

# Jiddu Krishnamurti

## First Public Talk in Colombo

*From the series:*

### *Five Public Meetings in Colombo - 1950*

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*Sunday, December 25, 1949*

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I think it is important to know how to listen. Most of us do not really listen at all; we are so accustomed to putting away the things we don't want to hear that we have almost become deaf to the problems that concern us. It is important, is it not, how we listen to everything that is going on about us - how we listen not only to the song of the birds, the sounds in nature, but to each other's voices - that is, how extensively we are aware of the problems of the day at different levels. Because, it is only in hearing rightly, and not as we want to hear, that we begin to understand the many problems, whether economic, social, or religious. Life itself is a complex problem which cannot be solved at any one particular level. So we must be able to listen completely and fully, particularly to what is being said. This evening, at least, we might try to listen, so that we understand each other as fully as we can. The difficulty is that most of us listen with prejudice to what is being said; we come to a conclusion about what is being said based on our own ideas, and our minds are already made up. We compare what is being said with the words of some other teacher, and naturally our reaction is conditioned and not a direct response to what is being said. So, if I may suggest it this evening, please listen fully without any prejudice, without any conclusion, without comparing; listen to find out what is actually being said. Because, the world is in a very terrible state; and whether you have riches, own several cars, a comfortable house, a good bank account, or have barely enough to live; whether you belong to a particular religious or political party or to none, these problems have to be understood. I shall be dealing with these problems during the next five weeks, not only here, but also at the discussions to be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we must first learn the art of listening - which is quite a difficult task - so that we get the full significance of what is being said. You cannot get the full significance of what is being said if you listen through the screen of your own prejudice, and the art of listening consists in removing that prejudice, if only for the time being, and trying to understand the problem completely. Thus we shall be able to deal with the problems that arise every day in our lives.

Now, we all have problems, have we not, and we cannot shut our eyes to them or approach them with a

pattern of action, either of the left or of the right, with a prejudice which we have formed out of our own knowledge or the knowledge of experts. Surely, the problem is always new; any problem is always new at any level, and if we approach the problem with a pattern of action, whether of the left, the right, or the center, then our response is obviously conditioned, which creates a barrier in understanding the problem itself. That is our difficulty. Life is a process of challenge and response - otherwise, there is no life. Life is a response, a reaction to a demand, to a challenge, to a stimulus, and if our response is conditioned, obviously that creates conflict, which is a problem. Consciously or unconsciously, whether we are aware of it or not, most of us are in conflict, in turmoil; and to understand this inward confusion, which has brought about confusion outwardly - whether political, religious, or economic - we must know how to approach the problem, how to approach this enormous and increasing confusion and misery. There is no decrease, no lessening of sorrow - politically, religiously, socially, or in any other way. Whatever we do, whatever religious or political leaders we follow, creates further disaster, and our problem is how to act so that that very action does not create a new problem, does not produce a further catastrophe, so that reformation does not need further reform. That is the situation each one of us has to face.

Surely, this increasing confusion arises because we approach the problem with a pattern of action, with an ideology, whether political or religious. Organized religion obviously prevents the understanding of the problem because the mind is conditioned by dogma and belief. Our difficulty is how to understand the problem directly, not through any particular religious or political conditioning; how to understand the problem so that the conflict may cease, not temporarily but completely, so that man can live fully, without the misery of tomorrow or the burden of yesterday. Surely, that is what we must find out: how to meet the problem anew, because every problem, whether political, economic, religious, social, or personal, is ever new, and it cannot be met with the old. Perhaps this is putting it in a way different from that to which you are accustomed, but it is actually the issue. After all, life is a constantly changing environment. We would like to sit back and be comfortable; we would like to shelter ourselves in religion and belief, or in knowledge based on particular facts. We would like to be comfortable, we would like to be gratified, we would like not to be disturbed; but life, which is ever changing, ever new, is always disturbing to the old. So, our question is how to meet the challenge afresh. We are the result of the past; our thought is the outcome of yesterday, and with yesterday we obviously cannot meet today because today is new. When we approach the new with yesterday, we are continuing the conditioning of yesterday in understanding today. So our problem in approaching the new is how to understand the old and therefore be free of the old. The old cannot understand the new - you cannot put new wine in old bottles. So, it is important to understand the old, which is the past, which is the mind based on thinking. Thought, idea, is the outcome of the past; whether it is historical or scientific knowledge, or mere prejudice and superstition, idea is obviously the outcome of the past. We would not be able to think if we had no memory; memory is the residue of experience; memory is the response of thought. To understand the challenge, which is new, we have to understand the total process of the self, which is the outcome of our past, the outcome of our conditioning - environmentally, socially, climatically, politically, economically - the whole structure of ourselves. Therefore, to understand the problem is to understand ourselves; the understanding of the world begins with the understanding of ourselves. The problem is not the world but you in relationship with another, which creates a problem, and that problem extended becomes the world problem. So, to understand this enormous, complex machine, this conflict, pain, confusion, misery, we must begin with ourselves - but not individualistically, in opposition to the mass. There is no such thing as that abstraction called the mass, but when you and I do not understand ourselves, when we follow a leader and are hypnotized by words, then we become the mass and are exploited. So, the solution to the problem is not to be found in isolation, in withdrawal to a monastery, to a mountain or a cave, but in understanding the whole problem of ourselves in relationship. You cannot live in isolation; to be is to be related. So, our problem is relationship, which causes conflict, which brings misery, constant trouble. As long as we do not understand that relationship, it will be a source of endless pain and struggle. Understanding ourselves, which is self-knowledge, is the beginning of wisdom, and for

self-knowledge you cannot go to a book - there is no book that can teach it to you. Know yourself, and once you understand yourself, you can deal with the problems that confront each one of us every day. Self-knowledge brings tranquillity to the mind, and then only can truth come into being. Truth cannot be sought after. Truth is the unknown, and that which you seek is already known. Truth comes into being unsought when the mind is without prejudice, when there is the understanding of the whole process of ourselves.

Several questions have been sent in, and I am going to answer some of them. It is very easy to ask questions. Anybody can ask a flippant or stupid question, but to ask the right question is much more difficult. Only in asking a right question is there a right answer because only then is the problem of the questioner revealed.

Question: You say that you are not going to act as a guru to anyone. Cannot one who has understood the truth convey his understanding to another to help him also to understand?

Krishnamurti: Surely, whether a guru is necessary or not is not important; the problem is why we want a guru, why we seek a guru. That is the problem, isn't it? If we can understand that, then we will find out whether truth can be conveyed to another. Why do you need a guru, a teacher, a leader, a guide? Obviously, you will say, "I need him because I am confused, I do not know what to do, and I am seeking truth." Let us not deceive ourselves about it. You don't know what truth is; therefore, you go to a teacher, asking him to teach you what truth is. You want someone to help you, to guide you out of your confusion; you are unhappy, and you want to be happy; you are dissatisfied, and you want to be satisfied. So, you choose your guru according to your satisfaction. (Laughter) May I suggest something? When you laugh at something serious, it indicates a very superficial state of mind. By laughing, you pass off the disturbing idea; so, if I may suggest, let us be a little more serious. Because, our problems are very serious, and we cannot approach them like flighty schoolboys - which is the way we are behaving, though we may have gray beards.

So, the question is not whether a guru is necessary but why do we want one? We want someone to give us a comforting hand - that is what we want. We don't want the truth because the truth can be extraordinarily disturbing. We really don't want to understand what truth is, so we go to a guru to give us the satisfaction we want, and as we are confused, obviously we choose a guru or a leader who is also confused. When we choose a guru out of our confusion, that guru must also be confused, otherwise we wouldn't choose him. To understand yourself is essential, and a guru who is worthy of that name must obviously tell you that. But to most of us, this is, a tiresome business; we want quick relief, a panacea, so we turn to a guru who will give us a satisfactory pill. We are searching not for truth but for comfort, and the man who gives us comfort enslaves us.

Can truth be conveyed to another? I can give you a description of something which is over, which is past, and therefore not real; I can tell you about the past, and we can communicate with each other on the verbal level about what is known, but we cannot communicate with each other about something which we are not experiencing. Description is always of the past, not the present; therefore, the present cannot be described, and reality is only in the present. So, when you go to another to be told what truth is, he can only tell you of the experience which is over, and the experience which is over is not truth - it is merely knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom; there can be description on the verbal level of knowledge and facts, but to describe something which is in constant movement is impossible. That which is described is not truth. Truth must be experienced from moment to moment, and if you meet today with the measure of yesterday, you will not understand truth.

So, a guru is not essential. On the contrary, a guru is an impediment. Self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. No guru can give you self-knowledge; and without self-knowledge, do what you will, act in any manner you like, follow any leader, any social or religious pattern - you are only creating further misery. But when through self-knowledge the mind is free of impediments and limitations, then truth comes into

being.

Question: You are reported as having said that ideas are not going to bring people together. Please explain how, according to you, people can be brought together to create a better world

Krishnamurti: Let us find out what we mean by ideas, and as I have said, please listen, not with prejudice, not with a conclusion, but listen as you would to someone whom you really like. What do you mean by ideas, what do you mean by belief, what do you mean by ideology? Let us think this out, investigate together. Do ideas bring people together, or separate people? Idea is obviously the verbal version of thought. Thought is response to conditioning, is it not? You are Sinhalese, Buddhists, Christians, or what you will, and your thought is conditioned according to your background. Background is memory, obviously; memory responds to stimulus, to challenge, and the response of memory to challenge is called thinking. Surely, you think according to the pattern in which you have been brought up - as Buddhists, as Christians, according to the left or the right, or God knows what. You are conditioned to believe certain things, and not to believe other things. That conditioning is memory, and the response of memory is thought. Thought examines ideas and, being conditioned, responds according to that conditioning, going either to the left or to the right. So, ideas gather people according to the particular pattern in which they have been brought up, and obviously ideas can oppose ideas.

As it is perhaps a little too abstract, let us put it differently. Suppose you are a real Buddhist, not a verbal Buddhist, but an active one - what does it mean? You believe in certain things and act according to that belief, and a Christian or a communist will act according to a different ideology. How can these two ideas ever meet? Each idea, each thought, is the result of its own conditioning, and how can one idea meet another? All one idea can do is to expand and gather people around itself, as also does any other idea. So, ideas can never bring about unity. On the contrary, they divide people. You are a Christian, I am a Buddhist, another is a Hindu or a Muslim; I believe, you don't believe, so we are at loggerheads. Why? Why are we so divided by ideas? Because that is the only thing we have - the word is the only thing we have; therefore, ideas have become extraordinarily important, and we gather around ideas to act - the Christian in opposition to the communist, labor in opposition to capitalism, capitalism in opposition to socialism. Idea is not action; idea prevents action. We will have to think it out; we will go into it at another discussion. Action based upon idea divides people. That is why there is starvation in the world, there is hunger, there is misery, there is war. We have ideas about it, but idea prevents our understanding of the problem because the problem is not an idea. The problem is pain and conflict. It is very comforting to have an idea about pain, suffering, trouble, exploitation; then you can talk about it and not act. Think it out and you will see, if you are really going into the problem and not merely reacting according to a certain pattern, that ideas are dividing people. Have you not noticed? You Sinhalese are fighting for nationalism, which is just an idea; Hindus are against Europeans, Germans and Americans against Russians. All over the world nationalism, which is an idea, prevents people from coming together, and because nationalism is elementarily gratifying and stupid, you are satisfied with it. Everywhere the word nationalism arises like a wall and keeps people apart. So, throughout the world, ideas are separating people, setting man against man. The ideas which we worship are the very denial of love; they have no significance; they cannot bring about a radical transformation. To bring about this fundamental revolution, you must begin to understand yourself; it is only then that you can bring about unity, and not through ideas.

Question: I feel uncertain about everything and consequently find it difficult to act well, as I fear that my action will only lead to further confusion. Is there a way I can act to avoid confusion?

Krishnamurti: Obviously, without knowing yourself, whatever you do is bound to increase confusion; if you don't know the whole structure of your being, your action will inevitably create mischief, though you may have a perfect pattern of conduct. That is why reformation, revolution according to a pattern, is a disintegrating factor in society - it merely carries on the past in a modified way. Self-knowledge, which you

cannot buy in a book or get from any teacher, is to be discovered in relationship with people, with ideas. Relationship is a mirror in which you see yourself as you are. Nothing can live in isolation. One must understand relationship and not merely condemn it, justify it, or identify oneself with it. We condemn because that is the easiest way to get rid of something, like putting a child in the corner. If I want to understand my child, my neighbor, my wife, I must study that person, I must be aware in my relationship with that person, mustn't I? So, to act without increasing confusion is possible only through self-knowledge.

Question: You are reported as having said that religion cannot provide a solution to the problems of humanity. Is that correct?

Krishnamurti: Now, what do we mean by religion? As we know it, it is organized belief, dogma, action according to a particular pattern, is it not? Organized belief is the experience of someone else, arranged according to a pattern of yesterday, and you are conditioned by that belief. Is that religion? The pattern may be of the left, of the right, or of the center, or it may be a so-called divine plan - there is not much difference between them - all have their ideals, all have their utopia or heaven, so all may be called religion, each perpetuating exploitation. Now, is that religion? Obviously, belief with its authority and dogmas, with its pageantry and sensation, is not religion. So, what is religion? That is our question. It is simply a word. The word door is not a door but only the symbol of something else. Similarly, religion is something behind the conditioned response evoked by that word, which means that we have to discover the thing behind the word. That thing is the unknown, isn't it? What you know has already receded into the past. There must be direct experiencing of what is, and for this the first requirement is freedom, which means you must be free of the false, which is belief, not at the end but at the beginning. You must have the freedom to discover what is false - surely that is religion. The whole process of yourself must be understood, for without understanding yourself, there is no wisdom. The beginning of wisdom is the understanding of yourself, and that is meditation.