

Jiddu Krishnamurti

What Is Communication with Others?

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Third Conversation with Dr Allan W. Anderson in San Diego, California

A: Mr Krishnamurti, in this series of conversations we have been exploring the general question of the transformation of man. A transformation, which as you say, is not dependent on knowledge or time. And, as I recall, we arrived at a point that was very crucial, namely the one concerned with relationship and communication. I remember one point in our conversation together that was extremely instructive for me, a point at which, when you asked me a question I began to answer it and you interrupted me and reminded the viewers and me, that the important thing here is, not to finish out a theoretical construction but rather to attain to the right beginning point so that we do not go beyond where we haven't yet begun. This, as I repeat, was extremely instructive for me and I was thinking, if it is agreeable with you, it would be helpful today if we could begin at the point of concern for communication and relationship to go into that question and begin to unravel it.

K: Unravel it, quite. I wonder sir, what that word communication means. To communicate implies not only verbally but also listening in which there is a sharing, a thinking together, not accepting something that you or I say, but sharing together, thinking together, creating together, all that is involved in that word 'communicate'. And in that word is implied also the art of listening. The art of listening demands a quality of attention in which there is real listening, real sense of having an insight as we go along, each second, not at the end, but at the beginning.

A: So that we are...

K: ...together...

A: So that we are both - yes, yes!

K: Walking together all the time.

A: There is a concurrent activity. Not one making a statement, the other thinking about it and then saying, 'Well, I agree, I don't agree, I accept, I don't accept. These are the reasons I don't accept. These are the reasons I do', but we are walking together.

K: Journeying together, walking together on the same path.

A: Side by side. Yes.

K: On the same road, with the same attention, with the same intensity, at the same time, otherwise there is no communication.

A: Exactly. Exactly.

K: Communication implies there must be at the same level, at the same time, with the same intensity, we are walking together, we are thinking together, we are observing together, sharing together.

A: Would you say that this requires an activity that underlies the speaking together, or does one come to the activity after one has started to speak together?

K: No sir. We are not saying that. What is the art of listening, aren't we? The art of listening implies, doesn't it, that there is not only the verbal understanding between you and me, because we are both speaking English, and we know the meaning of each word, more or less, and at the same time we are sharing the problem together, sharing the issue together.

A: Because, as you say, it's a matter of life and death.

K: Also if you and I are both serious, we are sharing the thing. So, in communication there is not only a verbal communication, but there is a non-verbal communication, really which comes into being, or which happens when one has the art of really listening to somebody, in which there is no acceptance, no denial, or comparison, or judgement, just the act of listening.

A: I wonder whether I am on the right track here, if I suggest that there is a relation that is very deep here between communication and what we call in English, 'communion'.

K: Communion, yes.

A: So that if we are in communion, our chance of communicating...

K: ...becomes simpler.

A: Right!

K: Now, to be in communion with each other, we must be, both of us must be, serious about the same problem at the same time with the same passion. Otherwise there is no communication.

A: Exactly!

K: If you are not interested in what is being said, well, you will think of something else and communication stops. So there is a verbal communication and a non-verbal communication. They are both operating at the same time.

A: One does not precede the other. Or follow upon the other. Yes, they move together.

K: Which means that each of us, being serious, gives our attention completely to the issue.

A: That act of seriousness that takes place then requires the utmost devoted attention.

K: Sir, but a man who is really serious lives, not the man who is flippant, or merely wanting to be entertained. He does not live.

A: The general notion of being serious about something generally suggests either undergoing some pain, or I'm serious about something in order to get something else. These two things, as a rule, are what persons imagine by seriousness. As a matter of fact, we often hear this expression, 'Don't look so serious', don't we.

K: Yes.

A: It's as though we fear something about the serious.

K: Sir, look! As we said yesterday, the world is in a mess and it's my responsibility living in this world as a human being who has created this mess, it's my responsibility to be serious in the resolution of this problem. I am serious. It doesn't mean I am long faced, I am miserable, unhappy, or I want something out of it. It has got to be solved. It's like if one has cancer, one is serious about it. You don't play around with it.

A: Action in relation to this seriousness then is instantaneous.

K: Obviously!

A: This raises not an additional question, I don't mean to go beyond where we haven't begun in that sense, but time assumes for the serious person something very different for his undergoing than it would seem to be for the unserious person. One would not have then the feeling of something being dragged out. Or as we may say in English, time that has to be put in.

K: Put in, quite.

A: As a matter of fact, in this concurrent communication in which communion is abidingly present time as such would not in any way oppress.

K: No, sir, no, sir.

A: Am I...

K: Quite right. Like we see sir, I am trying to see what it means to be serious. The intent, the urge, the feeling of total responsibility, the feeling of action, the doing, not, I will do. All that is implied in that word seriousness. At least I'll put all those things into that word.

A: Could we look for a moment at one of them that you put into them? Responsibility, able to be responsive.

K: That's right. To respond adequately.

A: Yes. To respond adequately.

K: To any challenge. The challenge now is that the world is in a mess, confusion, sorrow and everything, violence and all that. I must, as a human being who has created this thing, I must respond adequately. The adequacy depends on my seriousness, in that sense on my observation of the chaos and responding, not according to my prejudices, my inclination, or tendencies, or pleasures, or fears, but responding to the problem, not according to my translation of the problem. Right?

A: Yes. I am just thinking as you are speaking about how difficult it is to communicate this to the person who is thinking that the way adequately to respond to this chaos is to have a plan for it which one superimposes on it. And that's exactly what we assume, and if the plan doesn't work out, we blame ourselves...

K: Or change the plan.

A: Or we change the plan, yes.

K: But we don't respond to the challenge.

A: No.

K: We respond according to our conclusion about the problem.

A: Exactly.

K: Therefore, it means really sir, if we can explore it a little more, the observer is the observed.

A: Therefore the change, if it comes, is total, not partial. One is no longer outside what he is operating upon.

K: That's right.

A: And what he is operating upon is not outside himself.

K: Of course. As we said yesterday, it's very interesting if we go into it rather deeply, the world is me and I am the world. That is not intellectual or emotional, but a fact. Now, when I approach the problem, the chaos, the misery, the suffering, the violence, all that, I approach it with my conclusions, with my fears, with my despairs. I don't look at the problem.

A: Would you think it possible to put it this way, that one doesn't make room for the problem.

K: Yes. Yes, put it any way.

A: Would that be all right?

K: Yes. Sir, let's look at this. As a human being one has created this, this misery which is called the society in which we live, an immoral society.

A: Oh yes!

K: Completely immoral! As a human being one has created that. But that human being looking at it separates himself and says, 'I must do something about it.' The 'it' is me.

A: Some people respond to that this way. They say, 'Well look, if I am truly serious, I am truly responsible, I make this act and there comes between me and the world this confluent relationship, which is total. All the things that are going on out there that are atrocious, let's say, 2,500 miles away from where I am, don't stop. Therefore, how can I say that the whole world is me and I am the whole world?' This objection comes up again and again. I am interested to know what your reply to that would be.

K: Sir, Look. We are human beings irrespective of our labels, English, French, German, all the rest of it. A human being living in America or in India has the problems of relationship, of suffering, of jealousy, envy, greed, ambition, imitation, conformity, and all that are our problems, common to both of us.

A: Yes.

K: And when I say, the world is me and me is the world and the world I am, I see that as a reality, not as a concept. Now, my responsibility to the challenge to be adequate must not be in terms of what I think, but what the problem is.

A: Yes. I follow you I'm sure here. I was thinking while you were saying that, that it might have been possible to answer the question that I posed, and I am posing the question simply because I know some

persons who might very well view this, who would raise that and who would want to participate with us in this conversation. I wondered whether you might have said that as soon as one puts it that way, one has already divorced himself from the issue.

K: That's right.

A: That in the practical order that, that question is an interposition that simply does not have a place in the activity you are talking about.

K: Yes, that's right.

A: Now this is very interesting, because it means that the person must suspend his disbelief.

K: Or his belief.

A: Or his belief...

K: ...and observe the thing.

A: And observe the thing.

K: Which is not possible if the observer is different from the observed.

A: Now, would you explore the practical aspect of this with me for a moment? People will say, who up to this point are listening, it would seem people at this point will say, 'Well, yes, but I can't stop it, I think I have an intuition of what you mean,' they will say, 'But the minute that I open myself, or begin to open myself, all these things seem to rush in on me. What I had hoped doesn't seem to take place.' If I understand you correctly, they are really not doing what they claim that they are trying to do.

K: That's right. Sir, can we put it, this question differently? What is a human being to do confronted with this problem of suffering, chaos, all that is going on all around us? What is he to do? He approaches it generally with a conclusion - what he should do about it.

A: And this conclusion is interposed between him...

K: Yes, the conclusion is the factor of separation.

A: Right.

K: Now, can he observe the fact of this confusion without any conclusions, without any planning, without any predetermined way of getting out of this chaos? Because his predetermined conclusions, ideas and so on are all derived from the past, and the past is trying to resolve the problem and therefore he is translating it and acting according to his previous conclusions, whereas the fact demands that you look at it; the fact demands that you observe it, you listen to it. The fact itself will have the answer, you don't have to bring the answer to it. I wonder if I am making myself clear?

A: Yes, I'm listening very, very hard. I really am. I'm afraid if I am not going beyond where I shouldn't, having yet begun, the next question that would naturally arise here - well, perhaps you might feel when I raise the question that it is the wrong question - but can one communicate in the sense that we have been unravelling this? One says, I don't know. It doesn't seem to me that I have done this. I haven't done this yet. I can recognise all the things that have been described, that are terrible. I don't recognise all the things that appear to be promised without suggesting that I am imagining them or projecting them out there. Clearly, if there is to be a change, it has to be a change that is altogether radical. Now, I must start. What do I do?

K: There are two things involved in that. First, I must learn from the problem, which means I must have a mind that has a quality of humility. He does not come to it, and say, 'I know all about it.' What he knows is

merely explanations, rational or irrational. He comes to the problem with rational or irrational solutions. Therefore he is not learning from the problem. The problem will reveal an infinite lot of things, if I'm capable of looking at it and learning about it. And for that I must have a sense of humility, and say, 'I don't know. This is a tremendous problem. Let me look at it, let me learn about it.' Not I come to it with my conclusions, therefore I have stopped learning about the problem.

A: Are you suggesting that this act is a waiting on the problem to reveal itself?

K: To reveal. That's right! Therefore, I must be capable of looking at it. I cannot look at it if I've come to it with ideas, with ideations, with mentations, of every kind of conclusion. I must come to it, say, 'Look, what is it?' I must learn from it, not learn according to some professor or some psychologist, some philosopher.

A: That one has the capacity for this, some persons would...

K: I think everybody has. Sir, we are so vain.

A: But this doesn't mean anything for the doing, of what must be done, that there is a capacity.

K: Look, the learning is the doing.

A: Exactly. Yes, yes. I wanted to make that clear because we comfort ourselves with the curious notion, if I have been following you, that we possess a possibility and because we possess the possibility we think that someday it will actualise itself perhaps.

K: Quite right.

A: But if I'm correct, both ways no possibility can actualise itself, and in the practical order that never occurs, but somehow it is believed, isn't it?

K: I'm afraid it is.

A: It is believed.

K: Sir, it is really quite simple. There is this misery, confusion, immense sorrow in the world, violence, all that. Human beings have created it. Human beings have built a structure of society which sustains this chaos. That's a fact. Now, I come to it, a human being comes to it, trying to resolve it according to his plan, according to his prejudices, his idiosyncrasies, or knowledge, which means he has already understood the problem, whereas the problem is always new. So I must come to it afresh.

A: One of the things that has concerned me for many, many years as a reader, as a student, as one whose daily work involves the study of scriptures, is the recurrent statement that one comes upon, sometimes in a very dramatic form. For instance, take the prophetic ministry of Jesus where he speaks, and he says that they are hearing but they are not listening, they are observing but they are not seeing.

K: And doing.

A: But then it seems he does not say, 'In order to attain to that, do this'. No. The closest he comes to it is, through the analogy with the child, to have faith as a little child. I don't want to talk about words here because that would be disastrous, so what is meant by the word 'faith' here is not something that would be proper to go into, but the analogy with the child suggests that the child is doing something that is lost somewhere along the way in some respect. I'm sure he didn't mean that there is a perfect continuity between the adult and the child. But why is it that over the centuries that men have said this over and over again, namely you are not listening, you are not seeing, and then they don't point to an operation, they point to an analogy. Some of them don't even point to an analogy. They just hold up a flower.

K: Sir, look! We live on words. Most people live on words. They don't go beyond the word. And what we are talking about is not only the word, the meaning of the word, the communication that exists in using words, but the non-verbal communication, which is having an insight. That is what we are talking about all the time so far.

A: Yes.

K: That is, I can, the mind can, only have an insight if it is capable of listening. And you do listen when the crisis is right at your doorstep.

A: Now, I think I'm at a point here that is solid. Is it that we don't allow ourselves access to the crisis that is there continuously, it isn't a crisis that is episodic?

K: No. The crisis is always there.

A: It is always. Right. Well, we are doing something to shut ourselves off from it, aren't we?

K: Or, we don't know how to meet it. Either we avoid it, or we don't know how to meet it, or we are indifferent. We have become so callous. All these things, all three are involved in not facing the crisis because I am frightened. One is frightened. One says, 'My lord! I don't know how to deal with it.' So one goes off to an analyst, or to a priest, or picks up a book to see how it can be translated. He becomes irresponsible.

A: Sometimes people will register the disappointment that things haven't worked out. So why try something new?

K: Yes. Of course.

A: And this would be a buffer.

K: Yes. That's what I mean. Avoidance. There are so many ways to avoid - clever, cunning, superficial and very subtle. All that is involved in avoiding an issue. So what we are trying to say, sir, isn't it, the observer is the past, as we said yesterday. The observer is trying to translate and act according to the past when the crisis arises. The crisis is always new. Otherwise it's not a crisis. A challenge must be new, is new, and always new. But he translates it according to the past. Now, can he look at that challenge, that crisis, without the response of the past?

A: May I read a sentence out of your book? I think that maybe this has a very direct relationship to what we are talking about. It's a sentence that arrested me when I read it. 'Through negation that thing which alone is the positive comes into being.' May I read it again? Through negation, something is done apparently.

K: Absolutely.

A: Right. So we are not leaving it at the point where we are saying, simply words are of no consequence. Therefore, I will do something non-verbal, or I will say something because I never communicate with the non-verbal. That has nothing to do with it. Something must be done. There is an act.

K: Absolutely. Life is action.

A: Exactly.

K: It isn't just...

A: Now here I suppose I should say for our listeners and viewers that this is from the 'Awakening of Intelligence', the most recent publication of yours, and it's on page 196 in the chapter on Freedom. 'Through negation' - I take it that's a word for this act.

K: Entirely.

A: 'That thing which alone is the positive' - the word alone came over to me with the force of something unique.

K: Yes sir.

A: Something that is not continuous with anything else. That thing which alone is the positive comes into being. There is no temporal hiatus here, so we are back to that thing we began with in our earlier conversations about not being dependent on knowledge and time. Could we look at this negation together for a moment? I have the feeling that, if I have understood this correctly, that unless whatever this is that's called negation is not an abiding activity, then communion and communication and the relationship that we are talking about just simply can never be reached. Is that correct?

K: Quite. May I put it this way? I must negate, I mean negate not intellectually or verbally, actually negate the society in which I live. The implication of immorality which exists in society, on which society is built, I must negate totally that immorality. That means that I live morally. In negating that the positive is the moral. I don't know if I am.?

A: Oh, yes. I am being quiet because I want to follow step by step. I don't want to go beyond where we have begun.

K: I negate totally the idea of success.

A: Yes, I negate totally.

K: Totally. Not only in the mundane world, not only in the sense of achievement in a world of money, position, authority, I negate that completely, and I also negate success in the so-called spiritual world.

A: Oh, yes. Quite, the temptation.

K: Both are the same. Only I call that spiritual and I call that physical, moral, mundane. So in negating success, achievement, there comes an energy. Through negation there is a tremendous energy to act totally differently which is not in the field of success, in the field of imitation, conformity and all that. So through negation, I mean actual negation, not just ideal negation, through actual negation of that which is immoral, morality comes into being.

A: Which is altogether different from trying to be moral.

K: Yes, yes. Of course, trying to be moral is immoral.

A: Yes. May I try to go into this another step? At least it would be a step for me. There is something that I intuit here as a double aspect to this negation. I'd like very much to see whether this is concurrent with your own feeling about this. I was going to say a statement and I stopped myself. My desire for success in itself is a withholding myself from the problem that we talked about, and that itself is a form of negation. I have negated access to myself. I've negated, in other words, I have done violence to what it is that wishes to reveal itself. So I am going to negate then my negation as the observer. This I wanted to make sure.

K: You are quite right. When we use the word 'negate', as it is generally understood, it is an act of violence.

A: Yes. That's what I was hoping.

K: It's an act of violence. I negate.

A: That's what I thought. Yes. Yes.

K: I brush it aside. And we are using the word 'negate' not in the violent sense, but the understanding of what success implies. The understanding of what success implies. The 'me', who is separate from you, wanting or desiring success which will put me in a position of authority, power, prestige. So I am, in negating success, I am negating my desire to be powerful which I negate only when I have understood the whole process which is involved in achieving success. In achieving success is employed ruthlessness, lack of love, lack of immense consideration for others, lack of a sense of conformity, imitation, acceptance of the social structure, all that is involved and the understanding of all that when I negate success. It is not an act of violence. On the contrary, it is an act of tremendous attention.

A: I've negated something in my person.

K: I've negated myself.

A: Right. I've negated myself.

K: The 'me' which is separate from you.

A: Exactly.

K: And therefore I am negating violence which comes about when there is separation.

A: Would you use the term self-denial here, not in the sense of how it has been received down the line, but that if there is anything to what has been stated in the past, could a person who saw that word self-denial read that word in this context that you are using?

K: I'm afraid he wouldn't. Self-denial means sacrifice, pain, lack of understanding.

A: But if he heard what you are saying.

K: Ah, then why use another word when you have understood this thing?

A: Well, maybe he'd want to communicate with someone.

K: But change the word so that we both understand the meaning of self-denial. I mean all religions have based their action on self-denial, sacrifice, deny your desire, deny your looking at a woman, or deny riches, take a vow to poverty. You know all of them: vow of poverty, vow of celibacy and so on. All these are a kind of punishment, a distorting of a clear perception. If I see something clearly, the action is immediate. So, sir, to negate implies diligence. The word called diligence means giving complete attention to the fact of success - we are taking that word. Giving my whole attention to success, in that attention, the whole map of success is revealed.

A: With all its horrors.

K: With all the things involved in it and it is only then the seeing is the doing. Then it is finished. And the mind can never revert to success and therefore become bitter and all the things that follow.

A: What you are saying, I take it, is that once this happens, there is no reversion.

K: It is finished. Of course not. Say for instance sir...

A: It's not something that one has to keep up.

K: Of course not.

A: Well, fine. I'm delighted we've established that.

K: Now take for instance what happened. In 1928 I happened to be the head of a tremendous organisation, a

religious organisation, and I saw around me various religious organisations, sects, Catholic, Protestant, and I saw all trying to find truth. So I said, 'No organisation can lead man to truth.' So I dissolved it. Property, an enormous business. I can never go back to it. When you see something as poison you won't take it again. It isn't that you say, 'By Jove, I've made a mistake. I should go back and...' It is sir, like seeing danger. When you see danger you never go near it again.

A: I hope I won't annoy you by...

K: No, no.

A: ...by talking about words here again. But you know so many of the things that you say cast a light on common terms which for me at least illuminate them. They sound altogether different from the way they used to be heard. For instance, we say in English, don't we, practice makes perfect. Now obviously this can't be the case if we mean by practice we are repeating something. But if you mean by practice the Greek praxis, which is concerned directly with act, not repetition, with act, then to say, makes perfect, doesn't refer to time at all. It's that upon the instance the act is performed, perfection is. Now I'm sorry I used the word instant again and I understand why that's awkward, but I think in our communication the concern for the word here is one that surely is productive, because one can open himself to words and if one sees the word that way, then it appears there is a whole host of phenomena which suddenly acquire very magical significance. Not magical in the sense of enchantment, but they open a door, which, when walked into immediately situates him in the crisis in such a way that he attains to this that you call the one alone, the unique which comes into being.

K: Yes.

A: Which comes into being.

K: Sir, can we now go back, or go forward to the question of freedom and responsibility in relationship? That's where we left off yesterday.

A: Right. That was quoted from the chapter on freedom. Yes.

K: First of all, can we go into this question of what it is to be responsible?

A: I should like that.

K: Because I think that is what we are missing in this world, in what is happening now. We don't feel responsible. We don't feel we are responsible because the people in position, in authority politically, religiously are responsible. We are not. That is the general feeling that is all over the world.

A: Because those over there have been delegated to do a job by me.

K: Yes. And scientists, politicians, the educational people, the religious people, they are responsible, but I know nothing about it, I just follow. That's the general attitude right through the world.

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

K: So, you follow the whole thing.

A: One feels he gets off scot-free that way because its the other one's fault.

K: Yes. So, I make myself irresponsible. By delegating a responsibility to you I become irresponsible. Whereas now we are saying, nobody is responsible except you, because you are the world and the world is you. You have created this mess. You alone can bring about clarity, and therefore you are totally, utterly, completely responsible. And nobody else. Now, that means you have to be a light to yourself, not the light

of a professor, or an analyst, or a psychologist, or the light of Jesus, or the light of the Buddha. You have to be a light to yourself in a world that is utterly becoming dark. That means you have to be responsible. Now, what does that word mean? It means really, to respond totally, adequately to every challenge. You cannot possibly respond adequately if you are rooted in the past, because the challenge is new, otherwise it is not a challenge. A crisis is new, otherwise it is not a crisis. If I respond to a crisis in terms of a preconceived plan, which the Communists are doing, or the Catholics, or the Protestants and so on and so on, then they are not responding totally and adequately to the challenge.

A: This takes me back to something I think that is very germane in the dramatic situation of confrontation between the soldier and the Lord Krishna in the Gita. Arjuna, the general of the army says to Krishna, 'Tell me definitely what to do and I will do it.' Now Krishna does not turn around and say to him in the next verse, 'I am not going to tell you what to do', But, of course, at that point he simply doesn't tell him what to do, and one of the great Sanskrit scholars has pointed out that that's an irresponsible reaction on the part of the teacher. But am I understanding you correctly, he couldn't have done otherwise?

K: When that man put the question, he is putting the question out of irresponsibility.

A: Of course, a refusal to be responsible. Exactly! A refusal to be responsible.

K: That's why, that's why sir, responsibility means total commitment.

A: Total commitment.

K: Total commitment to the challenge. Responding adequately, completely to a crisis. That is, the word 'responsibility' means that, to respond. I cannot respond completely if I am frightened. Or I cannot respond completely if I am seeking pleasure. I cannot respond totally if my action is routine, is repetitive, is traditional, is conditioned. So, to respond adequately to a challenge means that the 'me', which is the past, must end.

A: And at this point Arjuna just wants it continued right down the line.

K: That's what everybody wants, sir. Politically, look at what is happening in this country, and elsewhere. We don't feel responsible. We don't feel responsible to how we bring our children up.

A: I understand. I really do, I think. In our next conversation I'd really like to continue this in terms of the phrase we sometimes use 'being responsible for my action'. But that does not seem to be saying exactly what you are saying at all. As a matter of fact, it seems to be quite wide of the mark.

K: No.

A: Good, let's do that.