

KFA Bulletin

#94

2020

The Urgency of Change

K KRISHNAMURTI
FOUNDATION
OF AMERICA

This annual Bulletin is offered to a small group of supporters and typically includes previously unpublished material by Krishnamurti. In our archives we have a great deal of unpublished content, including audio recordings, which require some work to transcribe and verify. There are some compelling materials in the vault that will one day be put into book form.

Dear Friends,

Each year the KFA selects a theme that connects the programs of the various parts of our organization; the Foundation, Center, and School. This year's theme is *The Urgency of Change*, which is similar to the title of a book we published in 1970. The transcript presented in this Bulletin is previously unpublished and based on the first in a series of small group discussions held in Malibu, California, in 1970.

Krishnamurti's associate at the time, Alain Naude, actively sought out people to meet with K for discussions. In this transcript, Krishnamurti emphatically questions the notion of "self-improvement," which he calls "a terrible thing." It seems counter-intuitive that the effort to gradually improve aspects of oneself may in fact prevent the urgency of fundamental change in our psyche. He suggests that all activity directed towards self-improvement is based on comparison with an example, an ideal, a hero, or a projection of a different tomorrow. Comparison is a trap, one always moves within the confines of what is compared, and it creates the feeling that progress is being made. Such as climbing on M.C. Escher's staircase! During the discussion K poses the question: "What brings about this explosive quality that breaks all this down?"

This question is central in our work as a Foundation, Center, and School. Our objective is to explore the nature of this trap within ourselves.

We hope you appreciate the contents of Bulletin #94.

Sincerely,



Jaap Sluiter
Executive Director
Krishnamurti Foundation of America

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

FIRST SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IN MALIBU

21 FEBRUARY 1970

Krishnamurti: May I begin with something and then we can go around it.

You know what's happening in the world – terrible mess, great violence, murder, and every kind of mischief is afloat, and amidst all this chaos what is a man to do and what is he to do seriously? And what does it mean to be serious? Can we discuss that? What it means to be serious in the context of this complete destruction, complete meaningless existence. Can we go into that? Would that be worthwhile?

What does it mean to be serious? Not momentarily serious but a sustained, continuous, passionate seriousness. What does that word mean to most of us? Because most of us jump from one thing to another, from one personal impetus or personal inclination, from one attraction to another, from one entertainment to another, philosophical, religious or personal pleasures and so on. What does that word mean to most of us? I wonder what it means to me. Does it mean exclusion and dedication to one particular direction, to one particular activity, to a particular ideology? Or is it the total denial, turning one's back completely on society? I don't mean organised society, the society with its establishments and so on. I don't mean that. Inwardly, psychologically, turn our back onto all that man stands for, has made himself into. For me, that is serious, to be serious – to turn my back on what man has made himself into and what he stands for, as he actually is – not an ideological, mythological entity but actually as he is – his

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vanities, his absurdities, his angers and viciousness and brutality, all that. I would consider that – I am speaking for myself – for me that is to be serious. And can one live that way? Not according to one's mood or occasionally, but with sustained intensity. Shall we discuss? Would that be of any value to discuss it?

We can put the question differently. We believe in progress, don't we, or self-improvement. Do we? Progress, the obvious progress of a society, of the computer, you know, progress, evolution, I mean, technological growth and so on. And is there progress at all in any other direction? Becoming better. Do you want to be serious about all this, to really deny the becoming?

Q: I'm not sure we see that we can't become.

K: I mean, becoming implies comparison, progress, time, the tomorrow, from what I have been I shall be. Which means really to be free of the word 'to be' in which is implied progress, becoming, moving from one level to another and so on. That word has conditioned us. And to be free of the implications of that verb and all the things involved in it, which means complete denial of self-improvement. It doesn't mean that one becomes static, one remains where one is, but to approach where one is without making it better. It's not that one is inferior or superior – the inferior trying to become the superior, or accepting the inferior and remaining in that state of inferiority, but to be out of that imbalance. Is this all too much?

Q: Doesn't that imply accepting 'what is', accepting as conditions are?

K: No, no. Does it imply accepting 'what is'? Or does it imply a quality of mind that is free of comparison and therefore sees 'what is' without comparing?

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Q: I don't know if we know how to see without comparing.

K: Shall we discuss it, go into it, why our minds have been so conditioned by that verb and the whole structure of human psychological endeavour to become something? I mean, must one always live in comparison – bigger car, bigger house, bigger bathroom, bigger, more beautiful – you follow? – which means everlasting struggle. And the denial of that doesn't mean accepting the status quo, but the mind that sees the futility of it. A mind becoming less angry or less detached or more affectionate, which are all comparative, which are all progressive in that sense. You see, the difficulty is, the word 'being' implies 'to be', in which there is no comparison or sense of change. I wonder if you understand what I'm talking about.

Q: Are you saying that one throw out the whole concept of progression?

K: How can I throw out the mechanical progress, mechanical perfection – better car – you know what I mean? But inwardly, psychologically, the freedom from becoming, the feeling of no more.

Q: Are you talking about desire? Is that the fuel?

K: That's part of it. That's only a small part of desire. Desire is a very small, little affair. Look at all the religious activities of man, whether in India or Europe or here: it is the same movement of psychological achievement and progressive realisation or enlightenment, or understanding of truth, and so on – gradual. I'm pretty sure the Brahmins, with all their mischief, invented this idea of gradual enlightenment – it suited them. They were the masters to give enlightenment to others. And they could achieve, they were there already, the Brahmins, and the poor other fellows

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gradually came up to their level. It is the same in Christianity – the layman gradually becoming the saint. This exists throughout.

Q: Doesn't it serve some function, that slow progress?

K: Function in what, sir?

Q: That it achieves an end for some individuals.

K: No, if it is poison to one, it must be poison to all. Either it is true or it is not true. It's really extraordinarily interesting to go into this, into oneself, to find out why we accept – I accept or you accept – the idea of progress inwardly, self-improvement. Let's stick to that word, 'self-improvement', which is a terrible thing. What is there to improve?

Q: It's such a natural impulse. When someone tells you that you're stupid, that you want to work...

K: Why? Why? It may be a natural instinct or it may be a conditioned response through education, through culture, through society and so on, but why do we accept it?

Q: Because we think it's a natural instinct.

K: No. Therefore let us tear it to pieces and find out.

Q: We accept it because we're not satisfied with what we are.

K: No, sir, that again ... You see, all this seems so small, doesn't it? We are all moving in small circles. I don't know if you follow what I mean. 'I'm satisfied, I'll be more satisfied, I'll be less satisfied, I've this desire, I wish I hadn't that desire, I wish I was...' You follow what I mean? It's such a small field of action.

Q: It does make us feel better though.

K: I know, but that 'feeling better' is also a petty little affair. Putting on a new shirt, clean shirt ... (laughs) But can't we move out of

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that small circle? Not form another bigger circle – move out of that circle entirely. I mean, a priest, leaving the Church, Catholic Church, getting married, and so on, so on – you know what is happening. It all seems so extraordinarily small when compared to the enormous thing that's going on in the world. I mean, it's like looking at those marvellous, beautiful mountains and saying, 'Well, let's go and have tea.' (Laughs) You know what I mean?

Q: It seems to be a preoccupation with our sorrows, because when I'll think of myself as no longer concerned with becoming anything then I seem no longer concerned with myself. And yet, I'm not revolving in that small area.

K: How do we get out of the small area? Not bit by bit. You follow what I mean? That's progressive, that is self-improvement. Here I am, caught, conditioned by that verb, and my whole activity inwardly, psychologically and in my mind, is to evolve round there, in that little cage. I know that very well, what it feels like, the pettiness, the shoddiness of the little business. Occasionally bursting out, you know, like a porcupine with quills and hurting somebody, and so on. But to break away completely from it. Shall we discuss it?

Q: Yes.

K: How do we do this? Knowing my life – life includes pleasure, you know, life – sex, love, everything is so petty, small, degrading. How do I completely let all that go? Is it one instant action, to shatter the walls, as it were, explode from within? And if that is so, how does it happen? Or is it a matter of the intensification of pressure from outside? I don't know if... Circumstances, environment, political activity, the upheavals – you know, all that, the immense pressure from outside – social revolution and so on, so on. What brings about this explosive quality that breaks all this down?

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Q: The explosive quality must contain urgency.

K: All right, sir. Yes, urgency, intensity, eagerness, passion, all that – how does it happen?

Q: I don't understand what's going to be broken in the explosion.

K: Look, sir, I live in a very small house. My walls are very thin or they're very thick by my own thought. And I move and live and survive within that very small house, adding an occasional room to it. And I suddenly realise how petty it all is. And somehow that very realisation doesn't do anything. You know what I mean? It doesn't shatter the walls. How does this happen? And in that house I grow old and die. That's the end of it. Now, sir, what shall we do? Shall we discuss that?

Q: Yes.

K: Go ahead, sir, discuss it. (Laughter)

Q: If I have a state of mind or a quality of mind which does not make comparisons, then how can I see sex and the pleasures of every day as being petty?

K: No, but why do you compare, sir? Put it the other way around. Why do you compare at all? What is the root of this business of comparing? What is behind it?

Q: Self-gratification, it seems.

K: Is that it?

Q: Is it our insecurities, desire to protect?

K: Sir, look, if you say something, it must be true. Don't guess. Let's investigate. Do you follow what I mean? Why do I compare myself with you or with somebody else? Why do I have examples at all? Why this comparative spirit, attitude, action?

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Q: The fear of not being the same as other people.

K: Is that all? Who cares? Not being like Mrs Jones. Heavens! No, please press it a bit more. Why do you compare?

Q: When I compare myself with somebody else, and through my own thinking I find that I'm better than the other person, then it makes me feel good in some way.

K: Is that the complete answer, sir?

Q: It's a partial answer.

K: No. Putting parts together doesn't make the whole. What is the complete answer to that? And because it's complete it will be true always. You follow what I mean?

Why do you compare? What would happen if you didn't compare, if you had no example, no hero, no ideal, no saying, 'I will be something different tomorrow,' if you didn't compare at all? What would happen? Is comparison an escape from yourself? And yourself not knowing what yourself is? I don't know if you follow. Because I don't know myself, I compare. If I know myself, what is the need to compare?

Q: We're constantly defining ourselves with the outside.

K: Therefore I have to understand what it is to know myself. Because I think Nixon is better – sorry! (laughter) – I want to be like him. Why? God forbid, but why? Or Jesus or somebody else, doesn't matter who it is – why? Better writer – you follow? – the whole series of comparative values which I have established for myself, which I pursue consciously or unconsciously. Why am I doing this? Now, to go into it completely, to the very end of it, is to be serious. Because to go into it, I mean to explore into it, one needs a great deal of energy, intensity, passion – you follow?

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– everything to go. That gives you an extraordinary quality of seriousness. And to explore together is to communicate. Shall we go now? Shall we go into it? Why? Why do I compare myself with anybody? Is it the word? Because I live with words and I say I'm not intelligent, whereas you are intelligent. Intelligence has certain value – moral, ethical, and economic and so on. And by comparison I struggle to be like you, because it's profitable. That's one. Why am I doing all this, all my life? Comparing, comparing – why?

Q: Because my life is so dull, not interesting.

K: Look, sir, you're doing it out of dullness? How do you know you are dull, if you didn't compare?

Q: How do you know yourself?

K: No, do look at it. How do you know you're dull if you didn't compare?

Q: Because everybody else tells me.

K: Then we are back again. I'm interested not what people tell me, that I am dull or stupid or enlightened, I'm interested to find out why I compare. Have you ever tried not to compare?

Q: Yes.

K: No, no, don't make it easy or hard. Say, 'No comparison.'

Q: We've been conditioned to think otherwise.

K: Break down that conditioning immediately and say, 'I won't compare.'

Q: But it's one thing to say...

K: Do it, sir. The proof is in the doing of it. The twisting out of that fact is the doing of it. Can I, can the mind which has been trained,

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conditioned, shaped to compare, inquire into non-comparative activity? Can I do it?

Q: Can one inquire into oneself without any terminology at all? What is the examination, the awareness without any concept?

K: Examination is the observation of what is going on non-comparatively, non-linguistically, non-putting what you see into words and translating, giving significance to those words, and then saying this is right, this is wrong, this should be, this should not be.

Q: How do you do it without words, Krishnaji? How can you possibly see something without...

K: Oh yes, surely. Surely that's possible, isn't it?

Q: Without any vocabulary at all?

K: Yes, surely.

Q: When I don't compare, then I don't make a barrier between myself and what I'm looking at, or thinking, or whatever it is.

K: Yes, sir. Go ahead, sir, don't ask me.

Q: Sir, you asked why do we compare, and we didn't get to the end of that question. Then you asked: can we not compare? But we don't really know why we should not compare. We haven't yet seen why we should not compare. And we haven't seen why we do compare.

K: I think it's fairly clear, sir, why we compare. Why do I compare? You answer me, sir, go ahead.

Q: It's loneliness. It would be very lonely.

K: Why? No, madame, écoutez. I mean, look, why do you compare?

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Q: Because we're afraid.

K: You're afraid?

Q: Isn't it a process of using certain tools in the mind which we do from birth onwards so that ...

K: I mean you have certain implements, certain instruments which you are using. Is that it? To cultivate the mind?

Q: We compare in order to become, as you said at the beginning, sir. It's part of that becoming.

Q: To protect yourself from the facts.

Q: In order to become, I think you mean in order to form a conclusion. Compare so we can come to a conclusion.

K: No. Would you try something? Listen. First, listen to the question. Listen, not interpret it. It has to be put verbally because otherwise no communication is possible. So someone is asking me: why do you compare? I have no answer. I don't jump into the question and say, 'I compare because I'm frightened.' I listen first. Right? I am really listening. I really don't know why I'm comparing, just that I've done it. Now why am I doing it? I've put the question: why do I compare? I've also said: why am I doing it? I am listening to the question, why I'm doing it. Right? I'm listening to it. Which means I am listening very carefully to the answer. I don't know what the answer is. I don't know if you're following what I mean. I am very carefully listening why I'm comparing. Is the listening a verbal state? Is the listening... am I listening to a word that's going to answer the question? Am I making myself clear? I have put to myself the question: why do I compare? Now, I'm listening to that. Am I listening to the word that is going to explain why I'm doing it? The word is the result of thinking. Thinking then is the past, and so on. So, am I listening

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when I put the question, why do I compare, for a verbal answer which will come out of the past? Or am I listening without the past. I don't know if you capture what I'm trying to explain.

I've put myself that question – why do I compare? Now, am I listening to the answer with my ears turned to the past, which is thinking, or am I listening non-verbally?

Q: It would appear you're groping for some sort of nostalgic orientation. You are looking to the past for guidance.

K: I haven't got it.

Q: In other words, when you reach into the past it's like looking into the rear view mirror to see all the situations which have gone before.

K: Sir, I put the question, which is, why do I compare? How do I listen to that question? Non-verbally or verbally? I don't know if there's any meaning in that.

Q: I think most of us are incapable of listening to it non-verbally.

K: Why?

Q: Because that's how we are conditioned.

K: Ah!

Q: We're listening with anticipation.

K: That is not an answer, madame.

Q: The question seems to raise some sort of anxiety and finding an answer for it seems to momentarily displace this.

K: Anxiety. Why should there be anxiety?

Q: We anticipate something. We anticipate an answer and we don't see.

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K: Sir, look, I have put to you the question. I don't know. You follow? Why should I be anxious about it? I don't know. I'm going to find out. Why should I have fear? Fear will come after I've found out what to do about it. You see, this is a very good mental discipline in the sense not conformity and discipline, but the mind that is inquiring is learning, and therefore very attentive. I don't know if you ...

Q: If I always compare, doesn't it mean that I always want to give myself a choice?

K: A choice.

Q: A choice, that I always want to say to myself: this or that, today or yesterday?

K: Yes, why? Why do you want choice? Why do you have to choose at all? If you see something very clearly, what's the need of choice?

Q: If I see something very clearly. If I don't see it, then I need to choose.

K: Then why don't you? No, find out, sir, go into it. Why don't we see things clearly? Why don't we see very clearly what is implied in comparison?

Q: We don't see it clearly because we always see it in relation to something else, and that's not clear.

Q: We only see a part of it.

Q: We never look at it without desiring an answer to the question. We never look at anything without some desire interplaying and interfering with it. So you don't really look at it at all. If you have any desire to find an answer in it, or to make some judgement

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on it, then there's no way of seeing because the barrier is there. You're already caught.

K: Sir, but look, we are investigating, we are exploring. In exploring, any form of desire, fear distorts the process of exploring. You go off in another direction. But here we're exploring, therefore that can't enter into it. Your motive, your desire, your fear doesn't enter when I'm saying let's find out what the microphone is made of. In the same way, we are trying to inquire into this thing: why do I compare? Is it choice? If it is choice, then what is the necessity to choose? I choose because I'm confused. I don't know whether to go there or there. But if I see very clearly where to go, there's no choice. So why don't I see clearly? It may be because I'm comparing – what Jesus said, what Nixon said, what somebody said, this and that. So I am confused. You do compare, don't you? Why? Go on, explore.

Q: Are we comparing with the image which we have?

K: Because you have an image about yourself and you want to improve that image?

Q: If we kind of hold on to the image.

K: If you hold on to the image, there is no need to compare. If I hold on to something, I don't compare.

Q: Falling short of the image.

K: It's only when I want to improve the image, or cut it down, or do something about it.

Q: Or conform to it.

K: Yes, yes, yes. You're not answering: why do you compare? None of you. You see, sir, you don't work at this.

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Q: I compare because I feel I have to know.

K: You mean to say you know through comparison? Take that statement. You know through comparison.

Q: I think I do.

K: Is that a fact?

Q: I'm cheating myself.

K: No, no! Don't say you're cheating. Is that a fact?

I compare this carpet to something else. There it is necessary, and so on. But we're talking at the psychological level where the operation of thought is always in action. When I choose this carpet after comparing it with half a dozen carpets, it's finished. But my life isn't the carpet. My life is this constant inward activity of comparison – you look better, you're more intelligent, you're more spiritual, you've got more money, your eyes are beautiful, mine aren't; you're tall, you're short, I wish I could have more sex, less sex. You follow? Back and forth. This is what I'm talking about, this endless chattering, comparative work, activity that's going on. I say to myself: why am I doing this?

Q: To survive in society.

K: No, that's surely... Survive in this society? I am surviving.

Q: To avoid seeing because we don't like the way it is, to avoid seeing the fact?

K: Sir, I can go on, but you don't explore together, you see? After all, sir, communication means understanding together, working together, sharing together. Communication means that. The verb 'communicate' means that. The very word means that. But here someone else is talking and you're all quiet.

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Q: Can we go back three spaces, sir, to a statement you made before about waiting for an answer, and if in fact it was a verbal answer we were waiting for, or a non-verbal answer. I got a little lost after that. And we never really did answer that question. If I were to be asked again, I would say that I would probably be waiting for a verbal answer because that is how I function.

K: You see, take that, sir. You're waiting for a verbal answer. Which means what?

Q: Which means if I am thinking, if I ask myself a question, I must answer myself verbally.

K: Verbally. Which means what? Go into it. Which means...

Q: Which means...

K: ...thought is thinking it out. Watch it, sir. Thought says, 'By Jove, why am I comparing?' Now thought is exploring. And thought is the past.

With the instrument of the past you are exploring something which is into the unknown. Because you don't know why you are comparing. So thought has no value there. So a verbal answer to that is no answer.

Q: But what is the quality of non-verbal?

K: I am doing it. We are doing it. To see that thought cannot explore this question. I can give innumerable reasons, which would be very thoughtful, thoughtfully intelligent, thoughtfully true, but it's still the activity of thought.

Q: But even that recognition or even that insight is a verbal thing, when you are seeing something.

K: I am only explaining it through words, a state non-verbal.

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Q: The words are just the letter. The thing itself is something different.

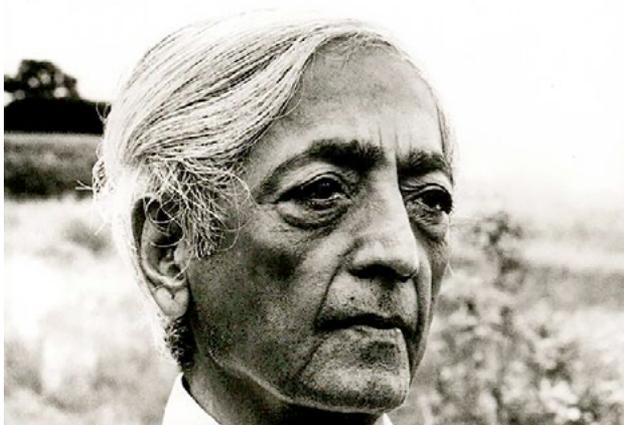
Q: I understand that but I'm wondering what is actually a non-verbal...

K: We will do it in a minute. Have a little patience. You will see it for yourself. I have put the question to myself... really, because I want to find out. It isn't a superficial question, it's a tremendously important question to me. Because the whole of my life is going to depend on that question, how I shall live in the future. I put that question very... tremendously seriously. And how do I answer the question? Am I going to answer verbally? Therefore the inquiry is an activity of thought? If it is the activity of thought, therefore verbal, therefore it is an inquiring with an instrument which is already dead, which is already old. It has not got a sharp precision in it. Therefore that's out. So I'm not using thought. Thought is not in operation, therefore non-verbal. Now, that means what? My mind is completely free of the word and the thought.

J. Krishnamurti

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The Urgency of Change



J. Krishnamurti

Available at the KFA Bookstore:
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Dear Reader,

The Krishnamurti Foundation of America is a non-profit charitable trust whose mission is to preserve and disseminate the work of J. Krishnamurti. His mission, in his own words, was to “set men absolutely, unconditionally free.” For sixty-five years he offered, in his talks and writings, an exploration into the nature of the self and the nature of truth that was bound by no cultural, theological, or racial limitations. It remains the mission of the organization to make these teachings accessible.

Krishnamurti’s message is more important today than at any other time in history. Psychological time, manifested as separative belief, desire, and fear, is as prevalent in today’s world as it was throughout the whole of human history. And it may be that one feels isolated and ineffectual in one’s little corner of the world, ‘working on ourselves,’ while chaos and violence explodes around us and around the globe. Listening and pure observation, as taught by Krishnamurti, are not a retreat, but an advance into freedom. They are not the end, but the beginning of action.

“Self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom.
Without self-knowledge, there can be no wisdom.”

— *J. Krishnamurti*

Thank you for your donation, it enables this work to go on.

The KFA staff