

BOOK REVIEW

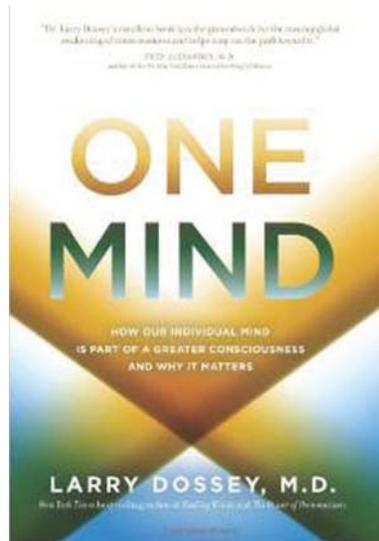
One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of a Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters by Larry Dossey. Hay House, 2014. 339 pp. ISBN 978-1401943158.

It seems that every cultural and spiritual tradition has some form of the proposition that we are all part of a greater whole. This goes by many names: Oneness, Unity, Wholeness, Godhead, Brahman, . . . , and it is something philosophers and teachers tell us in many ways. Alan Watts is quoted saying, “You and I are all as much continuous with the physical universe as a wave is continuous with the ocean.” Swami Vivikenanda says, “All differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything.” And from Osho, “We are all different expressions of one reality, different songs of one singer, different dances of one dancer, different paintings—but the painter is one.”

Larry Dossey is an integrator, who sees the commonalities and fundamental connections of apparently separate conceptions of the world. He brings this ability to bear in books from which I learn new things and creative ways of thinking about old ones, about ideas that have been around for a long time. It is a talent or a gift he has, but I think, as Edison said, it is 1% inspiration and the rest perspiration. Of course people who are so effective in their work love what they do, so it’s no sweat. His most recent book, *One Mind*, is a gathering and culmination of work by the author, who has touched on the same themes many times before. These are the connections that empower *Healing Words* and those which underlie *The Power of Premonitions*, two of his earlier books about ideas that have been on his mind and growing in clarity since his days as a battlefield surgeon in VietNam. Now Dossey is putting it all together, so that his readers can shortcut the process that engages so many of us, trying to integrate our spiritual and experiential lives. He asks who is in charge of the One Mind, and waves away the long list of gods and gurus and recommends to us that “as understanding grows, all descriptions of the Absolute are eventually transcended.”

In his latest book, Dossey looks at a special form of the oneness proposition, namely that we are all integrated in One Mind. As always, Dr. Dossey presents the broad scholarly picture, with an amazing array of ideas and extracts from a wide spectrum of literature resources. The result

is a persuasive case for the overarching idea—that our minds are not isolated and separate even though we tend to perceive the situation this way. There is just one mind, and it is the source of all individual consciousness. That we don't know this or have any real ability to assess the matter directly is an issue we should consider, and this is the point or one important point that this excellent book addresses. Dossey believes that an acceptance and understanding of our participation in one mind is essential—it has the potential to lead humanity away from the divisions and perceived enmities which are on track to destroy the world we know. What we need is recognition



and practice of our better selves, and that means recognition that we are truly interconnected and interdependent. We have urgent issues to address and they are so daunting that we feel helpless. But when we move as one, we do move mountains. This is Dossey's motivation: to help us see, accept, and act with the collaborative wisdom of One Mind.

The vehicle for Dossey's argument is a series of vignettes with the common theme of nonlocal effects of consciousness and mind. He recounts experiences that are unaccountable without a concept of links between people separated in time and space. The anecdotes are about the extension of mind into the world outside our bodies, where our connections become clear because we experience a sharing of ideas and emotions that is simply not explainable in the ordinary language of science. And on the other hand, he also looks to some of the most respected of scientists, people such as Erwin Schroedinger, William James, Albert Einstein, and David Bohm, for expressions of the theme in terms that are scientifically precise, but integrative across the whole range of human experience. Dossey says, "If we are to have a ghost of a chance of understanding the One Mind . . . we are going to have to learn to think nonlocally, not locally." The language of quantum physics may help us to do so. Dossey quotes Shroedinger's biographer, Moore: "Schroedinger and Heisenberg and their followers created a universe based on the superimposed inseparable waves of probability amplitudes. This view would be entirely consistent with the Vedantic concept of the All in One." We need the help of our most creative

minds still, for the classical view of separation is deeply ingrained. Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon who was profoundly affected by his own near-death experience says, "There's something going on . . . about consciousness that our primitive models don't get. It's far more profound than I ever realized before."

The book is filled with examples and quotes, and an enormous amount of information. Dossey covers the territory of many specialists in such depth and with such clarity it is in some ways better than reading the original works. Naturally, he would want us to do the latter, and he provides the means. The book includes almost 50 pages of endnotes and references plus a terrific index that itself is almost 30 pages.

Here is a sampling of concepts that you might not think about without the urging of someone who has paid attention to interconnection and nonlocality. Empathic resonance may be one of the most potent drivers of the linkages across time and space. Medical intuitions, when they are respected, save lives. Ecological validity helps researchers look at the actual world, not a confusing abstraction. Ineffable factors play a large, but unacknowledged role in the thinking of both ordinary folks and professionals in science, medicine, and academia. Interconnection occurs at deep levels in a natural and normal medium we usually cannot see, much as a fish cannot see the water in which it swims.

Dossey touches on some of the difficulties that the construct of One Mind faces. Most of the Western world has a notion of individuality that is ingrained by education, leading to something close to fear of the merging implied by ideas of interconnection. We worry about "who gets the credit" for a new idea that in so many cases emerges from shared thinking, from "standing on the shoulders . . ." Fortunately, there are vast numbers of messages from our best thinkers assuring us that such worries are misplaced. As Dossey says, "the urge to become absorbed into something greater . . . underlies the drive of many highly creative individuals." Arthur Koestler, reflecting on his insights while imprisoned, became certain that a higher order of reality existed, and that "the isolation, separateness and spatio-temporal limitations were merely optical illusions." It is an important matter, this illusion. Dossey gives the example of a conservative director of nursing, angry about her staff taking a weekend course in Therapeutic Touch (a healing practice). When the staff came back to work, they discovered a sign saying "There Will Be No Healing in this Hospital!"

His breadth of thinking and documentation is wide, but there is an area of relevance that is not covered in this book and I wish Dossey had given these questions some attention and research. How does the fact that some people have no interest in sharing in the One Mind affect the proposition,

and how can we accommodate those who may actively avoid interactions or any truck with the rest of us? I can see it might be argued that there is no choice; that every mind is integral to and sourced in the One Mind, but it seems a bit like expecting a family of sharks to be able to integrate with a school of dolphins. A few years ago I set up a survey using an interesting methodology, requiring selection of the preferred answer to a difficult question from pairs randomly selected from a pool. The question was, "How can we learn to talk with people on the other side of the fence?" The results showed most clearly that nobody has a singularly effective answer. It is common knowledge that people of privilege simply have no inkling of the life experiences suffered by people in poverty. That's because there is practically no communication across the fence. There is no shared consciousness at any level we can envision. I wonder how that can be, if we are all in and of the One Mind. To be sure, this question is mixing levels—the mundane direct experience versus the cosmic scheme of things—but I think it is germane because it speaks to the potential applications of the insights in Dossey's book. I hope many people take the message from the book that we are both capable of and responsible for efforts to activate our participation in an effective new level of consciousness that partakes of the One Mind proposition. And I hope people from all walks of life, including the other side of the fence, will read this excellent book.

Let me end with an extract from a speech of Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, quoted by Dossey.

Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed—be it ecological, social, demographic, or a general breakdown of civilization—will be unavoidable.

Havel sounds pessimistic, but he sees a way forward through:

Transcendence as a deeply and joyously experienced need to be in harmony even with what we ourselves are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in time and space, but with which we are mysteriously linked because, together with us, all this constitutes a single world.

ROGER NELSON