

# My Quest as an Educator

Kabir Jaithirtha

Before I begin with education, I think it's good to have a sense of what Krishnamurti was talking about—about life in general, about humanity—and then see how that connects with education. It doesn't need a Krishnamurti to tell us that there is great disorder in the world—a great deal of violence, tremendous inequality, a constant sense of anxiety amongst people about their security, job and so on. You turn on the television and you see pictures of children being dragged from bombed-out cities, children dying of cholera, and all kinds of violence we seem to heap on ourselves. Either we accept that as part of the natural order, and carry on as best we can, or one can begin to question why this happens. In such a questioning, one can probably come across many explanations—one could blame politicians, one could blame social and political systems, one could blame technology; Karl Marx would have blamed the economic system and so on. Krishnamurti pointed out that the disorder is really much more fundamental.

It is not really some kind of outward disorder, which a certain amount of careful thinking can set right. But there is a deeper cause of this disorder and he pointed out convincingly, to me at least, that disorder in the human consciousness creates disorder in society, in the world as a whole. So, the disorder outside is not independent of what we are as human beings. He makes one more point: that human consciousness is one; it's not that there are separate individuals and that somehow each of their separate consciousnesses added together in some abstract way can be called the human consciousness. He is saying that our brains respond to this collective human consciousness. Just like language is a collective phenomenon, each of us contributing to and participating in the language we use, we contribute similarly to what could be called the human consciousness, and participate in this human consciousness.

And this consciousness has within it movements of violence, fear, desire, and a peculiar quality of feeling that each human being is psychologically separate from other human beings. Even in our closest relationships there is a sense of separation, a sense of being psychologically separate from the other. And further, there is not only a sense of 'me' being psychologically separate from 'you', 'us' being psychologically separate from 'them', our group being psychologically separate from other groups, but even within myself there is a strange quality of psychological separation as 'me' and 'my experiences'. Most of us, when we grow up, take for granted this psychological separation because we absorb it from the environment in which we are born; every one of our structures reflects the psychological separation. So like a child who absorbs language, we absorb the language of psychological separation, and begin to take it for granted that it is the most natural thing.

We also take it for granted that the feeling of 'me' as separate from 'my experiences'. We assume that it is a fact of life that that is so. I don't think I would have ever had the capacity to explore whether this is really so. So it needed, for someone like me, Krishnamurti to point out that that may not be a fact. That the feeling of psychological separation, though it is there, may be constructed and sustained by thought, something that exists as long as thought is actively supporting it and sustaining it, something that could come to an end when thought no longer supports it and sustains it. We see many such examples. If I consider you my enemy, my thought has to sustain the feeling that you are my enemy. As long as the thought sustains the feeling that you are my enemy, I consider you my enemy and function accordingly. If it stops sustaining that idea, that opinion, that you are my enemy, you are no longer my enemy. So it seems to me a tremendous discovery to find out that this psychological division which we take for granted, and which we assume is something inherent in nature, is not really so.

The question then arises—Is it possible to free the mind of this activity of division and separation? One might ask why should it be done; why not just live with that situation? I would like to suggest that the deeper force of disorder is the feeling of psychological separation. In this feeling of psychological separation there comes the possibility that you might be a threat to me, that your group might be a threat to my group. So, there is immediately a need to create boundaries and protect these boundaries. In the creation of these boundaries and the protection of these boundaries, there is inevitably going to be conflict and violence.

The other person's misery seems somewhat distant, somewhat removed from my existence. And so I can tolerate it if a child in Yemen dies of cholera because of the fighting there. Only when it comes very close to my house, do I begin to be disturbed. So this feeling of psychological separation and division creates a profound lack of empathy, a profound lack of relationship between human beings. Therefore, without addressing this question of psychological separation and seeing whether it can be ended, you can never end human disorder. Every so called leader has this sense of division and separation embedded within him. So when he functions, however much he wants to do something good, because his action is coming from a sense of division, inevitably it sustains the disorder that comes from division. And quite often, people who become leaders exploit this sense of division. They find it convenient to be able to use it to come to power. So it's really an extraordinarily important question that human beings have to examine and address. You cannot end violence through violence; you cannot end division through the activity of division.

We have to bring a different approach to it altogether. Whether in a school, or talking to the public, or in dialogues that Krishnamurti had with people, he was educating the mind. Educating not merely in terms of giving it some concepts and ideas, but bringing about the capacity for the mind to examine its own activity and its own movement. I would call that education. It seems to me very logical that, if you are really concerned about addressing this disorder, however small that action seems, you have to start with education. You have to start with creating the capacity to question this activity of thought which sustains and creates division. Therefore, for me, it seemed very, very simple to say that if I am really concerned with the human situation, education is what one starts with.

As we know, most education is concerned with the development of the intellect. The only function of education seems to be to create people who are producers and consumers, so that the economic activity can go on and go on expanding, regardless of what happens to the earth and regardless of how this activity can be destructive to mankind itself. And quite often we feel that what could be called moral education also is the creation of a set of values and imparting those values as information to children.

There may be a very different approach to education, of not merely the development of the intellect, but the bringing about of the capacity to examine the activity of thought, to bring about a capacity in children, not to take for granted this separate activity of thought, not to indoctrinate them and somehow get them to feel trained into some kind of submissive acceptance, even submissive acceptance of an idea that 'we are all one'. That doesn't work because the deeper movement is a feeling of separation. The deeper movement always overwhelms whatever training you can give to the mind on the surface. But there may be a possibility of the adult, the teacher, the parent and the child actually learning the art of examining the activity of thought as it happens within themselves, as it happens within them and their friends, as it happens in the school environment. And it seems to me that it is very obvious that this education, this capacity to observe the movement of thought and what it does, is as natural and as important as the capacity to learn mathematics or to learn physics or whatever. I would suggest that, in fact, without bringing about this capacity, we are betraying our children. We are condemning them to a life of anxiety which inevitably comes about when this feeling of separation is not examined. Anxiety in relationship, and emotions that come from this feeling of separation, happen because we take it for granted that it is natural. But when you begin to question it, when you begin to ask yourself if it is really so, if it is really possible to awaken the mind to this activity of thought, then you begin to find out that in fact in a school you can do a great deal.

In bringing up children, one can bring about such a capacity, even from a very young age, from the age of four, five, because it is not an intellectual examination, it's a simple, natural act of observing. And children in fact are very, very good observers. They are very observant of everything. But we never ask them to observe the activity of thought. The observing is happening outwardly all the time. I am not saying that the outward observation is not necessary. It is absolutely necessary to be able to look at the flower, to be able to look at the tree, to be able to look at the sky and the cloud, but equally it is possible to get the child to observe the activity of thought as it is happening within him or her. And when you begin to do that from a very young age, a different quality can come into being in the child.

So, is it possible? I would say it is possible. My quest as an educator for the last forty-odd years has been to find out what kind of environment, what kind of bringing together of people, will allow for such an

exploration to happen. It might seem that in the modern world not very many people are very interested in this kind of a question, because the pressure to find security through a job or to find security through some kind of a skill seems so strong that very few of us really look at education in a different way. But fortunately, there are adults who want something different for their children. They may not be very clear what they are looking for, but when you begin to suggest that there is a totally different kind of education possible, people begin to respond to that; people begin to say yes, I would like to see if that can happen to my child.

Unfortunately, very often, we impose these structures of thought onto our children. Knowingly or unknowingly they absorb the way we act, the way we create division, and we impose it on them because for us that's the only way we function. But if we begin to engage together, the adults, the teachers and the parents, and we begin to ask ourselves whether it is possible to really examine within ourselves our own emotions, our own fears, our own conflicts, in that very alertness, in that very engagement with that question, we begin to get the capacity to be able to communicate that to the children, not merely as ideas, not merely as opinions, but in a very direct and simple way. And that kind of an education might help the human being to be free of this extraordinary curse of feeling separate psychologically.

It is possible to start with a small group and I think if there are some schools, even if there are only a few, who are engaged with these questions, they have a way of creating an environment where other people begin to ask these questions. Other people who are interested in education come and say if you can do it, perhaps I can do it too. So it is very, very important that there are at least a few schools that are asking these questions. I wouldn't, therefore, worry about success, I wouldn't worry about numbers, and I wouldn't worry about whether this can ever spread to larger numbers. I think doing something like this with great intensity has its own effect on society and the environment. And, therefore, it is worth doing. It requires, as I said, a great deal of cooperation between the adults. So the way you set up the school, the way you invite teachers, the way you invite parents to come and have this education for their children—you have to take great care in all that.

If one is not doing that, it is very easy to slip into a situation where the education is primarily for the intellect and one tries to bring this in to a greater or lesser degree depending upon what the environment allows you. But if you are really, really concerned, it does seem to me, that there are people out there, who have some kind of economic security, who are saying I want something else for my child. I'd like to see if really my child has stability, a deep profound stability, which comes not merely from living in a happy environment, but which has a deeper quality because one has begun to really understand one's own nature, the way thought works, what it does, what its effects are and whether the mind can be free of that.

Krishnamurti used to talk of two kinds of learning. One is an accumulative learning where you are learning skills, ideas, opinions, all kinds of things. He used to constantly ask, Is there a learning which is not accumulative, which is not really the development of skills? It seems to me that the word *learning* unfortunately has got too narrowed down to primarily the accumulation of skills and knowledge. So the minute one uses the word learning, the mind immediately goes to the idea that at the end of it there must be a body of knowledge and a skill-set and a knowledge-set that can be examined and measured. But there may be a very, very different movement of learning which is really about the brain becoming extraordinarily sensitive, becoming extraordinarily alert to the movements of thought, to the habits and patterns that thought creates. And in that very attention and sensitivity to the activity of thought, there is a certain kind of freedom. Whatever reactions we have accumulated, those reactions impose certain kinds of behaviour on us. So I accumulate a whole lot of reactions and these reactions come out in all my relationships. And there is an identification with these reactions, there's a feeling that this is 'me', and that makes it very difficult to really see if reactions could end, because these beliefs, these ideas, these reactions constitute 'me' and it becomes an existential crisis if I have to let go of all this.

But if the mind begins to see that this activity of thought brings about tremendous insecurity, not only in the individual, but in society as a whole, the very perception of that danger allows for a different movement of learning to happen. A movement of learning which is primarily a sensitivity, a profound alertness and an

awakened quality where you are watching the activity of thought, and because there is that capacity to watch the activity of thought, the brain doesn't get identified with it and move along with that.

So it seems that from quite a young age it is possible to bring about this kind of education. We take it for granted that perhaps children are too young, and you can't really explain all these things to them, and therefore you need for them to get older, because again, we function from and we depend on the intellect. But if we allow the other capacities of the brain—the capacity to observe, the capacity to look, the capacity to listen, the capacity to be attentive—you begin to find that from a very young age you can communicate to children in a very direct way about what is happening, what kind of reactions are taking place, and what kinds of reactions are accumulating. And I feel, that's all one needs to do. You don't need to then try and do something to control these reactions, you don't need to try to somehow train the mind not to have these reactions. The very alertness, the very act of being awake to these reactions, brings its own order.

So, is it possible for this to be the primary concern of education? Of course, we see that the child also needs skills, needs a certain amount of knowledge. But I start from seeing whether the education is about awakening, attention, alertness, a certain kind of awakened state, and from there I begin to see what kinds of skills, what kind of knowledge are needed. If the adults, if the teachers, if the parents are interested, it seems to me, that this kind of education is as possible as the other kind of skill- and knowledge-based education.

I said that we take it for granted that the intellect is the primary instrument that the brain has. And we give it primacy in every act of looking, in every act of listening. The intellect immediately comes and labels something, categorises. So we really don't look, or listen completely. And therefore, all the time our understanding, what we call understanding, is guided by the intellect. The intellect creates an idea about something, and then uses that idea to observe what is happening. We are all used to that, for that kind of analytical enquiry is very important and necessary if you have to create science, if you have to do mathematics. It seems to me that while we help our children learn skills, learn to analyse, learn to have a sophisticated way of using concepts and ideas, it is far more important to bring about in the children this capacity to just observe, to just listen. That word just seems to be very weak and incapable of doing anything. But in that just observing, just listening, there may be a tremendous vitality. And it may be that vitality which frees the mind from the patterns of psychological activity, and not any kind of control, not any kind of decision to be free.

So, very simply, it is worthwhile asking ourselves whether a totally different kind of education can come into being. I have a feeling that at the end of such an education the child who goes out of such a place will have a very different quality of intelligence, an intelligence which can meet society and not become part of it, which can meet the contradictory movements of society and not simply absorbed into it. That was Krishnamurti's concern with education. And that, it seems to me, is a very worthwhile intent to keep in mind and see if it can happen.

\* Editors' Note: Kabir Jaithirtha was a passionate educator for over four decades and a trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation India. This article is based on a talk given by him in January 2018 at Vasanta Vihar in Chennai, a few months before his untimely passing.