

Understanding Religion from J. Krishnamurti's Perspective

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If we look at the philosophers of contemporary India, be it Gandhi, Tagore, Krishnamurti, we see them asking man to find truth or God for himself without the support of an institutionalized religion. Such a call is indicative of the tendency of majority of contemporary Indian population to be to look outside, to an organized institutionalized religion to lead him to truth/ God. Man has absolutely started depending on a system, an authority to help him find it. Had it not been so, there definitely would have been no call to come out of his slumber. The job the philosophers have undertaken is not to provide with a new system of thought or a new religion, but to, as Krishnamurti says, “awaken that thought by which the mind can liberate itself from these things which we have established, which we have taken for granted as being true”.¹

For Krishnamurti, religion is living in which alone there is understanding of truth. In other words, living and understanding truth, as he sees it, are non-different. “Religion is the total way of life; it is the understanding of truth”.² When put in this kind of language, it does not feel to be different from our ordinary way of understanding religion in its essential and necessary sense. May be, in fact, that

1 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. II, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.53-54

2 Krishnamurti, J: Commentaries On Living Third Series, Penguin Books, 2006, p.121

is exactly what contemporary Indian philosophers are trying to bring home to us – that we have lost sight what religion means and why we in the first place *have* it. Religion as institution, as set of doctrines and practices, that lead one to a certain goal has been rejected by Krishnamurti. He says: “But truth is a reality that cannot be understood by following a path”.³ For Krishnamurti, truth or God cannot be taken to be a value pre-given. And it is precisely because of this reason that he also opposes to understanding religion as discovered path to truth. There is no value pre-given to which there can be any path pre-given. If we accept religion as a path to truth, it will exactly make truth, what he contests it to be not, a fixed value. Krishnamurti actually opposes anything and everything that is pre-given, things which we take up, ideas that we imbibe, without inquiring into it. To continue with values or things pre-given without questioning, according to Krishnamurti, is to be “unconscious”, to be “mass”. He says: “The many, the unconscious, is composed of unquestioned values – values that are false to facts, values which through time and usage have become pleasant and acceptable – it is composed of ideals which give us security and comfort, without deep significance; of standards of conformity, which are preventing clear perception and action; of thoughts and emotions which have their origin in fear and primitive reactions. This I call, the unconscious, the mass of which each one of us is a part, whether we know it to not, whether we acknowledge it or not”.⁴

Krishnamurti's call is to man to see how one is affected by one's whole environment in his way of living, in his search for God and in his chosen path in search for God, that is, what he calls is his religion. He is asking in a way to inquire oneself whether the God that is given to us, the God to which we are born and with which we live really is God for us or just an idea of God. This awakening, the inquiring into the features under which one is working, the “unconscious”, for Krishnamurti, is to be individual: “The conscious can be said to be the individual”.⁵ As he sees it, to believe that there is God, there is truth is itself to be working under pressure: “Until now it has been said that there is God, that there is truth, that there is something absolute, final, eternal, and on that assertion we have built our thought and emotion, and our life, our morality”.⁶ Man, according to Krishnamurti, has to become aware of the influences under

3 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.177

4 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

5 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.4

6 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

which he acts as well as how he has created the influences himself if he ever hopes makes himself free of these pressures. His has been an attempt to awaken man to the fact of his laziness and telling him that one has to free himself from the pressures, from influences if one is to ever find truth or God. He says: “If we are to understand life wholly, completely, we must bring the unconscious through experience, through experiment, into the conscious”.⁷ And it is only oneself, not someone else, who can help one to be free of the unconscious where there is the possibility of living, of finding truth. Krishnamurti says: “No psychologist or teacher can free the mind; its freedom can come only through its own inherent necessity”.⁸ Krishnamurti opposed living under influences as to live under pressure is to live with choice as given to us by our environment; and it is only when one is free of such choices that there can be true living and possibility of finding truth. We find him saying: “Only when choice ceases is there liberation, fullness, richness of action, which is life itself. Creation is choiceless, as life is choiceless, as understanding is choiceless. Likewise is truth, it is a continuous action, an ever-becoming, in which there is no choice”.⁹

Krishnamurti does not appear different from other contemporary philosophers in denying organized religion as the way to truth. But he comes across as unique in saying that such a religion is a factor contributing to human suffering.

Krishnamurti wants that man lives in happiness, without suffering. This is the life without effort. He says: “The highest bliss – and to me this is not a mere theory – is to live without effort”.¹⁰ But life continues with effort when we live with the pre-given, that is, under the influence and pressure of the environment to which we are thrown. It is not that the environment which gives us our goals for pursuing is separate from us. Environment is the product of man’s own needs and its ‘hideous’ growth which in its turn influences him. To quote Krishnamurti: “After all, these social organizations are essentially based on our needs, our needs for shelter, food and sex. The whole structure of our civilization is based on that. But this structure has become so monstrous, and we have glorified our needs so fearfully that our needs for shelter, food and sex, which are simple, natural, and clean, have become complicated and made hideous, cruel, appalling, by this colossal and ever-crumbling structure which we call society, and which man has

7 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

8 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

9 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.15

10 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.8

created".¹¹ According to Krishnamurti, religion, just like any other constitutes part of our environment, is responsible for giving us our objective in life in the pursuit of which each one of us spend life and thereby actually cease to live. He says: "Now, each one, more or less, is consumed by desires whose objects vary according to environment, temperament and inheritance. According to your particular condition, to your particular education and upbringing, religious, social, and economic, you have established certain objective whose attainment you are ceaselessly pursuing, and this pursuit has become paramount in your lives".¹² To work under the influence of environment is to be "unconscious".

Krishnamurti opposes living by pre-given as he sees them to be the cause of man's continued living in "effort". These efforts for Krishnamurti create self-consciousnesses or the 'I' which for him lies at the root of suffering: "Suffering is shock – I suffer, I have pain, it is the essence of 'me'".¹³ He says that the pre-givens create a duality in man where lies the root of suffering. He says: "As long as there is duality in mind there is effort to escape from one to the other. This effort gives birth to the consciousness of 'I', self-consciousness, and hence there arises suffering, pain, and the idea of time broken up into past, present, and future".¹⁴ Exactly for this reason he does not ask man to give up religion. The effort for *giving up* is also an effort, a result of the pre-given. By giving up too man is acting under influence and thus *not living*. Krishnamurti says: "If the mind tries to free itself from these limitations because of compulsion, rewards or punishment, or because it is sorrow-laden, and so seeks happiness, or for any suoerficial reason, its attempt must inevitably lead to frustration and confusion".¹⁵ It is for this same reason that Krishnamurti opposes to man finding his own path to truth and God. He makes it clear to us that when he asks us to find truth by ourselves he does not mean that each of us should find a 'path': "I say that everyone must find out for himself what truth is, but this does not mean that each one must lay down a path for himself, that each one must travel an individual path. It does not mean that at all, but it does mean that each one must understand truth for himself. I hope that you see the distinction between the two. When you have to understand,

11 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. II, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.84

12 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol II, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.104

13 Krishnamurti, J (in dialogue): 'What Future Does Man Have?', Questioning Krishnamurti, KFI, 2005, p. 93

14 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.44

15 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.6

to discover, to experiment with life, a path becomes a hindrance. But if you must hew out a path for yourself, then there is an individual point of view, a narrow, limited point of view. Truth is the movement of eternal becoming, so it is not an end, it is not static. Hence the search for path is born of ignorance, of illusion".¹⁶

According to Krishnamurti, unless man frees himself from the influences under which he lives, there is no chance of realizing truth. Krishnamurti is not against religion in the sense of asking man to give up or stop being a follower of religious practices. His argument is that as long as man lives by what is given, under the influence of the pre-given, there is no chance of coming face to face with truth. And the opportunity man gets to understand this is in suffering. He says: "There can be the true individuality only when each one through conflict and suffering, discerns the deep significance of the environment in which he is held. If you are merely the expression of the collective, you are no longer an individual; but if you understand the whole significance of the collective consciousness which now dominates the world, then you will begin to awaken that intelligence which becomes the true expression and fulfillment of the individual".¹⁷ According to Krishnamurti, individuality happens in moments of suffering because it is in such moments that man forgets to live in duality, in effort. He says: "If you are in a crisis of any kind, when you have to decide something vital, real, what do you do? You approach it with your whole being, not only mentally or emotionally, but harmoniously. Out of that there is a decision that is not born out of choice. When you are in a crisis, you are not seeking a solution. When there is a crisis, when you have to decide something very important, you begin to think, and gradually out of that, the decision is born and there is no choice. You don't weigh the opposites; on the contrary you do that only when you do not calculate, when there is a direct discernment only, when the problem is real, vital problem. One must live intensely all the time with full consciousness, facing everything, as it comes, frankly, not sincerely".¹⁸ In total action when man is without duality, without effort, he loses his sense of 'I'. And it is when man is an individual without the sense of 'I', that he realizes meaninglessness of living life by the pre-givens. This is what Krishnamurti calls wisdom. Krishnamurti says: "Wisdom comes only when there is fullness of action, when there is complete awareness of your whole being in action; then you will see that all the books and teachers that pretend

16 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.177

17 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. II, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.196

18 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, 38-39

to guide you to wisdom can teach you nothing".¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Krishnamurti, it is when one is free from individuality that one can come face to face with truth. Truth is when effort disappears and 'I' goes missing. He says: "You can know that which is immortal, everlasting, only when your mind is free from all sense of individuality which is created by the limited consciousness, which is 'I'";²⁰ "Truth does not come through effort. It must be born naturally when you remove all hindrances, when you are free from all barriers created by effort".²¹

Krishnamurti's call to man is to face suffering as that alone gives man the chance to live in fullness. He says: "But you are conscious of life only when there is conflict, pain, suffering, out of which alone comes the true understanding of life. For instance, a sprained ankle, as long as it is carefully bandaged and not used, it may give you no pain; but when it is used, blood surges through it, causing pain. So, likewise, you may have twisted ideas and perverted judgments of which you are wholly unconscious. They reveal themselves only through conflict and suffering, if you do not escape from them. When you become mentally and emotionally aware of these barriers, without reshaping yourself in another pattern, the freedom from these limitations is a spontaneous and an intelligent progress without self-imposed discipline and control".²² But when man suffers, says Krishnamurti, rather than facing the fact of suffering, man tries to escape the suffering and thereby gets entangled more in the whirlwind of suffering. Krishnamurti does not consider search for God as any better option of escape than drinking or drugs. As long one keeps seeking, one is not free to act, free to live, free to realize God/truth - an escape is an escape. At the same time Krishnamurti is not specifically opposed to religion. Religion is just one of the escapes man posits for himself. He says: "Now there are many kinds of securities, many kinds of shelters. There are those that give temporary emotional satisfaction, such as drugs or drinking; there are amusements all that pertains to transient pleasure. Again, there are the innumerable beliefs in which man seeks pleasure from his suffering; he clings to beliefs or ideals in the hope that they will shape his life and that by conforming he will gradually overcome suffering. Or he takes refuge in systems of thought which he calls philosophies, but which are merely theories handed down through the centuries, or theories that may have been true for those who thought them out,

19 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.23

20 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.23

21 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, 44-47

22 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, 32

but are not necessarily true for others. Or again, man turns to religion, that is, to a system of thought that tries to shape him, to mould him to a particular pattern, to lead him toward an end; for religion, instead of giving man understanding, gives him merely consolation”.²³ Krishnamurti tries to tell man that in fact, in reality, there is no security that man is seeking at the face of suffering. Man has to see it for himself if he is to be free from his useless pursuit of escapes: “When you realize that there is no such thing as comfort, no such thing as security, either in possession of things or ideas, then you face life as it is, not with a background of intense longing for comfort. When you realize that, you give up seeking an escape; you are then able to meet life completely, nakedly, wholly, and in that there is understanding, which alone gives you ecstasy of life”.²⁴

Krishnamurti states that as we stay with suffering we come to see how ‘I’ gets formed by pursuing the pre-given goals and objectives and how suffering gets intensified by escapes. According to him, as we come to see the origin of suffering, there is dropping of the cause, enabling man to live, leaving the door open for truth realization.

Krishnamurti says that as one pursues the goals which are pre-given to us, there arises a feeling of emptiness or insufficiency: “emptiness is action born of choice, in search of gain”,²⁵ “The cause of incompleteness is in the very search of attainment”.²⁶ Due to this feeling of “emptiness” or “insufficiency” arises man’s dissatisfaction and his seeking satisfaction. Krishnamurti says that as man tries to satisfy himself by fulfilling his desires, on one hand, this takes him away from truth, and on the other hand, increases the feeling of emptiness which had driven him towards satisfying of his wants. Whatever be the desire man is positing for himself to fulfill – physical or spiritual – wealth or God, they have the same effect. This search for God, which one may call religion, as a substitute for what one has is rejected by Krishnamurti. “Now dissatisfaction, discontent, arises from the feeling of emptiness, the feeling of loneliness, of boredom, and when you have this dissatisfaction you seek to fill the void, the emptiness in your life. When you are dissatisfied you are constantly seeking something to replace that which causes dissatisfaction, something to serve as a substitute, something that will give you satisfaction....In this search for the opposite, profound feelings

23 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.105

24 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.107

25 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.9

26 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.13

are gradually being destroyed. You are being more and more superficial, more and more empty, because your whole conception of satisfaction, happiness, is one of substitution...But this possession does not give me the satisfaction that I had hoped for; it does not give me lasting happiness. So I change my desire to something else, and I possess that. But even this new thing does not give me permanent satisfaction. Then I look to affection, to friendship; then to ideas, and finally I turn to the search of truth or God".²⁷ Again, as man lives by the standard given to him by his environment or the society, there is conflict. Krishnamurti says that life and the rules given by society do not go hand in hand. As we act with the pre-given in our life, there is conflict. He says: "Conflict is the impeded flow of spontaneous action, of harmonious thought and feeling. When thought and emotion are inharmonious, there is conflict in action; that is, when mind and heart are in a state of discord, they create an impediment to the expression of harmonious action, and hence conflict. Such impediment to harmonious action is caused by the desire to escape, by the continual avoidance of facing life wholly, by meeting life always with the weight of tradition – be it religious, political or social. This incapacity to face experience in its completeness creates conflict, and the desire to escape from it".²⁸ But the real problem arises when in our effort to escape this conflict we seek security – physical or spiritual – "When you are satiated with physical security or when you cannot attain it, you turn to what you call spiritual security. And when you turn to that, you establish and vitalize those things which you call religion and organized spiritual beliefs".²⁹ For, says Krishnamurti, there is no security and in fact to feel secure is to get further away from our chance of meeting reality: "but actually, there is no security in life – neither physical, nor intellectual, neither emotional, nor spiritual. If you feel you are secure, you can never find that living reality...".³⁰ And, Krishnamurti says, that as we keep on choosing between alternatives, alternative securities, we accumulate and with accumulation comes into existence 'fear' – fear of losing what we have accumulated. So we invent, as he says, our ways of escaping this fear through further beliefs in life after death or reincarnation. In the words of Krishnamurti: "Naturally this constant effort at choice increases, and this continued effort at choice, at decision, differentiating between the essential and the inessential, is

27 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.168

28 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

29 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.6

30 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.5

called growth, progress, and evolution. This constant effort at choosing the essential because you are seeking a certainty, must necessitate continued effort. And after accumulating through choice, we are afraid to lose what we have accumulated. That is why we are afraid of death.....and naturally, when there is a fear of death, we take comfort in hereafter or in the idea of reincarnation”.³¹

Krishnamurti not only looks at religion as a factor causing suffering, but he also sees it as standing on man’s way for having right kind of relationship with society. For him, being the outcome of man’s “egoistic desire for security” and thus having its origination in fear, it rather is a way of “oppression” and “domination”. He says: “Religion has become an organized belief, a crystallized form of thought, of morality, of oppression, domination. Religion, whose God is fear – though we use such words as love, kindness, brotherhood to cover up that deep fear – is nothing but a subjective submission to a system which assures us security”.³² Actually, in fact, according to Krishnamurti, human suffering is the result of wrong kind of relationship - “false relationship”, between man and his environment due to the following of unconscious values - “false values”. Conversely then suffering ceases as man finds true values. In other words, search for security has to end for man to pursue true values and thus build right relationship and accordingly end suffering. We find Krishnamurti saying: “To follow wisdom which is of true value, you must be free from this false idea of certainty”.³³ However, we cannot take Krishnamurti as blaming only religion to be the hurdle on man’s way to building right relationship. Any search for security, whatever that might be, is an impediment. As he sees it, man may either be involved in what he calls a “mechanistic view of life” or he may be “bound to faith”. By “mechanistic view of life” Krishnamurti understands the view according to which “man is merely the product of environment and of various reactions, perceptible only to the senses, the environment and reactions should be controlled by a rationalized system which will allow the individual to function only within its frame”.³⁴ As opposed to this view are the people “who accept the view that man is essentially divine, that his destiny is controlled and guided by some supreme intelligence”.³⁵ Krishnamurti actually, by showing these views, which need not be the only views, is bringing

31 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.69

32 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. II, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.204

33 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.70

34 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.49

35 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.49

home the fact to us that to accept one view or to accept another is actually to be involved in the structure of the "opposites".

Every philosopher has his own way of putting it, but the fact is that in India of contemporary time, the call of the philosopher has been to stop searching outside for help in one's quest of truth. Religion in the true sense of the term, for Krishnamurti, is being a light unto oneself. There is no guide, no institution to lead one to truth, to God just as nobody can help one to be free from suffering, to live life save himself. One needs to be free of the unconscious values to be able to understand life, live life and have true values, to realize truth or God. This freeing can be done only by each individual himself when he understands how the false values get created in his forming his own self, the 'I', where alone one can see how he himself as the 'I' causes his own suffering. And all these cannot be done somebody for anybody. To quote Krishnamurti: "To understand life and to have true values, you must perceive how you are held by the opposites, and before rejecting them, you must discern their deep significance. And in the very process of freeing yourself from them, there is born the comprehension of beginningless ignorance, which creates false values and so establishes false relationship between the individual and his environment, bringing about confusion, fear, and sorrow".³⁶

36 Krishnamurti, J: Collected Works, Vol. III, Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, p.51