

A Mind Seeking Permanency Soon Stagnates by J. Krishnamurti

Excerpted from a public talk given by J. Krishnamurti in Paris, Ma7 27th, 1965

Question: Doesn't the knowledge that life is impermanent bring suffering?

Krishnamurti: Right, sir. But it is a fact that life is impermanent, isn't it? Your relations are impermanent, your thoughts are impermanent, your self-fulfillments, your ambitious drive and achievements are impermanent, because there is death. And why should one suffer because of impermanency? The fact is that there is impermanency. It is so. But you don't want to accept that fact, you say, "There must be something permanent". You have a picture of what permanency is, and therefore, when you are faced with impermanency, there is a feeling of despair. You put death, which is the essence of impermanency, in the distance, so there is an interval, a gap between you and that which you call death. Here you are, living every day, carrying on with your routine, your worries, your frustrations, your ambitions, and there is death in the distance; and you think about that. You have seen death, and you know that you also will die one day, and you think about it. It is the thought of the future as impermanent that breeds fear. Please listen to this. But if you bring death - which you have put in the future - into the present while you are active, vital, strong, not diseased, then you are living with death; you are dying every minute to everything you know. After all, only that which ends can have a new beginning. Look at the spring. When the spring comes after the long winter, there are new leaves, there is something fresh, tender, young, innocent. But we are afraid to end; and ending, after all, is death. Take just one thing, something that gives you great pleasure, or great pain; take a memory that you have of somebody, a memory which causes you pain or pleasure, and end it, die to it, not tomorrow, but instantly. When you do that you will find a new thing is happening, a new state of mind is coming into being. So there is creation only when the old has ceased.

I DON'T KNOW IF on your walks you have noticed a long, narrow pool beside the river. Some fishermen must have dug it, and it is not connected with the river. The river is flowing steadily, deep and wide, but this pool is heavy with scum because it is not connected with the life of the river, and there are no fish in it. It is a stagnant pool, and the deep river, full of life and vitality, flows swiftly along.

Now, don't you think human beings are like that? They dig a little pool for themselves away from the swift current of life, and in that little pool they stagnate, die; and this stagnation, this decay we call existence. That is, we all want a state of permanency; we want certain desires to last for ever, we want pleasures to have no end. We dig a little hole and barricade ourselves in it with our families, with our ambitions, our cultures, our fears, our gods, our various forms of worship, and there we die, letting life go

by - that life which is impermanent, constantly changing, which is so swift, which has such enormous depths, such extraordinary vitality and beauty.

Have you not noticed that if you sit quietly on the banks of the river you hear its song - the lapping of the water, the sound of the current going by? There is always a sense of movement, an extraordinary movement towards the wider and the deeper. But in the little pool there is no movement at all, its water is stagnant. And if you observe you will see that this is what most of us want: little stagnant pools of existence away from life. We say that our pool-existence is right, and we have invented a philosophy to justify it; we have developed social, political, economic and religious theories in support of it, and we don't want to be disturbed because, you see, what we are after is a sense of permanency. Do you know what it means to seek permanency? It means wanting the pleasurable to continue indefinitely and wanting that which is not pleasurable to end as quickly as possible. We want the name that we bear to be known and to continue through family through property. We want a sense of permanency in our relationships, in our activities, which means that we are seeking a lasting, continuous life in the stagnant pool; we don't want any real changes there, so we have built a society which guarantees us the permanency of property, of name, of fame.

But you see, life is not like that at all; life is not permanent. Like the leaves that fall from a tree, all things are impermanent, nothing endures; there is always change and death. Have you ever noticed a tree standing naked against the sky, how beautiful it is? All its branches are outlined, and in its nakedness there is a poem, there is a song. Every leaf is gone and it is waiting for the spring. When the spring comes it again fills the tree with the music of many leaves, which in due season fall and are blown away; and that is the way of life.

But we don't want anything of that kind. We cling to our children, to our traditions, to our society, to our names and our little virtues, because we want permanency; and that is why we are afraid to die. We are afraid to lose the things we know. But life is not what we would like it to be; life is not permanent at all. Birds die, snow melts away, trees are cut down or destroyed by storms, and so on. But we want everything that gives us satisfaction to be permanent; we want our position, the authority we have over people, to endure. We refuse to accept life as it is in fact.

The fact is that life is like the river: endlessly moving on, ever seeking, exploring, pushing, overflowing its banks, penetrating every crevice with its water. But, you see, the mind won't allow that to happen to itself. The mind sees that it is dangerous, risky to live in a state of impermanency, insecurity, so it builds a wall around itself: the wall of tradition, of organized religion, of political and social theories. Family, name, property, the little virtues that we have cultivated - these are all within the walls, away from life. Life is moving, impermanent, and it ceaselessly tries to penetrate, to break down these walls, behind which there is confusion and misery. The gods within the walls are all false gods, and their writings and philosophies have no meaning because life is beyond them.

Now, a mind that has no walls, that is not burdened with its own acquisitions, accumulations, with its own knowledge, a mind that lives timelessly, insecurely - to such a mind, life is an extraordinary thing. Such a mind is life itself, because life has no resting place. But most of us want a resting place; we want a little house, a name, a position, and we say these things are very important. We demand permanency and create a culture based on this demand, inventing gods which are not gods at all but merely a projection of our own desires.

A mind which is seeking permanency soon stagnates; like that pool along the river, it is soon full of corruption, decay. Only the mind which has no walls, no foothold, no barrier, no resting place, which is moving completely with life, timelessly pushing on, exploring, exploding - only such a mind can be happy, eternally new, because it is creative in itself.