

## Blavatsky and Krishnamurti: A Timeless Dialogue

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(Originally published in *The Theosophist*, September 2008.)

All true spiritual teachers are unique. They have all shared with each other, throughout the ages of human evolution on this globe, a capacity to provoke thinking and to unsettle conditioned minds from their spiritual slumber. This may explain why many of them were profoundly misunderstood by their contemporaries. The orthodox religious mindset prevailing both in India and in Judea, for example, rejected the message of both the Buddha and Jesus Christ. Their teaching was simply too radical and too disturbing for the psychological comfort of most people in their times.

Genuine spirituality is not concerned with acceptance of beliefs, explanations, descriptions of the world or presumed spiritual authority. Its core concern is true spiritual transformation through contact with that which is uncreated, timeless and eternal. Such a transformation, when it is real and not imaginary, brings about a complete openness of mind and heart that endows every relationship with a quality of love and understanding that never fades away.

The personalities of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Jiddu Krishnamurti were quite different. She was born in 1831 to a Russian aristocratic family, had a fiery temperament and loved adventure and travels. He was a shy, vacant-looking Telugu-speaking boy born in 1895 to a Brahmin family in South India. While she went on to found the Theosophical Society in 1875 and left behind a body of teachings which became the historical and metaphysical foundation of modern Theosophical literature, he shook the Theosophical Society to its very core in 1929 when he dissolved the Order of the Star in the East and ceased his association with the TS and with a role he had not chosen.

In spite of the above-mentioned differences, there are profound similarities between some aspects of HPB's and Krishnaji's teachings on self-knowledge, the nature of the mind, newness, the self, understanding, true seeing and the timeless experience, among other things. This article, however, is not an attempt to reconcile the views of such profoundly different individuals or to justify why they differed. It is based on the premise that those who have found wisdom share a perception of life which is fundamentally similar in its essential aspects for, as was said of wisdom, 'being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new'.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps students of both HPB's and Krishnaji's teachings may find this present attempt pointless. Some students of HPB's works seem to see Krishnamurti as a messianic invention by both Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater. On the other hand, some Krishnamurti students tend to look at the Theosophical Society as if it was 'frozen' in the 1920s, apparently ignoring the fact that it emerged from that turbulent period reinvigorated by its refusal to ascribe authority to any person or any teaching, and insisting that its members are free to explore the significance of life through their own enquiry. It is possible that wisdom-teachings from different epochs and cultures are indeed in dialogue with each other for they

embody aspects of a perennial insight into life's unfathomable depths. The words of the wise may differ but their language is one.

## Self-knowledge

The first necessity for obtaining self-knowledge is to become profoundly conscious of ignorance; to feel with every fibre of the heart that one is *ceaselessly* self-deceived.<sup>2</sup>

To know oneself as one is, requires an extraordinary alertness of mind, because what is is constantly undergoing transformation, change, and to follow it swiftly the mind must not be tethered to any particular dogma or belief, to any particular pattern of action.<sup>3</sup>

The present age has been hailed as the 'information age' and never before have human beings had such a colossal amount of information and knowledge at their fingertips. Yet, and not surprisingly, self-knowledge remains elusive and very rare. Both HPB and K suggested that without alertness and awareness one cannot see through the deceptions that mental activity creates. Several traditions have insisted that in order to know oneself there must be impersonal attention to what happens both within and without. Such attention not only sees through the machinations and illusions which we have become accustomed to call 'me' but also brings them to an end. Self-knowledge is the beginning of transformation.

## The Learning Mind

He must endeavour as much as possible to free his mind, while studying or trying to carry out that which is given him, from all the ideas which he may have derived by heredity, from education, from surroundings, or from other teachers. His mind should be made perfectly free from all other thoughts, so that the inner meaning of the instructions may be impressed upon him apart from the words in which they are clothed.<sup>4</sup>

Reality is not a thing which is knowable by the mind, because the mind is the result of the known, of the past; therefore the mind must understand itself and its functioning, its truth, and only then is it possible for the unknown to *be*.<sup>5</sup>

In order to learn the mind needs to educate itself. The word education comes from the Latin *educere*, 'lead out'. Fresh understanding and insight are not possible if the mind is constantly 'crowded' with opinions, second-hand knowledge and reactions. They have to emerge from a deeper source within. The mind that truly learns is the one that pays attention to what is before it — the 'book of life' — and has an understanding which is both sensitive and compassionate — qualities that can only unfold in the present moment.

## Newness

Every such attempt as the Theosophical Society has hitherto ended in failure, because, sooner or later, it has degenerated into a sect, set up hard-and-fast dogmas of its own, and so lost by imperceptible degrees that vitality which living truth alone can impart. You must remember that all our members have been bred and born in some creed or religion, that all are more or less of their generation both physically and mentally, and consequently that their judgement is but too likely to be warped and

unconsciously biased by some or all of these influences. If, then, they cannot be freed from such inherent bias, or at least taught to recognize it instantly and so avoid being led away by it, the result can only be that the Society will drift off on to some sandbank of thought or another, and there remain a stranded carcass to moulder and die.<sup>6</sup>

Only when there is no residue of memory can there be newness and there is residue when experience is not finished, concluded, ended; that is, when the understanding of experience is incomplete. When experience is complete, there is no residue — that is, the beauty of life. Love is not residue, love is not experience, it is a state of being. Love is eternally new.<sup>7</sup>

The world bears ample testimony to the fact that mindless identification with an ideology — religious, political, intellectual, institutional — begets separateness, aggressiveness, violence and bitter division. It has been said that the reason why people so identify themselves is because it gives them a sense of security. But this, alas, is only one aspect of the problem. The unconscious desire for power and authority is a very deep undercurrent in the human mind and it has the capacity to warp and twist our understanding and judgement, thus preventing us from knowing what newness truly is. Only contact with what is eternal, beyond time, what HPB referred to as ‘living truth’, can make newness possible. Such a contact takes place only when there is the ending of all ‘residue’ — the debris of unfinished experience which generates conditioning in its many forms.

### No Self-seeking

*The Book of the Golden Precepts* — some of which are pre-Buddhistic while others belong to a later date — contains about ninety distinct little treatises. Of these I learnt thirty-nine by heart, years ago. To translate the rest, I should have to resort to notes scattered among too large a number of papers and memoranda collected for the last twenty years and never put in order, to make of it by any means an easy task. Nor could they be all translated and given to a world too selfish and too much attached to objects of sense to be in any way prepared to receive such exalted ethics in the right spirit. For, unless a man perseveres seriously in the pursuit of self-knowledge, he will never lend a willing ear to advice of this nature.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore there is no method for self-knowledge. Seeking a method invariably implies the desire to attain some result — and that is what we all want. We follow authority — if not that of a person, then of a system, of an ideology — because we want a result which will be satisfactory, which will give us security. We really do not want to understand ourselves, our impulses and reactions, the whole process of our thinking, the conscious as well as the unconscious; we would rather pursue a system which assures us of a result. But the pursuit of a system is invariably the outcome of our desire for security, for certainty, and the result is obviously not the understanding of oneself.<sup>9</sup>

One of the interesting phenomena in the world today is the ‘self-help’ industry. It is a big business worldwide, commanding millions of dollars and involving the production of many books, DVDs, seminars, workshops, etc. A pattern that pervades this industry is that it offers people *what they want* — fulfilment, wealth, pleasure, recognition, personal power, psychic abilities, kundalini awakening, among many other things. Invariably, in such an industry questioning the patterns of self-seeking is not encouraged as the aim is to enhance the

capacities and powers of the personal self. And yet the advice of the wise ones throughout the ages has always been the same: be aware of your motives, learn to look at yourself impersonally, be alert to the trappings created by self-interest. Self-seeking goes in the opposite direction to self-knowledge. The former imprisons us more and more in illusion and frustration; the latter opens the gateway to true spiritual freedom.

### Activity of the Mind

The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer.<sup>10</sup>

Now what is mind as it is functioning? It is actually a process of isolation, is it not? Fundamentally that is what the process of thought is. It is thinking in an isolated form, yet remaining collective. When you observe your own thinking, you will see it as an isolated, fragmentary process. You are thinking according to your reactions, the reactions of your memory, of your experience, of your knowledge, of your belief.<sup>11</sup>

In the above passages, both HPB and Krishnaji point out one of the essential features of the activity of the mind: its self-created separation from Reality. Our minds, under the sway of self-centred activity, prevent us from having a true and complete relationship with life in all its splendour. Unless we actually see for ourselves the continuous process of isolation created by the personal mind, it is of no use for anybody to tell us about it. In the strongly metaphorical language of *The Voice of the Silence*, one has to ‘slay the Slayer’, which may mean looking at all mental activity — thoughts, memories, emotions, reactions — without automatically identifying with it.

### What is the Self?

The self of matter and the Self of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both.<sup>12</sup>

Where *you* are, the *other* is not.<sup>13</sup>

Evolution is a vast process, stretching over almost unimaginable periods of time. Throughout this process consciousness unfolds many capacities and at the human stage it is centred in the mind and its activities. Even emotional responses are dependent upon and conditioned by mental activity. Thus the mind becomes the centre of our individuality, which has at its core a strong, resistant and resilient sense of self. It is like a fortress in which self-image and self-importance are the protecting walls.

Close consideration and study reveal that such sense of individuality and self are not natural developments of the evolutionary movement. They are *acquired* and are the mind’s response to the process of experience. When the experience is pleasant there is identification and attachment. When it is unpleasant there is repulsion and avoidance. But the wise ones have taught that we need not remain in such a state of bondage, that freedom is possible and that that freedom is within, for it is what we really are: the Other, the One without a second, the Self of all things, the uncreated Order.

## Dying to the Past

Long and weary is the way before thee, O disciple. One single thought about the past that thou hast left behind will drag thee down and thou wilt have to start the climb anew.<sup>14</sup>

Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost.<sup>15</sup>

When the mind is agitated, questioning, worrying, dissecting, analysing, there is no understanding. When there is the intensity to understand, the mind is obviously tranquil.<sup>16</sup>

Past impressions exert a strong pull on the mind and condition its activity. Perhaps one of the reasons why we dwell so much on the memory of past experiences is our profound attachment to and identification with our self-image. This intense process causes a serious drain on energy and in order to know ourselves we need the energy of attention and wakefulness. Life only happens in the present and continuous attention to the present is necessary for the mind to gain that capacity to see things clearly. There is no light in past experiences.

## Learning to Listen and to See

Unless thou hearest, thou canst not see.

Unless thou seest, thou canst not hear.<sup>17</sup>

To understand a problem obviously requires a certain intelligence, and that intelligence cannot be derived from or cultivated through specialization. It comes into being only when we are passively aware of the whole process of our consciousness, which is to be aware of ourselves without choice, without choosing what is right and what is wrong.<sup>18</sup>

Most people seem to have no difficulty in hearing and seeing what is happening around them. In scientific work, the capacity for hearing and seeing has been developed to a great degree and we now have, for example, potent telescopes that send images from the farthest reaches of the universe that one can see in one's home computer! But it is quite another matter to hear and see what is actually happening within oneself. In the US recently an astronaut, highly trained scientifically and intellectually, was charged with attempting to assault a fellow astronaut who apparently got in the way of her romantic interest. To truly learn how to see and listen to what happens within one's consciousness requires quiet objectivity and dispassion, an awareness that comes into being when one realizes that honest confrontation of oneself is the only sane alternative.

## Looking without Images

For mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects. It needs the gentle breezes of Soul-Wisdom to brush away the dust of our illusions. Seek O Beginner, to blend thy mind and Soul.<sup>19</sup>

To look is important. We look to immediate things and out of immediate necessities to the future, coloured by the past. Our seeing is very limited and our eyes are accustomed to near things. Our look is as bound by time-space as our brain. We never look, we never see beyond this limitation; we do not know how to look through and beyond these fragmentary frontiers. But the eyes have to see beyond

them, penetrating deeply and widely, without choosing, without shelter; they have to wander beyond man-made frontiers of ideas and values and to feel beyond love.<sup>20</sup>

In both above-mentioned statements one aspect of the mind's conditioning is highlighted. As St Paul wrote, 'now we see through a glass, darkly' (1Cor.13:12). Whatever we see — Nature, other people, ourselves — we see it through the dark glass of our conditioning, our psychological memory, the accumulated impressions of many experiences, reactions, predilections as well as inherited responses. These become inbuilt in the very process of perception. On the other hand, when there is the glimmering of wisdom within there is a new perception that reveals the intrinsic nature of everything. As C. Jinarājadāsa wrote, 'even a wayside flower throbs with the message of the cosmos'. For the unaware a wayside flower is just another little flower like all the others; for someone who is learning to look without images, it is an embodiment of timeless beauty, order and grace.

### Love is the Only Real Relationship

To reach Nirvāna one must reach Self- knowledge, and Self-knowledge is of loving deeds the child.<sup>21</sup>

There can be true relationship only when there is love but love is not the search for gratification. Love exists only when there is self-forgetfulness, when there is complete communion, not between one or two, but communion with the highest; and that can only take place when the self is forgotten.<sup>22</sup>

HPB's statement quoted above is nothing short of revolutionary. There will be some for whom self-knowledge is a private, individual affair, and who tend to shun relationships as 'obstacles' on their way to knowing themselves. But her words clearly indicate that it is only through love that Self-knowledge comes, almost as if suggesting that loving deeds help us to gain access to a much deeper dimension within ourselves. Krishnaji's statement that love exists only when there is self-forgetfulness equally implies that genuine love is free from the entanglements that arise from self-centred activity. In a fundamental sense, there is no difference between self-knowledge and love in their true meaning.

### Freedom from Oneself

The way to final freedom is within thy Self.

That way begins and ends outside of Self.<sup>23</sup>

The fundamental understanding of oneself does not come through knowledge or through the accumulation of experiences, which is merely the cultivation of memory. The understanding of oneself is from moment to moment; if we merely accumulate knowledge of the self, that very knowledge prevents further understanding, because accumulated knowledge and experience becomes the centre through which thought focuses and has its being.<sup>24</sup>

The word 'paradox' has a very interesting etymology. It is a Greek composite word: *para*, 'beyond', and *doxa*, 'opinion'. A paradox, therefore, is an expression or a teaching that challenges, perturbs and unsettles accepted opinions on a given subject. The passage from *The Voice of the Silence* quoted above is a paradox: freedom is within us but the way to it begins and ends outside of self. The ample canvas of human experience throughout the ages

attests to the fact that any self-based endeavour sooner or later ends in frustration. As the well-known saying affirms, ‘the path of Occultism [or Self-Knowledge] is strewn with wrecks’. Illustrating the insidious ways of the personal self, the Buddha, in one of his sermons, compared the self to a stranger that comes in the dead of night to a household, asks for food and shelter, gets liked by all the family in the household, and eventually kills the householder and takes over his entire property and family. Unless one is self-aware, from moment to moment, as suggested by Krishnaji, inner freedom remains elusive. Another paradox: in order to know oneself one has to be free from oneself as a product of past experiences.

## Undying Life

He standeth now like a white pillar to the west, upon whose face the rising sun of thought eternal poureth forth its first most glorious waves. His mind, like a becalmed and boundless ocean, spreadeth out in shoreless space. He holdeth life and death in his strong hand.<sup>25</sup>

Life is always the active present; time always belongs to the past and so to the future. And death to time is life in the present. It is this life that is immortal, not life in consciousness. Time is thought in consciousness and consciousness is held within its frame. There is always fear and sorrow within the network of thought and feeling. The ending of sorrow is the ending of time.<sup>26</sup>

The word *samsāra* means, among other things, going or wandering through the circuit of mundane existence, the world, worldly illusion. It is described in ancient scriptures as a wheel that imprisons the soul or mind in birth, death and rebirth. One of the strongest currents in the mighty stream of *samsāra* is *avidyā*, the primordial or beginningless ignorance or unawareness. Great seers have maintained that it is ignorance that attaches us to life and makes us afraid of death; such a pattern has dominated human life on earth for millennia.

But in every age there have been those few who have walked into the wilderness, through uncharted territory, and discovered the truth about the human condition. One of their fundamental discoveries is that life and death are not opposites that we should fear or become attached to. They are simply two aspects of the same existence. It is our perception of them that makes them appear separate and distinct, but they are one.

There is life in death, and death in life. To die to all experiences, all attachments, all projected images of oneself and of others is to discover uncreated, immortal life. And to live without accumulating experiences but understanding them as they arise and to be completely free from the tyranny of time which breaks the unbreakable Whole into past, present and future, is to welcome renewal. In such a consciousness suffering comes to an end, naturally, effortlessly.

HPB and Krishnaji never met each other but the essence of what they taught was perhaps part of a timeless dialogue. For as she co-founded the Theosophical Society and left a legacy of profound wisdom and insight, he helped us to realize that the word — the *teaching* — is not the thing and that the fragrance of sacredness is to be found in a life untouched by the self and its petty concerns.

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