still frame, there's a space, there's a still frame, there's a space. If I move the reel fast enough, about 24 frames a second, then I cannot see the gap; I cannot see the "off." I can only see the still frames because they move so fast. My senses cannot catch the "off." They can only catch the "on" of the still frame. The continuity appears in my consciousness when the real fact is one of discontinuity.

When I watch a Christmas light on a Christmas tree, there's a light going around the Christmas tree. All the light bulbs are going on and off. That's a discontinuity. If it happens very fast, sequentially, then in my consciousness, because I cannot catch the "off," I can only catch the "on," I experience a continuous moving light, like a neon sign or a Christmas light going around

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a Christmas tree. I watch an image on my television screen move from here to here; an automobile goes right across the screen. Then actually all that happens is [that] electrons and photons appear and disappear very fast in a certain sequence, and I create the image in my consciousness that shows that this image is going from here to here.

I am hope I am clear on what I mean with the word "discontinuity"..that the universe at its most fundamental levels is like that. It's a flashing on and off and a huge electromagnetic storm. Everything that we call reality and the perception of reality is a result of that on-off behavior of the universe. That is both objective reality and subjective reality. Right now as I am speaking to you, my vocal cords are going on and off, they are vibrating, and as a result of that the atmosphere is going on and off. As a result of that your eardrums are going on and off. As a result of that there's an on-off electrical signal to your brain, where finally as a result of all this activity, there's a binary code of photons or charges that goes on-off across cell membranes of neurons...and you have experience of me speaking to you.

How that happens, by the way, nobody really understands, because your brain, which is encased in your skull, has no direct experience of the world. Your brain responds to things like pH, chemicals, hormones, body temperatures, all of that activity finally becomes that binary code of charges – plus-minus across cell membranes – so if you could hear it, it would sound like dit dit ditditdit. Some of that right now is becoming the experience of sound, and of touch, and of sight, and of taste, and of smell. How the brain manufactures this reality we don't know.

[Sir Arthur Eddington](#), one of the greatest scientists of the last century said, "Something unknown is doing we don't know what." [*Laughter.*] That's the best we can say of perception. That's the best we can say. You are seeing me because of that on-off, and everything you experience because of so-called objective reality is the on-off of the universe.

So if I put my hand on your thigh and I don't move it, after a while you won't know it exists. But then if I move it you might say, "What the heck are you trying to do!" All of our subjective realities, imagine a sunset on the ocean. Imagine a candle in a darkroom? Do you see that in your imagination somewhere? Do you see a candle in a dark room? Imagine the voice of your mother. Imagine the face of your child. Imagine a full moon, a starry night, and as soon as you have that thought you feel images, sound, sensation subjectively. Those are just all binary codes of photons in your brain.

The Role of Photons

Today many scientists are telling us that photons, which are the most fundamental behavior of the universe, are actually the carriers of both subjective and objective information. If I send you an email, a message on your cell phone or SMS, or if you search the information highway on the internet, that's all information that's carried through photons. That's objective information. But subjective information is also like that. And since photons permeate the whole universe, and are the carriers of both subjective and objective information, there is a group of very, very cutting-edge scientists



Sir Arthur Eddington

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who are saying that is evidence that the universe is imbued with subjectivity. If you want to read a little bit more about this, go to Herms Romijn. He is no longer in this domain with us; he has passed on. But he was a neuroscientist in Holland and he wrote some extraordinary papers on how the universe is actually conscious. And that it is imbued with subjectivity. The universe is not dead, it's living, it's conscious, it thinks, maybe not in English with an Indian accent, but it's a thinking universe. It's a creative universe. It recreates itself. It is an evolving universe. It is a feeling universe. When science begins to tell us that, and that the great wisdom traditions have told us that, and when are now at a stage in our evolution where we are becoming conscious and aware of that, then, in fact, understanding what's really happening in the universe and its evolutionary processes is what's bringing you and me here together to talk about these things, to talk about the understanding of consciousness in the world of business and the world of politics and the world of government, and in society, and ultimately recognizing what has already been said many times, that we are not alone in this universe, that we are part of a great web of being, a great chain of being, and that our essential reality is contextual and relational and holistic and nurturing.

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Or if you don't like the word "God," you can say that acausal, non-local, quantum mechanical inter-relatedness, where everything is inseparable from everything else. Lack of understanding of that over the past few hundred years has actually brought us to this place where we recognize that our understanding of that [idea], our going back to that, is so crucial to restoring balance in nature, to participating in the evolutionary processes of nature, to joining hands with the harmonious elements and forces of the universe to further its evolution.

It's not just doing this here or there: it's doing everything all at once. Because consciousness, the ground of being, is what differentiates into everything that we call reality. Whether it's objective reality or subjective reality.

Five Discontinuous Findings

I was talking about the on-off of the universe, so we know now what's in all of the universe: it's vibration at a most fundamental level. The essential task of science today is to find out what is going on in the "off." We know what's in the "on." There are five things everybody agrees exist in the "off."

We had a conference at our center about two years ago on Science and Spirituality where people like [Hans Peter Dürr](#), [Academy Fellow] [Amit Goswami](#), and other eminent scientists from all over the world gathered to discuss what I've just mentioned: discontinuity.

We asked scientists what's happening in the discontinuity and there were five things for sure:

1. In the "off" of the universe there is no information, there is no energy, there is no space-time or matter. There are only **superpositions of possibilities**. It is the immeasurable potential of all that was, all that is, and all that will ever be. It is everything that exists in imagination, and beyond.



2. The discontinuity, **a place of non-local correlation**, is where everything is instantly correlated with everything else. Einstein tried to describe this as a mathematical anomaly. It was known initially as the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox, or Bell's Theorem later, but anyway today there's scientific proof there's a domain of existence where everything is inseparably one, and where everything is inseparably correlated with everything else. It is the only way we can explain the behavior of biological organisms and our organic planet and probably our organic universe.

How does a human body think thoughts, clean, play a piano, kill germs, remove toxins, and make a baby all at the same time? And what's the string that attracts the movements of stars and planets because your biological rhythms are actually the symphony of the universe? How does a single cell differentiate into a hundred trillion cells in just 50 replications? One cell becomes two, two becomes four, four becomes sixteen, 64, and then the mathematics gets really out of control, and in 50 replications you have 100,000,000,000,000 cells, which is more than all the stars in the Milky Way galaxy, and they are all differentiating simultaneously and correlating their behavior with everything else.

And that is what is happening in nature right now. If you look at the ecosystem, weather patterns, everything that we call the environment (it's the wrong word by the way), there is no such thing as a biological organism in an environment. They are the same thing as different patterns of behavior of the total universe. What we call the environment is our extended body. You have a personal body, you have an extended body, and they are both equally yours and they are both crucial to your existence. If those trees didn't breathe you wouldn't breathe.

And if you didn't breathe those trees wouldn't breathe. Your body is recycled dust and your body is recycled water, and your breath is recycled air, and everything that you call your Self is actually the total universe and has that pattern of behavior right now.

Everything is inseparable, correlated with everything else. And if we weren't scientists we would say it's a field of omniscience, a field of omnipresence, a field of omnipotence.

3. The third thing that exists in the discontinuity is a **proliferation of uncertainty**. There is a reason for that: the more uncertain a field becomes the more creative it becomes. Creativity is a function of uncertainty. The more you embrace uncertainty the more impetus there is for creativity because if you are certain about everything there is no place for creativity.

4. The fourth thing that is happening in the discontinuity is these **quantum leaps in creativity**. I think you have [Academy Fellow] [Elisabet Sahtouris](#) talking to your tomorrow, and she will talk about these gaps in evolution where there are jumps from amphibians to birds, and from primates to humans, and possibly from where you are today to the next jump. Rumi has a poem where he says, "I have lived on the lip of insanity wanting to know reasons, knocking at the door. The door opens and I have been knocking from the inside." Then he says, "When I die I will soar with angels and when I die to

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I am going to ask you eight questions....

the angels, what I shall become you cannot imagine."

This is a field of quantum creativity where the discontinuity allows you to move from one place to another place, without transition. It's a jump -- so a pattern of thinking and behavior of the universe, and then a new pattern of thinking and behavior of the universe with no intervening pattern of behavior of the universe.

5. Observer effects. [John Wheeler](#) says that in the absence of a conscious sentient being the Universe doesn't exist. Just as you cannot have an electrical current in the absence of a positive and a negative terminal, both secure, you cannot have a manifest universe in the absence of a Creator on one side and somebody to observe the creation on the other side. And the reason I took so much time to go into this right now is that these are the attributes of your own Self. These are the attributes of your soul. Your soul is not a thing, nor is it even a process. It is a field of infinite possibilities that gives rise to all processes and all things. Your soul is the place where everything is connected with everything else, where when you connect with that place, you actually connect with all of creation, and where love, compassion, understanding, creativity, insight, imagination, decision-making, all become part of the evolutionary process of the universe itself. Your soul is the place where you erase uncertainty and chaos which is happening in the world right now. All that uncertainty and chaos has the impetus for that next quantum leap of creativity. Your soul at the most fundamental level co-creates all of what we call reality with the Creator, or God, or that luminous mystery from where we all come, where there is no task right now more important than that of connecting with our soul. That's the change. We have a rift in our collective soul. In our Biblical traditions, our wisdom traditions say, "What good does it do a man to gain the world, but lose his soul?" That's the task we have today for our humanity. Your soul is a confluence of all your past experiences, which in Eastern tradition we call "karma," which leads to memory, desire, and creates the context, meanings and relationships of your life.

Eight Questions

I am going to ask you eight questions, and we'll see how that applies to everything that Rinaldo wants to ask or you will have to ask:

1. Can you choose three words to describe how you felt when you had a peak experience? An experience of whatever Maslow might have called self-actualization, peak experience, unity, consciousness, when we say, "Oh, the beauty of the mountain! It was breathtaking. Time stood still." A peak experience can happen when you fall in love, in meditation, in prayer, the experience of a miracle, a newborn child, even physical love, sexuality. So write down three words that describe a peak experience, maybe in childhood when you were playing.
2. Can you write down in three words what you think your purpose in life is?
3. In three words or three phrases, can you describe what your contribution is to your family or to your community or to your business or to society or to the world? It's the same. If you can't do it with your family, you can't do it



with your world.

4. Write down the names of five or six people in history or mythology or religion that you would consider your heroes or heroines, or people who inspire you.
5. Write down qualities – write down three words – that you most look for in a good friend.
6. In three words, what you think are your unique talents, your unique capacities.
7. What are the best qualities you express in your personal relationships?
8. The eighth question is to ask very fundamentally, what do I want? If I could get everything that I want, what would it be?

And right there, in the words that you have written down, is the essence of your being. Because your soul is a confluence of meaning, context, archetypal things, and relationships that create all of reality to appear as your mind with its perceptions and its thoughts and its feelings; it appears as your biology, and as the world that you find yourself in.

It is not a personality profile. If I were doing a personality profile, I would ask you how much money do you make. Or what's your job title? Or who are the people that you influence-peddle with? Who are your cronies? How do you engage powermongering? That would all be part of your personality profile. We are not talking about that. We are talking at a very fundamental level where karma, memory and desire at the level of the soul create the meanings, contexts, and relationships and also the archetypal themes of our lives. What I am saying to you is if you just did one thing today, if you said you are going to live your life from this level, [then] every choice you make is going to be congruent with who I really am – not my self-image – but my true self. And then apply it to business, to well being, to politics, apply it to anything else. Act from the level of your being. And when we act from the level of our being, then the world will reflect that.

Differentiations Without Separation

Consciousness differentiates into everything that we call existence, and differentiation is not separation. So just as your DNA differentiates into your sensory apparatus, into your eyes and ears and brains and fingernails and hands and liver and spleen and all the other organs, so does consciousness differentiate into biological organisms and the world.

For the world out there is not independent of us. In fact, the world and we are the same. There is differentiation of a single reality into us, the observer, into that which we observe. Science has made the fatal mistake of ignoring the observer; only the observed is the subject of science. Recently it has discovered we have a biological organism and an environment. What's the connection? We have a mind and the body. What's the connection?

It's an interesting exercise because first we separate something that wasn't separate, and then we spend 100 years to say what's the connection? They are the same thing. A single reality differentiates into sensory apparatus,

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Signposts

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and sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, into biological organisms and the environment, into mind and the body, into thoughts and perception: it's one reality. You get hold of that one reality.

The Vedanta says, "Know that one thing, by knowing which everything else is known. And change that one thing by changing which, everything else changes." That's what we're here to talk about: to be that change. Mahatma asked us, "Can you be that change that you wish to see in the world?" Because if you are not peaceful within, then don't even think about world peace. If you don't know how to love, then don't talk about love. If you haven't experienced compassion at the deepest core of your being, where there is compassion for other people, for nature, or species, then there is no hope for healing." The word "healing" is the same as the word "holy." And the word "holy" is the same as the word "wholeness," which means that at the core of my being I and you in the same place. You are not out there. That's a perceptual distortion. You are not out there! That's a very convincing hallucination. You are in me. You exist in me and I exist in you, and the place that you and I exist together is not a place. It is a state of consciousness. And when we get to that level of consciousness, then everything changes.

About the author:

Acknowledged as one of the world's greatest leaders in the field of mind body medicine, Deepak Chopra, M.D. continues to transform our understanding of the meaning of health. Through his creation of The [Chopra Center For Well Being in La Jolla](#), California in 1995, Chopra established a formal vehicle for the expansion of his healing approach using the integration of the best of western medicine with natural healing traditions. Dr. Chopra serves as the Director of Education at The Chopra Center for Well Being which offers training programs in mind body medicine (Journey into Healing). The University of California, San Diego School of Medicine has granted continuing medical education credits for this program, which satisfies requirements for the American Medical Association Physician's Recognition Award. Through his partnership with David Simon, M.D. and numerous health care professionals in both conventional and complementary healing arts, Chopra's work is changing the way the world views physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social wellness.

Chopra is known worldwide for his published works. The author of more than 36 books and more than 100 audio, video and CD-ROM titles, he has been published on every continent and in dozens of languages.

Through The Chopra Center For Well Being, Dr. Chopra is revolutionizing common wisdom about the crucial connection between body, mind, spirit, and healing. His mission of "bridging the technological miracles of the West with the wisdom of the East" remains his thrust as he and his colleagues conduct public seminars and workshops and provide training for health care professionals around the world. Dr. Chopra is a fellow of the American College of Physicians and a member of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists.

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