

# Being Nothing, Doing Nothing, Cultivating the ‘Other Part’ of the Brain

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Because our minds are crowded, we crowd our lives— with busy schedules, multiple activities, plans and projects for a better life. We rarely, if ever, take the time to investigate who or what it is that is generating all this, much less inquire if it can stop. Indeed, through long habit, we tacitly accept that this is the only way to be: to be is to do, that’s what we think. One of the implications of this is that it is better to do something rather than nothing. “Do good if tha can, but do summat,” as they say in Yorkshire. Doing something—anything—is better than doing nothing.

It doesn’t take exceptional intelligence to realize that, so long as we continue in this vein, we are committing and recommitting ourselves to a life of comparison and conflict, the battleground. Not only in the world at large, but also in our own milieus and workplaces, the warring tensions are constant and ubiquitous. We seem unable to call a halt to them. Is it simply because the machinery is so powerful, so atavistic, so unrelenting, that we are incapable of turning it off for a second? The teachings offer a different perspective.

Krishnamurti often spoke of the two capacities of the brain, the one which we know —acquiring knowledge, experience, etc. — and another which we, as yet, barely acknowledge: what might be termed the movement in not-knowing. Because the latter may seem nebulous and vague, we are apt to dismiss it as having no relevance and, again, fill up our calendars with events. In this sadly, even tragically, we miss the nub of the argument and the sap of our own lives. The thought-mind—let’s call it that—defines, itemizes, analyzes and controls; it is indispensable to our survival. There are, however, strict limits to its applicability and these we constantly overstep in our attempts to devise new and better solutions. We do not seem to realize that it is in the way the thought-mind as a whole works that the fault lies, not in the itemizing detail. Once committed to better, we are embarked on a train—a train of thought—which must lead us to a definite destination. This is why Krishnamurti so often says, the

means defines the end; indeed, the means is the end. We must look elsewhere, beyond the thought-mind.

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How might this work out in practice? I think it is essential from the very first to establish in the mind of the teacher and the student that a balance, a harmony, has to be created between the thought-mind and the not-knowing mind. One can think of them stereophonically, at first. Equal attention needs to be given to the cultivation of the not-knowing mind as is currently given to the thought-mind, without its becoming slack or vague, a factor which is a constant problem when you don’t ‘know’ what you’re doing. A period of silence before a class can be valuable, as well as conversations as to what silence might mean. It is important to stress the meaning of silence, even if there is initial resistance. The consumerist world is so agitated— agitated and committed to agitation—that there has to be a deliberate counter-movement to stem the tide of chatter and noise. Linked to this is the value of aloneness. Almost always we educate in classes and in classrooms, but surely this is not the only possibility. The quality of silence is so endemic and singular that it cannot be cultivated en masse: it is an ‘I’—not a ‘you’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ phenomenon. Having space and time alone should be part of the curriculum: Go and sit somewhere and observe your thoughts. Write them down if you feel it helps.

‘Watch this space’ is a catch phrase, but it could have deeper meaning. We think in facts, thoughts, things, re-alities; we rarely watch the space between. Closer investigation, however, reveals that thought is not completely continuous: there are breaks between thoughts and trains of thought; there are moments of pause in any human life. These we must bring attention to, for they are the moments, the space, of no-thing. Uncomfortable, perhaps, at first— after all, the collective collusion of

mankind is trying to cover it over all the time—we can (and must) learn to live with it, for fundamentally it is what we are: what we are, not what we think we are. Giving this focus to being/doing nothing allies us with our intrinsic human nature, with the source from which we flow ontologically. For, in and for ourselves, we are not objects in the world, rather the reverse: the world is in us. We are not something or somebody: we are nothing. To give equal weight to this perspective is the primary requirement of the new educator.

Obviously, it cannot be done by educators who are not themselves involved in this ever-deepening, widening inquiry. But, a ‘fairly sensitive, fairly intelligent’ person who is not too committed to this or that theory can surely be exposed to it and then, perhaps, catch fire. For, without that fire, nothing will prosper. It is already difficult enough for those of us who had close contact with Krishnamurti and, hence, had the experience—albeit vicariously—of how the whole mind operates in its process and action in daily life. We should not underestimate these difficulties; by the same token, we should not exaggerate them. Everyone, after all, seeks happiness, and what a work of careful wisdom it will be to give others (and ourselves) a helping hand through ancient falsehoods and contemporary trivia.

We need to build in time for silence at the very core of the curriculum. “Before you act, pause.” It could almost be a dictum. It mustn’t become that, of course, since then we are back in the thought-mind of measure. A healthy body is a requisite. Krishnamurti laid great emphasis on it not only for its own sake, but especially because it allows one to develop sensitivity, which is directly allied to intelligence. They are all linked, of course, and each is vital. The class and classroom must be exploded, and the learning that takes place when the mind is untethered must have a door left open for it, open wide.

Part of the movement of the learning of the ‘I’—along with silence, space, and aloneness—is a switch of focus from education as group learning, in which we have all been inducted since we went to ‘school’, to the inward learning of the heart-mind. This is not a group affair; indeed, it implies liberation from the group so long as that group is synonymous with society. For, it is not just society as demographics that is involved, but the whole network of values, spoken and unspoken, that infiltrate, drive, and destroy our lives. The phenomenon of war is the grossest example of how we as a species have become incapable not only of learning from history, but also of extricating ourselves from conflict without bloodshed. We are

committed to conflict at a deep level, and the heroic epics of East and West show just how deep the commitment is.

We are ungrown in the matter of intelligence, and to cultivate intelligence is the first task. Watching tapes and reading books has a place in this and, certainly, Krishnamurti should be studied. What he is saying is still so unfamiliar and, hence, by extension, difficult to access that direct exposure is necessary. It should not, however, become doctrinal and this, clearly, is something to watch out for, particularly as in the area of the thought-mind, which is the area of academic disciplines, some things have to be learned by rote. Krishnamurti himself, incidentally, gives an original definition of learning, which he distinguishes sharply from acquiring knowledge. Again, as in so many other instances, the groundwork has been laid: we need to move on it. Present-tense, active-present learning is obviously aligned with the not-knowing mind, since the thought-mind of memory, experience, etc., cannot encompass the newness of the now. It takes a heightened, passive awareness to receive the totality of the present, not a mind imposing its own agenda.

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This leads to the topic of meditation: obviously a loaded word. To avoid the trap of systems and practices, one could perhaps, initially, refer to it simply as ‘watching one’s thoughts’ or ‘being aware of what’s going on.’ There is no special time or place for it, though moments of deliberate silence might be valuable with some focus on breathing and posture, which are often in themselves quite indicative. The slowing down or stopping of any activity, say for a period of five minutes, allows the mind to refresh itself and to break the habit of mechanical functioning. And, again, it focuses on the pause, the space, rather than on the ‘hard edge’ of the task, with its concomitant angst and drive for completion.

Not that we do not need to finish tasks, but to take a step back and look at what we are doing takes us out of the loop of compulsive drive and the fear that goes with it, invariably and irremediably. It is a practical instance of freeing the mind from fear—not huge, not total, but a start.

We need to try these things out, of course, to see what works and what doesn’t in situ. The basic principle remains the same. It is imperative that we find ways and means

to implement a new kind of learning commensurate with the crisis we are facing. It is a work, first and foremost, in consciousness and, unless we grasp that nettle—and risk getting stung—we shall not have risen to the challenge that confronts us. My guess is that, if we are honest, it may not prove so dire and difficult. And, who knows, we might even enjoy it.

### **EARTHLING**

How many space craft  
have left for far destinations  
Planetary, heavenly,  
ideas carrying their cargoes  
Of visionary beings  
who will return.  
Far-seeing, or new-born dead  
in your shrouds  
I am your fellow,  
strange as you are,  
But let me stay, smelling  
earth and pond water at dusk.

— **Jeremy Hooker**

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