Can we think together about the crisis we are facing?

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Ten Public Meetings in Ojai, California - 1980

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First Public Talk in Ojai

As you have been told, there will be six talks and four, what we consider, discussions or dialogues. But we thought it would be better to have those four non-talks, to have questions. I think that will be better than having a dialogue, with so many people. Dialogue means really, actually, conversation between two friends, between two people. And as that is not possible we thought it would be good to have questions. You can ask any question you like, the sillier or the most profound questions.

If I may suggest, please don't treat these gatherings as a weekend entertainment. They are rather serious, demandng from each one of us considerable exercise of thought, capacity to investigate, to observe. And during this process perhaps bring about a radical change in the human mind. That is what these meetings are meant to be: that we are here to observe what is happening in the world; and also to observe what is happening to each one of us, inwardly, psychologically, within the skin as it were.

So we're going to first observe what is happening right throughout the world. And to observe one must be necessarily free from any commitment, which is going to be rather difficult, for most of us are committed to something or other. To observe without any prejudice, to observe without any fixed conclusion, to observe without any rationalisation, excuses, any form of belief - just to observe. Perhaps it may be rather difficult for most people, because we are so bound by our own beliefs, by our own prejudices, by our own conclusions, by our own personal inclination and idiosyncrasies. It becomes almost impossible to observe freely, choicelessly. And if we can do that together during these talks and question and answers, then perhaps we can go much deeper and further.

One can observe what is happening in the world: conflict. Wherever you go there is this terrible conflict between man and man, between nation and nations, between religions and religions; the conflict between theoreticians and theologians, Christian theologians and non-Christian theologians, the Communists, the totalitarians, and the believers, those who believe in systems, those who are bound by beliefs; those who are
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completely absorbed by images, religious images, Christian or Hindu, or Buddhist, or your own particular image. So there is this battle going on in the world; tremendous conflict between politicians, between gurus, between every human being outwardly, he is struggling, competing, striving to express himself, to identify himself, to become something. Probably more in this country where success is worshipped, where money, position, status becomes all important.

So there is this tremendous conflict going on, between the scientists, between the priests, between every human being on this unfortunate earth. And nobody seems to be able to resolve this conflict - the economic, the social, the political. Nobody seems to care in the struggle, the very destruction of man, the human being. Nobody has applied their mind and their heart to resolve this problem, this everlasting conflict. Meditation becomes a conflict, to change ourselves becomes a conflict; in any of our relationships, both intimate and otherwise, there is still conflict. Man apparently has lived for many, many million years and has not resolved this problem, after all this time. There is something radically wrong, that human beings, highly - so-called highly - civilised, with a great deal of knowledge, both psychological and scientific, a great deal of struggle, wars, tears, misery, man has not been able, human beings have not been able to resolve this problem. That is the outward world, what is happening there. And nobody seems to feel it is worthwhile to forget, or drop their own particular beliefs, dogmas, political opinions, theories, conclusions, beliefs, and say, come together and resolve this problem. No politicians will do it, no priest will do it, no psychologist will do it, and the scientists will not do it either. Right?

Do you understand the question? See the gravity of the question? Because we are destroying each other by our very strong beliefs, ideologies, concepts, images. And apparently we are incapable of coming together and resolving this problem. That is, thinking together. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats, in this country, will drop their particular line of thinking, or their personal ambitions, their craving for power, position. Because it is only when we all work together, think together, feel together the necessity, the absolute necessity, then perhaps we can resolve the problem. But none of them will do it because it means giving up their personal pride, vanity, position, power.

And the world is preparing for war, appalling violence. If you disagree with somebody they come and shoot you. All consideration for human feeling, human dignity, human freedom, has gradually been destroyed. So that is the outward world in which we live. I don't think anybody, in his mind, can deny all this.

And inwardly, in our psyche, inside our skin, in our thoughts, in our feelings, we are also in conflict. Always striving to become better, to become something, to achieve success, position, inwardly. This battle is going on inside. And again we don't seem able to resolve it, in spite of the psychologists, in spite of the psychotherapists, in spite of the confessions of Catholics, in spite of all the institutions, organisations that they have in this country. If you don't feel well you take a pill. If you can't stop smoking, then people will help you not to smoke. If you want to talk to god, they will help you. So gradually we are losing our own responsibility, being responsible for our own actions, for our own mind, for our own body. We are gradually, unfortunately, losing everything that matters. This again is true. We are not exaggerating.

So seeing what is happening in the world outside, and also seeing what is happening to each one of us as human beings, to observe this, and seeing the absolute necessity of thinking together. You understand my question? Thinking together. That is, we have conflict, outwardly and inwardly. And unless we resolve this conflict humanity is going to destroy itself.

And since you have been good enough to come here to listen to all this, it becomes very necessary that you and the speaker think together about this conflict. Thinking together implies that both of us put aside, if we are serious, if we know what is happening in the world, if we are responsible for all the things that human beings have done, and feel the necessity of bringing about a radical change in the human psyche, because society cannot be changed unless each human being changes. Seeing all that, we must think together. I do
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not know if you have observed how difficult it is that two people can think together, however intimate they are, man and woman, friends, to think together about something. Here is a crisis we are facing. Not merely political, economic crisis, but much deeper crisis, the crisis in our consciousness, the crisis in our minds. And can we, you and the speaker, think about that together? That is, you give up your conclusion, your position, your beliefs, your personal psychological commitments, and the speaker does it, so that both of us meet, so as to think together whether it is possible to resolve this conflict. You understand my question?

The more you observe, as the speaker has done for the last sixty years, and talked all over the world for that period, the more human beings are becoming uncontrollably mischievous, more violent, asserting their own independence, each one doing what he wants to do, driven by his own pleasure, ‘doing his own thing’ as it is called in this country. So each one is isolating himself and forgetting the rest of mankind. This is happening, again if you observe carefully, both in yourself and the world, that each one of us is pursuing his own desires, his own wants, his own particular idiosyncrasy - what pleases you, do it. Right?

So can we, at least for an hour, and perhaps for the rest of our life, think together? There is thinking together about something. Right? We do think together when there is a crisis, like a terrible war, then we forget our own particular nonsense, and the threat of something much greater, as war, brings us together. That’s obvious. And anybody who disagrees with that is either shot, sent to prison, or called a coward, conscientious objectors and so on and so on. So apparently a great crisis brings man, human beings together - in the name of patriotism, in the name of god, in the name of peace, and so on. But we have no visible, actual crisis as war now, fortunately. And so each one does what he wants. And that pursuit is encouraged. So we are gradually losing our freedom. I wonder if you observe all this.

Considering all this, can you and the speaker think together about this crisis which we are facing? A crisis which is not economic, nor politics, nor social - they are all outward. The crisis is in each one of us. The crisis is in our consciousness, in our minds, in our hearts. And so can we observe that crisis, and come together to resolve that crisis? You understand my statement, so that we can think together about the crisis.

There is also a thinking together without an object, that’s much more complex. Do you understand? That is, we can think together about war. If there is a crisis as war we forget ourselves and be responsible for the whole. Right? So thinking about a crisis is comparatively easy. But thinking together without the object, thinking together without ‘about something’. I wonder if you understand this. It doesn’t matter, we will come to that much later.

So can we, this morning, and subsequent mornings, think together? That is, can we both see the crisis in our minds, in our consciousness, in our hearts, and let us talk about it together. As it is impossible to talk together with so many people, the speaker will talk about it as though he were talking to two people. You understand? That you are alone with the speaker. We are all sitting together in this lovely grove, and see if we can resolve this problem. Not ultimately, not in a few days time - you understand - but in the very process of talking over together resolve the problem. That is, our brain has evolved through time. Right? That brain is not your brain, or my brain, it is the brain of humanity. Right? I wonder if you see. You are following all this? But what we have done is narrowed down that enormous capacity of the brain evolved through time, to the narrow little brain of the ‘me’. You understand? The ‘me’ with my little problems, the ‘me’ with my quarrels, jealousies, anxieties, competition, my success, I must do this, I must not - you follow? This enormous capacity of the brain, which has evolved through millennia upon millennia, has been reduced to something tawdry, something that is, you know, rather dirty.

And the brain has become accustomed to protect itself against any fundamental change. I do not know if you have observed your own brains. I am not the brain specialist, not the psycho-biologist. See what is happening, sirs. That is, scientists are examining matter to find something beyond. You understand? If you have talked to any scientists, or if you are a scientist yourself, you are trying, if you are serious, if you are
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really deeply concerned, you are investigating matter to find or discover something which is the origin of all this, not god, because that is the mere invention of man. We won't go into that for the moment. Instead of going through matter to find something beyond. But we as human beings are part of that matter. You understand? But if we went through ourselves we would go much deeper, much further, we would really come to the truth of that. You are following what I am saying? If I am not clear in my talk, please stop me. Because after all we are trying to communicate with each other, words are necessary. If the speaker uses non-technical words, non any kind of jargon, just speaking ordinary daily language then perhaps it would be easier.

So our brain has evolved through time. Our brain has its own chemical capacity to heal itself, or to resist itself. You'll find out if you go into it. To resist any change which doesn't give it security. And this brain, which is the essence of time - you understand what I'm saying, need I explain all this? I'll have to, I see. All right. Which is the essence of time, because it is the result of time, after many, many, many million years, it has established certain grooves, certain way of thinking, certain activities which are familiar, certain beliefs and conclusions, which gives it a sense of safety. All this has been developed through time. And we are saying, please listen to it, we are saying unless the capacity of that brain which has been conditioned according to certain concepts, beliefs, ideas, theories, by the theologians and so on, and so on, the brain cannot radically change itself. Which is obvious. You have understood? May I go on with that?

And thinking is part of this traditional, time honoured process of the brain. Right? So when the speaker said, let us talk over together, as two people, though there are many people here, as two people, concerned with that question of ending conflict, ending conflict not gradually, which is the process of the brain conditioned to time - you are following all this? - we are saying, unless that chain is broken there cannot possibly be a fundamental change in human nature. If you have observed your own brain in operation, not from books - they may help, but essentially the books, the writers about the brain, and the investigators and so on, they don't investigate their own brain. They investigate the brain. I don't know if you are following all this? We, if you are serious, we are investigating our own brain, not the brain according to some psychologists, neurologists, psychobiologists and so on and so on. Because then if you examine it according to the authority, it is the authority you are examining, not your brain. Vous avez compris? You have understood? Is this clear? Please, this is very important because we are all so learned, we have read so much, or been told so much, that we depend on others to tell us what to do: how to feed your baby, how to walk, how to run. You follow? They tell you everything. And we unfortunate human beings comply, slightly resist, but conform. And as the speaker doesn't read any of these books, but has talked a great deal to other professors, psychologists and scientists, and has observed the activity of his own brain, which is, the brain, the activity of the brain is the reactions, the responses, the sensory response, the shock - you follow - all that, to observe. Not second-hand, but actually. Then you have an extraordinary vitality; not to do mischief, an extraordinary vitality of the brain.

So what we are saying is, as the brain has evolved in time, and it can only think in terms of time, that the crisis will be resolved. The moment you use the words 'will be resolved', you are already thinking in terms of time. I don't know if you follow this. Right? Sir, you and I will talk together.

We are saying, this activity of the brain which has been cultivated through time can be broken when you face the crisis, and be free of the idea, the concept, the desire 'we will change it eventually'. You follow this point?

So in talking over together this question of conflict, we are asking, can the conflict end immediately? The moment it doesn't, when you have not the urgency of ending it immediately, you enter time. You have understood this? So we are now thinking together about the conflict, and not thinking in terms of 'it will end eventually, gradually'. You get it? Please understand this. So the very urgency of the crisis ends time. I wonder if you see this. You have broken the pattern of the brain. Are you doing this as we are talking; or
you are just listening to some kind of talk as an idea? You understand?

Now just a minute, we'll put it this way: is the crisis in your mind, in your heart, in your behaviour, is it an idea or an actuality? You understand my question? Is it a concept which has been presented to you verbally, and you accept that concept, and so it becomes an idea? But whereas in the very description of it, is the fact of your own observation. I wonder if you see this. Which is it that is going on between us? Is it an idea, a concept, the concept of time, the concept that it can be broken? And so then you will ask, how is it to be achieved, which is again a process again admitting time. I wonder if you see all this.

You know, take for example - the speaker personally doesn't like taking examples, they are a rather easy way out - we human beings are violent, which has been demonstrated throughout the world. That is obvious. Violence derived genetically from the ancient times, from the animal and so on and so on. So we are by nature, by our behaviour, being very, very self-centred, violent. And we say that violence cannot be ended immediately, therefore we must pursue non-violence. You are following this? The non-violence is an idea, it is not a fact. I wonder if you see this. What is fact, what is fact - I mean by fact what is actually happening, which is violence. You may not be violent now, sitting under the trees in nice weather and so on, but the fact is that human beings, you are violent. And our brain which has evolved through time, chemically protecting itself and so on and so on, conditioned to that, says, "I will eventually get rid of it". So the theorists, the theologians, the priests, all these people, because we have also said, we will get rid of it eventually. You follow? Whereas if you are only dealing with fact, not with idea, then you can do something immediately. You know the word 'idea' in Greek, means to observe. You follow? Merely to observe; not through observation make an abstraction of what has been observed. You understand? I wonder if you are following all this. You see what we generally do is, when we observe something, immediately we make an abstraction of it into an idea, and then try to carry out that idea. So it becomes extremely difficult to carry out an idea, so there is conflict. Whereas if one is only observing what is actually happening then you can deal with it, not in the context of time, but in the necessity of moving from there. I wonder if you follow all this? Tant pis, if you don't follow, sir, let's go on! At least some of us will.

So together we are thinking about the ending of this conflict. Not the day after tomorrow, or next week but immediately. So if we understand this, then let's think together. What is the problem? Because in understanding the problem the answer is in the problem, not outside the problem. You understand this? Whereas we say it is outside the problem. The answer will somehow lie somewhere else, not in the problem itself. Right? Can we go together, please?

So what is the problem? The problem apparently is, society can only be changed if human beings who have created it change themselves. That is the real problem, the real core of the problem. Right? Society, which is corrupt, which is immoral, which is ugly, there is injustice, cruelty, the rich and the poor, you follow, all that, the society, which human beings have created, not god, not some outside agency, but human beings have created it; created the division, the national division, religious divisions, economic divisions, and so on and so on, we humans, humanity has created it. Unless humanity, of which we are, changes fundamentally you cannot bring about a society which is healthy, sane, rational. Right? The materialists won't accept this. They say, change the environment then man changes. That is the totalitarian attitude. That is their whole historical experimental approach: change society, make laws, rules, control, control thought, don't let them be free - change that and then man, who is also purely material, will change. Right? What we are saying is totally different: which is, humanity has created society, unless humanity, each one, human beings, change, society cannot change. Which is being proved in the totalitarian world. The more intelligent you are in those states the more you revolt against all that. And so you are either sent to concentration camps or expelled from the country.

So the crisis is that. Now, how does each one of us - please listen to this for a few minutes - how does each one of us approach this crisis? You understand? Approach this fact that human beings have created society,
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society cannot change by itself, because society is part of human beings, unless human beings fundamentally change society cannot change. That is the real core of our problem. And how do you come to that? You understand? Is it a mental, rational conclusion, an abstraction that you have, after observing, come to? Or this is a fact. You see the difference? Is it a concept, an idea, or a fact? For you. If it is a concept, then see what happens. Concept is merely a conclusion derived cleverly, or unintelligently, rationally or irrationally, a conclusion that society cannot be changed, human beings cannot be changed, so carry on amicably. There are those people who are saying this: human beings are so conditioned, you cannot change that conditioning but make it a little better. You know the group, you know the tendency, all that.

So we are asking each other, is it an idea because we have been told; or it's a fact for yourself? You see the difference? When it is a fact for yourself, not given by another, then you have to deal with it. That is when you have pain you deal with it. When you have toothache you do something immediately. But if toothache is an idea then you say, well, perhaps I'll postpone it! No, don't laugh, sir, see the rationality of it.

That brings up another point: scientists think human beings are rational. But they are not. You understand? The fact is human beings are irrational. But there is a concept that human beings are rational. And we live according to that concept that we are. So we are never rational. I don't know if you follow this.

What time is it, sir? We will continue every day for the next two weeks about this question. If it is a fact then how do you conceive - no, how do you look at that fact? You understand? How do you come to the fact? So the approach to the fact matters. Is your approach rational, or irrational? Is your approach pessimistic or optimistic? Is your approach based on hope, desire and so on? If it is, your approach has already been dictated, therefore you are not free to observe the fact. You're following all this? You see, sir, this is enormously difficult. This isn't a thing you play around with. This is concerned with your life, not somebody else's theories, however clever, however ancient, however so-called religious. It's your life. And how do you approach your life? You understand my question? Is your approach conditioned according to your education? Examine it sirs, as we go along. According to your social position? According to your immediate demand? Or your approach is based on you believe in Jesus, or Buddha, or somebody? That is, is your approach to the problem imaginary? You understand? Because we live with images. I don't want to complicate this thing. Our whole life is formed through images. All our religions are images, either made by the hand or by the mind, but they are images, which we then worship. And that we consider marvellously religious, which is idiotic.

So is our approach free from our conclusions, from our experience, from our knowledge? If it is from our experience, from our knowledge, you have already answered the problem, which will be according to time, which will be according to your conditioning. But if you come to it freely, to observe, then there is immediate action.

I think that’s enough for today, isn't it? Because to spend an hour with this attention, probably you are not used to it. You get tired, your minds are wandering off, you are not fully centred. So after an hour let's stop and continue Tuesday and Thursday and Saturday - oh, tomorrow, of course. Tomorrow we will continue with this, may we?