Centenary Gathering Keynote Address

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On the Significance of Krishnamurti's Teachings

Keynote Address for the Krishnamurti Centenary
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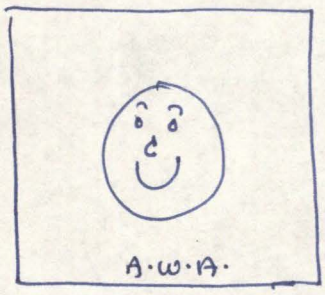

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It is the highest honor and privilege to have been asked to make these opening remarks on this unique occasion, the one hundredth year of Krishnamurti's birth. This occasion is not unique because it is a commemoration, even a centenary. In our time when gatherings, commemorations, centenary celebrations come and go with a careless speed, we are apt to take them in as thoughtlessly as we are quick to forget them. As we say, they simply come and go.

This particular centenary is unique for us because for ourselves present it is both the first and the last of its kind. It is unlikely that any of us here expects to be in the land of the living in the year 2095; at that time some future generation will celebrate the second Krishnamurti Centenary in our absence provided that we as a species have not destroyed ourselves physically or spiritually between now and then.

This opening talk falls under the rubric keynote address which means that its task is to set forth both the topic and its tone for the duration of our Gathering's dialogues. When Mark Lee, our Foundation's Director, invited me to this task I asked him what topic he felt suitable. He replied, "How about the significance of Krishnamurti's teachings?" I agreed. How easy to agree; how difficult to ponder.

I use the word ponder here rather than the word think since the word think does not immediately convey whether it is calculative thinking or meditative thinking that is meant. Calculative thinking computes, meditative thinking ponders. Calculative thinking strides through the world in seven league boots ever in faster pursuit of whatever lies outside the means it uses to reach it. It is eminently useful in the practical order; it satisfies our material needs and wants and, as for wants, it even invents them. Yet, it is ever restless and cannot come to peace and even when it most satisfies our material needs, let alone our wants, it can do so only intermittently. In the material order we necessarily move from hunger to hunger, shelter to shelter, vacation to vacation since all things pass and nothing stays. However, calculative thinking is absolutely necessary for our material survival; yet, ironically, in our time, the misuse and abuse of it and of technology has engendered a rapacity that seeks to devour the very world itself which means our own extinction.

How can things have come to such a pass? Very simply. More and more of us are coming to believe and practice, and the young now are even taught so, that calculative thinking is the only way of thinking. Unless calculative thinking is restored to its healthy role, the next century, which is less than five years away, will see the beginning of a fatal denaturing of our human being. This is because our human nature is essentially a meditative one and, further, unless meditative thinking can still be restored to a reciprocal relation with healthy calculative thinking our current spiritual disease which is life-threatening is bound to

become wholly fatal and the prophecy just mentioned -- indeed, not mine alone -- is bound to come to pass.

We are now in a position to see the beginning of an answer to the question: What is the significance, the meaning, the importance of Krishnamurti's teachings? They are of supreme importance since they are nothing if not meditational in the deepest and proper sense of that word. As such the teachings draw us to return to our origin, our essential nature by which I do not mean some theory of our prehistoric ancestry. Such theories are biologically and psychologically interesting but spiritually inept. They are spiritually inept because they reduce our nature to a seed once cradled in the dark womb of matter which on coming to flower cannot raise us to a contemplation of the boundless but only to a calculation of our material horizons.

Krishnamurti's teachings, if lived, and that is an immense *if*, restore us to an intuition of our original nature, our natural state, our original innocence none of which is a private possession. On our awaking from the illusion that these are our private possessions we realize an absolute freedom of spirit which is love, and love is the source of creation and the point from which genuine meditation and self-inquiry can authentically begin.

We have, now, one of the answers to the question of the significance of Krishnamurti's teachings which is that they are genuinely meditational in the deepest and proper sense of that word. As such they recall us to our natural state which is not a private possession. This is the state of our original nature, a nature given to us in advance with our being as human.

To speak of original nature in the possessive, as *our* own, is very apt to mislead. It seems to indicate that it is something we "have." The truth of the matter is otherwise. Rather, being-as-human disposes that original nature has us. It has us *freely* not coercively. If it had us coercively we should be unable to indulge in self-betrayal; also, we should be unable to fall into self-misunderstanding. These disorders, these conditions are functional only and will yield to remedy; nevertheless their momentum is such that they can afflict one's person for a whole lifetime.

Awaking to it that original nature has us rather than our having it as a personal and private possession goes far to clarify why Krishnamurti consistently refused to be treated as a personality figure or to pose as an authority crutch for followers. Awaking to the impersonal character of original nature further clarifies why Krishnamurti refused to establish his teachings upon the twin pillars of depth psychology, namely, experience and personality. The vagaries of so called "lived experience" are ephemeral and as inconstant as the states of consciousness. His statement that consciousness is its content is exact. Consciousness is tied to change and therefore cannot measure itself. Only awareness can specify the true character of each change in the content of consciousness.

The pure act of attention within awareness is not subject to a conflict of motives and so is able to negate totally the false in the false and to see the truth in the false. It does not measure the truth by a proposition on the strength of which it gives itself airs that it knows the truth in advance. This most common self-misunderstanding reveals its absurdity when one awakes to it that one cannot have the truth but only *be* it. A pure act of attention secures itself against the humbug of the self-misunderstanding that imagines one can have the truth in advance. It secures itself in this way: While it is seeing what is false it is upon the self-same present instant seeing what is truth and in this seeing both seer and seen fall away. The persona of the seer and the abstraction from the seen are not actors in the play. There is only seeing in the presence of the present. This seeing manifests itself not in a psychological explanation but in action which is death and creation upon the same instant.

On awaking to awareness and its pure act of attention Krishnamurti's statement that perception is the action becomes lucidly intelligible. This suggests a second significance of the teachings, namely, awareness as the choiceless watcher of the vagaries of consciousness is what puts self-inquiry on a firm footing. Here self-inquiry, that rarest of human acts, though the only saving one among them, is freed from the modern subjectivist view of it as an internal motion of the psyche.

On pondering further what puts self-inquiry on a firm footing, watching choicelessly the erratic movements of consciousness, one asks: What is the significance of thought in the teachings? This question is crucial for a balanced contemplation of the teachings. I am sure I am not alone in coming across person after person, each having the mistaken and curious notion that the teachings hold that there is something intrinsically wrong with thought as such.

Now, if pondering is to rest upon a firm footing it must include thought functionally since there is no pondering without thinking.

This issue concerned me deeply during the course of our eighteen dialogues which are now published under the title, *A Wholly Different Way of Living*. During the thirteenth dialogue I felt it timely to bring the matter before us so as to give Krishnamurti the opportunity to make himself completely clear. I shall quote from the text. My statements are preceded by the letter A and Krishnamurti's by the letter K. The transcript follows:

A. ....One of the things that has concerned me in this series of dialogues is that someone would feel that in our discussions of thought and knowledge what we have been saying is that there is some dysfunction in thought and in knowledge which relates to their own nature, the nature of thought and the nature of knowledge, which could very well give the impression that thought is a disease or that knowledge is a disease, rather than giving the impression, as I have understood from you, that thought and knowledge have their proper uses.

K. Of course.

A. Their natures are not corrupt as such.

K. Certainly not, it is the usage of them.

There is no need to quote further. This is eminently clear. The nature of thought is not corrupt. We corrupt it by misusing it. When this clarification of the nature of thought is brought into relation with the profound statement Krishnamurti made in his *Notebook* that "There's a 'thinking' born out of the total emptiness of the mind...." everything is present to place pondering on a firm footing. Calculative and meditative thought are each given their due. But it is well to remember that whereas meditative thought can put calculative thought in checkmate this is not the case conversely. When this is grasped adequately, one intuits how choiceless awareness and thought's role in self-inquiry reciprocally reinforce each other. Their union in love opens out upon that emptiness which lies beyond thought and the vagaries of consciousness while somehow abiding in them, nearer than hands and feet. This is a second significance of the teachings.

Perhaps this intuition of the unconditioned lay at the heart of Krishnamurti's enigmatic pronouncement that no one had understood him. Happily, however, he added that if the teachings are lived one might touch that focus of understanding and energy that were his.

This enigmatic claim that no one had understood him is not without precedent. In the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu says, "My teachings are easy to understand, easy to practice but no one understands them and no one

practices them." He then goes on to point out that his teachings are sourced in Nature and his deeds destined by Tao; further, he says that since people don't understand this, they don't understand him.

Confucius stated that no one knew him except Heaven. Jesus said to his disciples, "There are many things I would have told you but you cannot bear them." When the acid test of the cross obtained only one man stood with him and a few women. The women showed infinitely more courage than the rest of the men who failed to appear.

One of my most vivid memories of my few informal conversations with Krishnamurti occurred during a break between our dialogues. He stood up, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "I've been saying these things for fifty years" and then fell silent. His meaning was patently clear. He felt he had not succeeded in communicating what he was all about.

These four teachers stand together in at least one respect. They refused to denature their teachings so as to please and make comfortable those who heard them. One is reminded of Plato's point that the proper use of rhetoric is not to persuade but to speak the true.

These teachers were not purveyors of ideas, theories, visions and cosmic explanations. If I have understood anything whatsoever of their teachings it is this: They taught what it is to exist in what one understands. Please let me repeat this. They taught what it is to exist in what one understands. This is a third significance of Krishnamurti's teachings. He taught what it is to exist in what one understands. An event in his life will bring these words precisely into their own. On August 2, 1929, he dissolved the Order of the Star of the East of which he was the Head. Momentous as this was for the organization and the whole Theosophical movement it must have been as nothing contrasted with what it was for himself. Please do not misunderstand. I am not here speaking for Krishnamurti. That is absurd and patently impossible. I speak only as one who has some acquaintance with the price of self-inquiry. Authentic self-inquiry begins inevitably at a point of no return, an either/or which, unless one bolts from it, entails a psychological death which is also a creation.

If one has undergone that death which is also a creation it is not difficult to resonate empathically to another's like ordeal by which I do not mean the conjuring of fanciful images of the other's psyche and all that rubbish but the sober recognition that for oneself and the other that point of no return is here to stay. Isn't this what Krishnamurti meant when he said "The first step is the last step"? And isn't this step the step into what he called the vacant mind? Surely this mind must be the mind which is not limited by its own essence.

On pondering this further, the question arises, "If the point of no return is here to stay, how is it the case that the first step is the last step?" This is because every year, month, day, hour, minute, second, indeed every instant is a point of no return. Since it belongs to the instant, the point of no return is without duration, unlike the second, minute and hour. Yet instants follow upon each other and it is this apparent continuity that invites a self-misunderstanding. On one hand the instant is on the side of the timeless since it is without duration and on the other hand since instants succeed one another they seem to be a matter of time.

This felt difficulty vanishes when one perceives that each present instant has within it the unprecedented. The teachings bear witness to this. Krishnamurti's *Notebook* states repeatedly that the death of yesterday is the complete uncertainty of tomorrow, that love and death have no continuity; further, that the totality attends to the fragment even though the fragment cannot understand the whole.

This helps our pondering to a happy issue. The unprecedented in every present instant opens on the eternal

yet the fragments of time are continuous. Intellect finds this contradiction unsolvable. But intelligence is not embarrassed by it. Intelligence discovers the solution on awaking to the *timely* and the fitting which primal intuition reveals upon the instant. This timeliness abides between the timeless and time.

More significant than his words alone is Krishnamurti's life as he described it in his address on dissolving The Order of the Star. He said, "I have made this decision. It is not from a momentary impulse. I have not been persuaded to it by anyone. I am not persuaded in such things. For two years I have been thinking about this, slowly, carefully, patiently, and I have now decided to disband the Order, as I happen to be its Head. You can form other organizations and expect someone else. With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages, new decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free."

Note how that he said "For two years I have been thinking about this, slowly, carefully, patiently...." Now patience, unlike endurance has no agenda. Unlike endurance which is a matter of time, patience abides through time without being *of* it. The beautiful Greek word for patience, *hypomon* means, literally, to stay behind, to stay under. It has the closest relation to one of the great words in our English tongue, namely, understand. What is it that we stand under when we understand? It is a pressure from above that gently weights us down into ever greater depth toward our original nature, our original innocence which is not a private possession but that emptiness without a centre, that silence "in which and from which all things flow and have their being."

Could it be that such a standing under is the beginning of living out the teachings, the beginning of the first step which is the last step? This question, like the teachings themselves, is not addressed to the crowd, indeed cannot be so. The significance of the teachings is not available to the collective but to the single self only, the one alone in one's *un*-lonely aloneness, in the deepest depth beneath the ephemeral flux of personality; this only one with ears to hear and eyes to see who *listens* and perceives. Such a one, like Krishnamurti, stands patiently under the suasion of the eternal, listening in the valley of the timely between the peaks of the timeless and time yet upon each instant, is absolutely at one with that emptiness without a centre, the silence "in which and from which all things flow and have their being."

And so the first step is the last step into the pathless land of the true, into the fullness of the peace that passeth understanding, for the former things have truly passed away.

As a single self, a friend in dialogue with single selves and friends, I thank you for listening.

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