



What is the Self?

At the beginning of a question and answer meeting at Brockwood Park Krishnamurti said:

To quest is to seek: Together we are going to seek, find, discover the right answer. This is not the Delphic Oracle! Together we are going to find out the meaning and significance of the question and also seek the answer. There is no authority here. I happen to sit on a platform for convenience so that everybody can see, but that little height does not give me any authority whatsoever.

J. Krishnamurti Questions and Answers 1st Question Brockwood Park 1st Question & Answer Meeting 28th August 1979 'The Self'

Question: Is it possible ever to be free of self-centred activity? Is there a real self apart from the self-created image?

What do we mean by the self? If you ask somebody what the self is, he would say, "It is all my senses, my feelings, my imagination, my romantic demands, my possessions, a husband, a wife, my qualities, my struggles, my achievements, my ambitions, my aspirations, my unhappiness, my joys" - all that would be the self. You can add more words but the essence of it is the centre, the 'me', my impulses - "I am impelled to go to India to find truth" and so on. From this centre all action takes place: all our aspirations, our ambitions, our quarrels, our disagreements, our opinions, judgements, experiences, are centred in this. This centre is not only the conscious self acting outwardly but also the deep inner consciousness which is not open and obvious; it is all the different levels of consciousness.

Now the questioner asks: Is it possible to be free of this centre? Why does one want to be free of it? Is it because the centre is the cause of division? That is, the-'me' is the active element that is operating all the time; it is the same 'me' with different names, with a

different coloured skin, with a different job, with a different position in the hierarchical social structure - you are Lord so-and-so, somebody else is a servant - it is the same `me' dividing itself into all these different categories - socially, economically and religiously.

Where there is this division there must be conflict - the Hindu as opposed to the Muslim, the Jew, the Arab, the American, the English, the French. That is physically obvious and it has brought about tremendous wars, great agony, brutality and violence. The self identifies with an ideal - noble or ignoble - and fights for that ideal. But it is still `the ego trip'. People go to India trying to find spirituality; they put on different fancy dress but they have only changed the garb, the clothes; essentially they are each the `me' operating, all the time struggling, endeavouring grasping, denying, being deeply attached to their experiences, ideas, opinions and longings. And as one lives one observes that this centre, this `me', is the essence of all trouble. Also one observes that it is the essence of all pleasure, fear and sorrow. So one asks, ``How am I to get rid of this centre so as to be really free - absolutely, not relatively?" It is fairly simple to be relatively free; one can be a little unselfish, a little concerned with social welfare, with the difficulties of others, but the centre is always there biting hard, brutal.

Is it possible to be absolutely free of that centre? First of all see that the greater the effort that is made to be free of the centre, the more that very effort strengthens the centre, the self. For those who go off into meditation of various kinds, trying to impose something upon themselves, the `me' that identifies with that effort is captured by that and says: ``I have achieved", but that `me' is still the centre.

To be free there must be no effort; which does not mean doing what one likes, for that is still the movement of the self.

So what is one to do? If you are not to make an effort, because you see the truth that the more effort you make the greater the travail of the centre, then what is one to do?

The questioner asks: Is there a real self apart from the self created by thought with its images? Many people ask that. The Hindus have said that there is a highest principle which is the self. We imagine also that there is a real self apart from the `me'. You all, I am sure, feel there is something else beyond this `me', which has been called the higher self, the sublime or the supreme self. The moment we use

the word `self', or use any word to describe that which is beyond the self, the `me', it is still the self.

Is it possible to be free of the self? - without becoming a vegetable, without becoming absent-minded, somewhat mad? Which means: is it possible to be totally free from attachment? - which is one of the attributes, one of the qualities, of the self. One is attached to one's reputation, to one's name, to one's experiences. One is attached to what one has said. If you really want to be free of the self it means no attachment; which does not mean you become detached, indifferent, callous, shut yourself away, which is another activity of the self. Before, it was attached; now it says, ``I won't be attached. That is still the movement of the self.

When you are really, without effort, deeply, basically, not attached, then from that deep sense of no attachment comes responsibility. Not responsibility to your wife, to your children, but the deep sense of responsibility. Will you do it? That is the question. We can talk everlastingly, put it into different words, but when it comes to testing it, acting, we do not seem to want to do it; we prefer to go on as we are, with the status quo slightly modified but carrying on with our quarrels.

To be free from your own experience, from your own knowledge, from your own accumulated perception - it is possible if you go at it. And it does not take time. That is one of our excuses. We must have time to be free. When you see that one of the major factors of the self is attachment and you see what it does in the world, and what it does in your relationship with another, quarrels, separation, all the ugliness of relationship - if you see the truth of attachment, then you are free from it. Your own perception sets you free. Will you do it?

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