

What Makes a Teacher

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The question is sometimes raised, why the Krishnamurti schools do not have greater purchase in the educational community and, with the exception of the schools of the Rural Education Programme at Rishi Valley, do not have wider applicability. After all, the issues facing the teacher in any school are essentially the same, and may it not be that a teacher education programme can help teachers to develop along the lines suggested by Krishnamurti? The challenge may, however, be greater than most imagine. To date the need for the schools to understand and develop Krishnamurti's educational philosophy has been paramount, and it is only now that we may look to a further horizon and see if this approach can be applied elsewhere. The need for specificity should not lead to exclusivity.

Given that natural aptitude is there, one should foster and further in student teachers certain basic principles that, while not alienating them from any teaching/ learning situation, will nonetheless make it clear to them that what is required on their part is a fundamental reassessment of their role. While, in the long run, this can only be done by study in depth of what Krishnamurti says, it may be useful to highlight, semantically and actually, three basic terms that occur everywhere in education, the change in the definition of which throws instant light on this approach and prepares the teacher not just to teach, but to question the basis on which teaching takes place. These terms are learning, discipline and intelligence.

Learning

The usual definition of learning is have learnt, i.e. one acquires knowledge in a particular area, stores it in the brain as memory, then applies it to situations as they arise. One such situation is the examination room, and the application of such learning in the form of written answers is taken as a guide to intelligence and frequently defines the course of one's life. It is, it may be said, a past-tense affair: acquisition, memorisation, regurgitation, some analysis. It has nothing to do with the living present. For this reason, perhaps, Krishnamurti insists that learning is strictly in the present: it is not the outcome of the past, nor is it a projection of the future. It is the totality of perception at any given moment. This involves not just the acquisition of knowledge and the strengthening of the intellect, but

everything that is going on in this particular body-being: the way one feels, the state of one's health, the depth or superficiality of one's breathing, etc. It also includes what is going on around one—the state of the world and the colour of the sky— as part-and-parcel of being in the world. For, after all, all this impinges; all this gives the clue to who and what I am. All this, consequently, is part of learning.

This is not to deny, by any means, the importance of proper academic endeavour, of what constitutes making a person learned. It is simply to place it in a larger context: that of the mind discovering itself by an instantaneous act of self-perception. This instantaneous act does not depend on time; indeed, time can be seen as inimical to it. It occupies a different place and has a different role, both in the working of the mind and the functioning of the brain. For, while thought proceeding in a linear fashion, accumulating knowledge and experience, can be thought of— academically as well as more generally—as a form of positive thinking, all instantaneous acts of self-perception, even the disposition to them and including the silence that ensues, belong in the arena of negative thinking, which Krishnamurti describes as “the highest form of thinking.” One may well then ask, is this thinking at all? To which one must necessarily reply: If thinking is, by definition, the working of the mind and the functioning of the brain, then, yes, it is thinking, but of a different kind, perhaps a different order. Certainly it is, by the criteria of modern living, not something we are accustomed to; rather, it seems, the trend in education is towards more and more testing and codification. This should not deter the educator determined to plough a different furrow, to sow new seed and to bring about a new mind. For, newness and freshness surely reside in immediate acts of self-perception and not in the endless accumulation of facts and ideas.

This gives another entrée to our subject. Can the mind, while acquiring the necessary knowledge, at the same time learn to empty itself? Can these two processes go hand in hand, like two horses pulling the same plough?—equally, strongly, to a destination and to none. After all, the balance of positive and negative is one of the fundamentals of the harmonious life; it is written into the texture of life itself.

It finds its expression not just in physics, but in the ancient wisdom of yin and yang and the role assigned to man in all religions as the vital connection between heaven and earth. In a world where the sky itself is a threat, we should nonetheless not lose sight of the fact that we need to perform this 'balancing act.' Emptying the mind is part of it. Can we start now by giving equal importance to, say, silence at the beginning of a class as we do to mathematics, language, etc. Can we point out to the student, in the very learning of a language, that language itself is limited and that there is an immeasurably finer, richer field sitting waiting for us in emptiness? Are school students not too young for such things? Are they? Are they really? Or, is it we who have insufficient imagination, insufficient passion for the task in hand? Such experiments as there have been, including 'philosophy for six-year-olds,' have demonstrated quite clearly that students of any age are eager to inquire into life's issues. It is we who fail them, not they us.

The approach to emptiness is neither obvious nor easy, but the clues are there and we should follow up on them. Again, we need to think differently, working perhaps not to abolish the classroom, but to see it as just one of many learning arenas. The classroom exists for socialisation, for teacher-student discourse and instruction en masse; it is not the only place to be. In fact, to be, it is quite a poor place, vastly inferior to the shade of a tree, the bank of a stream, or a pleasant hillside. One of the great issues for ground-breaking educators is to shift the emphasis from the industrial model—itsself the product of the Industrial Revolution—with its rows of desks and chairs and invitation to conformity to a focus much more on the individual learner and his or her own special needs, using where relevant the vast resources of the computer. We should exploit the opportunities offered by this technology to make learning much more of an individual enterprise. As Marshal McLuhan pointed out forty years ago, we are now living in a 'global village' where knowledge is not the preserve of the schoolmaster but is universally 'out there' for all to discover. Even forty years on, however, little has changed in basic attitudes and structures and, after a brief period of experimentation, schools have reverted to traditional methods, not to mention traditional values, that more often than not is the consensus of bankruptcy. At this time and in this climate, it behoves the teacher more and more to step back from the position of controlling authority and adopt the role of facilitator and learner. Then, and only then, can he properly teach.

Time should be made for students to be alone, to watch their thoughts and feelings and to write them down. Though it may invite criticism, they should have time during the day—not necessarily a long time—to recollect,

to reflect, and to be consciously aware. The timeless cannot be gathered into time; nevertheless, time should be made for its emergence, even set aside for it. If indeed "the proper study of mankind is man", and we accept the Delphic injunction to "Know Thyself", do we really think these things can be learnt without a deliberate, conscious focus? Students should be encouraged to talk about their findings and to develop the capacity for articulate discourse; only in this way will it have meaning, as they begin to see, in their own mind's unfolding, the commonality of consciousness. Thus emboldened, they may throw off the shackles of a system based on fear and competition which sets man against man in the pursuit of specious riches. At the same time, instead of closing down and becoming ever more self-centred and angst-ridden, they may in the process of mutual disclosure begin to discover their own secret fears, their desire and wants, their hurts and hopes. By thus learning about themselves concomitantly with accumulating knowledge, they may begin to fold into a seamless whole the world outside and the world within. "You are the world," says Krishnamurti, but the realisation of the truth of this statement can only dawn if you study you as well as the world.

Discipline

From the foregoing it will be seen that discipline is akin to learning. The word discipline, as used by Krishnamurti, has nothing to do with regimentation—with the whole industrial mass-model, in fact—and everything to do with learning in the moment. It has none of the connotations of imposed authority, punishment, or bringing into line. "Discipline means to learn," he says, and when there is the act of instantaneous learning, a natural discipline flows from it. In other words, when the mind is alert, attentive to its own moves and meanderings, it awakens from deep inside itself the natural curiosity it had as a child and looks, as a child, with the same wonder and candour. Children, as we know, are often brutally honest, and this same honesty one surely needs if one is to plumb the depths of oneself. Honesty is the cutting edge, without which all inquiry is delusion.

Discipline, then, is brought about not by some external authority, but by the understanding of oneself. The real order comes from within, and it is only when one is engaged in this process, minutely observing thoughts-feelings as they arise, that one can be said to be leading a disciplined life. Without the implications of rod and rule—common alike to military, religious, and scholastic institutions—and with these implications understood and discarded, one is free to enter into what is actually an unfolding, an ordering of the kind exhibited by plants: slow, organic, mathematical. Again, we can say that both concept and actuality—the word discipline and the act of explication—are worlds

removed from the common understanding and involve, in themselves, a reordering of the mind. They are, at the same time, an invitation, an open invitation to everybody, to begin to educate themselves, to break open the prison of conditioning, and to create that climate of discourse and dialogue which alone can save the world from final ruin. The dialogue with oneself is the first dialogue, based not on opinion, belief, or self-identification, but on direct, unmediated observation of fact—both inwardly and outwardly—and it is only when this dialogue has been set in motion that the dialogue with others can take place; in fact, at that point, it becomes inevitable. Consciousness is one and all inquiry leads to it. It is not a matter of belief or opinion, both of which are superficial outcomes, but of the well of consciousness itself, that untapped source of ever-flowing waters in which, in any case, we have our being.

The mantle of authority is a terrible burden under which the conventional educator struggles. Not to impose so-called discipline, therefore, but to engage directly with oneself and with others in an ongoing inward research and inquiry becomes the primary task of the teacher. "The educator needs educating," says Krishnamurti and nowhere is this more relevant than in this first step of self-inquiry. The teacher, though superior in knowledge and experience, is at the same level as the student when it comes to understanding the psyche in itself. If he can admit that this is so—and he must—he has, at one fell swoop, stepped down from the pedestal set up by tradition, discarded the mantle of authority, and entered into a different relationship with the student. By doing this, he has struck a blow for freedom not only for the student but, as importantly, for himself. The mantle of authority is a terrible burden under which the conventional educator struggles. Nor is it a selfish act to claim the right to learn about oneself in the company of others whose need is just as great. It is not a cop-out or an invitation to a free-for-all, though for students accustomed to a more conventional approach, relying heavily on magisterial authority, there may be a period of transition. All students, however, want to learn, whatever version they give of themselves, and the teacher should act as a guide and friend in the interim movement to a 'level playing field.' This, of course, requires patience, but patience he will need in any case.

Intelligence

When it comes to the question of intelligence, a very great deal has been said and written. The essential point, so far as this exposé is concerned, is that, once again, there is a redefinition. Any number of definitions of the word exist, ranging from Donald Rumsfeld's intelligence community (the FBI and the CIA) to the perhaps more familiar intelligence quotient (I.Q.) Whether it's gathering information on supposed enemies of the state or putting

the young person's brain on the rack, intelligence in this sense has two key features: knowledge and measurability. What cannot be measured does not exist, with all that this implies by way of judgment and brutality, and this is the grid we hold up to children—increasingly as time goes by and the sense of insecurity thickens—as the graph on which they must plot their lives. It is, at best, a one-sided affair; at worst, it is a catastrophe. With all the information currently available, why make the brain the storehouse of knowledge and judge it by that criterion, rather than allow it to 'flower in goodness,' a field we have barely touched upon?

Such flowering is not the product of measurement, nor can it be measured at all; but it does require intelligence, in the sense Krishnamurti gives to that term. It is something within the scope of the mind and within the capacity of the brain, but more often than not it is never awakened because, with the years, the weight of conditioning, the gradual coarsening and thickening of the body-mind make it incapable of that quickness and sensitivity which are the necessary attributes of intelligence. Intelligence is not a thing, exactly, unlike brainpower or intellect, but includes within its scope sensation and emotion; in other words, it is non-divisive. It is the movement of the whole, harmonious human being coming to himself in the moment/ act of perception. By coming to himself I mean ending separation or—that curse of modern times—self-alienation. We have created a culture that is destroying itself, both inwardly and outwardly, and unless we tackle fundamental issues, we shall not be able to rescue ourselves. We are very close to Mayday for mankind.

This is why the awakening of intelligence is vital and why Krishnamurti gave his life to it. Unless this seed, which lies dormant in the psyche, can be touched and brought to quickening life, there is little hope or future for mankind. It is, then, the primary function of the teacher to inquire into what is real intelligence, which is not the intelligence of the real but that stratum of understanding available at every moment, the flavour and nature of which give passage to a vastly extended field of awareness. Once entered into, which is an act away from the predictable course of human development, this field has a force and a potency of its own. Unclaimable by its very nature, it is the one free field that is 'neither yours nor mine.' In the very act of awakening—at whatever inchoate, stuttering level—there is the beginning of a new life, a life which is neither yours nor mine, but part of the order of the natural world. Man, the stranger, coming home to himself: this is the work of intelligence.

How does one approach this intelligence? Is it all so rarefied and abstract? Not at all. Given that humanity, as

it exists, is not intelligent, there are numerous avenues of inquiry. Nationalism, “which is glorified tribalism,” is a favourite topic with Krishnamurti and there is excellent video material as backup. By identifying with the nation—the modern tribe—in the name of tradition, security, etc., we in fact make it difficult, if not impossible, for humanity as a whole to survive. At the first hint of danger to the nation, all the old feelings of self-protection arise and one is automatically down the road of hoisting the flag and reaching for the gun. The inevitable consequence is destruction, maiming, killing, sorrow and tears. At the end of it all we say, no more war, but the very next time the same thing happens—tangible proof of the lack of intelligence. We do not learn from history because time and its modalities can’t lead us there. The awakening of intelligence alone can.

The awakening of intelligence becomes, then, the first requirement and intention of the teacher. All teaching and learning gather in its light. It is the central pillar of the whole endeavour. This response of the whole for the whole by the whole is alone capable, in its strength and scope, of delivering mankind from its long sleep of ignorance, establishing a global outlook, and ushering in the true New Age. For the awakening of each is the awakening of all.

“I want people at the end of their education to understand the world in ways that they couldn’t have understood it before their education. In speaking of the world I mean the physical world, the biological world, the social world - their own world, their personal world as well as the broader social and cultural terrain. I believe that these are questions that every human being is interested in from a very young age. They’re questions which kids ask all the time: who am I, where do I come from, what’s this made out of, what’s going to happen to me, why do people fight, why do they hate? Is there a higher power? Questions like that—they don’t usually ask them in their words, they ask them in their play, in their stories, the myths they like to listen to and so on.”

— Howard Gardner

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