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Bulletin

KRISHNAMURTI FOUNDATION INDIA

FROM THE EDITOR

For Krishnamurti an inquiring mind/heart were the essential basis of a religious life and total freedom from the past was a necessary condition of that inquiry. Nor did Krishnamurti appeal to any traditional religious vocabulary to express his mature religious philosophy. 'If one has discovered something new, why would one want to use somebody else's words?' he asked rhetorically like a poet. Occasionally, however, he did explore with his audience traditional vocabulary, not from within the system but independently and anew. We present here samples of Krishnamurti's exposition of *karma*.

— R.H.

THE IDEA OF KARMA IS A CLEVER INVENTION

We are asking whether man can end suffering. Christianity has not solved it; it has made a parody of suffering — forgive that word. The ancient Hindus, being very clever, invented the whole idea of *karma*, which is, if you do something now you will pay for it next life — so behave. And as most human beings do not behave they maintain suffering.

— Brockwood Park, 3rd Public Talk. September 13th, 1975

WE ARE SOAKED IN THE IGNORANCE OF KARMA

Karma, a past life, is a marvellous solution for every thing: In a past life I did something that was wrong, therefore I am paying for it now. Or, I am now living in a good palace, because I did very well in my last life. The whole Asiatic world is soaked in this ignorance.

— Brockwood Park, 3rd Seminar Meeting. September 14th, 1978

KARMA AS AN EXPLANATION FOR SUFFERING SATISFIES MOST PEOPLE

Man right throughout the ages, from time immemorial, has suffered both physically and psychologically. Suffering has been the lot of man. The Asiatic world, including India, says that suffering is the result of past actions, of so-called *karma*. That explanation seems to satisfy most people — and most people in the world seem to be satisfied with explanations. But explanations, words are not the actuality. Suffering, the word, is not the actual tremor, the actual shedding of tears, the feeling of great emptiness, loneliness.

In the Christian world, suffering has been relegated to some symbol, and they think that by giving their suffering over to somebody their suffering will end. But man all over the world suffers.

— Ojai, 6th Public Talk. May 17th, 1981

EXPLANATIONS ARE AN EASY WAY OUT

Have you ever wondered why human beings go wrong, become corrupt, indecent in their behaviour, aggressive, violent and cunning? It is no good blaming the environment, the culture or the parents. We want to put the responsibility for this degeneration on others or on some happening. Explanations and causes are an easy way out. The ancient Hindus called it *karma*: what you sowed you reaped. The psychologists put the problem in the lap of the parents. What the so-called religious people say is based on their dogma and belief. But the question is still there.

Then there are others, born generous, kind, responsible. They are not changed by the environment or any pressure. They remain the same in spite of all the clamour. Why?

Any explanation is of little significance. All explanations are escapes, avoiding the reality of what-is. This is the only thing that matters. The what-is can be totally transformed with the energy that is wasted in explanations and in searching out the causes. Love is not in time nor in analysis, in regrets and recriminations. It is there when desire for money, position and the cunning deceit of the self are not.

— *Krishnamurti's Journal*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1991, pp 16-17

ACTION BORN OF THE IDEA OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT IS LIMITING

QUESTIONER: Must we return to the past? Must I be aware of what I have been? Must I know my *karma*?

KRISHNAMURTI: By being aware, both the past and the present are revealed. This is not some mysterious process, but in trying to understand the present, the past fears and limitations are revealed.

Karma is a Sanskrit word whose verb means 'to act'. A philosophy of action has been created around the central idea 'As you sow, so shall you reap' — but we need not go into all that now. We see that any action born of the idea of reward or of punishment must be limiting, for such action springs from fear. Action brings either clarity or confusion, depending on one's conditioning. If one is brought up to worship success, either here or in the so-called spiritual sphere, there must be the pursuit of reward with its fears and hopes, which conditions all action, all living

Q: Are we not to have in ourselves some standard for action?

K: Now we come to the fundamental question: Must one live by standards, whether outer or inner? We easily recognize the outer standard as one of compulsion and, therefore, preventing individual fulfilment. We look to an inner standard which each one has created through action and reaction, through judgement of values, desires, experiences, fears, and so on. What is this inner standard based upon, though it is constantly varying? Is it not based upon self-protective desire and its many fears? These desires and fears create a pattern of behaviour, of morality, and fear is the constant standard,

assuming different forms under different conditions. There are those who take shelter in the intellectual formula "Life is one", and others in the love of God, which is also an intellectual formula, and they make these into patterns, principles, for their daily life. Morality of will is not moral but the expression of fear.

— *Ommen, 3rd Public Talk, August 8th, 1938*

KARMA MEANS TO ACT NOW

One 'acts' or one 'does', according to a past reservoir of memory, according to knowledge — a symbol, a preconceived concept. Right? ... One acts also according to the future. That is, I will do this today, because of what I must do or be tomorrow ... Is there an action which is not based either on the past, or on the future? Because the word *karma* — I just heard the other day — means 'to act', 'to do'. And 'doing', 'the acting' is now — not tomorrow or yesterday. Action, actual action — not sublime action — is now. Do you understand what I am saying? And we cannot live without acting. When you get up, that is an act; when you go home, that is an act.

— *Madras, 2nd Question And Answer Meeting, January 3rd, 1985*

YOU CANNOT STOP ACTION YOU MUST UNDERSTAND ACTION

QUESTIONER: Is there a way to stop making *karma* all the time?

KRISHNAMURTI: Ah, *karma*! ... I have been told by Sanskrit scholars that the word *karma* means cause-effect, which is action. Can you stop action? Obviously one cannot stop action.

I do not know if you have observed something. The acorn will always produce an oak tree. It cannot produce a pear tree. There is a definite cause, and there is a definite fixed result. But we are not like that. I did something yesterday. That is the cause, but today there is a time interval during which other factors enter in; and therefore the effect is entirely different; and that effect becomes the cause of the next action. So there is never a definite cause-effect, except in nature. What becomes very important is not the avoidance of cause and effect, or the cessation of an act which has done harm to myself or to someone else, but an understanding of the whole structure of action in relation to time as an idea. If one sees that very clearly, then one acts without all this inward structure of the past which otherwise shapes action.

— London, 4th Public Talk. May 3rd, 1965

KARMA AS AN IDEA IS A DEAD THING

Ideas can never be living things — they are conclusions, reactions, dogmas impressed on our minds from childhood through propaganda, compulsion, education and various forms of communication. And have you not found how astonishingly difficult it is to free the mind from an idea? To free the Hindu mind from reincarnation, *karma* and all the rest of it, is almost impossible. As an idea, a conclusion, a belief is a dead thing, we see that a mind attached to an idea — to *karma* — is

attached to a dead thing.

— *Bombay, 4th Public Talk. December 7th, 1958*

YOUR BELIEF IN KARMA HAS NO VALUE AT ALL

You can play with life, but you cannot play with death; it is there and you are gone. And those of you who believe in life hereafter do not really mean it at all. If you meant it, you would instantly change everything in your life. You would change, because of your belief in *karma*. You say that, according to *karma*, whatever you do, you will pay for it. That is, just as you sow, you will reap. But you really do not believe any of it, for if you did — if you were really aware of it as a fact — then you would not cover, even for one minute, the ugliness of your minds and hearts. You would change the envies, the cruelties, the brutalities. You would mutate immediately. You see, your belief has no value at all.

— *Madras, 7th Public Talk. December 13th, 1961*

MAN DOES NOT LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS BELIEF IN KARMA

In this country, each man is concerned with his family, with his group, with his class, with his particular part of the country, with his particular language, and he has no civic consciousness at all. He is not at all conscious of what is happening to his neighbour; he does not care; he is totally indifferent to what happens. But yet, if you observe, his religious books have told him that perhaps he will live a next life and, therefore, he must behave. He has been told that

there is *karma*. He has been told that what he does now will matter. How he talks — it does not matter to whom — matters. He has been told that behaviour is righteousness, and that if he does not behave now, he will pay for it in the next life. He has been brought up on that for centuries. Yet such beliefs, such ideas, have no importance in his life, because he really does not believe. He still carries on as though this is the only life that matters. So he is competitive, he is ambitious, he destroys his neighbour. And he is not at all civic-minded, socially.

— *Bombay, 1st Public Talk. February 10th, 1965*

KARMA IS JUST A COMFORTING IDEA

One of your traditions is your belief in reincarnation, in *karma*. Now, if you really believe in reincarnation, it means that you must behave now, you must be righteous now — not tomorrow. If you believe in reincarnation, it means that you must have rectitude now, not in the next life. It means that you have to pay tremendous attention to what you are doing now, because if you do not, you are going to pay for it. So, *karma*, reincarnation — the everlasting talk about what will happen in the next life — is all just a comforting idea. Because you do not know how to meet death, you are just verbalizing in order to get comfort. And, so, you are not religious.

— *New Delhi, 3rd Public Talk. December 17th, 1970*

DO NOT SAY THAT KARMA PREVENTS HAPPINESS HAPPINESS IS FOR ALL

You and I have intrinsically the capacity to be happy, to be creative, to be in touch with something that is beyond the clutches of time. Creative happiness is not a gift reserved for the few; so why is it that the vast majority do not know that happiness? ... Do not say that life is too much for them, that they have to face hard realities, that it is their *karma*, that it is their fathers' sin; this is all nonsense. Creative happiness is for all and not for the few alone. You may express it in one way and I in another, but it is for all. Creative happiness has no value on the market; it is not a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder, but it is the one thing that can be for all.

— *Commentaries On Living, Series II*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1994, p. 2

WE INVENT THE WORD KARMA

QUESTION: What is *Karma*?

KRISHNAMURTI: *Karma* is one of the peculiar words we use; it is one of the words in which our thought is caught. The poor man has to accept life as a theory. He has to accept misery, starvation, squalor, dirt. He has to accept them because he does not have enough food. He has no energy to break away from it all and create a revolution. He has to accept what life gives and, so, he says, 'It is my *karma* to be like this'. And the politicians, the big ones, encourage him to accept life with its squalor, with its misery, with its dirt and starvation.

You do not want to revolt against all this, do you? When you pay the poor so little and you have so much, you gradually invent the word *karma*: the passive acceptance of the misery of life. The man on the top, the man who has achieved, who has inherited a lot, the man who has been educated and who has come to the top of things also says, 'It is my *karma*. I have done well in my past life and, so, it is my *karma* to reap the reward of my past actions'. But all he wants is to be at the top: to have many houses, to have power, position, and the means of corruption and, so, he says that it is *karma*.

But is that *karma*? Is the acceptance of things as they are *karma*? Do you understand? Is it *karma* to have the spirit of acceptance of things as they are? Is it *karma* to be without a spark of revolt? Is it *karma* to be ready to accept, to obey? You see, because we are not alive, words so easily become nets in which we get caught.

Karma has to be understood not as a theory. *Karma* cannot be understood if you say, 'That is what the *Bhagavad Gītā* says'. You have to investigate, you have to find out what is true, irrespective of what any book or any particular *guru* has said. And to discover the truth of anything, you have to be extremely active, vigorous, self-reliant.

— *Rajghat, 16th Talk To Students. December 28th, 1952*

DO NOT BE SATISFIED WITH KARMA AS AN ANSWER TO SUFFERING

The first and most important thing is not to be satisfied by explanations, not to be satisfied by the word *karma*, not to be

satisfied with cunning philosophies, but to realize, to feel completely that there is this immense problem — suffering, death — which no mere explanation can wipe away. If you can feel like that, then you will see that there is a revolution in the mind ... If you face the fact of suffering, if you face the fact of death, of deterioration, and if the mind is stripped of all explanations, all solutions, all answers — *karma*, and so on — then the mind will be directly confronted with the thing itself. But, curiously, our mind never allows that direct perception.

— *Bombay, 9th Public Talk. December 24th, 1958*

A MAN WHO TALKS ABOUT KARMA IS THE MOST IGNORANT MAN

You know, a man who talks about *karma* is a most ignorant man — because every cause can be changed immediately; every cause and the effect of that cause can be shattered. To keep on saying, ‘This is my misfortune; I did this in the past, therefore I am this’ is too childish! Cause and effect are closely related: what was the cause becomes the effect, and what was the effect becomes the cause; and that can be broken. And to break with it you must come into contact with it, and not just live in words. The ending of sorrow is possible.

— *Madras, 5th Public Talk. December 30th, 1964*

IT REQUIRES HARD WORK, A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO BREAK THE CONTINUITY OF KARMA

QUESTION: According to the theory of *karma*, in which many of us believe, our actions and circumstances in this life are largely governed by what we did in our past lives. Do you deny that we are governed by our *karma*?

KRISHNAMURTI: Sir, this is a very complex question, and it needs thinking out to the very end.

It is not a matter of what you believe. You believe that you are the result of the past. You believe that previous lives have conditioned your present circumstances. There are others who do not believe in all that. They have been brought up to believe that we live only one life and are conditioned only by our present environment. So let us for the moment put aside what you believe or do not believe. It is much more important to find out what is actually meant by *karma*, because if you really understood what *karma* is, then you would find out that it is not a thing which dictates your present action. We shall go into it, and you will see.

Now, what do we mean by *karma*? The word itself, as you know, means 'to act', 'to do'. You never act without a cause, or without a motive, or without being compelled by circumstances. You act either under the influence of the past, of a thousand yesterdays, or because you are pushed in a particular direction by the pressure of immediate circumstances. That is, there is a cause and an effect. Please follow this a little bit. For example, you have come here to listen to me. The cause is that you want to listen; and the effect of that listening is that you will find out — if

you are really interested. But the point is, there is a cause and there is an effect.

Now, is the cause ever fixed, and the effect already determined? Do you understand, sirs? In the case of an acorn, a seed, there is a fixed cause and a fixed effect. An acorn can never become a palm tree, 'it will always produce an oak. We think in the same way about *karma*, do we not? Having done something yesterday, which is the cause, I think the effect of that action is predetermined, fixed. But is it? Is the cause fixed? And is the effect fixed? Does not the effect of a cause become in its turn the cause of still another effect? I do not want to give examples, because examples do not really clarify the issue; they tend to confuse it. So, we must think this out clearly without using examples. Now, does not the effect become the cause of a future action? Surely there is never a fixed cause, nor a fixed effect. Each effect, undergoing innumerable influences and being transformed by them, becomes the cause of still another effect. So there is never a fixed cause and a fixed effect, but a continuous chain of cause-effect-cause.

Sirs, this is so obvious. You did something yesterday which had its origin in a previous cause, and which will lead to certain consequences tomorrow; but in the meantime the consequences, being subject to innumerable pressures, influences, have undergone a change. You think that a given cause will produce a fixed effect, but the effect is never exactly the same, because something has happened between the two. So there is a continuous chain of cause becoming effect, and effect becoming cause.

To think in terms of 'I was that in the past, I am this today, and I shall be such-and-such in the next life', is too immature.

That is utterly silly, because that way of thinking is not fluid. It has no living, vital quality; that is decay, deterioration, death. But if you think about the matter deeply, it will be really marvellous, because then you will see that this chain of cause-effect becoming another cause can be broken at any time, and that the mind can be free of *karma*.

Through understanding the whole process of the mind which is conditioned by the past, you will see for yourself that the effect of the past in the present or in the future is never fixed, never absolute, never final. To think that it is final is degradation, ignorance, darkness. Whereas, if you see the significance of cause-effect becoming again the cause, then because that whole process is for you a living, moving thing, you can break it at any time; therefore you can be free of the past. You no longer need be a Christian, a Buddhist, a Hindu, with all the conditioning that goes with it; you can immediately transform yourself.

Sirs, do you not know that with one stroke you can cut away envy? Haven't you ever tried to break antagonism on the spot? I know it is very comforting to sit back and say, 'Well, it is *karma* that has made me antagonistic to you'. It also gives a great sense of satisfaction to say that, and you have the pleasure of continuing hate. But if you perceive the whole significance of *karma*, then you will see that the chain of cause-becoming-effect-becoming-cause can be snapped. Therefore the mind can be astonishingly and vitally free from the past in the immediate.

But that requires hard work; it requires a great deal of attention, a great deal of inquiry, penetration, self-knowledge. And most of you are indolent; you are so easily satisfied by a belief in *karma*. Good God! It is what you are now that

matters, not what you did in the past and the effects of that in the present. And what are you now? You should know that better than I. What you are now is obviously the result of innumerable influences, compulsions. What you are now is the result of food, climate, contact with the West, and so on. Under the pressure of all that, the mind becomes lazy, indolent, easily satisfied by words. Such a mind may talk about truth, about God. Such a mind may believe in *nirvāṇa*, and all the rest of it, but those beliefs have no value at all, any more than do those of the Communist or any other group.

The mind can be transformed only when it understands the whole process of itself: the motives, the causations, of that process. In that understanding there are immense possibilities for the mind, because it opens the door to an astonishing creativity. And that creativity is not the writing of a few poems, or the putting of some colours on a canvas; it is that state which is Reality, God, Truth. And for that you need have no ideals. On the contrary, ideals prevent immediate understanding. You are fed on illusions, on things that have no value, and you easily succumb to authority — to religious as well as political tyranny. And that being so, how can such a mind discover that which is eternal, that which is beyond the projections of itself?

I say that it is possible to break the continuity of *karma*. It is possible to break the continuity of *karma* only when you understand the operations of *karma*, which is not static, predetermined, but a living, moving thing. And in breaking itself away from the past, the mind will know what Truth or God is.

— Colombo, 4th Public Talk. January 23rd, 1957

KARMA, BHAKTI AND JÑĀNA YOGA DO NOT LEAD TO TRUTH

To deny, to negate, everything that is not love — jealousy, attachment, possessiveness — is love. Out of total, complete, denial, negation, comes love. That is, through negation you come to the positive. And the most positive thing is love. And one of the odd things about love is: do what you will, it will be correct. When there is love, action — under all circumstances — is always right. And when there is that quality of love, there is compassion. Compassion means passion for all. Compassion — like love — cannot exist if you belong to any sect, or to any group, or to any organized religion. Compassion comes only when there is freedom from all that. And that compassion has its own extraordinary limitless intelligence. And when there is love, there is beauty. Love-compassion — with its intelligence — is the endless truth. To that truth there is no path — no *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and all that.

— *Bombay, 4th Public Talk. January 31st, 1982*

QUESTION: In the search for truth, is not 'interest' the motivating power? ...

KRISHNAMURTI: Obviously, where there is no interest, there may be control, domination and effort, but no search. There is a search, an inquiry, only where there is interest. That very search is devotion. Devotion is not a separate path to reality. Where there is this search, there is action — and there is no separate path of *karma yoga*. Where there is this search, inquiry, there is action, and the very search brings wisdom.

— *Bombay, 11th Public Talk. March 21st, 1948*

**CONCERN ABOUT REBIRTH LEADS
TO WRONG AND THOUGHTLESS CONCLUSIONS**

QUESTIONER: Do you believe in *karma* and reincarnation?

KRISHNAMURTI: Now let us go into this question fairly thoroughly. I think it is important to understand it, for consciously or unconsciously most of us think in terms of rebirth, continuity, and personal immortality.

The idea of reincarnation involves the rebirth of the 'I' which is regarded as a spiritual essence, the soul. The 'I' is supposed to continue, and it is born over and over again till it reaches perfection, reality, liberation. We have accepted this idea as it is very gratifying, comforting.

Now what exactly is this 'I'? We see continuation of character. We see the 'I' as being different from another 'I'. As I have said, conditioned thought must continue to create further limitations for itself. The 'I' is not only a particular, physical form with its name, but beyond its outer appearance, there is the psychological 'I'. What is this 'I'? The 'I' is a representative of previous influences and limitations. It is: being born in a certain family, belonging to a certain group, a particular race, with its prejudices, its hates and superstitions, fears, and so on — right? Fears and conditioning originate in ignorance, in craving. These limitations have been transmitted from father to son right through till I am also that father, that past.

AUDIENCE: This is interesting.

K: You say that this is interesting, but if you saw the implication in it, you would understand its real significance

and not merely be intellectually interested. My father is also myself. The ideas and the beliefs which my forefathers had and which have come down to me combine with the present action and reaction and become the 'I' of the present. Thus character is preserved and continued as myself today being reborn as another in the future. Without sentimentality and false emotion and prejudice, one can perceive the deep significance and reality of what I am saying: namely, that our ancestors, through their desires, fears, and hopes, created a certain pattern of thought and this thought is partly continuing in us. These ideas, in combination with the present, have created that narrow and limited thought which is the 'I'. This 'I', this 'ignorance', this 'myself', will go on in the future as another.

So the world, mankind, is myself. If I — being the world, the you — act thoughtlessly, I must increase and perpetuate ignorance with all its effects, fears, and hates. So what I do matters greatly — not in terms of reward and punishment. When I am deeply concerned about my rebirth, my immortality, the continuance of my experiences of achievement and sorrow, such concern must lead to wrong and thoughtless conclusions. The 'I' is a conditioned, limited state, and so it is unreal. Reality is that state which is free from the self.

Now, most of us are apt to think that cause and effect are cyclic. If it were thus in the past, it must be so in the present, and so in the future. But this is not so, for there is always a continuous change taking place, thus modifying the effect. In understanding the past influences and limitations, and discerning their effect, thought can transform itself in the present, and need not be bound by the past. Thought can free itself in the present from the bondages of the

past through intense awareness. Take, for example, a Hindu with his social and religious background. He lives thoughtlessly in a limited state and, so, in sorrow. He attributes this sorrow to *karma*, to the past and not to his thoughtlessness.

It is indolence, a form of conceit, that makes us cling to our past. Blessedness is not in the past or in the future but in the present for those who through joyous awareness understand and, so, are free from the cause of ignorance, which is craving.

If you will seriously reflect upon what I have been saying, then understanding will come out of your own earnestness. Knowledge is utterly valueless if you do not relate it to your daily life. If we are worldly, psychologically depending on things for our personal happiness, if our love is possessive and our thought crippled by beliefs and fears, then life becomes an increasing sorrow. In joyous and strenuous awareness thought frees itself from its limitations. Out of self-reliant, exercised understanding, there comes peace.

— *Ojai, 6th Public Talk. June 30th, 1940*

**DISCOVER THE TRUTH ABOUT KARMA,
FOR REPETITION DOES NOT BRING FREEDOM**

‘I have come to talk over *karma* with you. Of course I have certain opinions about it, but I would like to know yours.’

Opinion is not truth; we must put aside opinions to find truth. There are innumerable opinions, but truth is not of this or of that group. For the understanding of truth, all ideas,

conclusions, opinions, must drop away as the withered leaves fall from a tree. Truth is not to be found in books, in knowledge, in experience. If you are seeking opinions, you will find none here.

‘But we can talk about *karma* and try to understand its significance, can we not?’

That, of course, is quite a different matter. To understand, opinions and conclusions must cease.

‘Why do you insist upon that?’

Can you understand anything if you have already made up your mind about it, or if you repeat the conclusions of another? To find the truth of this matter, must we not come to it afresh, with a mind that is not clouded by prejudice? Which is more important, to be free from conclusions, prejudices, or to speculate about some abstraction? Is it not more important to find the truth than to squabble about what truth is? An opinion as to what truth is, is not truth. Is it not important to discover the truth concerning *karma*? To see the false as the false is to begin to understand it, is it not? How can we see either the true or the false if our minds are entrenched in tradition, in words and explanations? If the mind is tethered to a belief, how can it go far? To journey far, the mind must be free.

Freedom is not something to be gained at the end of long endeavour; it must be at the very beginning of the journey.

‘I want to find out what *karma* means to you.’

Sir, let us take the journey of discovery together. Merely to

repeat the words of another has no deep significance. It is like playing a gramophone record. Repetition or imitation does not bring about freedom. What do you mean by *karma*?

‘*Karma* is action, and action is the outcome of the past. Action cannot be without the conditioning of the background. Through a series of experiences, through conditioning and knowledge, the background of tradition is built up, not only during the present life of the individual and the group, but throughout many incarnations. The constant action and interaction between the background, which is the ‘me’, and society, life, is *karma*; and *karma* binds the mind, the ‘me’. What I have done in my past life, or only yesterday, holds and shapes me, giving pain or pleasure in the present. There is group or collective *karma*, as well as that of the individual. Both the group and the individual are held in the chain of cause and effect. There will be sorrow or joy, punishment or reward, according to what I have done in the past.’

You say action is the outcome of the past. Such action is not action at all, but only a reaction, is it not? The conditioning, the background, reacts to stimuli; this reaction is the response of memory, which is not action, but *karma*. For the present we are not concerned with what action is. *Karma* is the reaction which arises from certain causes and produces certain results. *Karma* is this chain of cause and effect. Essentially, the process of time is *karma*, is it not? As long as there is a past, there must be the present and the future. Today and tomorrow are the effects of yesterday; yesterday in conjunction with today makes tomorrow. *Karma*, as generally understood, is a process of compensation.

‘As you say, *karma* is a process of time, and the mind is the result of time. Only the fortunate few can escape

from the clutches of time; the rest of us are bound to time. What we have done in the past, good or evil, determines what we are in the present.'

Is the background, the past, a static state? Is it not undergoing constant modification? You are not the same today as you were yesterday; both physiologically and psychologically there is a constant change going on, is there not?

'Of course.'

So the mind is not a fixed state. Our thoughts are transient, constantly changing; they are the response of the background. If I have been brought up in a certain class of society, in a definite culture, I will respond to challenge, to stimuli, according to my conditioning. With most of us, this conditioning is so deep-rooted that response is almost always according to the pattern. Our thoughts are the response of the background. We are the background; that conditioning is not separate or dissimilar from us. With the changing of the background our thoughts also change.

'But surely the thinker is wholly different from the background, is he not?'

Is he? Is not the thinker the result of his thoughts? Is he not composed of his thoughts? Is there a separate entity, a thinker apart from his thoughts? Has not thought created the thinker, given him permanence amidst the impermanence of thoughts? The thinker is the refuge of thought, and the thinker places himself at different levels of permanency.

'I see this is so, but it is rather a shock to me to realize the tricks that thought is playing upon itself.'

Thought is the response of the background, of memory; memory is knowledge, the result of experience. This memory, through further experience and response, gets tougher, larger, sharper, more efficient. One form of conditioning can be substituted for another, but it is still conditioning. The response of this conditioning is *karma*, is it not? The response of memory is called action, but it is only reaction; this 'action' breeds further-reaction, and so there is a chain of so-called cause and effect. But is not the cause also the effect? Neither cause nor effect is static. Today is the result of yesterday and today is the cause of tomorrow; what was the cause becomes the effect, and the effect the cause. One flows into the other. There is no moment when the cause is not also the effect. Only the specialized is fixed in its cause and so in its effect. The acorn cannot become anything but an oak tree. In specialization there is death; but man is not a specialized entity, he can be what he will. He can break through his conditioning — and he must, if he would discover the real. You must cease to be a so-called Brahmin to realize God.

Karma is the process of time, the past moving through the present to the future; this chain is the way of thought. Thought is the result of time, and there can be that which is immeasurable, timeless, only when the process of thought has ceased. Stillness of the mind cannot be induced, it cannot be brought about through any practice or discipline. If the mind is made still, then whatever comes into it is only a self-projection, the response of memory.

With the understanding of its conditioning, with the choiceless awareness of its own responses as thought and feeling, tranquillity comes to the mind. This breaking of the

chain of *karma* is not a matter of time; for through time, the timeless is not.

Karma must be understood as a total process, not merely as something of the past. The past is time, which is also the present and the future. Time is memory, the word, the idea. When the word, the name, the association, the experience, is not, then only is the mind still, not merely in the upper layers, but completely, integrally.

— *Commentaries On Living, Series II*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1994, pp 78-81

ONE'S LIFE DOES START WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONDITIONING, KARMA

There were five of us in that sunlit room: a man and his wife, and two other men. All of them were young. The wife seemed sad and forlorn, and the husband also was grave, not given to smiles. The two young men sat shyly silent and let the others begin, but they would doubtless speak when the occasion arose and when their shyness had worn off a bit.

‘But why should it happen to us?’ she asked. There was resentment and anger in her voice, but tears were beginning to fill her eyes and trickle down her cheeks. ‘We had been good to our son; he was so gay and mischievous, always ready to laugh, and we loved him. We had brought him up so carefully, and had planned a rich life for him...’ Unable to go on talking, she stopped and waited till she was a little calmer. ‘Excuse me for being so upset in front of you,’ she presently continued, ‘but it has all been too much for me. He was playing

and shouting, and a few days later he was gone forever. It is very cruel, and why should it happen to us? We have led a decent life; we love each other, and we loved our boy even more. But he is gone now, and our life has become an empty thing — my husband in his office, and I in my house. It has all become so ugly and meaningless.’ She would have gone on and on in her bitterness, but her husband gently stopped her. She was sobbing now, without any restraint, and presently was silent.

This happens to all of us, doesn’t it? When you ask why it should happen to you, you really don’t mean that it should happen only to others and not to you. You share sorrow with the rest.

‘But what have we done to deserve it? What is our *karma*? Why didn’t he live? I would gladly have given my life for him.’

Will any explanation, any cunning argument or rationalized belief, fill that aching void?

‘I naturally want to be comforted, but not by mere words, and not by some future hope. As a result I just can’t find any comfort. My husband has tried to comfort me with the belief in reincarnation, but to no avail. And he too is suffering; even though he believes in reincarnation, sorrow is there. We are both caught up in it and twisted by it. It’s like some frightening, hideous nightmare.’ Again her husband interfered to calm her rising feelings.

‘I will be quiet and thoughtful, and I am sorry.’

‘Sir, we know so little of life, of death, so little of our own sorrow’, said her husband. ‘Since this event I seem to have

suddenly matured, and can now ask serious questions. Before, life was gay, and we were constantly laughing; but most of the things that made us happy seem now so silly, so trivial. It has been like a wind-storm that uproots trees and puts sand in one's food. Nothing will ever be the same again. Suddenly I find myself being dreadfully serious, wanting to know what it is all about, and since our son's death I have read more religious and philosophical books than I read in all my earlier life; but when there's pain, mere words are not easy to accept. I know how easily belief becomes a slow poison. Belief dulls the sharp edge of thought, but it also dulls the pain, and without it the mind would become an open, sensitive wound. We came to hear you last evening. You gave us no comfort, which I see is right; but we still want to heal our wounds. Can you help us?'

'The wound we all have', put in one of the other two, 'is not to be healed by words, by a comforting phrase. We have come here not to collect another belief, but to search out the cause of our pain.'

Do you think that merely knowing the cause will free you from pain?

'If once I know what causes my inward pain, I can put an end to it. I won't eat something when I know it will poison me.'

Do you think it is such an easy matter to wipe away the inward wound? Let's go into it patiently, carefully. What is our problem?

'My problem', the wife replied 'is simple and clear. Why

was my son taken away from me? What was the cause of it?’

Will any explanation satisfy you, however comforting it may be for the moment? Haven’t you to find out the truth of the matter for yourself?

‘How am I to set about it?’ demanded the wife.

‘That’s also one of my problems’, said one of the other two.

‘How am I to find out what’s true in this bewildering confusion which is the “me”?’

‘Was it our *karma* to suffer, to lose the one we most loved?’ asked the husband.

‘Perhaps I might be able to bear the pain of my son’s death’, added the wife, ‘if I could just have the comfort of knowing why he was taken away.’

Comfort is one thing, and truth another; they lead away from each other. If you seek comfort, you may find it in an explanation, a drug or a belief; but it will be temporary, and sooner or later you will have to begin over again. And is there such a thing as comfort? It may be that you will first have to see this fact: that a mind which seeks comfort, security, will always be in sorrow. A satisfactory explanation, or a comforting belief, can put you soothingly to sleep; but is that what you want? Will that wipe away your sorrow? Is sorrow to be got rid of by inducing sleep?

‘I suppose what I really want’, went on the wife, ‘is to get

back into the happy state I once knew — to have again the joy and the pleasure of it. As I can't do that, I am torn with sorrow, and therefore seek comfort.'

Do you mean that you don't want to face the fact which you think causes sorrow, and so you try to escape from it?

'Why shouldn't I be comforted?'

But can you find lasting comfort? There may be no such thing. In seeking comfort, what we want is a state in which there will be no psychological disturbance whatsoever. And is there such a state? One may put together, by various means, a state of comfort, but life soon comes knocking at the door. This knocking at the door, this awakening, is called sorrow.

'As you point this out, I see that it is so. But what am I to do?' insisted the wife.

There is nothing to do but realize the truth of this fact, that a mind which seeks comfort, security, will always be subject to sorrow. This realization is its own action. When a man realizes he's a prisoner, he doesn't ask what to do, but a whole series of actions, or inactions, come into being. From realization itself there is action.

'But, sir', put in the husband, 'our wounds are real, and can we not heal them? Is there no healing process at all, but only a state of bitter hopelessness?'

The mind can cultivate any state it desires, but to find out the truth of this whole situation is quite another matter. Now,

what is it that you are after?

‘No man in his senses would want to cultivate bitterness. There is certainly a philosophy of hopelessness, but I have no intention of pursuing that path. I do want to find out, however, what is the cause, the *karma* of our sorrow.’

Do you two also wish to go into this matter?

‘We most certainly do, sir. We have our own problems pertaining to the whole process of *karma*, and it would help us too if we could all consider it together.’

What is the root meaning of the word *karma*?

‘The root meaning of that word is “to act”’, replied the husband, and the others nodded in agreement. *Karma*, as it is generally — and I think wrongly — understood, is action as a determining cause. The future is fixed by past action; as you sow, so shall you reap. I have done something in the past for which I shall pay, or from which I shall gain. If my son dies young, it is due to some cause hidden in a past life. There are many variations on this one general formula.’

All things arise and have their being through the chain of causes and effects, do they not?

‘That seems to be a fact’, replied one of the other two. ‘I am here in this world because of my father and mother and through other previous causes. I am a result of causes which stretch back infinitely into the past. Both thought and action are the result of various causes.’

Is effect separate from cause? Is there a gap, short or long, an

interval of time between them? Is the cause fixed as well as the effect? If cause and effect are static, then the future is already established; and if this is so, there's no freedom for man, he's ever caught in a predetermined groove. But this is *not* so, as you can observe in everyday happenings, where circumstances are continuously influencing the course of actions. There is always a movement of change going on, whether immediate or gradual.

'Yes, sir, I see that; and it is an immense relief to me, who have been brought up in the one-cause and one-effect conditioning, to realize that we need not be slaves to the past.'

The mind need not be held by its conditioning. The effect of a cause is not bound to follow the cause, it may be wiped away. There's no everlasting hell. Cause and effect are not static, fixed; what was the effect becomes the cause of still another effect. Today is shaped by yesterday, and tomorrow by today. That is true, is it not? So cause and effect are not separate, they are a unitary process. A wrong means cannot be used to a right end, because the means is the end; the one contains the other. The seed contains the total tree. If one really feels the truth of this, then thought is action, there is no thinking first followed by action, with the inevitable problem of how to build a bridge between them. The total awareness of cause and effect as an indivisible unit puts an end to the maker of effort, the 'I' who's everlastingly becoming something through some means.

'Are you not giving your own meaning to *karma*?' asked the husband.

Either it is true, or it is false. What is true needs no

interpretation, and what is interpreted is not true. The interpreter becomes a traitor, for he is merely offering his opinion, and opinion is not truth.

‘The books say that each one of us starts this life with a certain amount of accumulated *karma* which has to be worked out,’ went on the husband. ‘We are told that it is in the working out of this accumulated *karmā*, whether in one life or through several lives, that there is the operation of free will. Is this so?’

What do *you* think, apart from the authority of the books?

‘I don’t feel able to think it out for myself.’

Let’s consider the matter together. One’s life in this present existence does start with a certain amount of conditioning, *karma*; every child is influenced by his environment to think within a certain pattern, and his future tends to be determined by this pattern. Either he follows, with a certain latitude, the dictates of the pattern, or he totally breaks away from it. In the latter case, that part of the mind which makes the effort to break away is also a result of conditioning, of *karma*; so in breaking away from one pattern, the mind creates another, in which it is again caught.

‘In that case, how can the mind ever be free? I see very clearly that the part of the mind that wishes to be free from the pattern, and the part that is caught in it, are both held, as it were, in a frame; the former thinks it is different from the latter, but essentially they have the same quality in that neither is totally free. Then what is freedom?’

‘Most people,’ put in one of the young men, ‘assert that

there is a super-soul, the *Ātman*, which will act upon our conditioning and wipe it away through devotion and good works, and through concentration on the Supreme.’

But the entity who is devoted, who does good works, is himself conditioned; and the Supreme on which he concentrates is a projection of his conditioning, is it not?

‘I see that,’ said the husband eagerly. ‘Our gods, our religious concepts, our ideals, are all within the pattern of our conditioning. Now that you point it out, it seems so obvious and factual. But then there’s no hope for man.’

To jump to a conclusion, and to start thinking from that conclusion, prevents understanding and any further discovery.

When the totality of the mind realizes that it’s held within a pattern, what takes place?

‘I don’t quite understand your question, sir.’

Do you realize that the totality of your mind is conditioned, including the part that is supposed to be the super-soul, the *Ātman*? Do you feel it, know it to be a fact, or are you merely accepting a verbal explanation? What is actually taking place?

‘I cannot definitely say, for I have never thought out this matter to the end.’

When the mind realizes the totality of its own conditioning — which it cannot do as long as it is merely pursuing its own comfort, or lazily taking the easy course — then all its movements come to an end; it is completely still, without any

desire, without any compulsion, without any motive. Only then is there freedom.

‘But we have to live in this world, and whatever we do, from earning a livelihood to the most subtle inquiry of the mind, has some motive or other. Is there ever action without motive?’

Don't you think there is? The action of love has no motive, and every other action has.

— *Commentaries On Living, Series III*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1994, pp 67-74

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