

Krishnamurti and Education: Application of Liberation

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This paper is an exploration of Krishnamurti's ideas on education in relation to American institutions of public education. It explores the K-12 levels and collegiate level of education. While reflecting on the nature of American public education, the paper also poses the question of how Krishnamurti's philosophy may be applied by the educator within the system.

Along with looking at both the nature of American public education and Krishnamurti's philosophy, I include my own quest on how, if possible, to apply Krishnamurti's teachings in the college classroom. Looking at multiple aspects of the subject, I reflect on my own conflicts in how to achieve liberation for the student or to provide an environment in which students may liberate themselves from conditioned ways of thinking. The paper concludes with a list of suggestions for a modified way of bridging the gap between Krishnamurti's philosophy and American public higher education.

Application of Liberation

A core premise of Krishnamurti is that individuals are conditioned and that this conditioning has a tremendous, usually negative, impact on their lives and capacity to come to an understanding of reality. This conditioning begins within the family and the acquisition of language. It continues in the education of the student which will be the focus of this reflection.

From the beginning, students in American public schools find themselves in a predicament. The fundamental pre-occupation of these schools is conditioning children within a system of social acceptability. This occurs not only in terms of information presented, but in the structure and function of the classroom and in terms of behavioral monitoring and grading of student performance. In terms of Krishnamurti, such "education" can be seen as a core element of "conditioning" that does little but set the student up for greater problems in terms of becoming deconditioned, should they so choose, later in life. Krishnamurti says that ". . .the pattern that we now cultivate and call education which is conformity to society is very, very destructive." (On Education, 90). So, destructive in fact that in *Education and The Significance of Life* he says that "Our present education is geared to industrialization and war; and we are caught in this machine of ruthless competition and mutual destruction" (13). An education that is geared toward destruction cannot be of benefit to anyone, except to those of a particular political ideology.

As a college educator, I have often asked myself, how can I apply Krishnamurti's teachings of liberation to the teaching of Communication Studies? How can I help provide an environment wherein the student can free themselves of their conditioning and question their presuppositions

so as to connect with reality for themselves and not through some means of propaganda. A challenge indeed. Especially, when the current educational system, from the very beginning, is set up against independent thinking and, I would argue, thinking in general in any genuine sense or realization of the wholeness of life and of being human.

Krishnamurti states:

Conventional education makes independent thinking extremely difficult. Conformity leads to mediocrity. To be different from the group or resist the environment is not easy as is often risky as long as we worship success. The urge to be successful, which is the pursuit of reward whether in the material or the so-called spiritual sphere, the search for inward or outward security, the desire for comfort – this whole process smothers discontent, puts an end to spontaneity and breeds fear; and fear blocks the intelligent understanding of life. With increasing age, dullness of mind and heart sets in (Total freedom,88).

From the out-set, students in American primary, secondary and universities are being set-up not to think independently, but to be cogs in the wheel of society. Criticism of this type of education and the toll it takes is not new. Even in the semi-autobiographical world of Herman Hesse's *Beneath The Wheel*(2003), readers find a world where the educational system crushes individual difference and any opportunity for the development or application of independent thought. In the above quotation, Krishnamurti gets to the heart of the matter when he discusses success-oriented education is also fear oriented education. It is only in the elimination or transcendence of fear and desire that education can take place.

As a college educator I have also reflected on universities as places of psychic violence, where education or learning does not often take place in the sense that Krishnamurti suggests. It is a place where the unspoken, underlying issues of power and control take precedence over actual education or "right" education. Indeed, Education being something to create a whole person is not what is found at any level of American public education. To further explore this, it is prudent to start at the beginning with K-12 education and form a total idea of what the student in American education faces and, perhaps, what can be done to help in the process of freeing minds from these institutions of so-called learning.

K-12 Education: Conditioning Responses in Children

A primary goal of K-12 education in the United States is "socialization." This term socialization can translate into the conditioning of normative behavior or more succinctly, behavioral conditioning. It is little different from the world Aldous Huxley described in his parable of the future, *Brave New World*(2004), where "neo-Pavlovian conditioning" is used to create socially acceptable individuals. Today, children are cut-off from the rest of society and culture and placed in educational institutions where they are then separated by age and then taught course material that is deemed "age appropriate" by the public educational establishment i.e. the State of California, for instance or the United States Federal Government. Such topics innocently enough cover basic writing, counting, history and science.

But the topics and presentation of the topics are far from innocent. Students are not taught to question the presupposition of their education or the educational establishment in much the same way Roman Catholics are not taught the history of the Church or taught to question the basic presuppositions of the religion itself. Roman Catholics are taught belief in the Church. Children are taught belief in the educational system. They do not question the underlying assumptions of how they are taught history or science, for instance. The paradigm is not brought into question and children are not allowed to discover or create new paradigms on their own that might promote human evolution. Children are not asked to question: why am I being educated in this manner? Is this the only, or most effective manner, in which to be educated? They, instead, take this mode of education for granted. They absorb the information and if they respond and behave within expected guidelines they are rewarded with a high grade and the social approval of teachers and classmates. They are succeeding within the conditioning system. Award-winning teacher and author John Taylor Gatto describes this type of conditioning phenomena in his classic pedagogical criticism of the American school system, *Dumbing Us Down*(2002).

While the basics of conditioning are set during the K-6 grade years, the junior high years continue this conditioning with slightly more complex material of the same nature. The American High School is the culmination of the compulsory public network of conditioning and is this society's social stamp of approval of an children who has been sufficiently conditioned to be considered educated enough to take a place in the world of working adults. In fact, during the final moments of my own high school graduation, the vice-principal completed her speech by saying triumphantly "And we now graduate the next generation of consumers!" A truly inspirational moment.

If done "properly" the average K-12 educational experience of students in America should produce approval-seeking, ego-centered, materialists ready to meet the needs of the 21st Century. The school system is a social construct separated from reality, that takes on a reality of its own for the students who compete against one another and themselves within this artificial environment. Despite the occasionally inspirational teacher who breaks the mold, the average student is left with nothing but propaganda and exits the system either aware or unaware that they have just spent their childhood being conditioned to "enter" a society which they had actually always been both a part from and of which they had always been a part.

Of late the issue of prescribing psycho-active medications to children in order to moderate behavior has become possible. While, some of these students may indeed be suffering and in need of some form of treatment, it is far more likely and in keeping with American educational philosophy that the medication functions as a means to fit the student to the classroom, instead of fitting the classroom to the student. This manipulation of consciousness is the beginning of a dangerous game. Again, Huxley had it covered in 1932 with *Brave New World* where the population of the future takes a mood altering drug named Soma whenever unwanted emotions arise.

Today's students are not only conditioned environmentally and socially, but chemically. A misbehaving student may also be sent to a "continuation" school where they are separated from the rest of their classmates and taught in a different manner that addresses their behavioral

“problems” (likely created by the conditioning they are receiving from their families, religion and schools). In American education there is a wrong answer to every challenge faced by the student. While the content of the system may be questioned within limits the system itself must never be questioned and the bureaucracy must continue its existence at all costs, even if it means betraying its basic premise and devouring the students and any opportunity for actual learning to take place or so critics are led to believe.

Perhaps worst of all is that the “education” at the K-12 level in America lacks relevance to the realities of intellectual exploration, the job market, 21st Century culture, and life as a human being. Education in America is a conditioning experience within an artificial social construct called a “school”. The content of education is propaganda where its presuppositions are never questioned. Education in America is pathological in nature, disconnected from reality, and I do not recommend it.

Krishnamurti states:

Though there is a higher and wider significance to life, of what value is our education if we never discover it? We may be highly educated, but if we are without deep integration of thought and feeling, our lives are incomplete, contradictory, and torn with many fears; and as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook on life, it has very little significance (Total Freedom, 89).

American education at the K-12 level does not establish an environment from which students can become whole people and develop the sort of integration of which Krishnamurti speaks in the above quotation. Instead of taking the vast financial resources of this technological empire and putting them to the use of developing whole people who are both technologically and transcendently whole, people who are able to function in society as well as people who are in tune with the human condition as it really is and exploring the nature of life, the K-12 educational system does little beyond imprint students with the very basics of society’s ideology, approval seeking, and the factory model where the bell is the ultimate authority in the classroom.

As a student in this system, I had the benefit of several dedicated teachers who understood the needs of the individual student. However, there were also teachers and administrators who attempted to have me expelled from high school my senior year for wanting to independently study comparative religions in the library. The librarian became one of my great mentors, friends and advocates. There was a mechanism in place by which to perform the independent study. The other teachers and administration, however, did not want this to take place. Fighting the system, I spent much of the last two years of high school in a library storage closet I had arranged into an office where I could not only study comparative religions, but everything from Plato, physics, indigenous people, water, cheese, culture and more. The entire library was my bookshelf and true learning was taking place (much to the seeming anger of the high school administration and the teachers who were miffed I refused to take part in the Academic Decathlon). I look back on my time in the library, my discovery of Taoism and having that freedom to study and explore as a foundational experience of my intellectual life and have a profound sense of gratitude to that librarian who had the vision to know when a student is ready to truly learn.

Perhaps the most telling example of the state of affairs in American public schools is this: no teacher I know, actively working or retired from the K-12 system recommends anyone going into

it as a teacher. The system, they say, is the problem. And the students. It would seem a disturbing state of affairs when those who are on the front-lines of a system of education reject it while they are actively involved and still after they have left it behind them.

The American University: Conditioning For Adults

By the time the child is grown and has become what society has determined an adult they have the option of entering into the job market, continuing study at a “higher” level or some combination of the two. Higher education at the American University undergraduate level, for instance, is broken into a variety of separated disciplines with a selection of required “general education” courses to round out the essence of a “liberal” education in the arts and sciences. For those not pursuing hoped-for careers in academia, the college Bachelor’s Degree has become almost entirely career specific for the American undergraduate. Students pursue Bachelor’s Degrees because they believe they will get a higher paying job, perhaps in a field of their choice, after they graduate based on their knowledge that simply having a high school diploma is next to meaningless, if not entirely meaningless, in the modern job market.

Idealistically speaking, the American University is supposed to be a place where an individual can come to think the great thoughts, consider the nature of the universe and human life and participate in a conversation that began thousands of years ago and leave the university changed, matured and with a greater sense of themselves and life. This, however, is rarely the case. As a state institution, American public universities have largely become conditioning centers for adults. This time, the conditioning is done in terms of subject matter with unstated philosophical and political presuppositions, continued standardized tests that, in and of themselves, are exclusionary of knowledge and the master/slave relationship of student and professor, based in the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic. The approval seeking students have learned in their K-12 careers will, however, come in handy in that respect, however. Students who want to succeed learn quickly how to please each of their professors. Yet, as Krishnamurti points out, “Ideals have no place in education for they prevent the comprehension of the present. Surely, we can be aware of what is only when we do not escape into the future, to strain after an ideal indicates sluggishness of mind and the desire to avoid the present (Education and The Significance of Life, 22).

In fact, much of what is called higher education does contain the ideals of the professor, the professor’s political or philosophical biases. How does that help the student in the project of liberating themselves from their conditioning? Isn’t that simply more conditioning, even if it is a criticism of their prior conditioning? Can knowledge exist that is not conditioning? In the tradition of Taoism it would be called knowledge of the “10,000 things.” Or, perhaps, “conventional” knowledge. I have always interpreted the term “conventional knowledge” to be that type of knowledge that would help one in daily life, but does not really help one along the path to enlightenment.

What of this so-called knowledge that is being discussed in our universities? What is being professed? As I have indicated above, it is highly political. But it is also highly specialized. This takes the student very much away from wholeness and completeness which are also core aspects of Krishnamurti’s philosophy. Krishnamurti speaks to this when he says:

In our present civilization we have divided life into so many departments that education has very little meaning, except in learning a particular technique or profession. Instead of awakening the integrated intelligence of the individual, education is encouraging him to conform to a pattern and so hindering his comprehension of himself as a total process. To attempt to solve the many problems of existence at their respective levels, separated as they are into various categories, indicates an utter lack of comprehension (Total Freedom, page 89).

Consider the very structure of society and the structure of university within the broader context of society. Everything is a part of the grid. There is a particular place to send the mail, there is a particular place to sleep, there are particular places to go to eat, and pray and, of course, to be educated. Everything in modern society is regulated and separated. The individual is supposedly given freedom of choice, but it is the freedom of choice of where to go on the grid. Applying Krishnamurti's thoughts in general and education specifically, would mean a total re-evaluation of the structure of society, a society that keeps this separate when they are, in fact, one. A society that takes education out of every day life, that separates it into disciplines (which are actually thought constructs that become social constructs) is not a society that is achieving liberation of the individual either intellectually or in any other way.

As a college teacher, reading and thinking about Krishnamurti's teachings on conditioning and education struck me deeply. It became part of a larger questioning process. What, if anything, am I accomplishing as a teacher in a traditional institution? In what ways might I begin to apply Krishnamurti's approach to thinking in the classroom in order to encourage actual thought?

As I continued to explore Krishnamurti and juxtapose his teachings against my role as an instructor in a California public university, I became quite conflicted. If there is no thinking taking place, what am I doing here? If there is no learning taking place what am I doing here? And, yet, there is learning taking place. There is thinking taking place. But, is it true learning and thinking in Krishnamurti's sense?

As their instructor, the students want to please me in order to have a pleasant classroom experience and get a good grade so they can move on to their next course and do the same thing. There is not learning going on when this is happening, except for an extension of an approval seeking process. The A-F grading system works more as a control mechanism in the classroom than it does as an accurate depiction of the student's performance in class or understanding of the course material. If the student gets what they want they are generally pleasant. If they do not, they are generally not pleasant. Most do see themselves as consumers as if to say "I am paying for this education! Give me the A I want!" And I do not blame them for the sentiment, when they feel that have put great effort into learning the course material.

The performative aspect of the classroom also deserves scrutiny here. There is an unwritten agreement between teacher and student. It is: I will perform the role of the teacher and you will perform the role of the student. The performative aspect of life at the American public university is intrinsic to its capacity to remain a viable bureaucracy. And, what would Krishnamurti say

about that? Perhaps that both teacher and student are dancing around in illusion?

As an example of the ideas I've discussed above I'll look into an upper-division class I teach called Mass Communication Theory & Research and see what might be found there in terms of this conflict between teaching as usual and education as Krishnamurti has posited. As the course title would lead one to believe, this course focuses on theoretical models and research performed in the field of mass communication beginning with its origins and leading to the present day.

The students in the course, based on what they've heard from students are prepared to listen to lecture, do some bit of analysis and then mirror back the material so that it can be proven that they understand it. There are often mixed reactions when I present a well researched theory, priming theory for instance, and then proceed to debunk it by discussing mirror neurons or looking at it from a radically different perspective. Or, perhaps, when I present the theory of distinctly human traits and then go into great detail about how these traits are also shared with other animals, thereby debunking that theory, the students are not sure what to think or how to respond. Some find this approach refreshing, others seemingly are confused. Why am I not just telling them objective facts? Why am I not telling them what to think?

In this process, I am teaching them to question the presuppositions of the theories and research and not to take them as monolithic or Biblical in nature. There are no laws in a social science, I tell them, only theories about human behavior – some based on experimental evidence. There are, however, no absolutes. Some students are disturbed by this. They want to not only be given definitive information, but they want to give that information back to me. This creates cognitive dissonance within them. Of course, this is the only time when the chance of them learning anything actually takes place. There must be some type of internal conflict and questioning process to shake them loose from the propaganda they have been undergoing for years and in so many other classrooms.

Yet, when I gave them an essay midterm with the question: "Why is it important to study media effects?" none of them questioned the basic presupposition: that I was saying it was important to study media effects. Had they been questioning, they would have asked in their essays: "Is it important to study media effects? If yes, why? If not, why not?" Again, while some of the students questioned the presupposition of the theories within their essay test, however they did not question the presupposition of the test itself; not one out of nearly 50 students. The desire to please, the desire for approval from the teacher is very, very strong. A good grade means scholarships, grad school, a good GPA and higher self-esteem if one is caught in those types of traps. And I do not blame them. I do, though, hope for their liberation from the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic that is continually present in the classroom.

In another course I teach, "Cyberspace, Communication & The Digital Age" a stunned silence was followed by a student saying "But, you are asking us questions that don't have definite answers." Yes, I replied. Otherwise this would be a math class. And, even then, at the highest levels of mathematics there are deep questions that need to be pursued about the very nature of mathematics itself and what it represents.

Perhaps the most genuine learning takes place in the interaction of the teacher and student

outside of the classroom in conversation. The students can learn to be themselves. And, from Krishnamurti's perspective, what might that mean? Well, at least it would mean something more human, than less human. Krishnamurti says, "Life cannot be made to conform to a system, it cannot be forced into a framework however nobly conceived. . ." (Education and the Significance of Life). Perhaps, in the very act of teaching within an institution, I am attempting to do the very opposite of what Krishnamurti has suggested. The question remained: is it possible to attain liberation while within "the system". On this, I would be challenged, not only by Krishnamurti, but also by the world's foremost authority on Krishnamurti, Professor Krishna.

A Transcendental Perspective

Now, as someone who was influenced by Taoist teachings early on and then by Krishnamurti and others, the idea of teaching the individual and teaching as a creative act and as an act of liberation for the students has been a central focus of mine. Recently, I had an e-mail interchange with Professor Padmanabhan Krishna, the world's foremost authority on all things Krishnamurti. I asked him how applying Krishnamurti's teaching could be applied to Modern American education and what an instructor in a traditional American college do to apply such teachings. His response, as follows, was profound. Krishna said:

Krishnamurti's teachings cannot be applied like a policy. They have to be lived and get communicated only as much as actually lived. To live them one has to first come upon that wisdom oneself, not merely as knowledge. You cannot achieve anything on a mass scale. It was Leibniz who said "I have great faith in man, but I despair mankind!" I think that is true. Anything is possible for the individual but only superficial changes are possible for society as a whole. (Krishna e-mail).

When I first read Krishna's response to my questions, I was somewhat dismayed. Did this mean my project of revolutionizing American higher education using techniques based on Krishnamurti would be impossible? Questions continued to arise: Why can't Krishnamurti's teachings be applied like policy? How do I know if I am living Krishnamurti's teachings and by that then, how will I know if I am able to communicate them. Have I found wisdom within myself or only knowledge? And why can't anything be achieved on a mass scale when "society" is made up of individuals. I contemplated Krishna's response to my questions for quite a bit, returning to them again and again. I began to interpret them. And here is my interpretation of Krishna's response based on my understanding of Krishnamurti's teachings on a basic level.

Krishnamurti's teachings cannot be applied like policy because they apply only to the individual. Throughout his teachings, Krishnamurti repeatedly tells the individual to return to themselves, that only they can understand their own consciousness, not to rely on any authority but themselves. According to Krishnamurti, the teacher communicates as much without speaking as he or she does by speaking if they become a manifestation of the teachings. This goes beyond simple body language to essence.

Now as to Krishna's point about one having to first come "upon that wisdom oneself, not merely as knowledge." This, perhaps, is the extreme challenge. This type of realization might occur in a moment, a lifetime or never at all. And then, how does one know? If you follow Krishnamurti's

thinking, there is no authority outside of one's own consciousness to tell the individual when they have achieved wisdom. I began to feel caught in a paradox. Understanding something logically or rationally does not mean one really understands something at the core level. Essentially, you either get it or you don't. There's no way around it. Do I get it or do I not get it? If I have to ask. . .

Krishna said "nothing can be achieved on a mass scale" and returned everything to the individual. This makes sense in terms of Krishnamurti's teachings and my own personal philosophy of teaching. Krishnamurti believed in an evolution of consciousness from within. He also used quite a bit of logic in his talks as a means of getting people to question their presuppositions. When I was hired at the university and expressed that my goal was to teach the individual a member of the hiring committee asked me how I planned to achieve that. I replied, "I will teach as many individuals as possible inasmuch as it is possible." Next time someone asks I will say "One at a time." Krishnamurti agrees with me when he says "If the teacher is of the right kind, he will not depend on method, but will study each individual pupil" (Education and the Significance of Life, 27). Perhaps, then, I will quote Krishnamurti instead of saying "one at a time." Yet, Krishnamurti does indeed believe that it is possible for an educator to help the student along the path saying "The right kind of educator, seeing the inward nature of freedom, helps each individual student to observe and understand his own projected values and impositions. . ." (Education and the Significance of Life, 29). In that sense, I knew my ideas about evolving education to suit the needs of liberating the mind of the individual student to be well founded in the tradition of Krishnamurti, but remained concerned about how they might be effectively applied within a public institution of higher education.

Again, Professor Krishna said "anything is possible for the individual". It is a humbling comment and also provocative. If anything is possible, where should the individual direct his or her energies? In terms of blending Krishnamurti's teachings with traditional American higher education what, then, is possible for the individual?

The basis of American education on all levels is the education of the individual within a socialized education system to create citizens capable of functioning in a democracy. The fact that this would be done within an authoritarian, undemocratic framework is fascinating to me as an educator. In terms of Professor Krishna's response to my questions, I became increasingly skeptical as to whether or not any part of my goal of a philosophical blending could take place. As I considered this and other related questions I returned to Krishnamurti who said:

All of us have been trained by education and environment to seek personal gain and security, and to fight for ourselves. Though we cover it over with pleasant phrases, we have been education for various professions within a system based on exploitation and acquisitive fear. Such a training must inevitably bring confusion and misery to ourselves and the world, for it creates in each individual those psychological barriers which separate and hold him apart from others (Total Freedom, 90).

The educated individual in the United States is not an individual who is whole. The educated individual may have a head crammed full of facts which may or may not be put to any beneficial

use, but the individual is still fragmented psychologically. So, according to Professor Krishna, anything is possible for the individual. Yet, according to Krishnamurti, the individual is so conditioned, so pre-programmed for selfishness, so surrounded by psychological barriers preventing realization, it made me more and more concerned that the liberation of the minds' of students would be impossible. If anything is possible for the individual, why is it that the individual is constantly stuck in this pre-programmed struggle as described by Krishnamurti. Is there anything an educator can do to help a student in a process of becoming unconditioned and truly learning to think for themselves? Or is this merely more conditioning of a different kind? Krishnamurti speaks to this when he says:

To bring about right education, we must obviously understand the meaning of life as a whole, and for that we have to be able to think, not consistently, but directly and truly. A consistent thinker is a thoughtless person, because he conforms to a pattern; he repeats and thinks in a groove. We cannot understand existence abstractly or theoretically. To understand life is to understand ourselves, and that is both the beginning and the end of education (Total Freedom, 91).

Understanding the meaning of life as a whole is no small task. Again, as I wrote above, this type of realization could take place in a moment, a lifetime or never. Where does this put the teacher and the student? Can a classroom be liberated or, perhaps, an environment where liberation is possible? Or is it only possible for an individual to liberate themselves once they come to a realization of their own conditioning. American education values "consistent" thinking and not always truly and direct thinking and certainly not about the nature of life as a whole. And having a personal philosophy of life or living, I would argue, is not the same as understanding the nature of life as a whole. There is a presupposition in Krishnamurti's quote about that the whole of life can be understood and that there can be such a thing a "right education". It is in this type of quote that Krishnamurti is frustratingly opaque. Yet, his quote mirrors almost exactly what Professor Krishna said to me in his e-mail. My mind was adrift in paradox. I knew what I was teaching and I knew what the students were learning, but was it what the students really needed to know as human beings? And if not, would I, in Krishnamurti's sense and in Krishna's sense be capable of conveying the message? I became irritated, but my curiosity about the possibilities helped me continue forward on the path to further understanding.

Again, Krishnamurti suggests that "Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole. But the whole cannot be approached through the part, which is what governments, organized religions and authoritarian parties are attempting to do" (Total Freedom, 91). Yet, how do students approach things from a perspective of wholeness and not from fragmentation. Or, if the student is fragmented or existing within a system that promotes fragmentation, how is that student to achieve wholeness? And how is the teacher to address this? How am I to address this as a teacher? I became reminded of the idea of synthesis as opposed to analysis (though Krishnamurti does more than his fair share of analysis throughout his lectures).

Most education in American as I have experienced it is based on some superficial form of analysis; the breaking apart of things to understand them. Synthesis is the putting back together

of the things that have been taken apart. From the American perspective, I believe one step toward a more transformative education in the spirit of Krishnamurti is to achieve synthesis, not simply analysis. I began to feel a bit better about myself once I felt I had some mechanism by which to achieve a shift in thinking in the educational institution I already existed within. Of course, that might've just been my conditioning telling me to relax because I was "finding" answers to "my" questions as an educator. I began to compile the beginnings of what could later become a comprehensive list of how an educator in a traditional American university could apply modes of thought in a context akin to Krishnamurti in spirit with the idea of giving the student space to find their own liberation. My paper will conclude with some of these ideas a bit later. But, first, it is vital to return once again to Krishnamurti and explore further the highest levels of these ideas of education. Is true or "right" education possible? How does education function at the most essential level? Krishnamurti states:

The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and, therefore, intelligent. We may take degrees and be mechanically efficient without being intelligent. Intelligence is not mere information; it is not derived from books, nor does it consist of clever self-defensive responses and aggressive assertions. One who has not studied may be more intelligent than one who has learned. We have made examinations and degrees the criterion of intelligence and have developed cunning minds that avoid vital human issues. Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, to what is; and to awaken this capacity, in oneself and in others, is education (Total Freedom, 91).

I began to feel, for the first time in recent days, that I was on the right track again. I could confound the rote system of education, by creating an environment in which "essential" issues could be discussed, where the student could be themselves and have room to explore all aspects of an issue, including their own conditioning. While Professor Krishna's response had first frustrated and disturbed me, I knew there to be some form of truth within it. It also melded quite well with what I knew of Krishnamurti's thinking. So, then, the question remained: how might I, a teacher within a socialized system of higher education achieve the seemingly impossible liberation of individual minds, not to teach them another ideology to replace the old one, but to help them achieve freedom from the known, as Krishnamurti put it. I've mentioned the beginning of my idea of "modes" of teaching above. This was the start. So, the first goal of teaching as a mode of liberation was having the student achieve freedom of mind, the freedom to question all teachings and decide for themselves what is true and what is not, perhaps, for the first time. But, I was confounded again by Krishnamurti just when I thought I had found the path. It was not just freedom that Krishnamurti suggested regarding education, but something more. Krishnamurti adds that:

Education should help us discover lasting values so that we do not merely cling to formulas or repeat slogans; it should help us to break down our national and social barriers, instead of emphasizing them, for they breed antagonism between man and man. Unfortunately, the present system of education is making us subservient, mechanical, and deeply thoughtless; though it awakens us intellectually, inwardly it leaves us incomplete, stultified and uncreative (Total Freedom, 91).

But, what are these lasting values? I remained perplexed. In that state, I focused on what Krishnamurti had said. If education as it currently exists leaves us “incomplete, stultified and uncreative,” then at least three of these lasting values must be completeness, spontaneous and creative. It was almost as if Krishnamurti had left a skeleton key to his thoughts within his very words. I thought to myself again, this could take a lifetime. But, what a lifetime it could be.

Having a world filled with people who embody completeness, spontaneity and creativity is a world that would be truly alive. It would be an unpredictable world of interconnectivity and positive energy. There is no way to know what sort of realizations might be possible in that type of environment. If there was a way for me to encourage completeness, spontaneity and creativity for my students, I would do it. And, of course, according to Krishnamurti and Professor Krishna, the best way to do this was/is to embody these qualities in myself. I was once again, back on the path. Or was I ever off it? But, the goal of this “new” education would not just be to help liberate individuals so they could become complete, spontaneous and creative because according to Krishnamurti:

Education should not encourage the individual to conform to society or be negatively harmonious with it, but help him to discover the true values which come with unbiased investigation and self-awareness. When there is no self-knowledge, self-expression becomes self-assertion, with all its aggressive and ambitious conflicts. Education should awaken the capacity to be self-aware and not merely indulge in gratifying self-expression (Total Freedom, 92).

These liberated students, these creative, whole individuals would determine their own values. They might not be my values. They might not be Krishnamurti’s. There would, perhaps, be liberations beyond all the sages throughout history, there would, perhaps at least be individuals at peace with themselves and education as a transforming aspect of society. But, would this social change be able to occur on a mass scale, even with many, many transformed individuals?

Professor Krishna’s comments, along with my study of Krishnamurti, had increased my skepticism of total social transformation significantly. There are billions of individuals on Planet Earth and it only takes one person or a small group to do something very good or very bad. I was left with lingering questions and doubts about Krishnamurti and education and, most of all, about the idea of education as a source of positive social transformation. Intuitively, I felt it to be possible. But, I needed to further question the systemic of it, the ecology of applying education as liberation.

If a systemic change is to take place, what form will it take? And will such a change occur naturally? Krishnamurti says that “Systems, whether educational or political, are not changed mysteriously; they are transformed when there is a fundamental change in ourselves. The individual is of first importance, not the system; and as long as the individual does not understand the total process of himself, no system, whether of the left or of the right, can bring order and peace to the world” (Total Freedom, 92). But, the result of this change will be as unpredictable as the individuals themselves. I could be helping students become liberated, but to what end? What if I, like Jedi teacher Obi-Wan Kenobi in the famous STAR WARS film franchise helped create

a Darth Vader through true teachings becoming obscured? Once these individuals liberated themselves, they would need to be the one's to choose their paths, just as I had chosen mine.

Therein lies the educator as liberator's dilemma. Krishnamurti asks "Do you educate the student to conform, to adjust, to fit into the system or do you teach him to comprehend, to see very clearly the whole significance of all that and, at the same time, help him to read and write? If you teach him to read and write within the present system of frustration, then the flowering of the mind is impeded." (On Education,90). By questioning presuppositions, and giving the student an environment in which to be themselves and explore the contents of their own consciousness, I believed it was possible to have the student achieve a level of "comprehension" in Krishnamurti's tradition. I would explore my own creativity, spontaneity and hopes of completeness with the great desire that the students would achieve their own. But, is liberation or freedom from the known enough when it comes to education as liberation? There was more, of course, Krishnamurti once again lead me to the intuitive place when he addressed the issue of education leading to the flowering of the total human being saying:

When we talk about a total human being, we mean not only a human being with inward understanding, with a capacity to explore, to examine his inward being, his inward state and the capacity of going beyond it, but also someone who is good in what he does outwardly. The two must go together. That is the real issue of education – to see that when the child leaves the school he is well established in goodness, both outwardly and inwardly. (On Education,92)

And what of the college student? How might I as an educator help the adult student flower in goodness on all levels after years of propaganda and conditioning. I came to the conclusion that the best I could do, in the spirit of Krishnamurti and the Taoists was lead by example always with Krishnamurti's saying in my mind that "The student must be free," (On Education, 96). This, to me, means freedom from fear, freedom from conditioning and, of course, freedom from the known.

Krishnamurti & The Future of Contemporary American Education

Krishnamurti's call for people to become aware of their conditioning in order to overcome it and achieve clarity of essence includes all forms of conditioning: family, religious, social and, most certainly that of education. To Krishnamurti the type of education I have been describing in the pages above would likely be reduced to the type of problematic conditioning that stands in the way of an individual having clarity of awareness. Krishnamurti espoused no system of thought, no religion, no practices that one must do to achieve enlightenment. However, he did speak often about conditioning, and how people are conditioned and how they need to become aware of their conditioning.

Now, how would the American educational establishment change if Krishnamurti's call to question our presuppositions were to become prominent? What if American educational institutions from K-12, to the university level, to graduate and beyond were based on the premise of questioning presuppositions and the totality of our conditioning as human beings? Would education become liberation? What would be "taught"? What would be "learned"? How would

the learning be tested? Indeed, what are the learning outcomes of a liberation-based educational system? A recursive educational system that is created with the point of questioning its very nature and the very nature of the contents of the human mind? How would that sort of system take shape and would it even be possible to have an educational system throughout the United States based upon such a principle as questioning the basic conditioning of the mind, if the basic presupposition, if unspoken, of American education is to condition the mind with the idea of creating a socially acceptable citizen? How would a student be judged? Where would approval and disapproval come from? From whence would this system that is created to question systems get its authority? Would we be, in effect, destroying the current educational system as it now exists and creating intellectual, if not actual, chaos? Or would we be redeeming education? Is it possible for Krishnamurti's teachings to be fully pursued without a complete revolution in education?

Based on my studies of Krishnamurti, my exchange with Professor Krishna and my experience both as a student and a college educator, I offer the following suggestions for integrating the wisdom of Krishnamurti into the American educational system without, as Krishna warned against, applying Krishnamurti's ideas like policy. I consider these a first step to the full realization of what could eventually become the evolution of the American educational system.

- 1) Questioning presuppositions – It becomes the responsibility of all teachers and students to question the presuppositions of their lessons and courses, so that the process becomes transparent and actual reflection can begin to take place leading to spontaneity, completeness and creativity.
- 2) Awareness of Conditioning – Once preconceptions are openly discussed the process of each student becoming aware of their conditioning can begin to take place.
- 3) Process-oriented learning – Learning becomes reflective of the organic process of life, instead of artificially created social constructs. What each student learns may be different based on their different needs.
- 4) Transcendence of Bureaucracy – Realization that the system exists to serve the students and that students do not exist to serve the system. The basis of the New Education will be for each student to come to full realization of their potential as a human being.
- 5) Students Become The Teachers – Students take their learning into the world organically.

Again, as Krishnamurti said “The student must be free.” These suggestions, based on my studies, would be a small step in the direction of the student having a space to become liberated instead of propagandized, to think for themselves instead of being told what to think. Yes, the student must be free. And, for that to happen, the teacher must be free as well.

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