

Through That Door

I think most of us seek some kind of mystery beyond life; we want something mysterious, occult, hidden, beyond existence; and it seems to me that there is a great mystery and an extraordinary beauty in the way of life, in the way that we live that life. For most of us, living - that is, everyday living: going to the office, the dreary house, the petty quarrels, and the innumerable ambitions and trials of life - is a degradation; it is boring and tiresome. And so we try, I think, rather vainly to go beyond the very nature of existence, and to find something that will give us complete satisfaction, gratification. And so we never know how to live, we never seem to understand the whole depth, the beauty, and the dignity of living.

To come into contact with anything directly is not to verbalize it but to look at it.

Apparently, it is one of the most difficult things to do, to come directly into contact with the fact. There is the fact of that tree - the fact, but not what you think about the tree. What you think about the tree is not the fact, which is the tree. Please follow this. For most of us, fact is nonexistent. We live with ideas; we live with our memories, with our experiences; and in the shadow of those experiences and memories we approach the fact, and thereby transform the fact, or rather hope to transform, hope to change the fact. Whereas to look at the fact, in itself, brings about the energy that is necessary to transform that fact. We are going into this a little bit.

You know, we never look at things. We never look at the sky. We never look at the shape of a building or at our neighbor - what he looks like, what he thinks, what he feels - we never observe. We are too occupied with our own miseries, with our own worries; and we are so self-centered, so enclosed in our own problems that we never see anything. But to observe means to learn. It is only through learning that you can bring about a radical change. The very act of learning is the act of change. So to look, to observe, is the primary necessity of a religious man, not what he thinks, not what he feels, not what his reactions are. We will come later to those reactions, to those beliefs, to those environmental influences which condition the mind and distort what he observes.

I do not know whether you have looked at a sunset, or the quiet dignity of a tree, or the line of a bird on the wing. To look demands quiet; it demands a quality of the mind that is quiet, that is not incessantly chattering with itself. There must be a certain silence to observe. And you cannot have silence if your mind, when it is observing, is projecting its own ideas, its own demands, its hopes, its fears. So, to observe the social structure in which we live, and to bring about a radical change in that society, we must first observe what is, not what we want that society to be.

This society in which we live, we have created, we are responsible for it - each one of us. It has not come into being because of some fictitious, spiritual forces. It has come about through our greed, through our ambition, through our personal likes and dislikes and enmities, through our frustrations, through our search for pleasure and satisfaction. We have created the religions, the beliefs, the dogmas, out of fear. It is in that society that you live. Either you run away from that society because you cannot understand it, or cannot bring about a change in that society of which you are a part; or you become so completely engrossed in your own particular travail that you lose complete interest in the radical demand of a human mind that says that it must change.

So, existence is relationship, existence is a movement in relationship, and that existence is society. And we cannot possibly go beyond the limits of our mind, of our heart, unless we understand the structure of our own being, which is society. The society is not different from you - you are society. The very structure of society is the structure of yourself. So when you begin to understand yourself, you are then beginning to understand the society in which you live. It is not opposed to society. So a religious man is concerned with the discovery of a new way of life, of living in this world, and bringing about a transformation in the society in which he lives, because by transforming himself, he transforms society. I think this is very important to understand.

Most of us are concerned with finding a way of living harmoniously, without too many conflicts, without the barrenness of modern existence. But without understanding existence, our life, there is no way out of our confusion, out of our misery, out of all the travail of man. I think that is the first thing to face. That is the fact. You have to face that fact objectively as you would face the fact of that palm tree; you have to look at it. Now, to look at a tree - you can easily do it because the tree does not interfere with your life. You can look at the lovely clouds full of life and gaiety and extraordinary vitality because it has no significance in your daily life. You can see the light on the water and enjoy the beauty, the quickness, the dance; and again that has no significance in your daily life. You can read all the sacred books in your country, quote them everlastingly; and again, that has no significance in your life.

To understand the tree, the cloud, the light on the water, you must look. And when you do look, your mind must be empty to look. I do not know if you have ever looked at a flower - not casually, not in passing by - ever observed it. To observe a flower is as important as to observe yourself. Because in observing a flower, you begin to learn how to observe. While observing a flower, most people bring forth into that observation the naming. They say it is a rose, a violet, or a primrose; and thereby they have stopped looking. The verbalization of the fact is a distraction away from that fact.

To observe demands a quiet, no verbalizing mind, a mind that looks without opinion, without judgment. And that is one of the most difficult things to do - to look at an objective thing, nonverbally. You try, as you are sitting there, to look at that palm tree or to listen to the speaker objectively, putting aside your opinions, your ideas, the reputation of the speaker, and so on - to non-verbalize. Then you will find, if you do look, that your mind must be somewhat quiet; otherwise, you cannot see. If I look at that palm tree thinking of other things, I cannot possibly see the beauty, the stillness, the depth, the quality, the nature, the totality of the tree.

To observe something totally, your mind must be completely empty to observe. And it is very difficult to observe things outwardly, if one has ever tried it. It is much more difficult to observe the social structure, the environmental influences, the state of your mind as part of your society.

I feel that the most important thing to understand is to look and thereby to learn. To look is not merely with your eyes but also with your ears - to listen with your ears. Probably most of us never listen. Again, to listen demands attention, not concentration - just attention to listen to the crows, to listen to the breeze, to listen to the murmur of a big town, to listen to the distant sea; just to listen without interpreting, without translating, without saying, "I have already heard that before." Because when there is learning about listening, then you will see that you can listen to all the intimations of your mind and also listen to all the hints of your own existence; and without listening you cannot learn. Because we have to learn about ourselves, we have to learn anew about society.

As an individual, it is your responsibility to bring about a tremendous change in the world. It is your responsibility because you are part of this society, because you are part of this tremendous sorrow of man, this constant effort, struggle, pain, and anxiety. You are responsible. Unless you realize that immense responsibility and come directly in contact with that responsibility and listen to the whole structure, the machinery of that responsibility, do what you will - go to every temple, to every guru, to every Master, to every religious book in the world - your action has no meaning whatsoever because those are mere escapes from actuality.

We have to understand this existence, this life, our relationship to society. We have not only to understand our relationship with each other, with society, but to bring about a radical change in that relationship. And that is our responsibility. I do not think we feel this urgency. We look to the politicians, we look to some philosophy, we look to something mysterious that will bring about an alteration within ourselves. There is no way out except that you become aware of this immense responsibility as a human being, and becoming aware of that responsibility, you learn all about it and do not bring all your previous knowledge to learn. And to learn there must be freedom; otherwise, you will repeat the same thing over and over again.

To be aware of this responsibility means great, arduous work. We have to work not only within ourselves but also in our relationship with others. I mean by "work" not the practice of some silly formula, some absurd theory, some fantastic assertions of some philosopher or of some guru or teacher. Those are all too infantile, immature. When we talk about work, we mean by that becoming aware of the responsibility, as a human being living in this world, that he has to work to bring about a change within himself. And if he really changes, if he brings about a mutation within himself, then he will transform society. Society is not transformed through any revolution, economic or social. We have seen this through the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution. The everlasting hope of man - that by altering the outward things, the inward nature of man can be transformed - has never been fulfilled, and it will never be. The outward change, the economic change, which is bound to come to this country which is so poor - that is not going to change man's attitude, the ways of life, his misery, his confusion.

To bring about a total change of man, man has to become aware of himself - that is, he has to learn about himself anew. Man, according to the recent discoveries of anthropology, has lived for two million years; and man has not found a way out of his misery. He has escaped from it, he has run away through some fanciful illusion. But he has not found it, has not built a society that is totally free; he has not built a society which is not a society of conformity.

A true religious man is concerned with creating a new society which is neither this nor that, but something entirely different - which is, each human being behaves righteously every minute because he understands his responsibility as a human being. He alone is responsible and no other - how he behaves; what his activities are; whether he is ambitious, cruel, destructive, hating, jealous, competitive; what his fears are. It is only such a mind that can bring about a new society. And we do need a new society, and that society is not going to be created by anybody except by you. I do not think we feel the immense responsibility of this. That is the first thing that matters. Because that is the foundation, which is righteous behavior, right conduct - not the conduct of a pattern, but the conduct which comes about through learning. If you are all the time learning, that very learning brings about its own righteous action. Therefore it is only the religious mind that can create this new society.

You must learn about yourself - not what you have been told about yourself, not what your sacred books have told you about yourself, because they are irrelevant, they have no meaning. You have to learn anew about yourself. Therefore, you have to learn how to observe yourself. As you observe that tree, so you have to observe yourself. As you observe that tree without distortion, so you have to observe yourself without distortion - and that is the greatest difficulty. Because we do not observe the fact, but we rather know what gives us pleasure or pain and therefore avoid the fact.

You know, if I want to know about myself, to learn about myself, I have to watch every movement of my mind, every feeling I have - not say that it should not exist or must exist, not deny it or try to modify it, but just to observe what I am. And that demands a certain discipline. Because to observe the fact is in itself a discipline. Please do look at it. Look at a flower and see how difficult it is to look at it without naming it, without bringing all your reactions upon it, without saying you like or dislike - just to observe. Then you will see how extraordinarily difficult it is to look at something which is totally outside objectively. And then, when you turn inward, it is much more difficult because you have opinions about yourself: what you should be or what you should not be; what you are; that you are the highest self, the atma, the God, or what you think you are - all the fantastic ideas and memories about yourself. It is these memories, these fancies, these illusions, these experiences - this acquired knowledge - that prevent you from looking at yourself. And to be aware of these - knowledge and the various forms of knowledge - and not allow them to interfere with your observation of yourself brings about a discipline in itself.

You know, to go very far, you have to begin very near. You must begin here, not beyond existence. You must begin with the earth, with us, with human beings, with ourselves, and not try to find what is the transcendental beauty of life. To find the transcendental beauty of life, we must begin with life itself. It is only through the daily existence and the understanding of the beauty of that life in our daily ways - it is only through that door that we can find that which is not measurable.

Our minds seek always something not transient, something called God, something called truth. And we are so desperate, we are so anxious, we are so surrounded by fear that we make every effort to find something which we call truth, which we call God. But to find that, we must lay the right foundation; and the right foundation is right action in our behavior. So we must lay the foundation, not on sand, but on the responsibility of our daily life, and try to bring about a tremendous revolution in that life.

You know, for most of us, change implies a bargaining process. I would like to change, and so I begin to bargain with myself whether it is profitable or not, whether it is worthwhile or not, so change implies a bargaining. Please think about it and feel how extraordinarily our mind works with regard to change. We change if it is profitable, if it is pleasurable, or we change when it is painful. But any change with bargaining is no change at all. So our mind that wishes to find the reality must begin with itself.

There is something that is not measurable by the mind or by the instruments invented by man. There is truth, there is benediction. But we must come upon it not through prayers, not through hope, but by becoming totally responsible for every action, every day and every minute of the day. Then out of that responsibility comes the flower of understanding, and that understanding is the way of life. And there has to be that discovery, for each one, of the way of living; and it is only that way that can bring about reality, clarity, and the great depth of the mind.

(From J. Krishnamurti: Talk 1, Bombay, February 10, 1965)