

Without a Center

*Reflections on the teachings
of J. Krishnamurti
by Michael Mendizza*

One of the most challenging, yet central themes evoked in Krishnamurti's teaching is the phrase, 'without a center' or 'there was no observer witnessing'. Choiceless awareness is another. Implicit in all of the speaker's observations are the borders thought creates in consciousness. At the very core of the teachings is a penetrating insight into nature and structure of 'self-centered' thought and the images this activity generates in the mind.

From The Core of the Teachings - Krishnamurti 1980

Man has built in himself images as a fence of security - religious, political, personal. These manifest as symbols, ideas, beliefs. The burden of these images dominates man's thinking, his relationships and his daily life. These images are the causes of our problems for they divide man from man. His perception of life is shaped by the concepts already established in his mind. The content of his consciousness is his entire existence. This content is common to all humanity...

When man becomes aware of the movement of his own consciousness he will see the division between the thinker and the thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience. He will discover that this division is an illusion. Then only is there pure observation which is insight without any shadow of the past. This timeless insight brings about a deep radical mutation in the mind.

Few describe the unique capacity of a brain to create images. Krishnamurti did so and often. Evolving over billions of years the sensory motor brain generates 'resonate representation' or images of the outside world by sensing it, sight, touch, taste, hearing. When the mammalian brain arrived it did so by growing sensors inside the body which monitored and produce mental images of inner states, what we call feelings. Millions of years later a thin layer of cells at the top of the sensory-motor and mammalian brains exploded into the new cortex. This profoundly different center monitored the images produced by the other brain systems and abstracted its own form of inner image, imagination, symbolic and metaphoric images, words which can be substituted or used in the absence of actual patterns. The word chair is a resonate representation in this thinking brain of the actual chair. The mental images we have of ourselves and others are equally abstract.

Krishnamurti Brockwood Park, 1978

A word is registered, if it is pleasant you purr. It is nice. If it is unpleasant, you will immediately shrink from it and that creates an image. The pleasure creates an image; the shrinking, the withdrawal creates an image.

So, our actual relationship with each other is based on various subtle forms of pictures, images and conclusions. So when there is an image like that, she has and you have then in that there is division and then the whole conflict begins, right? Where there is division between two images, there must be conflict, right?

The Jew, the Arab, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Christian, the Communist, it is the same phenomenon. It is a basic law, that where there is division between people there must be conflict.

The man may say to the woman or the woman may say to the man "I love you", but basically, they are not related at all. Then the factor arises, can all this image making, tradition and all that end, without a single conflict.

Brains create images. Each major brain system produces images unique to that system. It is reasonable and natural for this image making capacity to generate an image of what we call me, a self-image. The question is, of what slice of the pie is this is this 'resonate representation' constructed? Is the image of our self whole, complete a true representation or just partial? If it is partial, and I believe it is, what is the source? What is the brain responding to that evokes that partial image?

Neuroscientist Allan Schore, author of *Affect Regulation And The Origins Of Self*, provides a clue. At the age of eighteen months, when the toddler gains mobility and therefore independence, social judgments and comparison begins. "No! Don't touch. Do it this way not that." Each 'No!' is perceived as a threat and the repetition of this threat day in and day out produces a strong image in the developing brain. Very early the child realizes that every time he or she tries most anything new it will be met with a stern prohibition. So predictable is this pattern that the actual threat doesn't need to occur. The child anticipates the threat and this anticipation produces that same image making stimulus in the brain. Parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches all in their own way repeat and reinforce the image making process, via comparison, tests, grades, keeping score. This happens so often that the image becomes a fixed pattern in the brain, one that the brain assumes is real and permanent, when in fact it is only an image produced by being threatened. When there is no threat there is no image.

Theoretical physicists David Bohm put it this way:

I think the ultimate purpose of K's work was stated very early in his life in his work, which was to free humanity from the destructive conditioning around the self-centered

thought which is really an enslavement to absurdity, to destruction, to unhappiness, sorrow, and no other kind of freedom means anything unless we are free from that.

The problem with the self [image] - there is an assumption or concept which, if it were real, would be extremely important, would be the highest value of all things. Just think of the word, 'self,' it's basic meaning is the quintessence, the essence of all essences and that would, of course, have supreme value.

If we assume there is a self, this stirs up the whole mind and brain inside so it feels, just from that assumption, that something is going on inside which corresponds to this assumed self and gives it an apparent reality.

Once it has been assumed that this self is real and not merely an image, its attributed reality, it takes first priority and everything else comes second, so everything is distorted. The main points is that we don't really understand the nature of our thought process; we're not aware of how it works and it's really disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even someday damaging the system.

At first sight one might wonder why self-centered thought is so bad. If the self were really there then perhaps it would be correct to center on the self because the self would be so important, but if the self is a kind of illusion, at least the self as we know it, then to center our thought on something illusory which is assumed to have supreme importance is going to disrupt the whole process and it will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

In Krishnamurti's words - PBS 1968

What we are trying in all these discussions and talks here is to see if we cannot radically bring about a transformation of the mind. Not accept things as they are; nor revolt against it. Revolt does not answer a thing. But to understand it, to go into it, to examine it, give your heart and your mind with everything you have to find out a way of living differently.

Because you are serious, because you are intent, then you are aware of the whole process of the observer. Which means that you are totally attentive; completely attentive. And in that attention there is no border created by the center. And when there is complete attention there is no observer. The observer comes into being only when in that look, there is inattention which is distraction.

We have put away the observer and therefore there is attention which may last a second, that is good enough. Don't be greedy to have more. In that greed to have more you have already created the center, and then you are caught.

In that attention there is no seeking at all. And therefore there is no effort. The mind becomes extraordinary alert, active, silent. Such a mind is the religious mind. And such a mind has an activity totally different, at a different dimension which thought can never possibly reach.

From Krishnamurti's Notebook:

Silence grew and became intense, wider and deeper. The brain which had listened to the silence of the hills, fields and groves was itself now silent. It had become quiet, naturally, without any enforcement. It was still, deep within itself; like a bird that folds its wings, it had folded upon itself; it had entered into depths which were beyond itself.

It was a dimension which the brain could not capture or understand. And there was no observer, witnessing this depth. Every part of one's whole being was alert, sensitive but intensely still. This new, this depth was expanding, exploding, going away, developing in its own explosions; out of time and beyond space.

There is a natural order of the mind. This natural state of attention is the foundation out of which mental images arise. It is the soil. The stimulus, a threat for example, is the seed. That seed blossoms in consciousness as a mental image. Now we have two states, one, silent attention, meaning there are no images being produced by the brain and a mind that is occupied with images. Emerging out of the infinite field of silent attention images arises. Each image creates a border. Infinite is reduced to the border imposed by the image.

In the Tibetan Buddhists tradition the natural order of the mind is called 'emptiness' or 'absolute reality'. Krishnamurti called this state of complete attention silence. Both refer to a mind that is empty, therefore free of thought-forms, mental images. Buddhists refer to a mind occupied by mental images 'relative reality'.

Padma Madholkar, MD made this observation:

It has been said that Krishnamurti began where Buddha ended. Buddha is supposed to have brought rationality into spirituality. Krishnamurti goes beyond and he shows us the limitation of thought as a means of psychological mutation and he shows that pure perception, which is not related to time or to thought, acts and that perception which acts, that breaks away the pattern of the brain, in which human being has been caught over a million years, repeating the same thing over and over again.

Padma observes that the silent mind is not blank, void. It is exploding with active attention spreading in all directions and that attention acts. This action is choiceless, meaning there is no conditioned center, no observer or image of a thinker that chooses.

It is important to consider is that the state of the empty or silent mind is completely different than the state of a mind full of self-induced images. Once an image is formed it

tends to trigger or stimulate other images. One domino plows into another and another. The cascade begins very early with the development of symbolic and metaphoric language. A natural error occurs when the same image making capacity abstracts an image of self, which soon becomes so strong that it assumes a permanent and independent reality, when in fact is simply an image, like the word chair standing in the mind in place of the actual chair. Krishnamurti often said, 'the word is not the thing'.

David Bohm continues:

Because this illusory self, which is really an image, is regarded as all-important, whenever anything appears to be threatening, the brain develops a very powerful defense mechanism to try to prevent this from taking place. You can see this in an elementary way if somebody says, "You're an idiot," the image of yourself as an idiot is painful and there is an automatic response to accept assumptions proving you're not an idiot and somebody else is an idiot, but that's a minor point.

The major point is that if somebody says something that threatens the reality of this whole structure itself, then it's as if your life were at stake. All stops are pulled out and the brain responds with the instinct of self-preservation, it absolutely prevents you from considering it. It may just dull the mind or transfer attention somewhere else, or make you forget about it or make you find yourself thinking of something else--any number of defenses.

It's clear that when somebody like Krishnamurti comes along and says that this is an illusion or this isn't that real, that this defense mechanism is going to be provoked into action and this, then, becomes the principal difficulty in listening to the communication.

Part of the defense is to make us unconscious of it. The major form of defense is simply concealment of what's going on, because if we could see what's going on it would be obvious it's an illusion; it's like seeing through the trick of the magician. So in all the ways I've described, such as forgetting, and zapping your mind, or jumping to something else, are modes of concealment. You may also conceal by just denying that it's so, and asserting something else. Therefore, we are not conscious, certainly of the defense mechanism, because this process of concealment itself has to be concealed in order to make it effective, and therefore, the major part of defense consists in making the whole process unconscious.

Krishnamurti is suggesting, proposing, even saying that the self is not the source of thought but rather, thought is the source of the self. Now that may seem paradoxical to our ordinary experience, but at least we can make it reasonable.

We are saying that the assumption of the self creates, inside, a kind of image of the self, corresponding to that assumption, with great power. That image is attributed reality and you get a feeling that it's real; therefore you assume the

assumption that there is the self who is thinking. The self is seen as the source of thought, and there is that which he is thinking about.

The things which really are solidly existent in that view are the thinker and what he is thinking about. Thought is a very ethereal, almost a non-existent.

But, what is being suggested instead is that the thought process is real, it's going on in the brain and nervous system, and this thought process contains in it the assumption of a thinker who produces thought, so it is, as it were, producing a television program of a thinker producing thought and the mind is watching that program so intently that it takes that to be the reality. Therefore, thought now says, "I am very modest; I am serving the thinker," but in fact it is serving itself because it produces this thinker and then does what this thinker wants.

From Krishnamurti's Notebook:

Meditation was pure delight, without a flutter of thought, with its endless subtleties; it was a movement that had no end and every movement of the brain was still, watching from emptiness.

It was an emptiness that had known no knowing; it was emptiness that had known no space; it was empty of time. It was empty, past all seeing, knowing and being. In this emptiness there was fury; the fury of a storm, the fury of an exploding universe, the fury of creation which could never have any expression. It was the fury of all life, death and love. But yet, it was empty, a vast, boundless emptiness which nothing could ever fill, transform or cover up. Meditation was the ecstasy of this emptiness.

In the two Notebook quotes and implicit in all of Krishnamurti's teachings is a recognition that the state referred to as emptiness opens to perceptions that do not emanate from within the brain. This is virtually inconceivable in our brain centered materialistic relative-reality. Shamans, aboriginal dreamtime, savants, desert dwellers in the Kalahari, telepathy, precognition and many other examples clearly demonstrate that the brain is the source of a great deal of activity, but not all.

In the film Rain Man for example, Dustin Hoffman played the role of a savant. A box of wooden matches spilled on the floor - to which Hoffman's character replied 106, the exact number of matches in the box. Savants have been well documented and often have very low IQs, therefore are less prone to thought producing image making. Into such a mind patterns and perceptions pop spontaneously, not based on thought, conditioning, analysis or reasoning. This is but one of many concrete examples of the brain being influenced by fields not contained in or produced by the brain. What Krishnamurti and Bohm refer to as intelligence is such a field.

Krishnamurti and Bohm agreed that the brain is a conditioned often reflexive material process. The vast majority of thought and its mental images are produced by this

conditioning. Each mental image acts like a frame creating borders in the mind. Nearly all of one's available attention is held within this border, excluding everything beyond the frame.

Repeating the quote presented above:

Because you are serious, because you are intent, then you are aware of the whole process of the observer. Which means that you are totally attentive; completely attentive. And in that attention there is no border created by the center. And when there is complete attention there is no observer. The observer comes into being only when in that look, there is inattention which is distraction.

We have put away the observer and therefore there is attention which may last a second, that is good enough. Don't be greedy to have more. In that greed to have more you have already created the center, and then you are caught.

In that attention there is no seeking at all. And therefore there is no effort. The mind becomes extraordinary alert, active, silent. Such a mind is the religious mind. And such a mind has an activity totally different, at a different dimension which thought can never possibly reach.

When the borders created by mental images cease, the mind is empty of images and returns without effort, without choice, to its natural order.

In this state of complete attention 'the other,' that which is excluded by the borders created by mental images, may be perceived - directly. Krishnamurti called this state real meditation. This state with its implied intelligence dissolves the conditioning in which the human brain has been caught for thousands of years.

Without a center from *Krishnamurti's Notebook*:

The flashing river was now the light of the sky, enchanted, dreaming and lost in its beauty and love. In this light, all things cease to exist, the heart that was crying and the brain that was cunning; pleasure and pain went away leaving only light, transparent, gently and caressing. It was light; thought and feeling had no part in it, they could never give light; they were not there, only this light when the sun is well beyond the walls of the city and not a cloud in the sky. You cannot see this light unless you know the timeless movement of meditation; the ending of thought is this movement. The brain was completely still but very alive and watching, without a center. The otherness was there, deep within at a depth that was lost; wiping away everything without leaving a mark of what has been or what is. It was simply a fact, like a sunset, like death and the curving river.

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