

Krishnamurti and Saint Paul

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In his classic book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James describes one of the marks of the mystical experience as ‘ineffability’. “The subject of it”, he writes, “immediately says it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.” A genuine mystical experience can bring with it a deep and life-altering transformation, a complete re-direction of one’s life and a cleansing of one’s mind and consciousness that amounts to a ‘new birth’.

There are many differences regarding the historical context, mindset, temperament and language between St Paul and Krishnamurti. One became the master-builder of the Christian faith, electrifying audiences with his message of the living Christ; the other refused to fulfill a religious role not determined by himself and went on to become a vital voice for freedom and meaning in the twentieth century. One was laying the foundations of a budding religion, while the other questioned with relentless energy both religious and psychological conditioning while pointing out the essential sacredness of all life.

This article does not dwell on the differences between these two men – St Paul and Krishnamurti, fascinating though they were. It rather addresses some of the stunning similarities in their teachings, which seem to suggest that the source of their profound experiences was timeless and deeply rooted in an indivisible consciousness of love and wisdom. Whether on the road to Damascus or in Ojai, under the pepper tree, both men seemed to have been touched by the irresistible fire of the Spirit and communicated to the world a teaching which was not concocted by the brain, but which was suffused with an urgency and vitality which are difficult to ignore.

The word ‘religion’ today has become associated with division, strife and bigotry. Almost everyday the world’s media reports gruesome atrocities committed in the name of religion. No wonder that many psychologists see a great deal of pathology both in some religious institutions as well as in individuals dominated by inflexible religious beliefs. But history also shows that religious traditions are witnesses to profound insights into the human condition and the nature of existence. The depth of such insights not only stood the test of time but also continues to provide great inspiration to millions of people worldwide. Perhaps St Paul’s teachings are a reminder that there is a transcendental dimension to be found within every religious tradition, while Krishnamurti’s insistence on the urgency of self-knowledge shows that any tradition can become a trap if the light of attention and self-awareness is not present. Let us therefore consider some of their teachings on important aspects of life.

Conditioning

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans, 12:2)

Can this whole mind be completely still and function only when it has to? We say it can and this is the understanding of what meditation is. (*The Urgency of Change*, on Conditioning)

The very activity of the mind involves conditioning, conformity and repetition. For example, many people in the world consider ‘natural’ to feel suspicion about strangers. This may be a deep-seated conditioning coming from our animal past, in which every stranger was a possible enemy and therefore a threat to one’s survival. The treatment dispensed to refugees in many countries in the world today also corroborates the fact that most of them are seen just as threats, their human situation and personal history taking the back seat. The mind that conforms to conditioning – both social and psychological – can never know what goodness, harmony and order are. For that, the mind needs to find a depth within itself which cleanses it from the age-old process of accumulation. Is meditation such a depth?

Vulnerability to experience

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1Cor. 6:12)

You can’t have virtue and respectability. Virtue is freedom. Freedom is not an idea, a concept. When there is freedom there is attention, and only in this attention can goodness flower. (op. cit., on Morality)

One of the traps the human mind falls into quite regularly is its attempt to be ‘selective’ in its attitude to experiences. As a result, it develops a rather long list of likes and dislikes, of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’, resulting in a very sharp inward division and fragmentation. Careful consideration would help us to understand that we can have no control over external circumstances, including people and their reactions and attitudes. But if there is within oneself a degree of true stability, born of understanding, outside circumstances can cease to beget problems, conflicts and inconveniences.

A virtuous life is not necessarily one based on the exclusion of the senses, of experiences and contacts. Such a life would be indeed a self-enclosed movement of isolation, with disastrous psychological consequences. St Paul’s advice is sound for it enjoin us not to avoid experience while, at the same time, not being enslaved by them. Perhaps only the attention referred to by Krishnaji can assure a sense of freedom in the midst of all

experiences. If this is possible, the mind then would be learning from every experience, every contact, and that would have profound implications for human relationships and for social harmony as well.

Newness within oneself

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2Cor. 5:17)

Freedom from the past means living in the now which is not of time, in which there is only this movement of freedom, untouched by the past, by the known. (op. cit., on The Religious Life)

The conditioned mind is unable to see the marvelous ways in which life keeps renewing itself. This extraordinary movement is taking place all around us constantly, every day, and yet we may fail to see it and be a part of it. One of the outstanding contributions of the late Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1977, was his insight into the nature of disorder. He introduced a non-linear understanding to the concept of entropy (disorder). For example, a dead leaf is a system in disorder, decomposition, but this process, by its very nature, helps new life to come into being! Dr Prigogine emphasized that such a process can only happen in open systems. In nature, life and death are not separated, isolated events. They are intrinsic and dynamic parts of the awesome evolutionary process, about which we know very little.

It is important to realize that the human mind resists the process of renewal as it clings very strongly to the debris of experiences – past memories. In order for the human mind to experience true renewal it needs to learn to let go of all images, impressions, as well as attachments, both actual and imaginary. This is not an easy process for it involves questioning the very centre of selfhood that one regarded as one's real individuality. As St Paul and Krishnaji suggested in the excerpts quoted above, newness lies in a much deeper consciousness, not affected by time and its processes. Because it is an awakened consciousness it meets every experience and circumstance as it is, without distortion or bias.

Relationships

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom. 12:4, 5)

When this space actually disappears – not verbally or intellectually – but actually disappears – there is complete harmony, unity, between you and him, between you and another. In this harmony you and he cease and there is only this vast space which can

never be broken up. The small structure of the mind comes to an end, for the mind is fragmentation. (op. cit., on Relationship)

For millions of people in the world relationships are a source of constant misery, suffering and despair. And yet life cannot exist without relationships for every living process bears the signature of interdependence. What is the source of conflict in relationships? Krishnaji suggests that it is a space, created by our own mental activity. One of the inherent faculties of the mind is image-making. Inbuilt in this process are a number of likes and dislikes. If someone pleases, flatters or praises me, I automatically register that I like that person. Another person who may be critical, inconsiderate or rude is immediately labeled a 'dislike'. This indicates that for the most part human relationships are governed by emotional reactions, which may explain how unstable they become. The source of this instability is the constant refusal, conscious or unconscious, to look at oneself.

A few years ago, the writer had the opportunity of a conversation with a senior Buddhist monk in Badulla, Sri Lanka. A question was put to the monk: "what is *vipassana*?" His reply was: "To look at oneself intelligently." He then elaborated: "If we look at oneself intelligently, there is no self and therefore no suffering. If we look unintelligently, there is a self and therefore suffering." The distorted perception generates self-centredness and its ensuing problems. But, alas, very few in the world seem to be prepared to take full responsibility for their life, their actions and their inevitable karmic responses.

The Ground of Being

For in him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

... attention with your entire being is seeing the whole, and inattention is seeing the particular. To be aware of the whole, and of the particular, and of the relationship between the two, is the whole problem. (op. cit., on Seeing the Whole)

When the question of the Divine is removed from our daily experience and is transferred to the domain of the intellect and of belief all sorts of conflicts arise. Sigmund Freud's criticism of religion is understandable in this context and indeed millions in the world may see God as a protective father figure that will, so they believe, somehow rescue them from their problems, most of them created by themselves! For both Paul and Krishnaji this question is seen as something directly related to the way we perceive ourselves and the world. All existence, without exception, is rooted on the Ground of Being, a wholeness that defies description. By virtue of our intimate connection with that sacred source we are closely related to all expressions of life. In other words, we do not exist for ourselves, and our true identity is to be found in the uncreated oneness of all life.

Love beyond time

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. (1Cor. 13:2)

This quietness is the highest form of intelligence which is never personal or impersonal, never yours or mine. Being anonymous, it is whole and immaculate. It defies description for it has no quality. This is awareness, this is attention, this is love, this is the highest. (op. cit., on The Heart and the Mind)

What is usually called love is a form of sentiment that contains in itself varying degrees of expectation. Very often human relationships turn sour because a certain expectation or expectations were not fulfilled. Therefore, people both ‘fall in love’ and ‘fall out of love’. Surely a sentiment that wavers in such a way cannot be love in its true sense. It is not uncommon to see ‘love’ relationships to unfold as relationships based on dependence. A number of women in the world who are victims of domestic violence have reported that they cannot leave their abusive husbands or partners because they depend on them.

The love which both St Paul and Krishnaji speak about may seem elusive and distant from the daily reality of ordinary human beings. But in both passages quoted above it is clear how vitally important this principle was to both of them. Perhaps love comes uninvited to a heart that has become simple through the shedding of everything which unessential in life. Worries, position, self-image, achievements, control, are all really noises that disturb the sanctuary of the soul and prevent the establishment of that quietness which alone can invite love, the only real building power in life. Such a love bears all things, understands all things and endures forever.

To die everyday

Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. (1Cor. 15:36)

Awareness has shown us the nature of the trap, and therefore is the negation of all traps; so the mind is now empty. It is empty of the “me” and of the trap. This mind has a different quality, a different dimension of awareness. This awareness is not aware that it is aware. (op. cit., on Awareness)

As mentioned earlier, in nature life and death are not separate or divided. They are two aspects of the same unitary process which is evolution. ‘Dead’ matter is essential to every living process. By shedding its leaves in autumn a tree is renewing itself and the wind may help in this process. Similarly, we can learn to ‘shed’ all accumulated experiences, impressions, hurts, discontent and so on by learning to pay attention to what is really essential. Perhaps this is the central feature of meditation. As it is used in the modern

world, the word is really a tool to enhance the ego and its traps. But when seriously approached, meditation is indeed a rehearsal in dying to every illusion, expectation as well as to very subtler forms of self-importance and self-interest. Unless this is a daily activity the mental traps will overpower the consciousness and we remain stuck in the sense of a separate self.

Some Christian students may be shocked at this exercise of dialogue between the teachings of the great apostle and the contemporary religious philosopher who was so critical of tradition and uniformity of thought. On the other hand, students of Krishnaji's teachings may feel equally uneasy at seeing his teachings 'compared' with one of the early theologians of the Christian faith. But the aim in this article was neither comparison nor criticism. It was suggested by the very nature of their teachings which are concerned with vital aspects of life and living that are indeed timeless. Perhaps those who are wise are participants in a timeless dialogue and their teachings are part of the spiritual heritage of humanity, beyond the limits of exclusivity.

REFERENCES:

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