

The Flame of Attention

J. Krishnamurti The Flame of Attention Chapter 2 4th Public Talk at New Delhi 8th November 1981

Before we go into the question of meditation we ought to discuss, or share together perhaps that is the right word the importance of discipline. Most of us in the world are not disciplined, disciplined in the sense that we are not learning. The word 'discipline' comes from the word disciple, the disciple whose mind is learning not from a particular person, a guru, or from a teacher, or preacher, or from books but learning through the observation of his own mind, of his own heart, learning from his own actions. And that learning requires a certain discipline, but not the conformity most disciplines are understood to require. When there is conformity, obedience and imitation, there is never the act of learning, there is merely following. Discipline implies learning, learning from the very complex mind one has, from the life of daily existence, learning about relationship with each other, so that the mind is always pliable, active.

To share together what meditation is, one must understand the nature of discipline. Discipline as ordinarily understood implies conflict; conforming to a pattern like a soldier, or conforming to an ideal, conforming to a certain statement in the sacred books and so on. Where there is conformity there must be friction, and therefore wastage of energy. One's mind and one's heart, if in conflict, can never possibly meditate. We will go into that; it is not a mere statement which you accept or deny, but something we are enquiring into together.

We have lived for millennia upon millennia in conflict, conforming, obeying, imitating, repeating, so that our minds have become extraordinarily dull; we have become second-hand people, always quoting somebody else, what he said or did not say. We have lost the capacity, the energy, to learn from our own actions. It is we who are utterly responsible for our own actions not society or environment, nor the politicians we are responsible entirely for our actions and for learning from them. In such learning we discover so much because in every human being throughout the world there is the story of mankind; in us is the anxiety of mankind and the fears, loneliness, despair, sorrow and pain; all this complex history is in us. If you know how to read that book then you do not have to read any other book except, for example, books on technology. But we are negligent, not diligent, in learning from ourselves, from our actions, and so we do not see that we are responsible for our actions and for what is happening throughout the world and for what is happening in this unfortunate country.

One must put one's house in order, because nobody on earth, or in heaven, is going to do it for one, neither one's gurus, nor one's vows, nor one's devotion. The way one lives, the way one thinks, the way one acts, is disorderly. How can a mind that is in disorder perceive that which is total order as the universe is in total order?

What has beauty to do with a religious mind? You might ask why all the religious traditions and the rituals never referred to beauty. But the understanding of beauty is part of meditation, not the beauty of a woman or a man or the beauty of a face, which has its own beauty, but about beauty itself, the actual essence of beauty. Most monks, sannyasis and the so-called religiously inclined minds, totally disregard this and become hardened towards their environment. Once it happened that we were staying in the Himalayas with some friends; there was a group of sannyasis in front of us, going down the path, chanting; they never looked at the trees, never looked at the beauty of the earth, the beauty of the blue sky, the birds, the flowers, the running waters; they were totally concerned with their own salvation, with their own entertainment. And that custom, that tradition, has been going on for a thousand years. A man who is supposed to be religious, must shun, put aside, all beauty, and his life becomes dull, without any aesthetic sense; yet beauty is one of the delights of truth.

When you give a toy to a child who has been chattering, naughty, playing around, shouting, when you give that child a complicated toy he becomes totally absorbed in it, he becomes very quiet, enjoying the mechanics of it. The child becomes completely concentrated, completely involved with that toy; all the mischief has been absorbed. And we have toys, the toys of ideals, the toys of belief, which absorb us. If you worship an image of all the images on earth none is sacred, they are all made by man's mind, by his thought then we are absorbed, just as the child is absorbed in a toy, and we become extraordinarily quiet and gentle. When we see a marvellous mountain, snow-capped against the blue sky and the deep shadowed valleys, that great grandeur and majesty absorb us completely; for a moment we are completely silent because its majesty takes us over, we forget ourselves. Beauty is where 'you' are not. The essence of beauty is the absence of the self. The essence of meditation is to enquire into the abnegation of the self.

One needs tremendous energy to meditate and friction is a wastage of energy. When in one's daily life there is a great deal of friction, of conflict between people, and dislike of the work which one does, there is a wastage of energy. And to enquire really most profoundly not superficially, not verbally one must go very deeply into oneself, into one's own mind and see why we live as we do, always wasting energy, for meditation is the release of creative energy.

Religion has played an immense part in man's history. From the beginning of time he has struggled to find truth. And now the accepted religions of the modern world are not religions at all, they are merely the vain repetition of phrases, gibberish and nonsense, a form of personal entertainment without much meaning. All the rituals, all the gods specially in this country where there are, I do not know how many, thousands of gods are invented by thought. All the rituals are put together by thought. What thought creates is not sacred; but we attribute to the created image the qualities that we like that image to have. And all the time we are worshipping, albeit unconsciously,

ourselves. All the rituals in the temples, the pujas, and all that thought has invented in the Christian churches, is invented by thought: and that which thought has created we worship. Just see the irony, the deception, the dishonesty, of this.

The religions of the world have completely lost their meaning. All the intellectuals in the world shun them, run away from them, so that when one uses the words the `religious mind', which the speaker does very often, they ask: `Why do you use that word religious?' Etymologically the root meaning of that word is not very clear. It originally meant a state of being bound to that which is noble, to that which is great; and for that one had to live a very diligent, scrupulous, honest life. But all that is gone; we have lost our integrity. So, if you discard what all the present religious traditions, with their images and their symbols, have become, then what is religion? To find out what a religious mind is one must find out what truth is; truth has no path to it. There is no path. When one has compassion, with its intelligence, one will come upon that which is eternally true. But there is no direction; there is no captain to direct one in this ocean of life. As a human being, one has to discover this. One cannot belong to any cult, to any group whatever if one is to come upon truth. The religious mind does not belong to any organization, to any group, to any sect; it has the quality of a global mind.

A religious mind is a mind that is utterly free from all attachment, from all conclusions and concepts; it is dealing only with what actually is; not with what should be. It is dealing every day of one's life with what is actually happening both outwardly and inwardly; understanding the whole complex problem of living. The religious mind is free from prejudice, from tradition, from all sense of direction. To come upon truth you need great clarity of mind, not a confused mind.

So, having put order in one's life, let us then examine what meditation is not how to meditate, that is an absurd question. When one asks how, one wants a system, a method, a design carefully laid out. See what happens when one follows a method, a system. Why does one want a method, a system? One thinks it is the easiest way, does one not, to follow somebody who says, `I will tell you how to meditate'. When somebody tells one how to meditate he does not know what meditation is. He who says, `I know', does not know. One must, first of all, see how destructive a system of meditation is, whether it is any one of the many forms of meditation that appear to have been invented, stipulating how you should sit, how you should breathe, how you should do this, that and the other. Because if one observes one will see that when one practices something repeatedly, over and over again, one's mind becomes mechanical; it is already mechanical and one adds further mechanical routine to it; so gradually one's mind atrophies. It is like a pianist continually practicing the wrong note; no music comes of it. When one sees the truth that no system, no method, no practice, will ever lead to truth, then one abandons them all as fallacious, unnecessary.

One must also enquire into the whole problem of control. Most of us try to control our responses, our reactions; we try to suppress or to shape our desires. In this there is always the controller and the controlled. One never asks: who is the controller, and what is that which one is trying to control in so-called meditation? Who is the controller who tries to control his thoughts, his ways of thinking and so on? Who is the controller? The controller surely is that entity which has determined to practice the method or system. Now who is that entity? That entity is from the past, is thought based on reward and punishment. So the controller is of the past and is trying to control his thoughts; but the controller is the controlled. Look: this is all so simple really. When you are envious you separate envy from yourself. You say: 'I must control envy, I must suppress it' or you rationalize it. But you are not separate from envy, you are envy. Envy is not separate from you. And yet we play this trick of trying to control envy as though it was something separate from us. So: can you live a life without a single control? which does not mean indulging in whatever you want. Please put this question to yourself: can you live a life which is at present so disastrous, so mechanical, so repetitive without a single sense of control? That can only happen when you perceive with complete clarity; when you give your attention to every thought that arises not just indulge in thought. When you give such complete attention then you will find out that you can live without the conflict which arises from control. Do you know what that means to have a mind that has understood control and lives without a single shadow of conflict? it means complete freedom. And one must have that complete freedom to come upon that which is eternally true.

We should also understand the qualitative difference between concentration and attention. Most of us know concentration. We learn at school, in college, in university, to concentrate. The boy looks out of the window and the teacher says, 'Concentrate on your book.' And so we learn what it means. To concentrate implies bringing all your energy to focus on a certain point; but thought wanders away and so you have a perpetual battle between the desire to concentrate, to give all your energy to look at a page, and the mind which is wandering, and which you try to control. Whereas attention has no control, no concentration. It is complete attention, which means giving all your energy, your nerves, the capacity, the energy of the brain, your heart, everything, to attending. Probably you have never so completely attended. When you do attend so completely there is no recording and no action from memory. When you are attending the brain does not record. Whereas when you are concentrating, making an effort, you are always acting from memory like a gramophone record repeating.

Understand the nature of a brain that has no need of recording except that which is necessary. It is necessary to record where you live, and the practical activities of life. But it is not necessary to record psychologically, inwardly, either the insult, or the flattery and so on. Have you ever tried it? It is probably all so new to you. When you do, the brain, the mind, is entirely free from all conditioning.

We are all slaves to tradition and we think we are also totally

different from each other. We are not. We all go through the same great miseries, unhappiness, shed tears, we are all human beings, not Hindus, Muslims, or Russians those are all labels without meaning. The mind must be totally free; which means that one has to stand completely alone; and we are so frightened to stand alone.

The mind must be free, utterly still, not controlled. When the mind is completely religious it is not only free but capable of enquiring into the nature of truth to which there is no guide, no path. It is only the silent mind, the mind that is free, that can come upon that which is beyond time.

Have you not noticed if you have observed yourself that your mind is eternally chattering, eternally occupied with something or other? If you are a Sannyasi your mind is occupied with god, with prayers, with this and that. If you are a housewife, your mind is occupied with what you are going to have for the next meal, how to utilize this and that. The businessman is occupied with commerce; the politician with party politics; and the priest is occupied with his own nonsense. So our minds are all the time occupied and have no space. And space is necessary.

Space also implies an emptiness, a silence, which has immense energy. You can make your mind silent through taking a drug; you can make your thought slow down and become quieter and quieter by some chemical intake. But that silence is concerned with suppressing sound. Have you ever enquired what it is to have a mind that is naturally, absolutely, silent without a movement, that is not recording except those things that are necessary, so that your psyche, your inward nature, becomes absolutely still? Have you enquired into that; or are you merely caught in the stream of tradition, in the stream of work and worrying about tomorrow?

Where there is silence there is space not from one point to another point as we usually think of it. Where there is silence there is no point but only silence. And that silence has that extraordinary energy of the universe.

The universe has no cause, it exists. That is a scientific fact. But we human beings are involved with causes. Through analysis you may discover the cause of poverty in this country, or in other countries; you may find the cause of over population, the lack of birth control; you may find the cause why human beings are divided between themselves as Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and so on. You may find the cause of your anxiety, or the cause of your loneliness; you may find these causes through analysis but you are never free from causation. All our actions are based on reward or punishment, however finely subtle, which is a causation. To understand the order of the universe, which is without cause, is it possible to live a daily life without any cause? That is supreme order. Out of that order you have creative energy. Meditation is to release that creative energy.

It is immensely important to know and to understand, the depth and

beauty of meditation. Man has always been asking, from timeless time, whether there is something beyond all thought, beyond all romantic inventions, beyond all time. He has always been asking: is there something beyond all this suffering, beyond all this chaos, beyond wars, beyond the battle between human beings? Is there something that is immovable, sacred, utterly pure, untouched by any thought, by any experience? This has been the enquiry of serious people, from the ancient of days. To find that out, to come upon it, meditation is necessary. Not the repetitive meditation, that is utterly meaningless. There is a creative energy which is truly religious, when the mind is free from all conflict, from all the travail of thought. To come upon that which has no beginning, no end that is the real depth of meditation and the beauty of it. That requires freedom from all conditioning.

There is complete security in compassionate intelligence total security. But we want security in ideas, in beliefs, in concepts, in ideals; we hold on to them, they are our security however false, however irrational. Where there is compassion, with its supreme intelligence, there is security if one is seeking security. Actually where there is compassion, where there is that intelligence there is no question of security. So there is an origin, an original ground, from which all things arise, and that original ground is not the word. The word is never the thing. And meditation is to come upon that ground, which is the origin of all things and which is free from all time. This is the way of meditation. And blessed is he who finds it.