



Understanding truth through the lens of Jiddu Krishnamurti

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Abstract

This paper aims to bring to light how truth is being interpreted by the 20th century radical spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti. As far as the concept of truth is concerned, it is a fundamental concept in Philosophy; it has been given numerous interpretations by different philosophers. Krishnamurti, too, has offered his view on truth. He views truth as revelation of a thing in its true nature. And in his view, this revelation cannot not be brought about by any path. That is why, this paper also makes an analysis of the mechanism through which truth is stated to be attained according to Krishnamurti. Besides, it contains author's observation on the theme.

Keywords: Krishnamurti, truth, discovery, understanding, self, observation

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) is a radical spiritual teacher of 20th century India whose primary concern is to bring about a revolutionary transformation in the world. Although he belongs to India, his teachings cannot be identified and classified as belonging to a school of philosophy. In fact, he himself says that he is not formulating any philosophy, any theory. As far as his teachings are concerned, they are just teachings; he does not want to be the owner of them. He is an uncompromising enemy of authority, even that of one's own past experiences. It is for this reason, he asks his listeners not to follow or accept whatever he speaks or talks about. In his own words, "Please do not think of me as a philosopher expounding a new set of ideas with which your intellect can juggle. That is not what I want to offer you. Rather, I should like to explain that truth, the life of fullness and richness, cannot be realized through any person, through imitation, or through any form of authority." (Krishnamurti, 2007, p.4) So Krishnamurti may not be considered as a philosopher as he is neither interested in propounding any theory nor does he argue in favour of his teachings. Raymond Martin also points out, "Krishnamurti has little use for academic philosophy. Occasionally, he dismissed it as a waste of time, or worse as a generator of theories that become obstacles in an individual's attempt to

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understand him or herself." (Krishnamurti, 2017, p.x) Instead of offering any philosophy, he puts emphasis on developing a critical mind, a mind that is free from all conditioning. He himself possesses such a mind as he refuses to accept anything conventionally accepted. Whatever he teaches is based on his insights rather than any book knowledge and scholarship. In his opinion, "No book is sacred....like the newspaper it is only words printed on paper and there is nothing sacred in either." (Krishnamurti, 2012, p.114) The revolutionary transformation that Krishnamurti wants to bring about in the world outside can be made to happen only when we stop accepting or following others and start relying on our own insight as well as observation. His emphasis is on one being the light to oneself.

Krishnamurti puts fundamental importance on living and true living for him is to live in freedom. So he wants to free man to live life. This freedom is freedom from ideas, principles and beliefs. In his opinion, life is to be lived, not to be sacrificed at the altar of principles and beliefs. And he believes that understanding truth makes man free to live. As far as his perspective on truth is concerned, Krishnamurti has tried to interpret it from a different point of view. Being a stern critic of convention, he refuses to accept what we generally mean by truth. He also does not consider our search for truth truly a search for it; rather it is the way that man has found out to get comfort in the midst of everyday struggle and conflict. It is his urge to get immediate relief and comfort from pain that he starts searching for truth. In his own words, "So those people who are always proclaiming that they are searching for truth are in reality missing it. They have found their lives to be insufficient, incomplete, lacking in love, and think that by trying to seek truth they will find satisfaction and comfort. If you frankly say to yourself that you are seeking only consolation and compensation for the difficulties of life, you will be able to grapple with the problem intelligently. But as long as you pretend to yourself that you are seeking something more than mere compensation, you cannot see the matter clearly. The first thing to find out, then is whether you are really seeking, fundamentally seeking truth" (Krishnamurti, 2007, p.2) So, as behind our seeking for truth, there is a desire or a motive to be free ourselves from the innumerable difficulties that we have in our everyday life, Krishnamurti discards this very seeking as false because here our action is determined by a motive to gain something that makes the same having no implicit value. For example, if I am kind to my friend because I will be receiving something in return, then my kindness has no meaning as I am looking for a reward. So Krishnamurti says that it is only when we act in action itself, truth reveals to us. In other words, it is only when we search for truth to discover truth, not for the sake of escaping or finding out a solution of our problems, we can see the truth. Krishnamurti sees action as awareness in that which we are doing and only in that awareness truth reveals: "Become conscious, become aware in your

action that you are acting in search of rewards.....become fully aware in your action, that you are acting through a desire for reward, achievement, success or through fear, through escape. The moment you have become fully conscious of that, the cause disappears, because you will have understood it. You can only do that when your mind and heart are fully occupied, are fully harmonious with that act" (Krishnamurti, 2007, p.58)

Krishnamurti talks about discovery of truth in the present rather than aiming to attain it at a distant future. This is so because in his view, truth is not something static, something permanent and eternal; rather truth is a thing that is living from moment to moment. It does not continue. So truth cannot be absolute and permanent. Therefore, he maintains that quoting the truth of others is nothing but repetition and repetition is a lie. In his opinion, truth is seeing the fact and the fact is that nothing is permanent; everything keeps on changing from moment to moment. The fact is '*what is*' which is never constant, "*What is* is never static; it is ever in movement, ever undergoing modifications." (Krishnamurti, 2013, p.159) That is why truth, being the revelation of the everchanging '*what is*', is always new; it is immediate and always in the present. As such we have to discover it anew, afresh. And in Krishnamurti's view, to discover truth is to live truth by ourselves. But instead of doing this, he points out, we, on the most part, try to find out what other people say about truth. That is, we always look for a description of truth and accordingly make attempt to live our lives in the light of that description. But truth cannot be brought within the field of language as the same is a matter of discovery. We have to experience truth, to live truth in order to discover truth. He says "No description of truth can be lasting, for it can only be an illusion of words. You cannot know of love through the description of another, to know love you yourself must have experienced it. You cannot know the taste of salt until you have tasted salt for yourself. Yet we spend our time looking for a description of truth instead of trying to find out the manner of its realization. I say that I cannot describe, I cannot put into words that living reality which is beyond all idea of progress, all idea of growth. Beware of the man who tries to describe that living reality, for it cannot be described; it must be experienced, lived" (Krishnamurti, 2007, p.4). Krishnamurti's point is that experiencing truth has to be one's own experience. This reveals that truth belongs to the domain of the unknown. His conviction is that if the truth is already known, there is no necessity to look for the same. This further, Krishnamurti asserts, leads to the point that as truth does not belong to the domain of the known, we cannot seek it. To seek means to have prior knowledge about what we are looking for. In other words, seeking means to have pre-suppositions about what we are searching for. Since truth belongs to the domain of the unknown, it can never be sought according to Krishnamurti. Seeking or searching implies a desire for the attainment of what we are searching for which further implies

that we have experience of the same once before and we want to have that experience again. But in Krishnamurti's opinion, truth cannot be experienced before because it is not something static lying there to be experienced by us over and over again. Truth is living and as such truth can be immediately aware of.

As far as Krishnamurti is concerned, this immediate awareness of truth is not possible through the employment of any method. The reason stated is that as truth is always in the present and accordingly, we have to discover it in the present, so no fixed method can help us to see the truth which is ever new. Again, to fix a method for truth seeking implies that we already know about the object of our search for we cannot fix the method unless we know the nature of the object. But as according to Krishnamurti, truth and knowledge cannot go together; it falls outside the domain of knowledge, so a path leading to the known cannot lead one to truth, to the unknown: "A path can lead only to that which is known, and that which is known is not truth. When you know something, it ceases to be truth because it is past, it is entirely asserted. Therefore, the known, the past, is caught in the net of time. Accordingly, it is not the truth, it is not the real. So a path leading to the known cannot lead you to truth, and a path can lead only to the known and not to the unknown. You take a path to a house in a village, because you know where that house is, and there are many paths to your house and to your village. But reality is immeasurable, the unknown. If you could measure it, it would not be truth. And what you have learned through books, through the say-so of others is not real; it is only repetition and what is repeated is no longer truth" (Krishnamurti, 2005, p.16).

That is why, instead of following a method or a path, Krishnamurti talks about having a certain kind of mental state while delving into the discovery of truth. In his opinion, we need to realize truth in concrete experiences. However, at the same time, he declares that any and every experience of ours cannot give us truth; our experience should take place in a certain way so that we can see the truth. As such Krishnamurti talks about the nature of mind where truth can reveal itself. As far as the nature of that mind is concerned, he maintains, it is to be a free mind; the mind that is able to see a thing as it is. And for this, the mind has to free itself from thought. According to Krishnamurti, thought cannot reveal truth; in fact it is because of our thought that we are unable to see the truth. As he points out, our experiences are always influenced by our thoughts as we are the product of the environment in which we live, the culture and tradition which we follow and education we are given. As such, when we come to view things, we do it under the influence of these various factors. When we are listening to someone, we actually interpret his words as per our beliefs and prejudices. As a result, what we hear is not what other person is saying, but our own thoughts. Therefore, Krishnamurti always warns his listeners about the

limitation inherent in language. He says that we are prone to give words our own convenient meaning. Therefore, we have to free our minds from the ideas that we associate with the words and try to understand what actually is being spoken by the speaker. In this connection, Krishnamurti has brought to light a distinction between hearing and listening. To hear means to understand the sense of a sentence whereas to listen means to understand the meaning of it. As Dr Shakuntala explains it, "I can understand the sense of the sentence "I have seen God". But does it mean I really understand what the speaker is actually saying? The word 'God' brings to my mind some concepts which need not be his notion of 'God'. To understand what he actually is saying I need to stop myself from interpreting it according to my idea and listen attentively to find out what the speaker is actually trying to say. To do this, I have to free myself from my idea of 'God'." (Shakuntala, 2015 p.143) With regard to our seeing also, Krishnamurti says that we are not free from ideas and beliefs; mostly we see the thing in front of us not as it is right now. Rather, we do the same as we believe it to be. For example, when I see my student who stands in front of me right now, instead of seeing him as how he is right at this present moment, I try to see him with the knowledge that I have about him till now. In other words, I try to perceive him with all the memories I have about him and this interference spoils my observation. As a result, I do not see my student as he is, but as I believe him to be. So I have to be free from my image of him so that I can see him right at this moment. In other words, to see the truth about my student, I have to free my mind from any thought.

Krishnamurti says that our looking at something is always qualified by the characteristics or our images which we have of the thing from the past. For example, we always see an honest friend, loyal husband, beautiful house, pleasant ambience and the like. But the question of concern is— are they actually so or it is our way of looking at them as per our trait? Krishnamurti's response as observed by Dr Shakuntala is that "most of the time the attributes I am ascribing to the present object of experience are actually from memory of past experiences; they are images I associate with the object. I had a certain feeling when I came across it in my past experiences. Now when I see similarity of features I am imposing what I remember in this object. If I remember having pleasure from the object I call it now pleasurable. The notion of pleasurable or painful or beautiful are imposed ideas on the objects. Even when we take emotions like anger, we think of it as not likeable and the tendency to avoid anger lies in the fact of finding anger not likeable in one's previous experience" (Shakuntala, 2015, p.144). As per Krishnamurti, the very source of our qualification is naming and its consequent feeling. A particular feeling is associated with our naming of a certain experience. Whenever I have a certain experience, I always name it or classify it as the same feeling as I have in the past. And with this naming

comes the feeling of it either pleasurable or painful I had when I experienced the object. Thus, the feelings imposed by us are not the characteristics of the object. That is why, Krishnamurti has concluded that naming has to be stopped for making actual perception of a thing to happen: "You can know me only when you observe me, when you have communication with me, but by calling me by a name, saying I am this or that, obviously puts an end to communion with me...to understand something, the naming first cease first" (Krishnamurti, 2006, p.25). And in the absence of naming thought also ceases as thought disrupts our observation through naming. This state without naming is called by Krishnamurti attention. Without naming, the mind can see the thing as it is; it can see the fact, the truth about the thing. It is the perception of 'what is'. So 'what is' is a thing as it is, not being influenced by our conception of it and we can see it only when our mind is free from the conception of it. We become able to see 'what is' when we drop the images associated with the name. In other words, to free our minds from forming images and its consequent naming is to free it from the known. To put it differently, what Krishnamurti prescribes for the discovery of truth to happen is passive observation or *choiceless awareness*. While describing the nature of *choiceless awareness*, he says, "Choiceless awareness implies to be aware both objectively, outside and inwardly without any choice. Just to be aware of the colors, of this text, of the trees, the mountains, nature—just to be aware. Not choose, say "I like this", "I do not like that" or "I want this", "I do not want that". To observe without the observer. The observer is the past, who is conditioned; therefore, he is always looking from that conditioned point of view, so there is like and dislike, my race, your race, my God, your God, and all the rest of it. We are saying to be aware implies to observe the whole environment around you, the mountains, the trees, the ugly wars, the towns, to be aware, to look at it. And in that observation, there is no decision, no will, no choice" (Krishnamurti, 2005, p.73). This means that choiceless awareness is attention without any resistance or judgment. It is to see a thing as it is without judging it as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly and the like. In other words, it is clear, undistorted observation of the fact. And such awareness can take place in a free mind, that is, in a mind which is uninfluenced, undetermined and unconditioned. Whenever our mind is conditioned, we become judgmental; we choose between what is and what should be. And this prevents to see a thing in its true nature. It is only when we just aware of what is actually happening, we are able to see the truth. For example, if I am violent and choose to be non-violent, I am unable to see the violence in me. I resist revealing my actual feelings and responses; instead, I try to portray my conditioning. Therefore, one needs to be absolutely free from conditioning so that one can see the facts without any resistance or choice. Rohit Mehta, while interpreting Krishnamurti's choiceless awareness, says that generally we superimpose the ideal upon the actual, that is, 'what should be' upon 'what is'. In this way, we try to

resist or indulge. If attention is to take place, superimposition has to go away: "A problem is the outcome of something that is superimposed on a situation. All that one needs to do in order to deal with a problem is to see the situation as it is without any superimposition. Now this is not possible when one approaches a problem with resistance or with indulgence. Both these processes give a continuity to that which has been superimposed. If the super-imposition is to vanish then one must observe what is without any resistance or indulgence. Now to see what is, constitutes the very essence of attention. Thus, attention is a state of awareness, but it is awareness without any choice or selectivity." (Mehta, 2002, p.147). The moment we introduce choice, we move away from seeing the fact. For example, the moment I bring my choice to be non-violent, I move away from seeing the fact or truth about myself that I am violent. So choice creates hindrances in direct perception to happen. It is only when I see my thoughts as they occur, I can go beyond my thoughts, that is, it is only when I see my violence that I can go beyond it and become non-violent. Only in such a situation, action happens as I no longer stay with my seeing, but go beyond it. For example, when I come to see that I am really violent, I no more remain violent, I automatically transcend violence. I will become non-violent. Therefore, in Krishnamurti's philosophy, there is no distinction between seeing and acting. Because in seeing action takes place.

According to Krishnamurti, we introduce choice as we think that we can control over our thoughts. But in reality, there is no thinker apart from our thoughts. As far as the I or self is concerned, it is nothing else but our thoughts. That is why, Krishnamurti discards the very notion of the self as something substantial and enduring. The self, being thought itself, cannot continue as our thoughts are not constant; one is not continuously one thing. For instance, one cannot be generous or kind or honest throughout his life. If in one moment, a person is generous, in the next moment he may not claim himself to be so. Thus, there is no substantial self that continues.. There exists no thinker separately from thought. To make it clearer, there is no 'I' existing separately from my 'greed'; I am greed. In his own words, "Greed is part of me. I am not different from the greed or envy or hate or jealousy.....but I have separated anger, jealousy, sorrow from me so that I can control it, shape it, run away from it. But if that is me, I can do nothing about it but just observe it. So the observer is the observed, the thinker is the thought, the experiencer is the experienced. The two are not separate." (Krishnamurti, 2005, P-133) Thus, as far as Krishnamurti is concerned, there is no thinker who owns thoughts. This stands for self-knowledge in the opinion of Krishnamurti. Passive observation reveals this fact. And this is truth for Krishnamurti; truth is the revelation of the fact, the 'what is'.

In ultimate analysis, it may, thus, be said that there is an intimate connection between understanding of truth and understanding of self in the

philosophy of Krishnamurti. What he means by self-realization is coming to the understanding of true nature of reality. Self-knowledge makes us to confront the truth. The author also observes that as for Krishnamurti, through self-knowledge we can see truth and as self-knowledge is nothing but the discovery that there is no self and thereby destroys our very notion of the self as something permanent existing separately from our thoughts, it is the destruction of the self that reveals the truth according to Krishnamurti. In other words, the author would like to point out that truth revelation is possible in the absence of the self or the I. Krishnamurti himself is found to be concerned with the cessation of the self as he says, "I am concerned with the dissolution of the 'me', of the 'I', the negation of the self." (Krishnamurti, 2012, p.30) Moreover, the author observes that truth as Krishnamurti sees it is not a goal or end to be achieved because truth is not something fixed, static that we can aim to achieve in future; it renews it in every passing moment and reveals accordingly. Truth is discovery in the present. Truth is to discover that our thought is limited as well as false, for instance, when I discover that I am selfish, that very discovery is called by Krishnamurti truth. Only that discovery will lead me to act, that is, to become unselfish. Thus, truth is seeing and seeing is acting in his opinion; truth is not something which is gathered, accumulated, stored up so that we can use it as a guide in future. It is not something eternally existing. The author would like to conclude with the assertion that truth has been given a very unique meaning in the philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti and what is more unique than this is his significant remark that truth cannot be approached through any path. If we attempt to grasp it through any path, truth ceases to be truth. What he proposes is critical looking, that is, seeing things without any pre-supposition or concept or belief. Buddha also is found to encourage critical looking. However, his approach is different from that of Krishnamurti. While talking about the difference, Raymond Martin rightly points out, "Krishnamurti was not the first to propose critical looking. Others, such as the Buddha, had already proposed it. But Krishnamurti's approach was different and perhaps better suited to skeptically minded philosophers and students of philosophy. For one thing, Krishnamurti was anti-authority to a degree that few thinkers have ever been. He had no use for creeds or theories. He discouraged people from examining themselves in an institutional setting or as part of spiritual discipline. He taught that in examining oneself one should not rely even on what one has learnt in previous examinations. The freedom we need to see what is true, he said, is freedom from the known." (Krishnamurti, 2017, p.x)

Declaration

I hereby declare that the present paper entitled "**UNDERSTANDING TRUTH THROUGH THE LENS OF JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI**" is original and has not been published or submitted elsewhere for publication

Conflict of Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest with respect to my paper.

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