

Jiddu Krishnamurti

Why Are We Frightened To Be Nothing?

From the series:

Four Public Meetings at Brockwood Park - 1983

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Second Conversation with Pupul Jayakar at Brockwood Park

Pupul Jayakar: I saw a short report in one of the newspapers that a spaceship had been released which would travel to the outer spaces of the universe, and that it would be part of the universe - there will be no ending to it because there was no friction, no time, that there would be no ending. Is the within of the self, of the human brain, the human mind - call it what you will - is there a within of things, whether of man, of the tree, of nature, which is a space without ending? Is it a mirror image of that vastness which exists?

Krishnamurti: Are you asking, if I may repeat what you have understood, what you have said, that within the human brain - I'd like to distinguish between the brain and the mind, which we will discuss a little later - whether in the human brain there is, or there can be, a space without end, an eternity out of time? We can speculate about it a great deal, as philosophers have done, but that speculation is not actuality.

PJ: No. But it was an insight into outer space.

K: The human brain has set a machine that has entered into the whole...

PJ: No, but it was an insight first into the possibility of that, which now made it possible for them to experiment and prove it.

K: To produce a machine that will go beyond the - it will enter into the universe.

PJ: If you do not posit a thing then you cannot even...

K: No, I question whether - I want to be clear on this point - whether we are now in our conversation we are speculating, or theorising, or we are really trying to find out in ourselves whether there is such immensity, whether there is actually a movement which is not of time, which is eternal. Right?

PJ: How do you start an enquiry like this? By examination, or posing the question. If you don't pose the

question...

K: We have posed the question.

PJ: We have to pose a question.

K: We have put the question.

PJ: Now whether what comes out of it is speculation or examination depends on how you approach it. But the question has to be put.

K: We have put the question. We have put the question whether the brain can understand - not understand - realise the truth that there is either eternity, or not eternity. That is a question, we have asked that question. Right? Now you ask, how do we begin to enquire into it. How do you begin to feel gently, hesitantly your way into this really fundamental question, a question that has been asked for thousands of years, whether man is bound to time forever, or there is, or there can be, not imaginatively, not romantically, but actually can there be within the brain - or the brain realises itself in a state of eternity. That's the question we are asking.

PJ: Even to proceed into this you started by drawing a distinction between the brain and the mind.

K: Yes.

PJ: Would you elaborate.

K: We are saying, that the brain is conditioned, at least some of it. That conditioning is brought about through experience. That conditioning is knowledge. And that conditioning is memory and experience, knowledge, memory are limited, and so thought is limited. Now, we have been functioning within the area of thought. And to discover something new there has to be, at least temporarily, or a period, when thought is not in movement, when thought is in abeyance.

PJ: The brain is a material thing.

K: Yes.

PJ: It has its own activity.

K: Yes. It has its own activity not imposed by thought.

PJ: But for centuries the operation of the brain has been the operation of thought.

K: That's all. That's all we are saying. That's all we are saying, that the whole movement of the brain, at least that part of the brain which has not been used, is conditioned by thought. And thought is always limited, and therefore it is conditioned to conflict. That which is limited must create division.

PJ: What is mind then?

K: Mind is a wholly different dimension which has no contact with thought. Let me explain. The brain, that part of the brain which has been functioning as an instrument of thought, that brain has been conditioned, that part of the brain. And as long as that part of the brain remains in that state there is no communication, entire communication, with the mind. So when that conditioning is not then there is communication between that mind, which is totally on a different dimension, that can communicate with the brain and act, using thought.

PJ: But you have already posited...

K: Oh definitely.

PJ: ...a state which is outside the realm of thought.

K: That's right. Therefore outside the realm of time.

PJ: But as time seems to be the essential core of this problem...

K: Time and thought.

PJ: Thought is the product of time. I mean, thought is time.

K: That's the real point. Where do you start, you mean?

PJ: No. Perhaps if we could go into this whole business of the flow of time, and at what instant is interception possible?

K: What do you mean, interception, because I don't quite understand the usage of that word. Nobody can...

PJ: I am not talking of an interceptor...

K: That's it.

PJ: ...but the...

K: ...ending of it.

PJ: I was going to use another word, but you can use the word 'ending'.

K: Let's use simpler words.

PJ: Time is from a past immemorial.

K: Yes, which is thought.

PJ: Thought is also from a past immemorial, projecting into a future which is also eternal.

K: The movement of thought.

PJ: Eternal.

K: No. The future is conditioned by the past, as a human psyche.

PJ: So unless the human being ends, unless he ceases to be...

K: Ceases to be conditioned.

PJ: No, but you will still use thought.

K: No.

PJ: The content will undergo a change, but the mechanism of thought will continue.

K: The mechanism of thought will continue - let's put it round - now, thought is the chief instrument we have. Right?

PJ: Yes.

K: And that instrument after thousands of years of various efforts, actions, has not only made that instrument dull, it has reached the end of its tether because thought is limited, and time is limited. Right? Therefore it is conditioned, divided and in perpetual state of turmoil. Now can that end? That's the question.

PJ: Now I used the word interception. This movement of the past as thought, as the yesterday...

K: ...as today.

PJ: But what is the today?

K: Today is the movement of the past modified - memory. We are a bundle of memories.

PJ: That is true. But the contact with time...

K: Now wait a minute, what do you mean contact with time? Time is thought.

PJ: Time as a psychological process - I am not talking of contact...

K: Of course - leave all that.

PJ: But contact with time as a psychological process is in the present, isn't it? There can only be aware...

K: Pupilji, let's be very clear. Time is thought. Right? Don't separate time as though something different from thought.

PJ: No, time is thought.

K: So it is time-thought.

PJ: Yes. As the past, present and the future.

K: Are you asking, what is the now?

PJ: Yes, because this interception I am talking about - let me use my word till you...

K: All right. Interception, I don't quite understand.

PJ: Interception is contact with, contact with the fact.

K: Contact with the fact that the whole movement of thought...

PJ: Not even all that, just contact with 'what is'

K: Which is what?

PJ: Whatever is, is your statement now. Whatever you are saying now and my listening to you is the contact with 'what is'.

K: Ah, I understand. That is - may I put it the way I understand it? The past, the present and the future is a movement of time-thought. How do you realise it?

PJ: How do you realise it.

K: How do you come to see the truth of it, the fact of it?

PJ: You know sir, there is such a thing as tactile touch.

K: I can touch, yes, textile touch.

PJ: Now...

K: Not textile, tactile. How do you touch this thing?

PJ: How do you touch this thing.

K: How do you - to use your word - come into contact with it, with the fact? With the fact that I am a whole series of memories, which is time-thought.

PJ: Let us be more concrete. The thought that I am going away this afternoon, and that I will be leaving you. It is a thought.

K: It is a thought. It is an actuality.

PJ: An actuality. But out of that there is a certain pain of leaving you, which is the emotional, psychological element which come to cover up the fact.

K: Yes, which is what? You know, in the French, 'partir'.

PJ: So how does one... What is to be contacted? Not the fact that I am going away.

K: But, what?

PJ: But this pain.

K: The pain. I understand. Are you asking, the pain of going, the pain of a thousand aches of years and centuries of pain of loneliness and sorrow and all that, grief, the agony, the anxiety and all that, is that separate from me who is to feel it?

PJ: It may not be separate.

K: It is me.

PJ: At what point, how do I touch it?

K: I don't quite understand your usage of 'how do I touch it'.

PJ: It is only in the present...

K: I see what you mean.

PJ: The whole of this edifice rests on that.

K: Yes, that's what I said. That's what I said. The now contains the past, the future and the present. Right?

PJ: Yes.

K: Let's understand this. The present is the whole past and the future. This is the present. The present is me, with all the memories of a thousand years, and that thousand years being modified all the time, and the future - all that is now, the present. Right?

PJ: But the present also is not a static thing. It's over...

K: Of course, of course, of course. The moment you have said, it's gone.

PJ: It's gone. So what is it that you actually see? What is it you actually observe?

K: Actually observe the fact...

PJ: What fact?

K: The fact - just a minute - the fact that the present is the whole movement of time and thought. To see the truth of that - let's not use the word 'see' - have an insight, perception into that, that the now is all time and thought.

PJ: Does that perception emanate from the brain?

K: Either it emanates, comes from perceiving with the eyes, nerves and so on, or that perception is an insight which has nothing to do with time and thought.

PJ: But it arises within the brain?

K: Yes, or outside the brain, you are asking.

PJ: It's very important.

K: I know, that's why I want to be clear. Is it within the sphere of the brain; or it is that insight which comes when there is the freedom from its conditioning, which is the operation of the mind, which is supreme intelligence. Do you follow?

PJ: I don't follow.

K: Aha. Let's be clear. The brain, whatever part it is, is conditioned by time and thought, time-thought. As long as that conditioning remains, insight is not possible. You may have occasional insight into something, but pure insight, which means comprehension of the totality of things - yes, I'll use the word 'totality', not wholeness because that word is now being used so much - it is the perception of completeness. Right? That insight is not of time-thought. Therefore that insight is part of that brain which is in a different dimension.

PJ: Without sight there cannot be insight.

K: That's all I am saying.

PJ: So seeing - perceiving...

K: Yes perceiving.

PJ: Perceiving - listening is contained in perceiving - seems to be the essential essence of insight.

K: Would you repeat that again slowly?

PJ: Let us take the word 'insight' - it is seeing into.

K: Into, seeing into.

PJ: Seeing into. Seeing into seeing?

K: No. Seeing into - just a minute, let's look at that word. Seeing, comprehending the totality of something, the vastness of something. Right? Insight is possible only when there is cessation of thought and time. Thought and time are limited, therefore such limitation cannot have insight.

PJ: To understand what you are saying I have to have an open ear and eyes that see. Out of that sound, out of that form, out of that whole...

K: The meaning of the words and so on and so on, yes.

PJ: ...arises a seeing which goes beyond. I am trying to get at something.

K: What are you trying to get at? I don't...

PJ: I am trying to get at - you talk of insight. Now insight cannot arise without attention.

K: No. Don't introduce the word 'attention'.

PJ: Or sight, seeing.

K: If we can stick to the same thing, that is, insight cannot exist as long as time-thought play a part.

PJ: You see it's like which comes first. Which comes first.

K: What do you mean?

PJ: In consciousness, in my approach to this, I can't start with insight. I can only start with observation.

K: You can only start by realising the truth that time, psychological time and thought are always limited. That's a fact.

PJ: Krishnaji, that is a fact.

K: Wait, start from that, and therefore whatever it does will always be limited and therefore contradictory, therefore divisive and endless conflict. That's all I am saying. You can see the fact of that.

PJ: You can see the fact of that outside of yourself.

K: Wait, wait. You can see it politically...

PJ: You can see it outside of yourself.

K: No, wait. You can see it politically, religiously, all throughout the world, this is a fact, that time and thought in their activity have brought about havoc in the world. That's a fact.

PJ: Yes, yes.

K: Now. So the question is: can that limitation ever end? Or is man conditioned for ever to live within the time-thought area?

PJ: You see the difficulty of understanding this is, what is the relationship of the brain cells and the action of the senses - I am not using the word 'thought' at the moment - on a statement like this: that do you see the fact that time, thought...

K: ...are limited.

PJ: ...are limited? What does it exactly mean, how does one see that? It is like telling me that you are an illusion.

K: What?

PJ: It is exactly like telling me that Pupul is an illusion.

K: No, I didn't say that.

PJ: But I am saying it.

K: No, you are not an illusion.

PJ: No, sir, it is exactly that.

K: No.

PJ: Because the moment you say, after all Pupul is a psychological bundle of the past...

K: Psychological movement of time and thought, which is the psyche.

PJ: Which is the psyche.

K: That psyche...

PJ: ...is limited.

K: ...is limited. Whatever it does is limited.

PJ: Then I would ask, what is wrong with it being limited?

K: Nothing is wrong. If you want to live in perpetual conflict there's nothing wrong.

PJ: All right, move further. To end it, is not only to say, to feel that it is limited, but there must be an ending to it.

K: I said there is.

PJ: What is the nature of this ending?

K: What do you mean ending?

PJ: Just seeing...

K: Let's take the word 'ending' - I must be clear what you and I, we are both saying, understanding the meaning of the same word, to end something - to end attachment, to end, not to smoke, not to do this or that, to put an end to it - the ending.

PJ: The flow ceases to flow.

K: Yes, if you like to... The movement of thought and time ceases, psychologically. What is your difficulty? You are making it terribly complex, a simple thing.

PJ: No, sir. There is a point of perception, which is a point of insight, what is that point of insight?

K: What do you mean, point of insight?

PJ: Where I see... In what time space do I see it?

K: Look, Pupul, just let's be simple. Time and thought has divided the world - politically, geographically, religious - that's a fact. Right? Right? Can't you see the fact?

PJ: No, sir. I look outside...

K: Wait, wait. Don't look outside.

PJ: No. I don't see the fact.

K: What do you mean you don't see the fact?

PJ: Because if I saw the fact, really saw the fact...

K: You would stop that kind of thing.

PJ: ...it would be all over.

K: That is all I am saying.

PJ: Why sir, if it is such a simple thing, which I don't think it is, because it has such devious ways.

K: No. That's the whole point - this is where I am saying something which we are probably putting in different words - if you have an insight that the movement of thought and time are divisive, at whatever

level, in whatever realm, in whatever area, it is a movement of endless conflict. That's a fact. Britain fought for some island, that's a fact. Because British, British, French, French, German, Russian - they are all divisive. And India against somebody - this is the whole movement of time and thought. That's a fact.

PJ: Yes but you can see it when it is a matter outside of you.

K: That's a point. If you can see it outside, this movement, what it does in the world, what misery it has caused in the world, then inwardly the psyche is time and thought, is the movement of time and thought. This movement has created that. Simple. The psychological movement, the divisive psychological movement has created the external fact. Right? I am a Hindu, I feel secure. I am a German, I feel secure in the word, in the feeling that I belong to something.

PJ: You see, Krishnaji, I would say that all these, being a Hindu, greed, all those one has seen as a product of this movement of time-thought.

K: That is all I am saying.

PJ: But that, it's not quite...

K: What is your difficulty, Pupul?

PJ: There is within it all a sense of 'I exist'.

K: I don't realise the psyche is that!

PJ: That's essentially the nature...

K: Why doesn't it? Because - it is simple enough, why do you make it complex - because I have thought the psyche is something other than the conditioned state. I thought there was something in me, or in the brain, or in somewhere, which is timeless, which is god, which is this, which is that, and that if I could only reach that everything would be right. That's part of my conditioning, because I am uncertain, confused, god will give me safety, protection, certainty. That's all. God or a highest principle, or some kind of conviction.

PJ: What is the nature of the ground from which insight springs?

K: I have told you. Insight can only take place when there is freedom from time and thought.

PJ: It is a sort of unending...

K: No, it is not. You are complicating a very simple fact, as most of us do. If one wants to live at peace, which to live in peace only is to flower, is to understand the extraordinary world of peace. Peace cannot be brought about by thought.

PJ: You see, please understand, Krishnaji, it is the brain itself which listens to that statement.

K: Yes, it listens. And then what happens? Just a minute. What happens? If it listens it is quiet.

PJ: It is quiet.

K: It isn't ruminating, it is not going on, 'By Jove, what does he mean', it is not rattling, it is quiet. Right? Wait a minute. When it is actually, not induced quietness, actually when it listens, and there is quietness, then there is insight. I don't have to explain ten different ways the limitation of thought, it is so.

PJ: I see what you're saying.

Is there anything further than...

K: Oh yes there is. There is a great deal more. Which is: is listening a sound? A sound within an area, or I am listening to what you are saying without the verbal sound? If there is a verbal sound I am not listening, I am only understanding the words. But you want to convey to me something much more than the words, so if the words are making a sound in my hearing I can't deeply understand the depth of what you are saying.

So I want to find out something much more. We started with the present. The present is the now, the now is the whole movement of time-thought. Right? It is the whole structure. If the structure of time and thought ends the now has totally a different meaning. The now then is nothing. I mean, when we use the word 'nothing', zero contains all the figures. Right? So nothing contains all. But we are afraid to be nothing.

PJ: When you say it contains the all, is it the essence of all human and racial and environmental, and nature and the cosmos, as such?

K: Yes. No, I would rather... You see, I am talking of the fact of a realisation that there is nothing. The psyche is a bundle of memories - right? - and those memories are dead. They operate, they function, but they are the outcome of past experience which has gone. I am a movement of memories. Right? Now if I have an insight into that, there is nothing. I don't exist.

PJ: You said something about sound.

K: Yes.

PJ: And listening.

K: Listening without sound. You see the beauty of it?

PJ: Yes, it is possible when the mind itself is totally still.

K: No, don't bring in the mind for the moment. When the brain is quiet, absolutely quiet, therefore there is no sound made by the word.

PJ: There is no sound made by the word.

K: Of course. That is real listening. The word has given me what you want to convey. Right? You want to tell me, 'I am going this afternoon'. I listen to that...

PJ: But the brain has not been active in listening.

K: Yes. And the brain when active is noise, is sound.

Let's go back to something more, we will include, come back to this sound business because it is very interesting what is sound. Sound can only exist, pure sound can only exist when there is space and silence, otherwise it is just noise.

So I would like to come back to the question: all one's education, all one's past experience and knowledge is a movement in becoming, both inwardly, psychologically as well as outwardly. Becoming is the accumulation of memory. Right? More and more and more memories, which is called knowledge. Right? Now, as long as that movement exists there is fear of being nothing. But when one really sees the insight of the fallacy, the illusion of becoming something, therefore that very perception, that insight to see there is nothing, this becoming is endless time-thought and conflict, there is an ending of that. That is, the ending of the movement which is the psyche, which is time-thought. The ending of that is to be nothing. Nothing then contains the whole universe - not my petty little fears and petty little anxieties and problems, and my sorrow with regard to, you know, a dozen things.

After all, Pupilji, nothing means the entire world of compassion - compassion is nothing. And therefore that

nothingness is supreme intelligence. That's all there is. I don't know if I am conveying this. So why are human beings - just ordinary, intelligent - frightened of being nothing? If I see that I am really a verbal illusion, that I am nothing but dead memories, that's a fact. But I don't like to think I am just nothing but memories. But the truth is I am memories. If I had no memory either I am in a state of amnesia or I understand the whole movement of memory, which is time-thought and see the fact as long as there is this movement there must be endless conflict, struggle, pain. And when there is an insight into that nothing means something entirely different. And that nothing is the present. It is not varying present, it isn't one day this and one day the next day - being nothing is no time, therefore it is not ending one day and beginning another day.

You see, it is really quite interesting if one goes into this problem not theoretically but actually. The astrophysicists are trying to understand the universe. They can only understand in terms of gases, but the immensity of it as part of this human being, not out there, here. Which means there must be no shadow of time and thought. Pupul, after all that is real meditation, that's what 'sunya' means in Sanskrit. But we have interpreted it ten, hundred different ways, commentaries, this and that, but the actual fact is we are nothing except words and opinions, judgements - that's all petty affairs. And therefore our life becomes petty.

So to grasp, to understand that in the zero contains all the numbers. Right? So in nothing, all the world - not the pain and the - that's all so small. I know it sounds, when I am suffering that is the only thing I have. Or when there is fear, that is the only thing. But I don't see it is such a petty little thing.

So having listened to all this, what is it you realise? If you could put it into words, Pupulji, it would be rather good. What is it that you, and those who are going to listen to all this - it may be rubbish, it may be true - who are going to listen to all this, what do they capture, realise, see the immensity of all this?

PJ: It is really an ending of the psychological nature of the self, because that is becoming...

K: Wait a minute, Pupulji, I have asked a question because it is going to be very helpful to all of us if you could, as you listen to all this, what is your response, what is your reaction, what have you realised, what have you - say 'By Jove! I have got it, I have got the perfume of it'?

PJ: Sir, it's very... Don't ask me that question because anything I say would sound... Because as you are speaking there was immensity.

K: Yes. Now wait a minute. There was that, I could feel it. There was the tension of that. But is it temporary, is it for the moment, for a second and it is gone? And then the whole business of remembering it, capturing it, inviting it...

PJ: Oh no, I think one has moved from there at least. And another thing one realises, the most difficult thing in the world is to be totally simple.

K: To be simple, that's right. If one is really simple, from that you can understand the enormous complexity of things. But we start with all the complexities and never see the simplicity. That's our training. We have trained our brain to see the complexity and then try to find an answer to the complexity. But we don't see the extraordinary simplicity of life - of facts, rather.

PJ: In the Indian tradition, if I may move away a little...

K: I am glad.

PJ: Out of sound was born all the elements, all the Panchamahabhut?

K: You see...

PJ: The sound which reverberates and is yet not heard.

K: That's it, that's it. But, Pupulji, especially in the Indian tradition, from the Buddha to Nagarjuna, and the ancient Hindus, have said there is that state of nothingness, which, they said, you must deny the whole thing. Nagarjuna says - he came to that point, as far as I understand, I may be mistaken, what I have been told - that he denied everything, every movement of the psyche.

PJ: Every movement of the brain cells as becoming.

K: Yes. It is there in the books, or it is there in tradition. Why haven't they pursued that? Even the most intelligent of them, even the most religious devotee - not to some structure but to the feeling of... the feeling of the divine, the sense of something sacred - why haven't they pursued, denying, not the world - you can't deny the world, they have denied the word, and made a mess of their own lives - but the total negation of the 'me'.

PJ: Really, you know, renunciation - let me use that word - is the negation of the 'me'.

K: Yes, but the 'me' exists still. I may renounce my house, I may get away from my memories but - you follow?

PJ: Basically the renunciation is never in the outer.

K: Inside. Which means what? Don't be attached. Even to your highest principle. Don't be attached to your loin cloth. So I think what is happening is that we are caught, really caught in a net of words, in theories, not in actuality. I suffer, I must find a way to end that, not escape into some kind of silly illusions. Why have human beings not faced the fact and changed the fact? You follow my question? Is it because we are living with illusions of ideas, ideals and conclusions and all that - unrealities? It is so obvious, all this.

PJ: We are living with the history of mankind. That is the history of mankind.

K: That is the history of mankind. And mankind is me. And me is this - endless misery. And so if you want to end misery, end the 'me'. The ending of me is not an action of will. The ending of me doesn't come about through fasting - you know all that childish business that human beings have gone through, who have been called saints.

PJ: It is really the ending of time, isn't it, sir?

K: Yes, isn't it. The ending of time-thought. That means to listen without the sound - listen to the universe without a sound.

We were talking the other day in New York, and there was a man, a doctor - I believe he was very well known. He said, all these questions are all right, sir, but the fundamental issue is whether the brain cells which have been conditioned can really bring about a mutation in themselves. Then the whole thing is simple. I said it is possible only through insight - and we went in, as we have gone into it now. You see, nobody is willing to listen to this in its entirety, they listen partially - agree in the sense, go together up to a certain distance, and stop there. If man really says I must have peace in the world, therefore I must live peacefully, then there is peace in the world. But he doesn't want to live in peace, he does everything opposite to that - his ambition, his arrogance, his silly petty fears and all that.

So we have reduced the vastness of all this to some petty little reactions. Do you realise that, Pupul? And so we live such petty lives. I mean, this applies from the highest to the lowest.

PJ: What is sound to you, sir?

K: Sound is the tree. Sound - wait a minute - take music, whether the pure Indian chanting, Vedic chanting, and the Gregorian chanting, they are extraordinarily close together. And one listens to all the songs of praise - which are, you know what they are! Then you listen to the sound of the waves, the sound of strong

wind among the trees, sound of person whom you have lived with for many years. You get used to all this. But if you don't get used to all this, then sound has an extraordinary meaning. Then you hear everything afresh. Say, for instance, you tell me time and thought is the whole movement of man's life, therefore limited. Now you have communicated to me a simple fact, and I listen to it. I listen to it without the sound of the word, I have captured the significance, the depth of that statement. And I can't lose it. It isn't I have heard it now and it is gone when I go outside. I have listened to it in its entirety. That means the sound has conveyed the fact that it is so. And what is so is absolute, always.

I believe only in the Hebraic tradition, Jehovah, or whatever, the nameless one can only say 'I am', like 'Tathata' and so on in Sanskrit.

I think that's enough.