



J Krishnamurti's Insight on Meditation

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Abstract:

J. Krishnamurti, whose life and teachings spanned the greater part of the 20th Century, is regarded by many as one who has had the most profound impact on human consciousness in modern times. He talked of the things that concern all of us in our everyday life: the problems of living in modern society, the individual's search for security, and the need for human beings to free themselves from their inner burdens of violence, fear and sorrow. Meditation, according to Krishnamurti, is not the popular tranquilizer that most people call to mind, but an attempt to see if there is an end to knowledge, therefore freedom from the known. What Krishnamurti considers meditation is along the lines of insight meditation or *jyana yoga*. Meditation is not a means to an end; there is no end, no arrival; it is a movement in time and out of time. Every system and method binds thought to time, but choiceless awareness of every thought and feeling, as well as an understanding of their motives, their mechanism, allowing them to blossom, is the beginning of meditation. This paper is an attempt to discuss J. Krishnamurti's insight on what meditation is and how to practice it.

Keywords - Meditation, Choiceless awareness, Insight.

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Jiddu Krishnamurti was a philosopher with a difference. He did not teach in any university, nor did he propound a new system. He was however, acquainted with all the major religious traditions of the world. Krishnamurti is still regarded as one of the greatest thinkers and religious teachers of all time globally. He did not expound any philosophy or religion. Instead, he talked about things that concern all of us in our everyday lives. He reminded his listeners again and again that we are human beings first and not Hindus, Muslims or Christians. He persistently reiterated that all of us are like the rest of humanity and are not different from one another. He requested that we tread lightly on this earth without destroying ourselves or the environment, and communicated a deep sense of reverence for nature. He explained with great precision the subtle workings of the human mind, and often reiterated the need for bringing into our daily life a deeply meditative quality. His teachings transcend all man-made confines of religious beliefs, nationalist sentiment, and sectarian outlook.

Krishnamurti's books apart, his published dialogues are reminiscent of Plato's, Buddha's and Nagasena's dialogues. He has employed new terms to designate many old concepts. He asks his readers and listeners to focus intensely on the problems at hand. He introduces new descriptions of old, familiar experiences. In the process he discards or critiques many old expressions. 'Meditation' is one of the few words which deserve mention. Either he has not been able to change the term or has voluntarily retained the same. But what becomes important for this commentary on Krishnamurti is how he has qualified the same term by his own interpretation.

For Krishnamurti, meditation is not a search; it's not a seeking, a probing and an exploration. It is an explosion and discovery. It's not the taming of the brain to conform nor is it a self-introspective analysis; it is certainly not the training in concentration. It is something that is aroused naturally, when all positive and negative assertions and accomplishments have been understood and can be dropped away easily.

"It's the emptiness that is essential not what's in the emptiness; there is seeing only from emptiness; all virtue, not social morality and respectability, springs from it. It's out of this emptiness love comes, otherwise it's not love. Foundation of righteousness is in

this emptiness. It's the end and beginning of all things." (Krishnamurti, 69)¹

Fickleness of mind is proverbial. Arjuna² had complained that controlling the mind was as hard as controlling the open air. Meditation as a distinct practice in Indian philosophy appears in a variety of texts from the third century before the Common Era as well as in sculptural depictions. The quintessential manual on meditation, the *Yoga Sūtra*, was composed in approximately 200 CE and includes philosophical positions and meditation techniques from the Sāṃkhya, Jaina, and Buddhist traditions. Sāṃkhya philosophy, articulated by the philosopher Ishvarakrishna in the early centuries of the Common Era, delineates a cosmology based on this dynamic tension between the processes of activity and witnessing. The realm of activity includes psychological states (*bhāva*), operations of the mind (*manās*), sense and motor capacities (*indriya*), as well as the subtle and gross elements (*bhūta*) that manifest as discrete, concrete objects. In India there existed very old schools of philosophy which were entirely devoted to mind-control or meditation. Meditation is understood as the way of silencing and stilling the mind. And it is overwhelmingly important in our lives.

Meditation is a central issue in Krishnamurti's discourses. According to him, meditation is intimately connected to freedom. Freedom is not only the beginning, it is also the end. It is the target of his philosophy as also in life. He calls it the first and the last freedom. We begin with freedom to achieve it. Meditation and freedom are two aspects of the same thing; they are not merely related as a method and a goal. At every stage in life there is freedom which inspires meditation. Thus if freedom is an experience, meditation is an activity directly linked with it as a cause and effect. Freedom is the basic purpose of life and meditation is the route to that. Freedom is hence possibly metaphysical, and meditation psychological.

Meditation, he opines, is not about freeing one or escaping from the world. It is, in addition, not a solitary activity that requires everyone to shun themselves from the world. Instead, the understanding of the world is integral for conceptualising meditation. He adds that the world guarantees basic necessities,

which inevitably is linked to pain and suffering. Meditation is similar to a travel away from these constraints. He iterates,

“One has to be a total outsider, then the world has a meaning, and the beauty of the heavens and the earth is constant. Then love is not pleasure. From this, all action begins that is not the outcome of tension, contradiction, the search for self-fulfillment or the conceit of power.”³

Meditation basically helps us reach the pure state of consciousness. Krishnamurti talks of choice less awareness. Where there is choice, there is no complete awareness. For the person with complete awareness, life's problems cease to be problems. He articulates his view by saying,

"There is then an action which is continuous, without any break and therefore holistic. It means therefore to have a mind that is sane, which implies no commitment to any particular form of belief, dogma, ideal, nothing. It is to have a mind able to think clearly, directly, objectively. In the process of meditation one comes to find that action.”⁴

Krishnamurti accepts meditation as a rigorously religious affair but does not condone orthodox religious meditations, as in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism or Islamic meditation typified in Sufism. He rejects these, on grounds of traditionalism and goes far beyond tradition⁵. Often he is very critical about the orthodox forms of meditation. He disapproves of the proliferating meditation centers all over the world. For Krishnamurti, meditation is not divorced from daily living. For it has to permeate through daily desires of fulfillment, ambition, greed, envy, the daily competitive, imitative, conforming spirit, and the daily affinities-sensuous, sexual and other forms, intellectual appetite and so on. Meditation has to flow through and transform all these.⁶

The repetition of words, of prayers, is self-hypnotic, self-enclosing and destructive. The isolation of thought is always within the field of the known, and the answer to prayer is the response of the known. Meditation is far from this. In this field, thought cannot enter; there is no separation, and so no identity. Meditation is in the open; secrecy has no place in it. Everything is exposed, clear; such as the beauty of love.

Krishnamurti includes in meditation what he calls 'the whole field of existence whether in the artistic or business field'. For he thinks that divisions like artist, businessman, the politician, the priest, the scholar or the scientist - the way we view these as careers, causes a fragmentation of human beings.⁷ Meditation, on the other hand, is understanding. Understanding is in its very basis. For proper understanding that leads to meditation, right values of the things in question are to be established. But even prior to this, one must understand oneself. "If I don't understand the thinker, which is myself, then my action, my thought, has no foundation whatsoever. Therefore self-knowledge is the beginning of meditation"⁸.

Krishnamurti identifies self-knowledge with meditation.⁹ According to him self-knowledge is the culmination of meditation. Meditation is the breaking of all bondage. Krishnamurti says "it is a state of freedom, but not from anything. Freedom from something is only the cultivation of resistance. To be conscious of being free is not freedom"¹⁰

Krishnamurti objects to the use of the words like mind, self, *atman* etc. on the ground that these will signify agency and effort. Thought is caught in the net of its own making. Even the best of thinking cannot break down all thought. Consciousness has to still itself voluntarily. He reiterates that "Silence of the mind cannot be brought about through the action of will. There is silence when will ceases. This is meditation"¹¹.

All of Krishnamurti's works are a series of attempts at understanding the process of life. A serious look at reality is meditation. Though often he talks of silence and stillness, Krishnamurti is not against activity as such. Meditation implies the ending of all strife, all conflicts, inwardly and therefore outwardly.¹²

Every passing instant has to be consigned to non-existence in order to achieve true meditation. Even what we think meditation is has to be rejected. Krishnamurti says that all previous knowledge of what meditation is thought to be as concerns that block future exploration. Meditation is that attention in which there is no registration. Normally the brain registers almost everything - the noise, the words which are being used - it is registering things like

a tape. Extreme selectiveness has to be observed here, in meditation, so that only healthy and useful experiences are taped and the rest ignored. In meditation, there is no registration psychologically, no registration at all except the practical facts of living, going to the office, working in a factory and so on, nothing else. Out of this comes complete silence, because thought has come to an end - except to function only where it is absolutely necessary. Time has come to an end and there is a totally different kind of movement in silence.¹³

He is against seclusion and resistance and calls it suppression and control of thought. But if we are to register selectively, are we not resisting? The traditional concept of *dharānā* is indirectly at play here. Having shunned suppression, the mind has to cultivate itself into understanding life in its proper perspective. The mind has to be alert. It should face the totality of life without any fragmentation. No control of thought, for that will breed conflict. In fact the entire structure of thought, feeling and other experiences has to be understood without interference and personal involvement. "Meditation is to be aware of every thought and of every feeling, never to say it is right or wrong but just to watch it and move with it".¹⁴ Traditional ideas of meditation want to remove ourselves from the reality of life, the 'what is'. Seeking the so-called transcendental experience is an escape from the real, our own being. But for Krishnamurti, a mind that is extraordinarily aware, intelligent, free and awoken does not require any experience at all. Light is light; there is no question of more or less in or of it. Our complete life is at our disposal; shunning it and seeking for a higher, deeper, illusory life is a mistake - what is, is already given. Krishnamurti is ever eager to help us have the right perspective of the world around us. Seeing it without a conditioned mind is meditation. Once we recondition ourselves, free ourselves from the known - we have achieved the goal. It is quietude, extreme sensitivity, alertness. It is a point where the difference of outside and inside, observed and observer is obliterated.¹⁵

In spite of there being certain contradictions, Krishnamurti has surely come up with new insights into the problem of meditation. It cannot be woven into a theory - true; and it is not intended to be so. But there is an inner consistency also. There is a movement from a

chaotic beginning to a harmonious end, from confusion to order. If he asks us to discover our mind, it is relevant within a particular universe of discourse that is Krishnamurti's philosophy of life. There is no point in criticizing him for his position in a particular dialogue on the basis of his position in a previous dialogue - for this is exactly what he has asked us not to do. We have to investigate existence in the 'now' and as 'what is' without any reference to the past. If that is accepted, we shall see how from book to book, from dialogue to dialogue, Krishnamurti has built a remarkable theory of life and a useful concept of meditation.

Endnotes:

1. Krishnamurti, J. (1970). *The only revolution*. M. Lutyens (Ed.)(40). London: Gollancz.
2. Arjuna is a character in Mahabharata who is being referred to here as a listener to Lord Krishna in the Bhagavat Geeta.
3. Krishnamurti, J., & Blau, E. (2002). *Meditations*. Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd (34).
4. Krishnamurti, J. (1990). *The Wholeness of Life*. Krishnamurti Foundation of India (142).
5. Krishnamurti, J., & Anderson, A. W. (1991). *A wholly different way of living*. Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd. (246).
6. Krishnamurti, J., & Anderson, A. W. (1991). *A wholly different way of living*. Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd. (234).
7. Krishnamurti, J., & Anderson, A. W. (1991). *A wholly different way of living*. Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd. (240).
8. Krishnamurti, J., & Anderson, A. W. (1991). *A wholly different way of living*. Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd. (243).
9. Krishnamurti, J. (2013). *The first and last freedom*. Rajpal & Sons. (219).
10. Krishnamurti, J. (2013). *The first and last freedom*. Rajpal & Sons. (220).

11. Krishnamurti, J. (1956). *Commentaries on living: second series*. Rajagopal, D. (Ed.) Quest Books. (116).
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13. Krishnamurti, J. (1990). *The Wholeness of Life*. Krishnamurti Foundation of India (142).
14. Krishnamurti, J. (1990). *The Wholeness of Life*. Krishnamurti Foundation of India (207).
15. Krishnamurti, J. (1969). *Freedom from the Known*. M. Lutyens (Ed.). New York: Harper and Row.