Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools

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An Educational Journal

This is a journal on education brought out annually. It is an anthology of writings by educators, teachers, and thinkers exploring a vision of education in its many dimensions—philosophy, psychology, classroom experience, curriculum, nature and environment, and contemporary issues. It lays a special emphasis on J Krishnamurti's principles of education, and will be of use to teachers, parents, educational administrators, teacher-educators, and anyone interested in education.

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Dear Reader

Kindly share this Journal, after your perusal, with a school nearby or a school you know, or a teacher who you feel will enjoy this, so that it reaches more educators.

Many thanks
The Editors

LIFE IS LIKE A RIVER

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 a 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.

Do you understand what I am talking about? You should, because all this is part of real education and, when you understand it, your whole life will be transformed, your relationship with the world, with your neighbour, with your wife or husband, will have a totally different meaning. Then you won't try to fulfil yourself through anything, seeing that the pursuit of fulfilment only invites sorrow and misery. That is why you should ask your teachers about all this and discuss it among yourselves. If you understand it, you will have begun to understand the extraordinary truth of what life is, and in that understanding there is great beauty and love, the flowering of goodness….

—Chapter 17, *Think on These Things*

Contents

Editorial

The twenty seventh issue of the *Journal of Krishnamurti Schools* is in your hands. Handle it with care, read and glean what you will, and do share it with others!

Why do we say this?

If you look through the titles of the articles in the contents page—whether you are a teacher, a parent, a student, or a concerned citizen with questions about education—there is something for each one here.

As we were putting together this Journal, someone asked: *Is there any theme running across these articles?*

If you glance across many of the articles, you will find the recurrence, in one way or another, of a central notion—*care*. As editors, we had decided to write our own brief ruminations around this question: *what is care?* Unexpectedly, we found that many other articles too echoed the idea of 'care', at many levels, and in varied contexts.

In the very first article Vinuta Gopal, former student of a Krishnamurti school, reflects on her growing life concerns in the context of accelerating global climate change and its dire prognosis, a sphere in which she has been on the forefront of personal and political action. Her care for the environment also leads to serious self-reflection that now takes her into new forms of engagement. Against this backdrop, Nagini Prasad writes about the poignant challenges and dilemmas of teaching a course on 'environmental management' to young people today. Apart from sharing her approaches to teaching the much-needed knowledge of the myriad interconnected issues, she also wonders at what level a teacher can raise questions that evoke both a sense of 'care' as well as a deeper 'self-inquiry'.

In an article titled 'What is a healthy mind?', Shailesh Shirali leads us on to a further question: are our very ways of living and educating responsible

for mental health issues that are becoming increasingly rampant? He explores the causative factors, drawing on quotes from a host of writings (including ChatGPT!) as well as carefully chosen extracts from Krishnamurti, who urges schools and teachers to take seriously their responsibility (and care!) in seeing that students experience an atmosphere of 'wholeness' and 'ourness', which may be the only lasting antidote to the fragmentation and malaise in our human consciousness. Picking up on the concern for wholeness in relationship, Dr Suchitra—an educator and a counsellor—draws richly on the work of therapist Carl Rogers to evoke a sense of care at the intimate level of empathetic listening, a quality of listening that may promote self-understanding and healing.

Vaishnavi Narayanan—the first part of whose longer essay was published in Volume 26—continues in the second part with her gentle and leisurely exploration of what education in a Krishnamurti school has come to mean to her.

And this brings us to the section on 'care', highlighted within the grey pages of this *Journal*, in which the editors have put together brief fragments of their reflections on what 'care' might mean to each of us.

Two accounts of personal journeys follow each other. Vaishali Humnabadkar writes of a succession of movements and changes in her working life, first from a pharmaceutical lab to a school, and then within the structures of the school itself. Each of these moves has led her into many new kinds of learning. Dev Kumar, a former student at a Krishnamurti school, speaks—in an interview format—of his engagement with Krishnamurti's teachings, the many challenges this has posed and the varied expressions that his care for 'living the teachings' has led him into.

Any eclectic journal of education must contain something on curriculum and pedagogy in subject areas, and here too we have articles related to art, history as well as sports and games. Jaai Deolalkar and Soumya Ravindranath collaborate to unfold the multiple ways in which a vibrant art programme permeates the curriculum at their school. Sanjay Mathur evokes the everydayness of a senior school history teacher's work in school, even as he engages in a many-layered questioning of his purposes in teaching history. His answers may surprise some; but they remain highly relevant to the challenging times in which we live. Balaji's article, 'To Cooperate is a Challenge When There is an Urge to Win' takes us through the aims and

practices of 'cooperative games', which he has undertaken to promote in his school.

Two teachers pose their own individual questions about education and life and share with us their musings and learnings. Janani Venkat grapples with the ubiquity of change and uncertainty, and comes up with some insights and some pointers that might help to navigate these. Siddhartha Menon recalls how he had wondered as a young teacher about the purpose of KFI Gatherings in a school setting. He returns to this question more than two decades later, this time as a keynote speaker at one such recent Gathering on the theme of 'self-knowledge'.

The article, on 'teacher-student relatedness', by G Gautama is a response to another article on 'teacher-student relationship', published in volume 26 of the *Journal*, that had raised several critical questions about the impact on students of a teacher's passion and way of being. Gautama, striking a cautionary note, suggests that forming any kind of exclusive relationships with students around an individual's passion has its in-built risks. Dangers in relationship is also the theme of the final piece, a review article by Kanti Phatak based on the book, *The Self-esteem Trap: Raising Confident and Compassionate Kids in an Age of Self-Importance* by Polly Young-Eisendrath. This book is aimed at parents but is equally relevant for teachers.

If you have scrolled down this far, you can now take your pick. What aspect of education, teaching and learning do you most care about? Which article would you like to begin with? May you take away many things of value that you can chew on. We wish you happy and thoughtful reading.

Alok Mathur

Climate Action

The Personal and Political

VINUTA GOPAL

In October 2023, I was invited to speak at the KFI Teachers' Conference being held in Chennai, at The School KFI, my alma mater. I was excited to both attend the conference and share my experience of working in the field of climate change. The School had shaped so much of my life and the choices I made, that I felt an opportunity to reflect on what my journey had been in a contentious space of climate action. was quite appropriate.

In school, I had been what one would call a 'good student'. I was mostly happy and engaged and thrived in the environment the school nurtured. However, I had very little idea of what I wanted to do after school. I had no passionate calling nor any career plans, and to my parents' credit, they were supportive of my general lack of direction. It was after some years of dabbling in many things, including getting certified as a Chartered Accountant (in which I had no interest), that I joined Greenpeace, an international environmental organization. This too was thanks to a former teacher in the school, someone I consider my mentor and who was also my boss in Greenpeace for many years. He had just joined the organization as their Executive Director and was setting it up formally in India. He needed an assistant and I was more than thrilled to be offered a part-time position. This was my first taste of environmental activism. I stayed on in Greenpeace for close to 16 years and quit the organization as Executive Director and mother of a two-year-old. This backstory is to provide some context as to how I entered the space of climate change and environmental action.

Cut to the present: 2023 has been declared as the hottest year on record and we have witnessed floods and droughts, Bangalore city facing a water crisis, farmer distress, and are looking at the prospect of an even warmer 2024. We are witnessing temperature rise at a pace never before seen in human history. The reason has been unequivocally established to be

greenhouse gas emissions, the majority of which come from burning fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil. The situation is dire and is getting worse as we continue with business as usual. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the consequences of average temperature rise above 1.5 degrees centigrade is devastating for life as we know it and we are currently headed for an average warming of 2.9 degrees centigrade (if all the current country pledges are met). Not only are we facing a climate emergency, we are also pushing various planetary boundaries. More simply put, we know that things are already very bad and are going to get alarmingly worse; how terrible we cannot quite predict.

What would be an appropriate reaction to this situation? Are we in denial because it is impossible to accept the levels of risk and so we carry on with the everydayness of our lives? Would we be delusional if we felt that things can be made better? Is the appropriate response one of anger or fear or both? Should we constantly experience guilt and shame on account of the choices we make when we take a flight, switch on an air conditioner or possibly choose to have a child in this time and age? These questions are hardy perennials in my mind and possibly for many people. But before exploring my personal journey in navigating this fragmented and contested space further, it might be appropriate to unpack some of the dominant narratives that have been around.

For a very long time, in India, and in many developing countries, global warming was seen through the lens of international climate negotiations. There was deep suspicion as to the real motives of the developed world in imposing restrictions on carbon emissions while they continued to grow and industrialize. The notion of a 'carbon budget' that was to be split between countries didn't go down well with anyone. This was a fight for 'equity' and 'fairness' and not necessarily a question of how to solve a complex problem. The solution that emerged from years of negotiation was to have 'common but differentiated responsibilities' across countries. However, no one was asking the question about fairness within countries; wouldn't the same principle of ensuring carbon space for the poor within a country be important? Weren't the rich within a country consuming all of the carbon space of the poor?

As emissions continued to balloon, the reality that every single country had to act to bring down emissions was finally accepted in Paris in 2015, and there was a new agreement that every country would act on its emissions at

a pace that would be determined by the country itself. The media discourse started shifting to acknowledge that India was extremely vulnerable to a climate crisis and hence had to respond. The political stance also shifted to adopting ambitious renewable energy targets and this was seen as a new investment opportunity, which was in India's own interest. So now, certain kinds of climate action were no longer being imposed on us, but rather, we in India were acknowledging that this was 'good' for our economy and development.

Around the same time, movements, especially in Europe, like 'Extinction Rebellion' and 'Fridays for Future' started gaining momentum. They were pushing for ambitious and urgent action. Both these movements were fuelled by anger and anxiety as the primary motivators for action. They were both radical in their approach, and very successful in creating a sense of urgency and calling out political inaction and the wilful obdurateness of corporations. Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish activist, who decided to skip school to strike for climate action, emerged as a youth leader who gave voice to fears that young people and adults were experiencing. She spoke truth to power in ways that only the young can. Similar youth movements began to spring up across the globe and were instrumental in even shifting voters in many countries, giving a new impetus to 'green' agendas in government. However, these movements lost steam and were hard to fuel over long periods of time. The pandemic and social distancing forced the movements online which was much harder to sustain, but also gave pause and time for them to reflect.

This brings me back to my own personal journey. I was in search of something that I could commit to and that I would feel passionate about. Joining an environmental organization gave me an identity. During this time I admit that I felt the heady rush of righteous anger that propelled and motivated me to act on what I/we considered wrong. The 'I' blurred into the collective 'we' and that was strangely liberating.

Being confrontational is not an emotionally comfortable space for me as I normally shy away from it, but being part of a larger group, organization or movement, allowed me to occupy and even enjoy the power it provided. I experienced how radical thought and action could be both empowering and deeply divisive at the same time. How ideologies masked facts and the willingness to engage. It also provided clarity and simplified complexities. This was at once appealing but also resulted in less open enquiry. It was an

intense experience and I learnt a lot from it. I was also glad that I stepped out and explored new ways of working on climate change.

While climate action requires many to act together, in a short period of time and with ambition, there hasn't been much dialogue or constructive conversation across diverse actors. The discourse has been polarizing and all about finger pointing. The questions are often cast as binaries which are in opposition: for example, 'climate mitigations vs climate justice', 'large corporations acting vs individual action', 'developed countries vs developing countries', and the list goes on and on. As the fragmentation of ideas gets more extreme, the space for constructive and deliberative dialogue shrinks. Ideologies trump everything and nuances are discarded in a rush to simplify and compartmentalize to satisfy narrative machineries that are getting more sophisticated by the day.

In this context, I felt that there needed to be spaces to bring people together rather than further polarize them. There is also energy to be found in aligning diverse stakeholders and building collective momentum for solutions. While it is tiring and sometimes frustrating to hold space for a diverse group to build trust and be able to work with each other, when that does happen, it feels magical. It also unlocks a different kind of energy and power to make change happen. I'd like to believe that this investment in breaking down silos lasts longer as it is forced to unpack biases and open oneself to 'different' ideas and thought processes. At the same time, in the making, it is also as fragile as the ego of individuals in the group.

Over the last couple of years, my colleagues and I have come together to see if we can enable a deeply interconnected, inclusive, responsive and powerful ecosystem of stakeholders who work in concert to achieve ambitious climate action. We believe that many 'small' organizations and individuals working on issues that are at the intersection of the climate crisis—water, agriculture, migration, gender justice, livelihood, land use, and common property rights (and not just energy and climate in the traditional sense)—can come together. We don't set up a 'secretariat' to coordinate the group; instead, we allow the rules and the decision-making structures of the group to form through 'dialogue' and 'doing'.

The networks are normally small to start with and grow organically as we work together. For example, the Clean Air Collective that we initiated five years ago has grown from ten organizations to now more than 200 organizations and individuals, working across most states in India.

We have networks across issues and geographies and so far, have initiated them across ten States. Most of the networks we build are unbranded and depend on the partner organizations to shape the future of the network. So, it is possible that each network develops a slightly different culture of working together—as long as the core values of collaborative intent, space for diverse and marginal voices and ecological sustainability are held.

As an organization and as individuals, we are learning to 'listen' more and 'advocate' less. We are also learning that unless we can mirror the trust we seek within our own organization, the inside can implode as easily as the outside might. While this might seem less radical an approach, I believe it is deeply demanding of every individual and the collective if we are to succeed in building this decentralized network. We have seen people who have never come together in the past work in concert. We have built linkages between a power plant in Maharashtra and the local community—where for the first time in this region the managers of the plant met with representatives of the local *panchayat* to discuss regulatory lapses.

We call this network 'Mycelium'. The mycelium network is a web of connections that convert a forest of individual trees into a hyperconnected super-organism that can dynamically respond to threats and opportunities as a whole. A whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Environmental Management

Tending a Deep Gash with a Too-tiny Band Aid?

NAGINI PRASAD

Knowing is the key to caring, and with caring there is hope that people will be motivated to take positive actions. They might not care even if they know, but they can't care if they are unaware.[1]

—Sylvia Earle, Oceanographer

At the Centre For Learning (CFL), as a school, we have had certain practices that could be considered ecologically sound or that aim to create ecological awareness. For instance, all students are involved in aspects of growing vegetables organically; we source produce from local or organic growers as much as possible; we have dry pit latrines; educational resources are reused or upcycled multiple times; we encourage car pools or bus transport; students are taken on day and night walks in the surrounding landscapes, encouraged to closely observe their natural surroundings, and develop an ease and affection for these landscapes.

I have taught the Environmental Management curriculum at CFL for the last five years. Every year the scale and immediacy of the ecological crisis has grown and become increasingly apparent. I want to convey this to my students without causing alarm, a sense of hopelessness, or guilt. By the time they are in the ninth standard, students can engage in rigorous questions about the ecological state of the world and how the ecological crisis is a reflection of the crisis in human consciousness. When they begin this engagement, they seem to have heard ubiquitous phrases such as 'global warming' and 'climate change' but do not have exposure to the causes and the myriad, interlinked and interdependent aspects of environmental management. I wish to open their minds to this intricate web and hope to touch a chord. Are they moved by what they learn? Are they moved to care? Guilt is definitely not on the agenda. Rather, a looking at all the motivations and insecurities that we as

humans have, which has resulted in the situation we find ourselves in today. If nothing else, can we be at the very least aware of the consequences of our lifestyles and actions as we live them?

At the back of my mind, however, Amitav Ghosh's voice lingers, but I keep it at bay, "...the quandary that now confronts the world's status quo powers: how do you reduce your dependence on the very 'resources' on which your geopolitical power is founded? How do you reduce the fossil-fuel consumption of a gargantuan military machine that exists largely to serve as a 'delivery service' for hydrocarbons?"[2] My concern, if I were to share this idea with students, is that there may be a sense of hopelessness or a feeling that whatever we may do at a personal level, it is nothing in the face of the huge military-industrial complex.

Personally, I swing between Earle and Ghosh. However, something a tinkerer-activist-scientist friend of mine shared always surfaces. I asked him how he keeps going, questioning power tirelessly for decades, "There is nothing else we can do", came the immediate reply. This quickly puts Ghosh's voice, however valid, to rest, as it seems even in the face of such power, there is nothing else I can do but care, at whatever level and to whatever extent. And one of my attempts then becomes to answer Ghosh's question: What are the many ways in which people are innovating and working towards reducing our dependence on hydrocarbons?

Beginning with the notion that environmental management lies at the intersection of society, economics, ecology and politics, there are several threads that we explore. Once a student asked, "What has politics got to do with it?" However, it was not long before case studies and field visits illustrated that politics is a primary force in most environmental management scenarios. The title of the course, 'Environmental Management', is itself of interest: whereas all other species *adapt* to their environment, is it humans alone who *manage* the environment to suit them? Further, we come to wonder whether under the predominant economic system of 'profit at all costs' (which one student cheekily suggests is an oxymoron), there is any hope for ecological and socially sound environmental management? Quite often human rights and ecological rights are undermined by our ever-increasing desires and insecurities.

A potpourri of case studies

Case studies and field visits are an excellent way to bring the curriculum to life and illustrate how the issues are linked to each of us and our patterns of living and thinking. I see the importance of the students knowing about the issues that require our attention and care. However, increasingly, I have been trying to include more examples of positive action. I share a potpourri of case studies below.

Waste not, want not: Studying aspects of the food industry, students learn about the immense waste generated when edible items are discarded as urban consumers

look for the perfectly shaped vegetable or will not buy a slightly damaged package. Is it really more profitable to discard these items than to attempt selling them at a lower price? What is our responsibility as consumers in the demands we create? Where are our desires for the so-called 'perfect' product stemming from? Do we even know the consequences of this in a world where millions are going hungry? What about 'food miles'—the distance a food product travels (thereby consuming fossil fuels) to get to our plate? And what about our diets? Are we aware that a meat-eating diet has by far more negative and far-reaching consequences on ecosystems around the world, than, say, a vegetarian or vegan diet? Are we aware of the impact on ancient forest ecosystems that are being 'clear cut' to feed our tastes? What about the impact of this destruction on greenhouse gas levels?

Slaves to fashion: I draw attention to the 'mountains of clothing waste' from some western countries lying in Accra, Ghana and the Atacama Desert, Chile (20 metres high at times). I share this data: "Since 2000, global production of clothing has doubled. We're buying 60 per cent more clothes now than we did 15 years ago and keeping them for half as long. A major survey in the UK six years ago found one in three young women considered garments 'old' if they had been worn just twice. An estimated 85 percent of all textiles go to the dump every year, according to the World Economic Forum. Globally, that's the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles being burned or going into landfill every second."[3] We then explore the idea that if consumers paid the social and environmental costs of our clothing, would we buy less? For instance, do we pay for the impact on communities elsewhere when trapped methane in these 'mountains' causes towering fires? Or do we pay for the impact of 'ropes' or 'nets' of excess clothing that finds its way into the ocean ecosystem off the coast of Ghana? I further ask what is it in our psyche that marketers and advertisers hook onto, making us feel we must have this or that item of clothing? What deep psychological insecurities or desires must they be tapping into?

Niger on fire: The Niger Delta has been home to major oil companies since oil was first discovered there in the 1950s by European explorers. The people whose lands are being pillaged to extract oil do not benefit in any way. Instead, large oil companies and their executives rake in profits and the delta is left literally blackened by crude oil; the soil and waterways become completely unproductive and in fact toxic. Desperate locals whose agricultural and fishing livelihoods have been decimated struggle in a dangerous and violent landscape ruled by the gun. None of these oil companies pay the environmental and social cost of their operations. If they did, if at all that were possible, what would this mean for the price of oil and all its derivatives from plastic to synthetic clothing? What would it mean for our production and consumption levels, our levels of waste?

Copious consumption: In just one generation it seems that we want things yesterday, that is, even today is too long to wait! Instant gratification seems to be the king and international online shopping companies are happily and profitably catering to our 'needs'. Is it really so difficult to live with what is available in our neighbourhoods or to wait until we have a chance to go out and purchase locally? With any product in the world literally a click away, our desires and ability to fulfil these are endless and instant. Whereas for my generation, this is quite a new way of being, for our students' generation, this is the 'norm'. We, as adults, need to be very cognisant of the impacts of our normalizing this way of living and consuming. The impact of this is not only excess consumerism and its associated fossil fuel consumption and habitat destruction, but just as crucially, a possible feeling of entitlement. It could also mean a minimising of human connections with our immediate neighbourhoods, potentially increasing the sense of isolation, separateness, and 'othering' at a very gross level.

A pinch of salt: We engage in a case study of the Agariya salt harvesting community of the salt pans in the Rann of Kutch. It makes students aware of the back-breaking and heart wrenching work conditions and paltry remuneration this community receives. One student asks, "Why can't they be paid and looked after well? Surely it will benefit the company as workers can work better?" In this instance, I open a discussion on an economic system that maximises profits by keeping wages meagre and working conditions minimal.

Learning from field visits

Planet or plastic? Plastics in our eco-systems, both in habitats and within the tissues of living organisms, are a mammoth issue. A field trip tracing the path of our school trash shows the extent of the waste challenge. A river or coastal walk shows first-hand the impact of plastic and other waste on our waterways. I can open up many questions: What is the link between the synthetic plastics industry and the fossil-fuel industry? Should it be the consumers' or producers' responsibility to manage plastic waste? What is the impact of micro plastics on our ocean ecosystems? What about plastic derivatives in the clothing we love and the brands we are made to love as if our self-worth depended on them? What about the impact of discarded nylon fishing nets on our coral reefs and other sea life?

Fish, anyone? As part of an excursion, I take students to a fishing village on the banks of a river in Goa to meet fisher people. They share that they were impacted generations ago by the local university acquiring their land. Now five-star hotels and possibly an Adani port coming up soon, will further affect their mackerel fisheries. This fishing community faces an uncertain future and the students learn this first-hand. Later, being hosted in the home of a fisherman along the Maharashtra coast, they meet his family and play with his children. They learn

about his livelihood, and how it is being affected by modern, commercial fishing practices. They also learn of his work in beach cleanups and the conservation of Olive Ridley turtles.

What else can we do?

The title of Bill McKibben's book, *Hope, Human and Wild*,[4] seems apt for the range of efforts that concerned and caring humans are making to address the ecological crisis. We view and discuss several films. For instance, the 2019 film *Our Gorongosa* beautifully illustrates how human-elephant conflict can be addressed and go hand-in-hand with basic human needs, as shown by a group of young women in Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique. The 2017 film, *Chasing Coral*, documents mass coral bleaching events between 2014 and 2017, attempting to open the public's eyes to this potentially catastrophic effect of climate change. The 2007 film *Andrea: Queen of the Mantas* follows a young biologist's quest to map manta ray populations in a bid to protect this magical species of marine megafauna from overfishing and the Chinese medicine trade. These are efforts by individuals and communities to counter climate change and its related issues. They must feel, as my friend does, that "there is nothing else that we can do", and so they continue to tirelessly address issues of pollution, fossil fuel consumption, habitat destruction and so on.

However, despite these commendable and much needed efforts, I cannot help but wonder: Are we trying to tend a deep gash with a too-tiny band aid?

How do students respond?

One student reflects, "I don't like the phrase 'save the planet' because the planet is going to be there. It is almost as if the whole thing is about saving ourselves." She probably meant that we *Homo sapiens* are most concerned about saving our physical selves. However, must we not look at ourselves and consider how our very 'thought', creating the illusion of a separate 'self' that is identified with our physical bodies, is the cause of that deep gash? Do we perceive everything through this illusion? Can we simply see this and be totally responsible?

These are some other responses I get from my students:

> *We are very tiny actually and there are a lot of big issues happening in the world; this makes me realise my issues are rather tiny.*
>
> *All of us may not think we can do much but a lot of people who think like this may make a bigger change. If you think you can't make a big change, maybe you can, by getting other people involved; you don't need status, what if you just know a lot of people.*
>
> *Even aside from this class, when I wonder what people can do for the earth, it's difficult, as there's so much that needs working on: social, economic, environmental.*
>
> *It became damaging when it changed from 'assurance of life' to 'quality of life'.*

So, it changed from 'wanting to live' to 'how comfortable will we be'. But can it be argued that this is evolutionary?

I think humans need to adapt rather than adapting the environment to us.

Whenever I start imagining my life in the future, I feel I can't imagine it, I have no idea how it's going to be as things can be very different. I kind of know it's not going to be the way it is now due to climate change, coral dying, deforestation. It's going to be a very different place.

It also depends on the way you look at it. There have been other mass extinctions. It could create a new scenario, as last time mammals took over and maybe insects will now.

Where are we humans in all this?

Each of these issues that we explore in the Environmental Management curriculum are intricately linked to us. As I discuss with my students, to put it crudely, any one of us who has money in a bank is linked, whether we like it or not, to each of these situations. So, is there any other way? The students and I share ideas: What if there was a maximum ratio in salary between the highest and lowest paid person in a company? What if environmental and social costs were transferred to consumers? What if we had locally owned and operated companies so that those investing (the owners) also faced the impacts of the operations on their immediate environment and workforce? Would this not compel us to weigh how much profit we wanted and at what cost? Is it not possible for world leaders, political and industrial, to steer a change towards a more equitable way of being? With so much funding being available for the military worldwide, surely it cannot be a case of there not being enough money.

All this is very well and seems to put the onus squarely at the feet of the 'world outside'. But what of each of us? As Krishnamurti asks, "Where shall we start to understand the world about us and the world within us? The world within us is so enormously complex but we want to understand the world of nature first. All this becomes our mania. Perhaps if we could start with ourselves. Not to hurt. Not to be violent. Not to be nationalistic. But to feel for the whole of mankind. Then perhaps we shall have a proper relationship between ourselves and nature. Now we are destroying the earth, the sea, the things in the sea because we are the greatest danger to the world."[5]

We are the world'. But do we truly see this? We may have an intellectual grasp and understand the tremendous danger in the separative nature of thought. But do we really see this? Are we prepared to consider our inner worlds, without guilt? Are we prepared to turn that proverbial torch inwards to pause and consider our insecurities and fears, our aspirations, or sense of becoming? This seems the crux of the matter. Imagine a world where all of us—every single human—was content

with living within our means; where there was no desire to outdo each other; no fear of missing out on something for ourselves or our children; no yearning for knowledge or entertainment to escape so-called boredom. In such a world, would we not 'need' less, consume less and thereby feed the military-industrial complex less? Or is this too simplistic?

If I feel no sense of separation, that I *am* the world, and feel total responsibility, then in that feeling is there another way of living? What will this mean for our currently fragmented way of living? What will this mean for global consciousness?

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1 *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Ocean's Are One*, Sylvia A. Earle, 2009, National Geographic

2 *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, Amitav Ghosh, 2021 University of Chicago Press.

3 'Dead White Man's Clothes: How Fast Fashion Is Turning Parts Of Ghana Into Toxic Landfill', Linton Besser in Ghana, October 2021, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, http://www.abc.net.au

4 Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on Earth*, 2007, Milkweed Editions.

5 "We are the greatest danger to the world", J Krishnamurti, 2nd Question & Answer Meeting, Brockwood Park, 1980.

What is a Healthy Mind?

SHAILESH SHIRALI

What do we mean by a healthy mind? It may help if we use the analogy of a healthy body. Presumably, it is one that has strength and stamina to the right degree; a body that can deal with physical challenges; a body that can deal with infections. Perhaps more such qualities can be added to the list but one gets the general idea. Can we extrapolate these to the mind?

It is of interest to see how chatbots based on large language models (e.g., ChatGPT) respond to such a question. On being asked for the markers of a non-healthy mind and of a healthy mind, the following lists of attributes emerged.

Markers of a 'non-healthy mind'

1. Negative thoughts, dark thoughts
2. Tendency towards isolation and withdrawal in the face of stress
3. Lack of interest in life; lack of pleasure in simple things
4. Tendency towards substance abuse and addiction
5. Difficulty making decisions
6. Extreme mood swings
7. Distorted perceptions; tendency to 'overthink'
8. Cynical world view

The word 'persistent' can be prefixed to all of the above phrases. (To avoid repetition, we have not done so.)

Markers of a healthy mind

1. Thinks clearly
2. Looks at life afresh each day
3. Is happy to learn, and learns new things
4. Sees good in the world. Has a sense of optimism

5. Has a sense of meaning and purpose, and a feeling that life is meaningful
6. Is self-aware
7. Has meaningful relationships
8. Has the quality of resilience

Note that these are essentially lists of outwardly observable symptoms. Can one force such attributes into existence? Are they subject to the will? Surely not.

Mental health issues have now become widespread all over the world. It has become routine for people of all ages to seek the help of counsellors and therapists. What is one to make of this phenomenon? There are writers and analysts who ascribe much of this to Covid and to social media and smartphones. But surely, the problem is not of such recent origin; we are talking of a problem whose roots lie deep in human consciousness. So, we ask: what will bring a greater quality of health and happiness into our lives and to society?

Before continuing, here are two related quotes that reveal how we have looked at the problem of mental health in the past.

> *The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.*
>
> —John Milton, in 'Paradise Lost'

> *The mind is the sole lens we have on what the world is and what we are. The quality of our mind—the clarity of it, the composure of it— shapes the quality of our lives.*
>
> —Maria Popova

The reader would have noted in the list above: 'has a sense of meaning and purpose, and a feeling that life is meaningful.' We recall the following lines from Viktor Frankl (a Holocaust survivor):

> *It's not pleasure nor success nor power that drives people; it is finding something—a purpose, a meaning—to live and even die for. … To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a 'why' to live for can bear almost any* 'how'."
>
> —Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*

There is surely much wisdom in what Viktor Frankl has said. It should be obvious that there is joy in living a life rich with meaning and purpose, and crushing heaviness when life becomes empty and purposeless and devoid of meaning. In the chilling words of Henry David Thoreau written more than one and a half centuries ago: "The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation". Thoreau's quote tells us that the problem we are talking about is not new; there is nothing 'modern' about it.

But there is a difficulty with this diagnosis. From where do meaning and purpose come? Can one manufacture them? Can one will them into being? Surely, meaning and purpose must arise in a natural and organic manner from the substance and fabric of our lives, from the very manner in which we live. It seems to me that we need a different perspective to progress in this exploration.

Mental health and the 'individual'

There is a related question which we must ask. Is mental health to be thought of only in terms of the individual? Is it just an individual problem, to be solved by that individual? If so, then the best we can do is to help alleviate the symptoms, lessen the pain, and make life tolerable for that individual.

But it is surely not the case that the problem is at the individual level alone: it lies in our very ways of living. We are bringing the problem into existence by our collective way of living and thinking and relating to one another.

In a recent report, we hear Dr Vivek Murthy (Surgeon General of the United States) telling us that loneliness is not simply a bad feeling experienced by a person:

> *Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health…the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished.*

As Krishnamurti has pointed out, the problem is with human consciousness itself, which is fragmented and lacks wholeness. He maintains that wholeness is the well-spring of vitality and a sense of well-being.

What does it mean to be whole?

To take this line of thinking further, we can ask a different question altogether: *What does it mean to be 'whole'? What is the connection between wholeness and a 'healthy mind'? If there is a connection, how does it manifest, how does it work?*

We shall try to make sense of the notion of wholeness by asking what it is to be not whole. How does a lack of wholeness manifest in our lives?

Lack of wholeness really means the following: *To be fragmented, inwardly as well as outwardly; to be isolated within some fragment; to be specialised.* A careful look at life around us reveals that fragmentation and specialisation have now become a hallmark of human existence. We see an exaggerated emphasis given to a part of oneself, or to a fragment of our lives, each leading to an exaggerated specialisation. We see the worship of success, power, status, knowledge and talent, and a preoccupation with identity, symbols, pleasure, ideas and the will. It is an endlessly repeated theme in the world as it is constituted currently. But such exaggerated emphasis to a fragment of life destroys the balance and harmony that are vital to sane living and vital to peace. It denies wholeness. We are moving away from the wellspring and vitality of the whole, from its joyful momentum. It seems inevitable that our minds will get twisted and lose the quality of simplicity.

Educating for a different way of living

Krishnamurti places a great deal of emphasis on being rightly educated in order to go beyond the trap of fragmentation. In 'Intent of the Krishnamurti Schools' we read the following:

> *It is becoming more and more important in a world that is destructive and degenerative that there should be a place, an oasis, where one can learn a way of living that is whole, sane, and intelligent.* [Ojai, 1984]

Note the words: *whole, sane, intelligent.* We naturally ask, what is sanity? What is intelligence? K has elaborated on this theme on innumerable occasions. In the passage below, he talks about the serious impact of one-sided education.

> *What we now call education is a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books. Such education offers a subtle form of escape from ourselves and, like all escapes, it inevitably creates misery. Conflict and confusion result from wrong relationship with people, things, and ideas, and until we understand that relationship and alter it, mere learning, the gathering of facts and the acquiring of various skills, can only lead us to engulfing chaos and destruction.*
>
> —Chapter 2, 'Education and the Significance of Life'

He goes on to pose this challenge to teachers:

> *You've got so many students here—capable, intelligent. Through what means, what kind of attitude, what kind of verbal explanation, would you educate them*

in a holistic way of living? I mean by 'holistic,' whole, unbroken, not splintered up, not fragmented, as most of our lives are. [How] do you bring about a holistic way of living, an outlook that's not fragmented in specializations?

—'The Future is Now', 7 December 1985, 2nd Dialogue with teachers, Rishi Valley

Let us look separately at three fragmentary phenomena, the worship of knowledge, the preoccupation with identity and the worship of power in human society.

Knowledge

Krishnamurti speaks somewhat enigmatically about the place of knowledge in education:

A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations. It is a place where one learns to observe the world, to look at the whole of man's endeavour, his search for beauty, his search for truth and for a way of living without conflict. ...

—'Intent of the K Schools', Ojai, 1984

Note the juxtaposition: 'importance of knowledge' and 'limitations of knowledge.' Why do we worship skill and knowledge, and what makes us misuse knowledge with such great ease? In every field of human activity we see, with Jacob Bronowski, that *the most powerful drive in the ascent of man is pleasure in his own skill.* But what is the right place in our lives for this pleasure, this drive?

The story of the development of the H-bomb is a grim example and an extremely interesting one. To develop such a bomb, we need to generate extraordinarily high temperatures in a very small region; this is what enables hydrogen atoms to fuse together and release large amounts of energy. The calculations and technical difficulties involved were formidable, but finally, a breakthrough was made. The elegance of the solution impressed many scientists, and the physicist Robert Oppenheimer called the idea 'technically sweet.'

However, it is my judgment in these things that when you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it, and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success. That's the way it was with the atomic bomb. ...

This theme has recurred so many times throughout history. Humankind delights in ideas and theories that are technically sweet, no matter how destructive they are to human beings or to the world of animals and birds and forests and the ocean. Their allure is far too great.

And yet, life is not a specialisation. Krishnamurti says:

> *In this specialised world, where specialists are in demand—scientists, mathematicians, lawyers, doctors, technicians, and so on—every specialisation, though it may create a certain type of intelligence, is not the intelligence of the whole process of living. It is only a fragmentary type of intelligence, a specialisation. But life is not a specialisation, it is a total thing which involves sorrow, pain, desire, conflict, discontent, despair, affection, jealousy, greed, ambition, and death—the whole of it. One has to understand this whole, not just one part of it. To understand this whole, with all its astonishing variety, nuances, subtleties, and extraordinary beauty, one must have total intelligence, not a specialised intelligence.*
>
> —Public Discussion 6, Saanen, 9 August 1964

And this is what the purpose of education is: to understand life as a whole. When a child once asked of Krishnamurti, 'Why must I read?' he did not deny the knowledge and joy to be gained by reading, but placed it simply as one among a whole range of activities in human living:

> *Why must you read? Just listen … You never ask why you must play, why you must eat, why you must look at the river, why you are cruel? You rebel and ask why you must do something only when you don't like to do it. But reading, playing, laughing, being cruel, being good, seeing the river, the clouds—all this is part of life; and if you don't know how to read, if you are unable to appreciate the beauty of a leaf, you are not living. You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it. That is why you must read, that is why you must [also] look at the skies, that is why you must sing, and dance, and write poems, and suffer, and understand; for all that is life.*
>
> Chapter 3, 'Think on These Things'

Identity

Another human preoccupation is to hold on to a certain identity, an identity circumscribed by words and symbols and beliefs. Do we understand why we do this? Are we aware that these are various forms of illusion? When we do this, are we aware that we are taking comfort in an idea? While we

may believe that our 'identity' defines us as an 'individual', Krishnamurti questions this assumption:

> *Obviously, we are not truly individuals. We may each have a different name, different tendencies, a particular house, a particular bank account, we may each belong to a particular family, have certain mannerisms, belong to a certain religion—but that does not make for individuality. Our whole mind is the result of the environmental influences of a particular society, of a particular culture, of a particular religion; and so long as it belongs to any of these particularities, obviously the mind is not simple, is not innocent in its directness. Surely a clear, simple mind is essential, if we are to find out what is real. ——*
>
> —Amsterdam, 2nd Public Talk, 19 May 1955

Do we see that identification—with religion, nationality, some experience or some aspect of one's birth—is due to some accidental factors operating in our lives? It may be difficult to do so, given that we invest so heavily in identification. It may be difficult even to see the suffering brought about by identification and attachment. When we link our entire sense of well-being with identification, it naturally becomes difficult to inquire into it with any degree of objectivity. A question such as 'why is there such a deep attachment to identity?' becomes impossible to answer. But if we are concerned with psychological well-being at a larger and deeper level, then we must confront this question. We must ask, 'what are the consequences of this identification?' Krishnamurti points out that:

> *It is fear that makes for identification—identification with another, with a group, with an ideology, and so on. Fear must resist, suppress; and in a state of self-defence, how can there be venturing on the uncharted sea? Truth or happiness cannot come without undertaking the journey into the ways of the self. You cannot travel far if you are anchored. Identification is a refuge. A refuge needs protection, and that which is protected is soon destroyed. Identification brings destruction upon itself, and hence the constant conflict between various identifications.*
>
> —Series I, Chapter 2, 'Identification', Commentaries on Living

Power

We come to the third phenomenon referred to above—the worship of power—which has been with us for thousands of years. The following two well-known quotes illustrate how strongly we hold on to this tendency.

> *Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*
>
> —Lord Acton

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

—Abraham Lincoln

What makes us hunger after power, and hold on to it so obstinately? Here is Krishnamurti on power:

I think we ought to talk about something of which some of us may be aware, namely, the peculiar desire for power over others and over oneself which most of us have.

I think that power is one of the deeper desires behind which really lies that fear which comes from a sense of loneliness, a sense of frustration. What I am saying may be difficult, but please listen. If one can understand this and go beyond, then there is a different kind of state in which love is. If one has not that love, life becomes dull, weary, empty, and shallow.

I think it is important to understand this thing that we call power—not electric power or steam power, not the capacity to do something efficiently—which are all necessary. I am talking of something which is of greater significance and of much deeper value, and without understanding which, efficiency, the capacity of doing things, becomes a means of creating greater misery, greater suffering for man.

—Talks to Students at Rajghat School, 18 January, Banaras, India

It is interesting that the capacity to do things efficiently can become a means of creating greater misery and suffering for humankind, if we do not understand the phenomenon of power and why we seek it so badly.

Krishnamurti now poses a direct challenge to us: can we live without the desire for power and the desire to dominate others? In asking this he introduces an unusual word not to be found in any dictionary—but a word that holds great beauty and promise.

You have to see if you can live in this world without dominating people, without controlling people, without shaping their minds. Because, after all, each one of us is as important as the politician, the wielder of power; each one of us wants to grow in freedom so that we can be what we are, so that we can understand what we are and, from that, act so that we are not imposed upon by society or by our teachers or by our parents or by any other person who is trying to dominate and shape our particular lives. It is very difficult to withstand all this because we ourselves, each one of us, want power. The teacher wants to become the principal, because the principal has power over so many people and he has more money.

When you are controlled by another through money, through position, through status, the feeling that you are an individual, a human being, a single unit, is completely denied, destroyed. Whereas, it seems to me, it is very important in a school of this kind, that we should create a feeling that this is our school, yours, and mine, in the sense that you, as a student, are as important as the teacher or the principal. This feeling of ourness does not exist anywhere in the world, the feeling that this is our earth, yours, and mine, not the Russians' or the Americans' or the English or the Africans', the feeling that it is our world, not a communist world or a socialist world or a capitalist world, the feeling that it is our earth in which you and I and others can live and be free to find out the whole significance of living.

— Talks to Students at Rajghat School, 18 January, Banaras, India

The word we are referring to which is not in any dictionary is 'ourness'. He continues:

I think this is the only spirit that is going to save the world, not clever scientific inventions but the sense that you and I are creating together in a world which is ours. But that is very difficult to come by because, now, everything is mine and not yours, the mine being divided into many classes, many holdings, many functions, many nationalities. That feeling of ourness does not exist in this world. Without that feeling, we will have no peace in the world. Therefore, it is very important that you, while you are young, should understand this and have this feeling, so that when you go out into the world, you can create a new world and a new generation.

—Talks to Students at Rajghat School, 18 January, Banaras, India

It becomes our responsibility to nurture such a culture in our educational centres. Can we not free ourselves from these bondages of knowledge, identity and power? We must, if there is to be collective security on Earth and if we are to live healthy, sane and happy lives.

Empathetic Listening

SUCHITRA RAMKUMAR

Seeing, Observing, Listening, these are the greatest acts.

—J Krishnamurti

This article is based on the work of Carl Rogers. I first encountered him when I trained to be a counsellor and he was truly inspirational. I found a lot of resonance between what he was saying and what Krishnamurti was pointing to regarding relationships and listening—*an acceptance of what is, observing all emotions and realities with interest and without judgement.* The aim of this article is to sensitize all of us adults who teach young people to the challenges and possibilities of cultivating genuine empathetic relationships with adolescents, so that we too may grow and learn with them. I will outline what I have understood as being essential for empathetic listening and will freely quote from Rogers. I will add some comments based on my experiences in counselling and teaching adolescents. I will also raise some questions for us to consider.

I begin with this poem written by a 16-year-old girl:

> You taught me, and I gained some knowledge.
> You looked after my physical needs, and I felt grateful.
> You spoke a kind word to me, and I felt comforted.
> You listened to me, and I felt heard.
> I learnt to listen to myself.
>
> —Anonymous

This is a clear statement of what listening does to another!

Rogers is considered the architect of the 'Humanistic' school of counselling that is based on empathetic listening. His life, research and writings have

contributed immensely to this field. We may ask: what is its relevance to our lives, especially our lives as teachers? Basically, it means that if we really listened to each other and to children, we would not need counsellors. Our children and students would experience a much more secure emotional base. Moreover, according to Rogers, "listening is a growth experience" for the listener and the one listened to.

Rogers defines empathetic listening as having three basic elements.

1. **Empathy:** This means understanding another individual in their own frame of reference. It involves being sensitive to whatever he or she is experiencing. Most importantly it means NOT making judgments or imposing one's frame of reference on another. Rogers says that "each response of mine contains the unspoken question, 'Am I catching just the colour and texture and flavour of the way you are experiencing right now?' If not, I wish to bring my perception in line with yours." For only then can the adult be in tune with the adolescent.

2. **Congruence:** This in other words means genuineness or authenticity of one's response. Rogers states that, "congruence is the term used to describe a condition when a listener 'is what he *is*' in the relationship. That is, in the relationship with the person, a listener is 'genuine' and without a 'front' or a 'façade', openly being the feelings and attitudes which at that moment are flowing *in* him—a unified, or integrated, or congruent person." This is a rare quality, for it means that as I listen, I need to be aware of my own feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, with complete honesty. *Only after that*, do I take a decision on what is best to communicate. This second element as defined by Rogers, is often lacking in adult life. In the guise of 'niceness' or 'appropriateness', honesty with one's own responses is not only denied but also justified. This leads to the presence of the 'overt' and the 'covert' in human conversation and behaviour. This aspect of adults is what adolescents are most sceptical about. Their growing cognitive and perceptive abilities often helps them perceive adults for who they are. When the adult does not reciprocate in honesty, there is a sense of disappointment that is often expressed as anger.

In working with young people, do we assume that we need to be 'nice' or have an 'acceptable' response to what they may say? Is there another way of relating with them?

3. **Unconditional Positive Regard:** This means, in Roger's words, "a respect…for him as a separate person, a willingness for him to possess

his own feelings in his own way….an acceptance of his attitudes of the moment, no matter how negative or positive….entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it ...being sensitive moment to moment to the changing felt meanings which flow in the other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion. This kind of acceptance of the other person makes it for him a relationship of warmth and safety."

This way of relating with our students would create a very different atmosphere between adults and adolescents. Is it possible for concerned adults to work towards such an ethos in a school?

What is involved in 'listening'?

I now discuss some important considerations in listening.

Meaning and listening: Rogers emphasizes, "any message a person tries to send usually has two components—the concept of the message and the feeling or attitude underlying this content. Both are important—both give the message meaning. It is the total meaning of the message that we try to understand." Krishnamurti too suggests, "So, when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it." Our responses typically start from the sensation (a physical feeling resulting from something that happens to, or comes into contact with, the body). Our inner recognition and interpretation of sensation creates perception. Perception is a selection, organization, naming, and interpretation of the external world, as well as of oneself, and that is not a perfect representation of what is happening. There is the awakening of emotional responses, thinking and memory. This is our inner world of experience. All our experiences and our conditioning, i.e., our habitual responses, create our inner world of meaning and belief vis-a-vis the outer world, ourselves, and another. Hence, there are two questions we could keep in mind when confronted with a situation with our students:

- *Can we become more aware of our sensations and how they convert into perceptions and inner realities?*
- *Can we see how these inner realities influence our perceptions in this (or any) situation?*

Importance of the non-verbal: Listening involves observing the speaker's non-verbal behaviour such as voice, inflection, expression, and gestures, as well as understanding the speaker's verbal messages. Empathetic Listening

is listening to the meaning of the words, as well as to the intent and the implied (which is often imagined!). From the perspective of the student, when the non-verbal is contrary to the verbal, as often happens when we are just being 'nice and polite' (but could be seething within!), it causes confusion in the listener. It can be termed 'inauthentic appropriateness' and leads to miscommunication and reaction.

Can we become aware of how these pretences operate in us, and do we recognize it when adolescents react to this?

Self-narratives and listening: Krishnamurti often points out that we operate in our relationships through the images that we hold of each other. Rogers too says that "through all of our lives, from early childhood on…we have built up pictures of ourselves. Sometimes these self-pictures are pretty realistic, but at other times they are not. These self-pictures are not necessarily attractive. A man, for example, may regard himself as incompetent and worthless. He must hold on to this self-picture because, bad or good, it is the only thing he has by which he can identify himself." In empathetic listening, since there is no criticism, moralizing or judgement, a person is able to explore his or her own narrative, see it for what it is. In a threatening atmosphere, on the other hand, there can be no effective communication and possibility of change, since there is likely to be only a defensive reaction.

Are we able to provide such a non-threatening space while listening to our adolescent students?

Listening to ourselves: Most importantly, Rogers points to the fact that one's ability to listen to another is remarkably similar to the way one listens to oneself. It's all about just listening; to oneself or another and to both simultaneously. "Listening to ourselves: This is a prerequisite to listening to others. The ability to recognize and understand the meaning which a particular episode has for you, with all the feelings which it stimulates in you…that is, if some person or situation touches off feelings within you which tend to block your attempts to listen with understanding, begin listening to yourself."

So, can I listen to myself, even as I listen to another?

Attitude of active listening: Empathetic listening is active listening; it is not a passive process. It may require changes in our own basic attitudes; changes that are not easy. It cannot be employed as a technique if the listener's fundamental attitudes are not rooted in a genuine respect for another—their intrinsic worth, and capacity for change and growth. To be effective

in active listening, one must be sincerely interested in the speaker and what they are experiencing. If we are only pretending to be interested, the other person understands this and will no longer share freely. Roger underlines the demands of empathetic listening, "…it takes a great deal of inner security and courage to be able to risk one's self in understanding another… Sometimes, if the discussion is a personal one, you may have to see yourself as the other person sees or experiences you, and this can be very threatening to your 'self-image'. However, if you can accomplish this, it can be extremely valuable for you to discover the discrepancy between how you see yourself and how another sees you".

Can I be vulnerable enough to let the other person show me what they are in fact seeing about me?

Genuine expression of feelings: Caring confrontations: Often in our relationships, we avoid genuine expressions of feelings, for this often masks an inability to accept and deal with the so-called negative feelings of irritation, anger, fear etc., which may arise. It also leads to the inability for 'caring confrontations', where one can be with those feelings and yet be related. It leads to 'private' internal conversations rather than 'open' ones, and this results in unhealthy modes of decision-making and much sorrow and mistrust in human relationships. Rogers offers that, "genuine expression of feelings on the part of the listener will be more helpful in developing a sound relationship than the suppression of them—whether they be resentment, hostility, threat, or admiration. Keep this in mind when you begin to fear a clash of personalities in the listening relationship—otherwise, fear of your own emotions will choke off full expression of feelings." The adolescent is particularly sensitive to these 'games' and sometimes they can also ruthlessly point it out.

Can I be authentic in communicating what I am feeling, in a way that is not judgmental of the other? Can I risk a 'confrontation' that may eventually lead to better mutual understanding?

Barriers to good listening

As will be evident from the above considerations, there are some key barriers that come in the way of 'good listening. I summarize these here:

- Evaluation and judgment of the other is clearly a barrier to listening.
- We may not be observant of and sensitive to the non-verbal, and so miss a great deal.

- Even if we do pay attention to this, at times we may over-interpret the non-verbal.
- Our own emotional insecurities and resulting defensiveness about ourselves and our viewpoints get in the way.
- We may feel resentful of views that may be in opposition to what we think or expect from another.
- Interruptions and distractions (such as the buzzing cell phone!) can also get in the way of paying attention to what is being communicated.
- Moreover, not being aware of one's own responses as one listens—our feelings, thoughts, biases and beliefs—makes the quality of our listening 'top-down' rather than 'congruent'.

Krishnamurti highlights such difficulties too, "we listen either with pleasure, with distaste, or with a formula of ideas, a philosophy which we have cultivated, or have learned. Through these screens we listen, interpreting, translating, putting aside what we don't like, keeping what we like, and the act of listening never takes place."

Carl Rogers himself has two suggestions to offer:

- "Because understanding another person is actually far more difficult than it at first seems, it is important to test constantly your ability to see the world in the way the speaker sees it. You can do this by reflecting in your own words what the speaker seems to mean by his words and actions. His response to this will tell you whether or not he feels understood."
- "The next time you become involved in a lively or controversial discussion with another person, stop for a moment and suggest the following ground rule. Before either participant can make a point or express an opinion of his own, he must first restate aloud the previous point, position, and meaning of the other person. This must be in the responder's own words and be accurate enough to satisfy the speaker, so that he believes he has been understood. Then the listener can be allowed to speak for himself. This may seem tedious at first, but it can be very rewarding. Note the changes in the emotional climate and quality of the discussion when you try this."

Over the years, in journeying with empathetic listening, I have found it useful to ask myself some questions to become more aware of the quality of my interactions and relationships. For instance, in any encounter with a

student I could try to become conscious of the following:

- *How am I feeling right now? Am I indifferent or tired?*
- *What are the sensations I'm experiencing?*
- *What are my thoughts?*
- *What are my narratives about this particular student?*
- *What's happening with the student?*
- *What are the feelings that the student is expressing?*
- *What values are operative in my interaction?*
- *How are my values and attitudes being expressed in my non-verbal behaviour?*
- *Am I able to listen to his/ her point of view even if it challenges mine, or even if I must differ and confront him/her?*

Another more general question that is useful to ask ourselves regarding an adolescent student we perceive as 'difficult' would be, *'Are we focused more on deviant/non-conformist behaviour in the adolescent or are we able to see and listen to him/her as a whole person?'* For a concerned teacher, empathetic listening would reflect this attitude: *You are important to me. You are worthy of my time and attention. You are saying something that I am interested in hearing.*

To sum up, for me empathetic listening is an attitude, a commitment, as well as a skill I need to develop. It is also a lifelong journey.

A Living and Learning Space
Approaches to education in a Krishnamurti school

VAISHNAVI NARAYANAN

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Relationship: Looking inward

When we look at the word 'relationship,' we immediately think of someone or something outside of us. Krishnamurti said:

> Life is relationship, living is relationship. We cannot live if you and I have built a wall around ourselves and just peep over that wall occasionally. Unconsciously, deeply, under the wall, we are related. (Krishnamurti, 1972, np)[2]

It seems as though we can only have a relationship with that which is outside of us. In school, one is urged to look inward, and that means to look within, to uncover and understand the truth of our existence in relationship to all of life.

The school is a place of relationship with nature, with the adults and students around me and most importantly with myself. If I do not recognize the importance of engaging with myself, then I can, at best, be someone who carries out tasks in a functional manner without ever truly understanding the meaning of why I do what I do. To be related, for me, is to be sensitive, aware, and attentive.

My mind captures images of everything and stores them as memories, adding to my knowledge. These often come in the way of my relationship

with others as the mind tends to operate from these images. Thought gives its own description to what I observe, and I need to be aware of that, of that movement in my mind. A colleague once asked me as we were talking over a Krishnamurti text, "How can one stop thoughts from coming? It is impossible, isn't it?"

At another time, during a retreat, when I asked the same question of another participant, the answer I got made me pause for a while and see if there was something that one could do. "Watch your thoughts and as they come, watch them pass you as you would watch the waters of a river flow. When it is passed, you know it is not there anymore." These words have stayed with me, and though I have not been able to do it as often as I would like to, I have tried to watch my own thoughts and it has been a revealing experience. I see how caught up I am in defining my identity and holding on to it, for fear that without that identity, I will be nothing. I can only say that in my tryst with the Krishnamurti school and way of education, I have always been able to begin from where I am at that point of time. This is an opportunity to look inward and see how I relate to myself.

Krishnamurti has often spoken about cooperation and what it means to 'come together' as teachers in the work they do in the space of the school. This is not easy, as each individual is a different person, but if one were to look at the school and its work, then these individual identities somewhere melt into the background, leaving behind the purpose and intent of the school. Staff meetings are spaces that create the impetus to exchange ideas and discuss with an open mind about possibilities in school. Events that happen in school are usually organized without a 'duty list' that outlines specific tasks for each one to do. At such times, everyone takes charge of different areas of work and brings in their strengths to make things 'happen' the way they should.

Another example would be when the school relocated to its current campus a couple of years ago. All staff and students moved with the school to the new location, unmindful of the fact that the new campus is at quite a distance from the city. New schedules and structures had to be created, keeping in mind the variables that had changed. This might seem like an irrelevant detail for it is quite obvious that any institution, for that matter, has to work with change, and there is sometimes no choice in the evolution of these structures. To me, the move to the new campus is a reflection of the relationship each one has with the school, its spirit and what it has brought

to individual lives in inexplicable ways. A mammoth task such as relocating a 'living and working' school is not possible without the fine thread of relationship that binds each one to that space.

> *Communication is not only the exchange of words, however articulate and clear those words may be; it is much deeper than that. Communication is learning from each other, understanding each other; and this comes to an end when you have taken a definite stand about some trivial or not fully thought-out act.* (Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch.37, np)[3]

It is important to understand communication when one speaks of relationship. All relationship takes its birth in the bedrock of affection and respect. In school, we are in a relationship of learning with the student, with each other and the school itself.

There can be no relationship if there is assertiveness, authority, and mere acceptance of that. Krishnamurti has often said that relationship is the mirror in which we discover ourselves. He even says that without relationship one cannot exist. What does he mean when he says this? Perhaps it is to delve within and find out for ourselves, to be self-aware, to understand my pretences, fears, and motives. It is to uncover the ugliness that I do not wish to engage with. The true acceptance of oneself is the first step towards embracing another. When the ego dies, the self disappears and the 'other' becomes visible.

> *Life cannot be without relationship. If we can deeply understand the problem of relationship between oneself and another, then perhaps we shall understand and solve the problems of society, for society is but the extension of ourselves. The environment which we call society is created by past generations; we accept it, as it helps us to maintain our greed, possessiveness, illusion. In this illusion there cannot be unity or peace. As long as we do not understand individual relationship, we cannot have a peaceful society.* (Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch. 67, np)[4]

Learning: A continuum

I write this paper at a time when the world is going through a crisis, the crisis of the pandemic. Never before have we been challenged like we are now. We need evolution. Krishnamurti said:

> Learning is one thing and acquiring knowledge is another. Learning is a continuous process, not a process of addition, not a process which you gather and then from there act. Most of us gather knowledge as memory, as idea, store it up as experience, and from there act.

> That is, we act from knowledge, technological knowledge, knowledge as experience, knowledge as tradition, knowledge that one has derived through one's particular idiosyncratic tendencies; with that background, with that accumulation as knowledge, as experience, as tradition, we act. In that process there is no learning. Learning is never accumulative; it is a constant movement. (Krishnamurti, 1964, np)[5]

The absence of human contact, the fear and anxiety of getting affected by the virus and the reality of immeasurable loss, have had their impact on the physical and emotional well-being of all individuals. The school is like an oasis at this time, a place that has helped many of us just visit it to feel alive again.

The school, a place I have walked into every day, taking in the sights of children walking down the path as they get off the bus, laughing and talking as they make their way to their classes. I have often wondered what it is that they talk about and engage with in such delight. Sometimes, I have asked them too. The responses have sometimes led to questions around entertainment, pleasure, and how we understand them.

In the assembly hall as we sit down to sing together, songs of different languages, regions, written by poets over time, there is an energy that is felt, as it reverberates through the physical space into our very being. We all sit together, unmindful of who is next to us, singing softly or sometimes listening to others sing, but engaged in this act of coming together. Questions that are raised at this time are an attempt to bring to one's attention, one's responsibility to the school space. Discussions happen in this space, allowing for any question or idea that one may wish to examine. I remember in one assembly presentation a senior school student spoke about honesty and truth. At the end of that presentation, a ten-year old middle schooler raised his hand and asked, "Are you always able to speak the truth? I want to know because I feel that truth hurts and it is not easy to speak it." The question was asked in all its seriousness and with the intent to understand the other person's stance on it. The senior school student responded saying that it was not easy and maybe that is why it was important to speak the truth. Conversations are never conclusive and in the living quality of a moment when a question is asked, it always leaves behind it the trail of further questioning.

> *Truth is living, it is not static, and the mind that would discover truth must also be living, not burdened with knowledge or experience. Then only is there that state in which truth can come into being.* (Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch. 26, np)[6]

Sitting together and having breakfast and lunch makes the simple act of eating so much more meaningful. Again, the table has students and teachers in a mix from across the school. To appreciate the effort of those who make the food for you is seen in the gentle reminders that students give each other if they see anyone wasting food. Likes and dislikes take a back seat, and the food is eaten because someone made it for you. Even food is used as an analogy to sometimes understand life. I remember this instance when a student pointed out that the beetroot always bled into the rest of the dishes on his plate making them all pink. To which a senior school student replied, "Don't you think that's something like life? No experience is independent in itself. It always has its shade from another and leads to another." I still think of this student who passed out of school a long time ago, and this nugget of wisdom that he shared that day over lunch is something that has stayed with me.

A place that always sees action and vigour is the games field. This is the place where comparison and competition rear their heads often. Tears from a lost game often find their space in the classroom after games is over. A conversation to reflect upon questions of aggression, fair play and inclusion helps to understand oneself. To play well and play hard without feeling the pressure to meet others expectations and to give one's best to a game is a learning that finds its expression in cooperative games. One such instance of a cooperative game that comes to my mind is of carrying a small cup filled with water by a group of students balancing the cup in the middle on a flat base to which varying lengths of threads had been attached with each end held by a student of the group. It took patience and slowing down for the group to figure out how to do this together. As one student remarked later, "It was just a matter of understanding each other's strengths, Akka. Once we knew that, we knew how to go about the activity with ease." Discovering for oneself and helping others see it too, there is immense learning there.

> *One is always comparing oneself with another, comparing one painting with another. There is comparison between the greater power and the lesser, between the timid and the aggressive. This constant measurement of power, position, wealth begins almost at birth and continues throughout life. This comparison is one of the many aspects of violence. The word more is always comparative, as is the word better. The question is: can the educator put aside all comparison, all measurement, in his teaching?* (Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch. 26, np)[7]

Working together in the kitchen, making dishes or doing dishes, all of it brings to the fore the quality of 'livingness' to a classroom. One has to engage with the discomfort of doing things that one may not be used to doing. Breaking free of habit and paying attention to what needs to be done is a vibrant experience in itself. Cleaning the classroom, putting away things in their rightful places and doing something for the common spaces is a step away from the 'self.' Doing something for others, be it laying the table for lunch or putting away the *chowkies* (traditional Indian chairs) in class; all these create the climate for learning from doing seemingly insignificant acts.

> *Order can be brought about by watchfulness throughout the day, and then, before sleeping, by putting everything that has been done during the day in order. In that way the brain does not go to sleep in disorder.* (Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch. 72, np)[8]

A middle school student once asked while doing the dishes, "Why do we have to clean everyone's plates? Why don't we just get a dishwasher, Akka?" I did not respond and waited to see if someone would pick the thread of conversation. Sure enough, there was a response, "A dishwasher uses too much water, do you think we should waste water?" I waited a little more and another voice piped up, "I think that everything we do in school is done together and this is one more such thing. I like it." I had not intervened in this conversation yet and listened to see if more voices will express their understanding. A student who usually never talks surprisingly spoke and said, "If we don't do it, the Akkas and Annas in the kitchen will have to do this job too. Don't you think we all are responsible for the school?"

The washing continued after this with nothing more added. I smiled for I had not said a word and the students had themselves figured out the importance of doing something for another, of putting aside one's discomfort and doing a task because it needs to be attended to and done. These are the moments when one sees how a Krishnamurti school is different in its approach to learning for it is about all of life, with all its beauty, challenge, and conflict. There is no running away from it all and the mere acceptance of something paves the way forward to engage and learn from whatever comes our way. It is not experience that is important but what it leaves behind in the mind of the learner, something more than the mere accumulation of knowledge, which can be limiting.

The school trips are a way of further seeing the world in all its colours. These experiences are not to tell the students that there exists a world

'outside' of school but to actually and closely examine the fact that the school is located very much in that world. These experiences are also not to create an idyllic setting or to define 'ideas' and 'ideals' that can be problematic in themselves. The intention is to appreciate life, to see the beauty in the ugliness, to be sensitive and sensible, to be accepting and non-judgmental and to see the immense possibilities that life holds for an individual.

I remember one of the school trips to Kotagiri, a small town in the hills of Ooty, where we had gone to study the Toda tribe and learn about their lives. As we went into the Shola forest, there was a quiet and silence that was almost physically palpable. When we neared the sacred space of the Todas, the person who was guiding us told us how the spirit of the forest took care of their needs and that this space was a celebration of the spirit. They had rituals and celebrations once a year to worship the forest spirit and only the men folk participated in these rituals. We were quiet as we listened to him. Upon our return the students had many questions. "Why do people believe in a spirit? Isn't that also a kind of religion?" "How did the idea of god and worship reach a tribe that lives deep in the forest?" "Looks like we are all quite the same, whether we live in the city or far away from it. There is gender bias in a tribe too!" The discussion continued and there were further comments that appreciated the tribe, about how respectful these people were of their environment and how simple their lifestyle was. Observations and questions kept the group thinking and discussing their understanding of this hill tribe that was part of the larger world too. It was enriching to just listen and observe the earnestness of a group of young adults trying to make sense of the world, to see the nuances and identify how at a certain level all humans were essentially the same.

The pedagogies and the structures in a Krishnamurti school are created with the intent of recognizing the limitation of knowledge and engaging with each moment as it unfolds itself before us. I have said this earlier in my writing and I repeat: the school is a place of learning for both the student and the adult, for unless we examine ourselves in the light of all the knowledge we have accumulated, we will not engage authentically with the dynamic quality of learning.

As an educator, I have to engage with my fears, questions, and uncertainties even as I engage with those of the students. It is not that the former has to be resolved and then the latter can be attended to. It happens moment to moment, in our lives—of both the adult and the student.

When Krishnamurti talks about learning, he talks about life. It is in the living of life that one learns. It is in the teaching of a subject that I engage with fear, anger, disappointment, and elation. If I do not engage with these questions, as and when they emerge, then my work as a teacher holds no meaning.

In closing

All the instances and experiences that I have shared in this paper are a reflection of my journey as a teacher and of my growth as a person. Every interaction and conversation that I have had in the space of the school has always left me with further questions and the urge to enquire. I have had the time to examine these questions around education and engage in dialogue with colleagues and others who are interested in this journey of 'being' and not reaching somewhere. There are those meaningful pauses that allow for reflection and each pause gives expression to a new question.

I have often heard from teachers who work in other schools that this approach to learning and to understanding life is only possible in a Krishnamurti school, that this space, this leisure, is not present in 'non-Krishnamurti' schools for adults to come together and examine with serious intent and reflect upon the essence of one's living and being. That is my attempt in writing this paper, for educators everywhere, that as long as one is serious about one's question, the path for its exploration emerges in that sincere attempt to inquire, and that many of these practices I have mentioned in my paper, can be followed and structures created for education to enable, as Krishnamurti says, the 'flowering of goodness.' It is also interesting that all these questions take their birth in a place like The School, abuzz with much activity and the daily humdrum of being with children! This is my tryst with Krishnamurti's teachings.

> *There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.* (Krishnamurti, 2018, para.152)[8]

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Some thoughts on

What is Care?

What is care?

VENKATESH ONKAR

The waking day seems full of emotional reactivity. We react to others' opinions on a multitude of issues—political, religious, ecological, aesthetic, occupational. This reactivity can keep us happily (or unhappily) occupied for much of the day. Then we react to others' opinions and judgements of ourselves as people. These opinions may not literally be articulated on an hourly basis, but we have an uncanny ability to remember others' judgements of ourselves. The body and mind can plunge into a reactive loop to a memory or a perception of judgement. The funny thing is, even a positive reaction (agreeing to someone's opinion, for example) seems to strengthen the centre of reactivity, strengthen the predisposition to reactivity of all kinds. And, when a person who earlier articulated a 'happy' opinion now articulates a painful one, the knot is intensified.

We react to relationships. I perceive that I am ignored by another and this sets off painful thoughts and emotions. Or, even if I react positively to a relationship (with pleasure), then there is fear of loss and also a fear that the 'pleasure person' will begin to contradict themselves and thus hurt us.

When K talks about total listening or attention, I wonder whether this is a positive act—something I have to stiffen my muscles, strain my eyes and ears and nostrils, and focus my psychological energy to attain—or rather, is it merely a lack of reactivity, a natural openness or pre-existing awareness that just notices and allows the world and mind to happen without reactive loops draining energy?

The same analogy occurs to me with regard to care. Care does have positive behavioural attributes—helping behaviours, a generous outlook. There are such things as kind habits, I think. But I also wonder: is care, very simply, a lack of reactivity? If I don't react, then the other—person, animal, tree— is simply and automatically present in their wholeness, their authenticity, in my consciousness. When they are present and I don't react, I have a different response to them than when I react to them through memory, images, pleasure and pain. Since this response lacks the mechanical quality of reactions, one may call it care.

The thought 'I *must* care for others, for nature, I must be responsible, sensitive, etc, etc,.' is a very tortured and complex thought. Paradoxically, it produces a self, a centre, which is then trying to convince itself that it must care. Guilt, resentment, anger are the by-products of this rather violent thought that insists that it must care. Since I don't generally know the 'thoughtless' or non-reactive care, I then overly insist on thought-reaction-care even more and thus intensify the loop of division and reactivity.

How then to be non-reactive, so that I can be a better caring person? This is a really funny question, because I think this very question is born from the same conditioned reactive centre that asks, how can I have more pleasure, more self-importance? It is a pretend-question, posturing as a question of compassion and care, with no authentic answer.

What is it to care?

ALOK MATHUR

In asking the question, 'what is it to care?', I also wonder what it means 'to be cared for?' We readily recognize, for instance, that children need to be cared for, as do our aging parents. Children need adults who are engaged and responsive, looking out for their physical, emotional, and mental well-being, perhaps on occasion worrying about them, even at times scolding them for something or the other. And yet the young need the space to feel, to think, to express themselves, and to grow in their own way. Parents who are aging feel cared for when their children (and grandchildren) are present for them, support them as their physical needs increase, and remain in close communication with them. And yet they too may need their own space to live out the days of their lives on their own terms.

To care, then, perhaps implies having an empathetic connection as well as space in my relationship with another. It is a feeling of concern that does not crystallize into a fixity of expectations. Care in a relationship can never be static. It demands alertness to my predilection to become self-enclosed, to project one's images, desires, or anxieties onto another. It manifests when there is affectionate watchfulness of what is happening with the other, and within myself. I may then be attentive and responsive to ever-changing situations as they present themselves each day.

There is also care outside the boundaries of human relationships. I could care for an animal or a plant, look after a pet dog or cat, a single plant in a pot, or a garden that needs tending. In paying attention to and looking after whatever it is that is cared for, I must put aside self-preoccupation, turn my gaze to that which is out there, and respond to

what is required to nourish life out there. In doing so, the feeling of care opens the heart and refreshes life within.

Is there also caring for the self? What could 'self-care' mean and how is it distinct from 'self-preoccupation'? There is of course a care for the body and its well-being. Self-care also suggests that one is aware of the movements of the 'self', allowing it space to reveal itself and tell its own moving, shifting, story. This is the 'human story', the story of all manner of human predilections that we carry within us, the pleasure, the pain, the fear, the sorrow, the joy and everything in between. Listening to this story—without reaction whenever possible—may allow for a measure of self-knowing as well as empathy and connection with people and with nature.

Beneath this on-going murmur and tumble of the human story, there may on occasion be an opening into that silent space in which the stream of life flows, life that expresses itself in myriad changing forms. Is it not in this shared life stream that care is born?

Tapestry of Care

ANANTHAJYOTHI

How did the chicken cross the road? While driving down a highway, I saw a mother hen expertly clucking her way across the road with her brood of chicken under her wings. It takes me a while to cross a road. She did it with such care and such confidence!

Monkeys seem such careless eaters. Yet, when they eat and scatter a half-eaten fruit, perhaps another tree grows. When a tree falls, it is the monkey that mourns. Like Richard Ford says, "It is no loss to mankind when one writer decides to call it a day. When a tree falls in the forest, who cares but the monkeys?" It is difficult to fathom what the forest thinks? I know this: If the forest were to choose between me and the monkey, it would choose the monkey.

A tendril lies forlorn on the ground. You plant a stick by its side. The sapling wraps itself around the support and grows strong and sturdy. The stick provides no water, no sunshine, no manure but just stands there till the tender shoot gathers its own momentum and place in the world. Caring sometimes is about just being there—even if the rest of the world thinks that you are nothing but a piece of dead wood.

In his poem 'Vultures', Chinua Achebe speaks about a vulture perched high on the broken bone of a dead tree and nestling lovingly with his mate. Should one marvel at finding love and care in such an unlikely place—a corner in the charnel house? He further speaks of a Commandant at Belsen Camp, who while heading home with the smell of burnt human flesh still clinging to his nostrils, stops by the wayside sweet shop to pick up a chocolate for his tender offspring waiting for his Daddy. Achebe asks

a poignant question at the end of the poem: Should we feel gratified that even in such a cruel world, there is this small spark of kindness and care; or should we despair that he who is so caring can also be very cruel?

…Praise bounteous
providence if you will
that grants even an ogre
a tiny glow-worm
tenderness encapsulated
in icy caverns of a cruel
heart or else despair
for in every germ
of that kindred love is
lodged the perpetuity
of evil.[1]

Seeing clothes drying on a line stirs something deep within. It is a great reminder that somebody has cared enough to wash away the weariness of the day. The fragrance and freshness of newly washed clothes always makes you ready to tackle another tough day!

Woven into the tapestry of life are these small nuggets of care which make the world a beautiful place. A Welsh poet WH Davies wrote:

A poor life this if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare…[2]

I would say:

Please take your time to stand and stare
It is a place so full of care.

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1 'Vultures', Chinua Achebe, *Beware Soul Brother, and Other Poems*, Heinemann, 1972.

2 'Leisure', WH Davies, *Songs of Joy and Others*, AC Fifield, 1911.

Care-raising times!

KAMALA MUKUNDA

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted my students to care about things. Care about your classmates, about your teachers, about the spaces at school, about the spiders and the snakes, the trees. As they grew older, I would want them to care about the whole wide world—waste, pollution, war, hunger, extinction. Actually, young children feel empathy very quickly and intensely for aspects of the natural and social world. I remember many impassioned speeches from them (*when I grow up, I'm going to take care of the whole world*), and also expressions of care and concern for little creatures, for trees, and at a later age, the quieter feeling of compassion for people whose lives are very difficult.

Raising awareness—to spark off feelings of care in others—is a part of my educational plan. Actually, it is my 'action', it is the thing that *I've* chosen to do in response to *my* feelings of empathy and care for the world! I think these days we're riding a wave of this kind of 'care-raising', if you will. Excellent books are being written for even very young children that sensitively introduce complex realities such as poverty and injustice. Other media, too, are being designed to evoke this sense in children early on. Educational curricula formally acknowledge this need as well. Blissful ignorance is now neither possible nor desirable for the young.

Today, thinking about the topic of care, I'm looking afresh at my eagerness to create exposure and tell the untold stories. For some students over the years, this sense of care in fact turns into a burdensome thing, a sadness that distorts their daily life. That's not the intention, although to be honest I prefer it to resignation (*well, that's just the way the world works*)

or denial (*there's so much to be glad for in the world, why be so negative all the time*).

Maybe it is when care cannot be followed by a positive action, that it remains an uncomfortable feeling within. That is unless some thought or other comes along that quietens the inner tension, or some action that releases it. For me, feelings of care seem to rise up in the midline of my ribcage, in response to all kinds of triggers. The feeling often translates into action when there is something immediate that I *can do*—write a letter, pick up the phone, give someone a hug.

But, I'm thinking now, it matters less whether or not action follows. It's just heart-warming every time a person—young or old—can have feelings of care about something other than their own interest! And if this feeling can be shared with others, could it not have its own ripple effect in the world?

1 William Stringfellow, *Count it All Joy,* 1999

Can I be the Fire and not the Frying Pan?

RAMESH PARTHASARATHY

To write on this elusive word 'care', where do I begin? 'Care' sometimes sounds like a reproach, at other times an admonition. *Better show care next time, take care, don't you see that I care*, and so on. Mostly we are put on the defensive. We are also asked to handle fragile things with care. We are advised to cross roads, drive vehicles 'with care'.

As soon as we are born, we become part of a religious, cultural and social ambience. Gods, rituals, food habits, kinship, school and the neighbourhood together make up what we are. Our world is primarily made up of parents, siblings and children and extends up to close friends and relatives. We 'care' for them in varying degrees. What is the nature of this care? To what extent can we be said to care beyond this small world? If you are a medical nurse, or even a relative or a friend who looks after the sick, you may be called a 'caregiver'. In all these contexts, personal interest and motive of some kind may exist (vocation, attachment to the person who is in need and so on).

But what of helping someone, say one's neighbour, without such motive? We do not love our neighbour in the abstract. When we see someone in pain and in need of help, we do what is necessary and leave it at that, like the good Samaritan of the parable. The good Samaritan does not go looking for his neighbour so that he could love him. He comes across someone in need of help and gives it. For some people, this seems to happen naturally; but for most of us it is a question of our energy levels, our commitment to doing the right thing, and at least a temporary holiday from self-absorption. Is this where care ends?

The following excerpt from Krishnamurti, at first glance, seems to meet our normal understanding of care:

> ...freedom implies responsibility. And therefore freedom, responsibility, means
>
> care, diligence, not negligence.
>
> —From Dialogue 4 with Prof. Andersen, San Diego, California, USA.

We do apply ourselves with a sense of responsibility, with diligence in many things we do. However, the *freedom* that Krishnamurti alludes to has a different level of demand. Does it mean being without any ties that bind, whether to persons, to ideas, or even to any sense of our own identity? For him, freedom to *respond* is the first step; it is also the last step, as *responsibility*. Diligence and care follow naturally. There is no personal motive.

Is it possible then to care for people, for the earth, without any 'reason' as it were?

To paraphrase Krishnamurti, the mind is a vast energy field and without boundaries, while our brain and its thinking are limited and operate from a centre. Is the challenge then for us to learn to function psychologically outside the brain, function with a wholeness of heart and mind? If that is so, deeply exploring this thing called the centre and, in the process, dissolving its hold, is what we in fact need to do. Only then will the energy of care, affection and love be released and take charge of everything we do!

The 'moral' of the story: *steer clear of the frying pan and its contents (brain and thought) and be the 'fire' (of care and love) that cooks.*

What is it to care?

VIJU JAITHIRTHA

There are certain questions where the answers cannot be a rehash of memory and experience. Is an 'answer' even required? The key word here, 'care', touches the confines of my brain like bubbles in those ancient screen savers! They touch the edges, dissolve, and a seemingly new bubble emerges to shoot aimlessly in a straight line. How expected and typical and…known. I think I can hold out for a while. There is space around this question. There is no pressure to perform.

I don't want to know what it means to care. I stare at the laptop screen. A quiet Sunday morning, faint bird calls, the loud hush of the fan, and a cool breeze entering the window. The heat of the question remains and as an escape and a distraction I turn to the etymology of the word. There is an explosion of information. The word 'care' in English has several ancestors. From Middle English to Old English, further back to the Germanic, to Old Norse and Old Saxon. It is interesting that in all these languages—and thus in these societies—the reference is to grief, sorrow, worry anxiety, lament, the sickbed. Is this the 'care' in the question? Then unexpectedly there is a Gothic *kara* which means 'concern' and the Latin *cura*, that which heals, restores health. What brings this shift in meaning? This search has presented an ambiguity.

Meanwhile the question has not gone away.

Recently a young colleague asked during dialogue: "What is it to care for my grief, to care for my loneliness?" Not to run away, not to wallow. But to care for it, look after it, to listen to it.

So, in care is there listening? Is active care, active listening? Across human interactions there is advice and information on the need for the skills of caring and listening. It is seen as a competency and various lists of listening skills are available. In a *dhrupad* lesson the teacher said, "Try listening to the whole. If you just try to master the specific patterns there will be something accumulated, something to show. But that is not what this music is about."

Listening, to quote William Stringfellow is a "…primitive act of love…" when you "…listen[ing] to the word as the word is being uttered."[1]

So, in care, when you listen, thought is quiet and minimal. In that state, you are without defence and the mind is open to the other. Is this then an essential quality of the 'care' in question? And all else flows from this…

Moving and Learning

VAISHALI HUMNABADKAR

Recently a noted psychologist, Dr Arati Rajaratnam, visited our school to address the parents of the junior school children. The topic was 'A Moving Child is a Learning Child', in which she discussed how physical movement is important for the cognitive development and learning of the child. Extending this thought, I started wondering how movement and flexibility, not just physical, but also in the way we think and approach people and situations, leads to learning.

We usually get stuck in a particular way of doing things. A few years back, to reach my work place I used to walk for about fifteen minutes to a highway and then take a bus. One day as I was walking, the road was blocked with no way to cross. I started looking for an alternate parallel lane and found one which was much better and faster, and I managed to reach ahead of time. 'Why did I not look for alternatives until I met a roadblock' was something I wondered for the next few days. I got into an exploratory mode, started leaving home slightly earlier, trying out a different path each day and really enjoyed this.

I wonder how easy it is to get used to doing things in a particular way through habit, thinking in a particular way and resisting change. But if 'learning' by definition is 'change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience', does resisting change also mean resisting learning? While doing my work, isn't it important not to get stuck in one way of doing things, without considering options? While working in a team, is it not important to listen with an open mind to others' perspectives? One can stay in the same role and keep learning, looking at each day afresh, each interaction an opportunity to learn. Reflecting on my life over the last few years, I feel that in moving from one situation to another, from one role to another, I ended up in places where learning to do things differently became mandatory and not optional.

About ten years back I moved to The Valley School after having worked for about fifteen years in pharmaceutical companies. I started teaching biology and chemistry in senior school. A big change

it was, from working in laboratories with fancy equipment, doing experiments using cutting-edge technologies, to classrooms and black or white boards, textbooks and children. I came from a place where people would come in a few minutes ahead of the appointed time and settle in for a discussion. In contrast, now there were days when I would enter the classroom, and less than half the class would be inside. As I entered, a few of them would call out, "Aunty is in the class", and the remaining children would jump in through windows, running in from the volleyball court. One had no option but to figure out how to negotiate this new situation.

A couple of years after I joined the school, a parent who was a chemist working in a pharma company asked me, "Aren't you missing the lab?" On the spur of the moment, I said, "No, I feel that I am in a bigger lab!" Later, reflecting on my own statement, I felt how true this was. Am I not in a much livelier place, trying out different things on a daily basis? Teaching biology and chemistry in the senior school was of course challenging. It needed intense pre-work, being with children, dealing with their tantrums at times, and admiring their maturity and adaptability at other times, always thinking and learning—about the content, the mode of delivery, the class dynamics and so on. In my four years in senior school, I got to teach biology and chemistry to grades 8 to 12 and every day was a new day. I learnt that even if I plan my lesson to the greatest detail, what happens in the class is greatly influenced by the learners. While planning for a class is important, equally important is the flexibility to change the plan if required.

I am tempted to share a trivial but very practical thing I learnt in the chemistry classroom. We had just graduated from a blackboard to a whiteboard with markers. An eleventh grader who used to trouble me a lot in chemistry classes noticed that I was changing the whiteboard markers frequently and asked me, "Aunty, don't you think you should be buying refill ink for the markers, instead of buying markers?" Though I had a feeling that he was not concentrating much on the subject I was teaching, I admired his observation skills and was thankful for his comment. I didn't even know that such a thing existed. And thereafter, buying ink to refill markers became the norm in school. I think this was a great learning for me and for the few of us who had got white boards installed in our classes.

After four years of teaching, when I felt a little settled in the senior school, a new challenge or rather an opportunity presented itself. There was a need for all the teachers to be formally trained in compliance with the RTE Act. The Government had planned a drive to train all in-service teachers across the country. So, a group of us enrolled for the NIOS Diploma in Elementary Education course. This was a strenuous phase where we were performing all our work at school from Monday to Friday, and then going

to a college in Jayanagar on Saturdays and Sundays. As students, we had to attend classes, submit a lot of assignments, take exams, and go for field trips, among other things. It became overwhelming to start with, but over time we started learning how to manage time, prioritize, cooperate with each other and, in fact, started culling out some fun time within the tight schedule. As a practical component of the course, we had to write lesson plans and do practice teaching in the junior or the middle school. It would have been impossible for me to do this along with my scheduled senior school classes. The school accepted my request to move, and in the academic year 2018–19, I became a group teacher in the junior school. This move presented an opportunity to have an amazing and enriching learning experience.

I now started working with much younger children and in a different setup. We have six mixed age-group (MAG) classes, each with about sixteen children of seven to ten years of age. As a group teacher, one had to take overall responsibility for the children in the class and teach them English, math and EVS, as well as accompany them to games and land-care classes. This organically presented a good opportunity for holistic learning. As the same curriculum had to be transacted in all the six MAG classes, the six teachers worked together on the curriculum. As the whole setup and the way of working was different, it provided an amazing scope for learning. As a new group teacher in the MAG, even as I felt that I had enough autonomy to conduct and plan for my group, I was able to receive support from the experienced co-teachers and other group teachers. While the things I experienced and learnt during the three years as a group teacher are difficult to summarize, I will share a few that are significant.

Before starting to teach in the MAG, I had imagined that planning and conducting a mixed age-group class would be a herculean task, and wondered how to teach a group of children with such varied levels and capabilities in terms of reading, writing and math. However, with the support of my co-teachers, I started learning how one can plan and execute such a class. Making the curriculum contextual, and the activities hands-on, is important for this age group of children. Understanding the ability of each child and planning accordingly, while leveraging the tremendous potential of peer learning, is something one needs to keep in mind in the MAG classes. The presence of a co-teacher in the class also allows for giving individual attention to the children who need it. A few of the most fascinating things that I observed closely were the group dynamics in the homogenous and heterogenous groups of children during MAG classes, and also how groups formed organically during free play time. The other amazing thing that I witnessed in MAG classes was how older children support the younger ones to adjust and learn.

I realized that, here, I needed to work like a true facilitator and provide the environment for children to become progressively independent. I needed to be flexible, giving the children time and space to learn independently, help where they required it, but pull back when not necessary. To see a child grow and become increasingly independent and start to support other children during their three-year stay in the MAG class, is one of the most fulfilling experiences as a mixed age group teacher.

Listening to children and giving them opportunities to express themselves was very important and enjoyable. Once, we were working on the 'Soil' module in EVS and also had to teach 'compare and contrast' according to our English plan. So, after doing an experiment to separate gravel, sand and clay, I thought as a class we would compare and contrast sand and clay. Children looked at and touched sand and clay and also observed samples of these under the microscope. The number of similarities and differences they came up with were amazing. One of the similarities was that they are both fun to play with, and one difference was that clay can be moulded into toys but sand cannot. I realized that the way a child looks at sand and clay may be completely different as compared to how I look at it with my scientific, analytical mind. Allowing children to express how they look at things without boxing it in our narrow way of looking at things is something I feel I should remain alert to.

After working for three years as a group teacher, it was suggested that I take up the role of coordinator of the junior school. I was hesitant to take this up as I felt it would involve a lot of administrative responsibilities, with less opportunity to work with children. The logic given to convince me to take up this role was, 'Why don't you look at it as an opportunity to work closely with 130 children instead of 16?'. I ended up accepting it. Over the last three years it has really been a great journey, with many opportunities to connect with most of the junior school children inside and outside the classes, working closely with all the teachers there, along with children and colleagues from other sections such as the senior school, the middle school, as well as the administration and the sports department. Working in this capacity, I started seeing how demands from one section can be challenging for others to fulfil, and there is a frequent need to reach a mutually amicable solution.

I have come to believe, with Steve Jobs, that one can, "Learn continually. There is always 'one more thing' to learn." I feel a sense of gratitude towards each person who has interacted with me over the years, and look forward to a life full of movement, change and learning.

Living with Krishnamurti's Teachings

DEV KUMAR DEGA

As a former student of Rishi Valley School who has long been moved by Krishnamurti's teachings, I was invited by one of the editors of this journal to write something about the impact of these teachings on my life. Without a moment's hesitation, I poured out a 'raw and unfiltered' account of my recollections and feelings on this topic, and the ways in which the teachings continue to shape my life. I was then encouraged to slow down and elaborate further on these thoughts, by being posed with a set of questions to help me reflect and express a little more of my journey with the teachings and the various outer expressions it has drawn from me. This writing is hence structured more like a conversation prompted by these questions.

How did you come to be a student at Rishi Valley School? During which years were you there?

I became a student at Rishi Valley School at the age of six, when my uncle who worked in Madanapalle as a banker for the school told my parents that it was a 'good school' and helped me secure admission. I studied and grew up in this beautiful valley for a little more than a decade, from 1965 to 1975, when I completed my ISC exams.

What are some vivid impressions from the early years of your life at the school that have remained with you?

The landscape of Rishi Valley is stunning and so it was an exciting place to grow up in. I have vivid impressions of cave rock hill, the lost lake, and the waterfalls around the valley. There were occasions when there were torrential rains, and the rushing waters overflowed the first and second bridge on the road that leads out of the valley. We used to go on weekend hikes to different parts of the valley. All these are unforgettable memories. As the years passed, I began to enjoy the sunsets from Astachal hill and this for me was the ground of 'meditation'. I have ever since never lost touch with this beautiful valley and with K's teachings.

What do you recall of Krishnamurti's visits to the school, his presence in the valley and the interactions that he had with students?

K used to come to the school year after year and talk to us. I recollect his visits as being a festive time in the school. There were moonlight dinners, great plays, as well as dance-drama performances. There was also a sense of ecstasy with K's presence; his interactions were full of love and affection. These charged the air and left strong imprints that last to this day. It felt as if we were in the presence of a great soul who walked the Earth. Without exaggeration, it was something like a sacred blessing year after year!

When did you seriously begin to try and understand what Krishnamurti had to convey? In what way(s) did this happen?

In my younger years, I understood nothing; but just felt the presence of a great soul with great affection. There was no pressure to understand but there was a feeling of goodness and sacredness lingering all round. Among my fellow students, there were very few who would directly engage with the teachings; in fact, the few who did were often treated by their peers as 'outsiders'. It so happened that a person called Shivaram, who came as a visitor during the talks, introduced me specifically to K's teachings. That was the greatest thing that happened in my life. I started reading all his books starting with Commentaries on Living series 1 to 3. This was in the year 1975, when I was just passing out of school. Ever since then, K's teachings never ever left me despite all the diversions in life and all its ups and downs. Later, I watched many of his talks on tapes, and to this day I keep going to them whenever I feel like, along with reading his books, because each time I find there is something new to learn without a memory of the old. That's the beauty of K's teachings: you never feel you have read or heard it before even after so many years passing by in studying the teachings!

How did meetings with Shri Shivaram influence your understanding of K or give a direction to your life?

With Shivaram I had many intense discussions, and we watched tapes together and talked about them. I also continued to read the Commentaries on Living. These are great books to be read for a whole lifetime, full of a living quality and deep understanding! After my school years, I used to meet Shivaram on the beach near Nellore, my hometown in South India, and especially discuss K's vision of education. We talked about what it would mean to start the 'right kind of school'? At that time, I felt education was the

only way to bring about a new generation and a new World, and one needs to give everything to it. I became interested in helping start a new school based on K's teachings.

You spent six months with David Horsburgh, the founder of Neel Bagh. You observed his school in action and had many discussions with him. What did you learn from these experiences and discussions?

I spent six months at Neelbagh with David Horsburgh, to try and understand how a rural school could be run and what a good school other than a K school could be like. David had also worked for Rishi Valley and was a sort of rebel in his own right. I had many discussions with David, a great soul who has contributed much to creative education and enriched the learning process for many children. He had worked with the British Council and had a collection of all the right books in education. I read many books, learned much about methods of teaching and experiments in education, and debated on these with David. The textbook-cum-workbooks he developed, which start with 'thinking and doing', were a great contribution to children's learning. However, in my numerous encounters with David I also disagreed with him on many counts. For instance, I wondered if one could drink and smoke and eat meat, and at the same time teach morality in these matters to children. While David saw no contradiction, my view was quite the contrary. I also felt that along with a skilful way of learning, unless there was an inward blossoming, even this creative education would be limited.

You also helped start a village school along with Shivaram and Eleanor Watts, as an experiment with a new kind of education for rural children. How do you think it impacted these children? What is your connection with this school now?

Later in life, I supported a small rural school for village children started by Shivaram and an English lady, Eleanor Watts, whom I had met at Neelbagh. My main interest was to promote a school that incorporated K's teachings; but I was not involved in academic matters. I believe the Srujana School was unusual in some ways, with a curriculum that drew much from their own local environment and the children learnt in freedom. But I really don't know how it impacted the children. I believe Shivaram and Eleanor Watts made some useful contributions to education. Shivaram's approach of combining classroom learning with K's teachings seems to have been popular among many rural schools in and around Andhra. Eleanor Watts went on to write highly regarded textbooks and workbooks published by

Orient Longman. But what I felt was missing was a group of committed people who were seriously interested in the teachings. It seemed that the purpose for me, of starting such a school into which I had put all my savings, did not turn out to be what I had expected. Being a free school, being in a village, did not attract a person really interested in K's teachings. So, it ran like another good village school, doing lots of experiments in education in a small way. I slowly disassociated with its day-to-day activities. I kept in touch with Shivaram but lost my earlier interest in schools and education.

How did K's teachings impact what you attempted to do in life thereafter? How did your family respond to this?

K's teachings had awakened my life like a jolt. However, with the advent of time the power of it seems to have wavered from time to time depending on the need for physical security which confronted me and numerous ups and downs that happened, in part due to family responsibilities. But in the background the bells were ever there, ringing all the while, till I got back as fully as possible into it! Coming from an agricultural cum business family, I had begun asking questions like: why should I be like the rest of the world? Why should I become a money-earning machine? Or why should I live a mechanical life going to the office from 9 to 5? My family were fundamentally traditional and had no idea what this whole thing was about. Many a time I felt I had to be a rebel and spend time on things which the family was not for. For example, there was great opposition to my producing the 'Essence of Life' dance program, because I was so passionate about it and again put all my savings into it thinking that there is nothing more important than this. This did affect my physical security and it took years to get back some sort of security. So, personally, I had to pay a great price for it. But I never regretted it as I felt I had done something necessary and opened up a whole new world for many people. To date I feel that this is the best thing that happened in my life, and I really enjoyed doing it.

What was the inception of your initiative to convey K's teachings on 'meditation' through a classical dance and music presentation? How did this idea evolve, take shape, and find its audience in different parts of the country?

My initial initiative came from the love of K's teachings and the love for classical music and dance that I had imbibed at Rishi Valley. The statement that 'K's teachings are difficult to understand' used to haunt me. I really got fired by this idea when I heard the first audio on meditation. It made me 'go

gaga' because I fell in love with K's expressions on the essence of meditation. The intention of bringing this deep wisdom to a larger audience took hold of me. Then there was no looking back till everything was done. It was such a beautiful experience, including all the man-made problems of ego, name and fame. It was a journey into a real experience of 'living the teachings'. Such was the experience during each of the live shows that we had all over India including the one in Rishi Valley and then in Bangalore, which the whole of the Bangalore school attended in perfect silence! Audiences in many parts of India appreciated the live shows, which were held in Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Auroville in Pondicherry. Others could view it on YouTube, where glimpses of the production are still available. The only disappointing factor was that these performances could not go abroad, though an attempt was made; but then there was not enough support.

How did your life undergo a change after you got married? What were some challenges and learnings from this?

I got married quite early on, thinking that it would give me the independence to do what I wanted, because there was pressure from my father to get back to business. But having got married into a family that was also quite traditional, it was a very hard time for me. Without having family support for my other ventures, it forced me back into business, an area in which I knew little, to earn a living. I realized that marriage takes a lot of energy in earning a livelihood, in supporting a family, and keeping a social connect. It makes living a religious life truly challenging.

Can you share more about your interest in 'holistic health'? What has 'good health' come to mean to you and what are your attempts to promote this more widely?

Having been interested in environmentally friendly practices, I started a small eco-friendly farm and community in Hosur, called Dega Farms. This was the beginning of this journey towards 'good health'. My inspiration in recent times have been Dr Khader Vali, who is known for promoting healthy agricultural practices and the wide use of millets in our diets, and Dr BM Hedge, who advocates a drug-free treatment for most of our health concerns. We had also been buying good organic products from nearby farms like 'Navadarsanam' run by Dr Ananthu and Jyothi. We enjoyed the health benefits these had brought and thought why not share these with all the people we know. So, we started to source products from all over India and began selling these online. This was, initially, just to sustain our

farm. Then we realised that more than just providing sustenance, it became a passion and we learned more and more about healthy living and good dietary practices. We continue to discover new products and share them with people who come to our farm, as well as those who wish to order these on a popular website like Amazon. We have travelled quite far into this area and today we ourselves make plant-based products which are beneficial as supports for some forms of cancer. We continue to pursue this passion and get great satisfaction from this. It also gives employment to a few, and we continue to spread whatever we do in the area of health products and lifestyles to as many people as possible.

Can you tell us about your attempts at setting up a space and infrastructure where a 'community' of people who wish to inquire into life and the teachings can come together? What are some challenges and learnings for you in this endeavour?

I had always felt that a school is a place for real learning. I agree a hundred per cent with K that a school is a place where right relationships can happen. But it is difficult to start and run this kind of school without the right people, the teachers as well as parents. I may be idealistic, but I feel that organizational factors and our human limitations inevitably dilute the intentions of a school based on K's teachings. So, another dream of mine has been to start an international retreat centre in Coorg, which I call 'The Pathless Land', where adults with a deep interest in the teachings can come and live together. But this too has not taken off. Perhaps it is too huge an endeavour for an individual or just a few of us to initiate and sustain. At present, we continue to expand the infrastructure at our small space in Hosur to accommodate more friends who are interested in learning and living the teachings. My challenge in each of these endeavours is finding the right people and making it sustainable. We are now just going about doing whatever we can and seeing how it goes, without having great expectations!

In what ways does K's teaching throw light on the 'self' and its 'workings', even as one is continuing to meet life's challenges along these varied pathways? What has 'living the teachings' come to mean to you?

As far as I understand, the core of the teachings is 'being free from the self' and that seems to be the greatest challenge for mankind. In essence, I feel that that is what 'living the teachings' is all about. Even as I write this article, I ask myself: have I, or those of us who are interested in the teachings, really been free of the self? And this question remains as an enigma of

sorts! Towards his last days, K talked about 'nucleus groups' and I feel those of us who are serious need to rethink how this whole thing can happen. I feel that is the last hope for humanity in this world where each is concerned with 'the self'.

What Art Gives to the Curriculum*

JAAI DEOLALKAR AND SOWMYA RAVINDRANATH

To be a painter, you must know yourself and to know yourself is extremely difficult, but to learn a technique of painting is comparatively easy.

—J Krishnamurti

In a bustling breakfast meeting for teachers from different schools, a few of them sit down as they greet unfamiliar faces and discuss familiar narratives. "What activities do you have in your school?" comes a question. The writers (of this article) look at each other and chat about a set of pursuits children enjoy on campus—tree-climbing, seedpod collecting, going on long walks and so on—we list. "But what about art— what art activities do you offer?" the teacher insists. "Oh, art!" Now, we talk about the art program as more teachers join the table. "Really?! That is extensive. How do you make time for art in your timetable?" comes the next question. We discuss how timetabling is approached and strategies that have worked well. But curiously, this conversation unravelled something deeper—both logistical and philosophical. Is art a subject? Does it have a curricular role? What is the place of art in education? We returned and steeped in the warm spotlight of this deliberation, discussed with colleagues, current and former, to come away being enamoured with how the art program had grown over the years.

The setting

The verdant campus of The Valley School lays a fertile ground for self-exploration. From finding inspiration and a space for quiet to collecting natural materials, it is a privilege to be cradled in this green expanse. The art program, therefore, draws from the lush surroundings. It facilitates an exploration—of the outer world and

* Reprinted with permission from *Teacher Plus*, where this article was first published as the cover story in the February 2024 issue.

the inner world with appreciation and aesthetics.

Art classes are hosted in what is lovingly referred to as the Art Village. An integral part of the school, Art Village is a magical space where the sounds of handlooms, chisels, and hammers sweeten the rhythms of the bustling studios. It is here, where creativity takes shape, form, and expression. It is here, where students and teachers immerse themselves in painting, pottery-ceramics, thread craft-weaving, and sculpture-carpentry. The music and dance studios buzz with energy as students explore *tabla, mridangam*, and theatre. Throughout the week, grades one to twelve visit the Art Village to explore visual and performing arts. Over their years in school, students are exposed to four to five different visual art mediums, while learning in a vibrant setting.

Drawing inspiration

If one had to choose the common lexicon of art and children, it would begin with wonder—an unrestrained sense of wonder that permeates imagination and creation. A stroll to the Art Village offers myriad inspirations for the wandering and the wondering. Art teachers often welcome groups of children who have turned the walk to their classes into an exercise in foraging—a wood apple here, a few tamarind pods there, a stash of winged seeds and leaves, or a roly-poly (insect) in little hands is a common sight. Sometimes, the foraged inspires the artwork, allowing for a more visceral experience. Paying close attention to all that is near and immediate builds a capacity for silence—an essential part of engaging in the arts. Classes could begin with watching a Paradise Flycatcher dance from tree to tree, or listening to the White-rumped Shama's melodious song, or the orchestra organised by the gushing stream nearby. "Close your eyes, listen to the music, and draw on the paper with pastels; allow your hand to follow the rhythm", the teacher says, setting the pace of leisure. The class tunes in, each one interpreting the music with different strokes. In another class exploring watercolours, a boy sits in the corner with a blank piece of paper. "Why is your brush not dancing on the paper?", the teacher asks him. "The brush wants to swim in the water", he says and demonstrates how two shades are blending, while the paintbrush appears to be examining, as he does, the swirl and vibrance of the water bowl. There may have been no artwork on his piece of paper, but the observation gave the boy immersive moments of wonderment.

When children are invited to draw or paint, a blank piece of paper can be quite daunting. As delightfully described in the book *The Dot* by Peter H Reynolds, a blank sheet of paper could be a "polar bear in a snowstorm". The challenge lies in embracing the uncertainty and staying with it. This process involves responding to the situation and transforming it into an opportunity for creativity. As educators, we may be conscious of our pursuit of an outcome. But what is worth

exploring is this: are we missing the trees for the forest?

Brush strokes

Two famous quotes by Picasso: "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up" and "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child", draw our attention to the irrepressible urge and spirit of creation that a child possesses. But the architecture of 'learning' leans on the accumulation of skills and techniques. How then does one fan the fire of art engagement without an overwhelming focus on proficiency?

The key is to nurture the innocence inherent in a child's artistic expression, allowing them to experiment freely beyond external influences. This means encouraging them to explore their ideas, embrace uniqueness, and teaching them to respond to the visual language they are creating on the canvas or paper. In this way, the focus is on the journey of self-discovery and artistic exploration rather than conforming to preconceived notions or expectations. Many times, teachers or facilitators try not to ask children to work on a given topic or idea, instead, open-ended simple techniques, like how to handle a pencil or brush are the prompts. For younger kids, learning happens through play—playing with lines, colours, clay, or thread, and experimenting with textures, or trying various methods of colouring. The learning process becomes enjoyable when there is a sense of openness and a playful approach to action. The attempt is to help them break free from imitating famous artworks, commonly appreciated styles, or even one's art.

Culture of art appreciation

To offer an art program to students is to be awake and alive to the possibilities of the now and the near. Art need not be what one engages in the scheduled confines of a timetable. A culture of art immersion aids in building a consciousness to comprehend and respond to art and aesthetics.

That art can fuel cross-disciplinary curiosity creates infinite possibilities. A few years ago, the middle school students were encouraged to learn about India through the different folk-art forms. The library was converted into an art gallery, dotted with books and art pieces in different styles—*Gond, Bhil, Warli, Madhubani, Mandana, Kalamkari*, and more. Original *Pattachitra* scrolls gifted by visiting artisans sparked awe and intrigue. As the art teacher unpacked the history of the art forms, the children went on a gallery walk, pausing to notice the nuances in line work, motifs, and their cultural references. The children dug into reading material, and the library brimmed with questions and eagerness, leading to two weeks of immersion in the folk-art forms.

Similarly, an English teacher developed a special art appreciation module for creative writing. The children were invited to pick various art pieces around the school—from sculptures and murals to wall paintings—and craft essays about

them. The teacher emphasised the importance of not just describing the art but capturing the visual experience without relying solely on words. The message was clear: paintings and sculptures are more than just pictures or objects; they offer a unique visual encounter that can't always be perfectly expressed through language.

The school regularly hosts workshops by artists and artisans. Open to students and parents, these workshops not only familiarize learners with the craft but also the intimate and lived realities of the artisans. Hussainbi and Fatimabi *ajji* are two Siddi women from the dense forests of Dandeli. As they demonstrate their intricate art of quilt-making, their quest for prudence—in using up even the smallest piece of cloth—gives a peek into their way of living. Their *Kaudis*, swollen fingers, and stories offer a glimpse of how folk arts keep sustainability at the heart of art and aesthetics.

Whether it is the magical natural dyes in *Kalamkari* intriguing the chemistry students or the value of involvement and detachment evinced by the Buddhist monks creating *Mandalas*, each of these artisans builds our capacity to look at the multi-layered facets of art.

Campus as the canvas

All creative endeavours need a canvas. In the past few years, students and teachers have added their artistic touch to the campus, leaving a luminous reminder to slow down and appreciate. Painting walls and creating murals is a much anticipated and enjoyed group activity. Led by the art teacher, students take on these projects which could last a few weeks or months. From drawing with chalk on the floor to accommodating each other's expressions and complementing forms, colours, and textures, murals have been momentous pursuits in kinship and engagement, especially post-covid.

Recently, a group of grade 12 students took on a project to create a mural in the library. A wall and a section of the roof were identified as the canvas. To arrive at the composition, the teachers organised the reading of books. From immersing in poetry and folktales to reading books about books, the group pored over a curated collection, drawing and deliberating on the floor before they took their ideas to the wall. A reading of *A Book is a Bee* by children's author Lavanya Karthik and a few wonderful letters from *A Velocity of Being* by Maria Popova surged the ideas into patterns and graceful lines. Over the next few weeks, students from various classes lay beneath the painted canopy as they spun countless stories and poems inspired by the artwork.

Art as social capital

The Annual Art *Mela* is one more opportunity where the whole school, from adults to children, gets together. *Mela* is a convergence for the current, former, and extended family of the school to engage in artistic explorations. Creative murmuration built over the year constellate to reverberate with joy. Works

of art are displayed and celebrated; music and storytelling hyphenate the back score of the day, making the atmosphere vibrant and festive. This allows for even the reluctant to abandon their inhibitions and dive in. From clay work, woodwork, painting to papercraft and thread-craft, the *Mela* hosts an array of arts and crafts. But it is the coming together of people, the weeks spent in preparing for the event, that lays testimony to the undeniable power of art to announce a sense of the possible.

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What do I Teach when I Teach History?

SANJAY MATHUR

At the beginning of the term, I asked my Class 12 history students, why do we study history? They responded with the usual and a little more:

- "To learn not to repeat the mistakes of the past."
- "To understand human behaviour."
- "To understand the present, why things are the way they are."

To go a little deeper, I said that history is not just the study of the past but also the study of change. I then brought in what a Class 11 student had said: "Can we just study history out of a pure interest in the past, can we love history for itself? Have you ever thought that the ancients might have known some things that we don't, for example might their philosophy and *feeling for life* have been more profound than ours?" Perhaps that was a stretch, but students then added two other reasons:

- "To appreciate how our ancestors lived", alluding to our forebears not enjoying the comforts we enjoy today.
- "To understand the distortions of history that have been made for political purposes."

The last comment caused me to say that none of them had said 'heritage', but understanding heritage is also a reason for studying the past and that, alongside the triumphs and inspirations, one must avoid the exaggerations and distortions that come when pride in heritage becomes the focus of history.

And then we commenced with the Indus Valley Civilization.

This is what my notes tell me, as I look back on the year and wonder, as I do on a weekly if not daily basis, what have I really taught anyone today or any day? Today, for example, was a typical teacher's day on an exam-driven week nearing the end of the term—a unit test on USA and Australia

in World History, followed by a video on the topic of 'being Japanese' from the perspective of Japanese minorities; a review of the unit test on 'rights' and 'citizenship' in Political Science, followed by opening the chapter on secularism, which starts with the outdated narrative that 'every political party professes to be secular'; and then distribution of a sample test to those same Class 12 students quoted above who will soon be appearing for their board exam. As I grade the unit test on World History later in the afternoon, I go through the usual reactions of a teacher—pleasure and satisfaction at the in-depth answers and well-chosen words of a few students and disappointment at the glaring mistakes and misunderstandings of others who I thought were grasping the content.

Which leaves me wondering, what then do I teach when I teach history? Some would say I merely 'facilitate' the learning of the student; but that strikes me as too facile. Why then can they not learn on their own? As seen from any student who takes leave from our residential school and studies at home for a period, they cannot absorb the *feeling of history*, having missed out on teacher-led class discussions. They did not have the teacher or their peers to question the text, to question each other's assumptions, to look deeper, to bring in new information by writing on the board, to cover a few things that our text does not cover, or to challenge ourselves. Whether this is called 'teaching' or 'facilitating' is a matter of words. One must go beyond the assumption that all the teacher has to do is get out of the way of the child's natural penchant for learning. If the teacher does that, then the child will learn by following their own wayward interests and inclinations. What they will learn is anyone's guess, but they will not learn the subject, and maybe pick up all kinds of notions.

Again, having given ample thought to how I teach my subject, what exactly am I teaching? Recently, a guest visiting the school posed this question—why study history—in our faculty meeting. Thinking about it, I said, "to understand human nature." In that way, history helps with self-knowledge too. I gave the example that one thing you find repeatedly in history is one party attempting to dominate another party, and this suggests that in our human nature there is a recurrent will to dominate. All of us have violence within us. Some of the best questions in history, I said, relate to motives. It is what makes the chapter on the Mongols so compelling. What were the motives of Genghis Khan to leave his little corner of the world and set out on a vast project to establish the largest empire the world had ever known up until that point? And further, once you go beyond the brutality

of conquest, we then learn about how the Mongolian Empire changed a large part of the known world. It resulted in the security of the Silk Road, expansion of trade, a policy of religious tolerance, and more.

Once we learn this, I then have my class wrestle a bit with the question, was Genghis Khan a brutal conqueror or a great unifier? The answer, arguably, winds up being both. So, do you think the violence is justified? I am always relieved if a student says, like this year, "No sir, I just don't see how you can justify that amount of suffering, no matter what good comes out of it."

The risk of asking this question is that students, and us adults too, don't really know how terrible war is, how utterly destructive it is, even though the NCERT textbook has source material that says Genghis Khan commanded that "in the exaction of vengeance not even a cat or dog should be left alive". Yes, it was a kind of 'total war' in the thirteenth century, well before the Second World War which is often seen as the marker for the kind of warfare that would not spare civilians. The reality of war, however, in all its barbaric cruelty and bloodletting and numbness is not something we can even imagine.

Still, what am I teaching: is it just the content of the subject? I hope not! I had no interest in history myself until Class 11, when I had an unorthodox teacher who would question the assumptions of students in the class on topics that weren't in the syllabus. It was 1983, the year that Israel invaded Lebanon—a pattern that sadly repeats today, although it is Gaza now—a good number of my fellow students were Jewish and repeated simplifications they had undoubtedly heard at home, such as "the Palestinians left in 1948 and they weren't coming back." "Voluntarily?", the teacher would ask. And the questioning of assumptions began, even on controversial topics of religion and identity and even at the risk of a student relaying what the teacher had said to his or her family at home. For the student would never have the knowledge of the teacher, neither the breadth nor depth of understanding, nor likely would his parents have it regardless of their level of education. This teacher would also mimeograph supplementary reading assignments and ask us not to answer a set of questions on it, but to come back to class having read it, and each of us had to ask 'one intelligent question' about the assignment. What he meant by 'intelligent' had more to do with critical reading or mindful reading and the 'why' questions as opposed to questions with a ready answer.

History requires study, not only in terms of knowledge, but in some training of the mind—borne from understanding evidence and bias and correlations, from the habit of comparing and contrasting societies and civilizations and nations across time periods. The conversations this teacher had with a student or two in class on a subject that did not concern me, like Israel and Palestine, nevertheless had me looking for more in my high school library and checking out the first history book I ever bothered to read, bearing the title *The Fertile Crescent*, on the Israel-Palestine conflict. I still remember the laminated brown book cover. To my astonishment, I discovered that there were claims to a land that dated back not a few decades but thousands of years. It was that conflict, in fact, taking place in real time then, that taught me 'historical thinking', or taking a current issue and thinking evaluatively in terms of history.

But what am *I* teaching, besides the miserable memorization for exams, besides the awful repetition of violence—'man's inhumanity to man'—that sadly makes up for a good amount of human history? Our World History textbook, in just term two covers *confrontation of cultures, displacing indigenous people, disease, slavery, death and misery on a mass scale, industrialization, colonization, the pollution of the environment, war and genocide, world wars, decolonization* and so on. The greatest advances in science become the greatest threat to the world in the form of the nuclear bomb. But aren't advances in science and medicine, art and culture, the true legacy of humankind, that has made our lives better, what we have salvaged after a run of perhaps 250,000 years as Homo sapiens on a planet that can barely contain us?

Today, humanity confronts problems it never had before. The spectre of climate change. Mutual destruction. The challenge of living sustainably. Mental health. And if it can be argued that war is less than it was, it can also be argued that hatred is more than it was. The common person who merely followed orders as a soldier in times past is today both the victim of, and participant in, the vast cesspool of 'social media propaganda' that feeds on the pride and anger that in times past only the rulers and religious leaders and elites were 'privileged' to have. Social media has magnified and amplified the dark side of human nature, even as it has connected people across the globe in matters of empathy, good will, and beneficence.

It then comes as no surprise that I have often thought, paradoxically, that what I hope we learn from history is to be *free of* history. Through the

process of studying history, can we slowly lay aside our pride, prejudice, pettiness, fear and so on? Can we check our tendency to violence, to self-aggrandizement, to absolutist thought and feeling? Can a sustained, in-depth holding of the past teach us to respect it but to be free of its excesses? Is the importance of moderation, reasonableness, compassion, peace, tolerance, and inclusion something we can take from history, even if it means understanding human frailty, which is surely a lesson of history? And *humility*? But in these nationalistic times? Who will stand up for it? Who will correct the propaganda of aggressive leaders and manipulators who aim to drive us into a single view of the past, absent its complexity, its discrepancies, its nuances? It is a tall task.

"You're swimming on the surface", I found myself telling my students this year, "go deeper". "Question the assumptions. Ask why. Listen to what each of us has to say. What do you think?"

At the end of the year, it is rewarding to see the students more excited about history. Their sensitivity to depth and complexity, their knowledge, their written and verbal communication skills have all improved, in different measure for each student. Are they better human beings? Maybe, but the field of action is not theirs yet. One can only sense that they are more thoughtful, more intellectually curious, and more sceptical of blanket statements about the past. As my old teacher used to say, "I hope history teaches you to develop a healthy scepticism."

To Cooperate is a Challenge When There is an Urge to Win

BHARATH BALAJI SATHIYAMOORTHY

One can bring cooperation into a game, but it is very difficult to take competition out of it. An important aspect of playing sports has always been the tendency to compare two individuals, two teams, who wins against whom and who loses against whom. Winning and losing touches a very visceral part of our being and if we observe carefully, the games field becomes a tremendous place to learn about ourselves. We in Pathashaala had dealt with this through interventions during play time when necessary, and during discussions at the end of a games session. Facilitators played a crucial role in emphasizing the non-necessity of comparison and competing, playing games with joy, building skills, and being fit. However, responding to the challenges of Covid-19 showed us what cooperation implies. We also recognized that games could play an important role in instilling this feeling of cooperation among learners in our schools.

The beginning

Having the whole school back on campus in 2022, post Covid-19, was a major transitional phase in Pathashaala. Old practices were reviewed to make space for some new ideas to come in. We also brainstormed the way games and sports could be played. We felt the need to emphasize fitness, exercise and skill building, as well as playing safely, before moving on to playing the popular games such as cricket, football, basketball, and volleyball that students like to play. However, we found that the students were interested only in playing. Before Covid we had played what we used to call 'community' games. When we reopened, there was a strong suggestion that we should have dedicated time for playing such games, for there was a feeling that enough of these games were not being played. These had been introduced at The School by Vinayan Anna, the physical education teacher. Seeing the importance of such games in a K School, I volunteered to anchor these games at Pathashaala. We renamed them 'cooperative games'.

Meeting the challenge

The foremost challenge was to come up with the kind of games to be played. I took suggestions from other educators and ideas from recreational sports activities from around the world. I modified the existing and popular community games to suit our intention of not competing. Most importantly, I tried to evolve original ideas complete with rules and consequences. Another challenge was also to ensure that there is no feeling of monotony while playing these games. Creating new games together with the learners helped in this.

When we moved from cooperative games to resume the popular team games like cricket and football, we observed the difficulty that players had in cooperating when they felt the urge to win. This was a challenging time, to communicate the importance of cooperative games in their educational experience. Inclusion of more physically demanding cooperative games meeting their energy levels, was needed. The process of co-creation was very helpful in this regard. Now, many students share their strong inclination to play cooperative games. One can see a sense of joy in playing these games and also the struggle to cooperate.

The pedagogy of cooperative games

These games sessions in the school represent more than just moments of leisure; they encapsulate a pedagogical approach aimed at nurturing essential life skills while fostering a sense of camaraderie among learners. The games are meticulously designed to avoid competition, prioritize safety, and instil participants with the joy of collaborative play. Within this framework, learners not only engage in physical activity but also embark on a journey of personal and social development, enriched by experiences of cooperation, problem-solving, inclusive discussions, effective communication, trust-building, strategic planning, and decision-making.

It has been two years since all classes began playing weekly cooperative games at Pathashaala and now we have tens of games in our stock. This has developed well from having the same kind of games for different classes each week to different games for different classes depending on their interest and skill in playing the game. As each game is played together as a whole class, the learners find it interesting and enjoyable as well. One of the defining features of cooperative games is the emphasis on inclusivity and non-competitiveness. Modified versions of popular games are crafted with

meticulous attention to detail, ensuring that every participant feels valued and involved. I now share some examples of such games.

Examples of cooperative games

Dodgeball: An example of such a game is dodgeball. The whole class is divided into two groups. A circle is drawn and the boundary is set. One group stands outside the circle and the other group stands inside of it. The objective is to oust the players inside the circle by making a volleyball touch them below the knee. As each one gets out, they become part of the group outside the circle trying to oust the people inside the circle. After everyone has been ousted, the players who were initially inside are swapped with those outside. Many versions of this game are played. One such is having three sections namely core, crust and mantle wherein the players in the core and crust try to oust the players in the mantle. There is a continuous swap of players as and when they are ousted. This is a popular game and children greatly enjoy it.

These games are not only engaging but are also designed to challenge participants cognitively and physically, prompting them to employ critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork to overcome obstacles and achieve common goals. 'Great Escape' is another such example.

Great escape: The participants must stand in a circle, maintaining a rope taut at waist level by pressing their backs against the rope, forming a webbing. The objective is for the entire group to escape the webbing formed by the rope without letting it touch the ground. They must adhere to the following rules:

- Hands and arms cannot touch the rope.
- The rope cannot be lifted above waist level.
- Participants cannot duck under the rope.
- The rope should not touch the ground until everyone has exited the taut rope.

Participants must strategize and coordinate their movements to exit the webbing. They must carefully manoeuvre around the rope without violating the rules. The game is successfully completed when all participants have exited the webbing without letting the rope touch the ground. After the game, participants can discuss strategies, teamwork, and communication skills employed during the activity.

The involvement of experienced educators as well as learners in the creation and facilitation of games adds a unique dimension to the playing experience. With firsthand knowledge of their needs and abilities, educators and learners have tailored games with rules that prioritize the cooperative spirit, ensuring that each activity serves as a platform for meaningful learning and growth. Some of the games that have been created in such a collaborative manner are Collision, Ball rush and Keep it in the air. The latter is a variation of the normal volleyball game.

Keep it in the air: This is an example of a game with simple rules and instructions. The task is for the group to keep a volleyball in the air for the longest time possible. The participants can only tap the ball across the net without holding or grabbing the ball and no one is allowed to do two consecutive taps or touches. The game ends if and when the ball hits the ground.

Carefree games: Due to the nature and the spirit with which we play cooperative games, some learners from Class 10 have done a team project as part of their exam requirement, titled 'Carefree Games—Win With, and Not Against'. As part of the project, they designed games keeping in mind the prerequisite of simplicity of rules, instructions and materials used, so as to include differently abled players. They did this under the guidance of Vidyasagar, a school for the differently-abled in Chennai. Co-holding their sports event with Pathashaala, the school conducted their Sports Day and issued medals to everyone and not just those who had 'won' a game.

We also held *Kondattam* (celebration in Tamil), an inter-school event, around the same theme, in which different schools participated. Students from different schools shared their positive feelings of playing 'Carefree Games'.

Lessons from cooperative games

By playing cooperative games, students have gathered many lessons in collaboration and problem-solving. In activities requiring acts of cooperation—such as navigating obstacle courses blindfolded—students learn to trust and rely on one another's guidance, fostering bonds of mutual respect and support. Similarly, in games demanding strategic planning and decision-making, students engage in lively discussions, weighing different perspectives, reaching consensus through inclusive processes. The quality of listening and communication skills are honed through activities that necessitate clear verbal instructions or relaying of messages. Realizing that

success hinges not only on their individual actions but also on their ability to collaborate and coordinate with others, participants learn the importance of attentive listening and effective communication. By prioritizing cooperation, inclusion, and meaningful engagement, these games instil in learners the values and skills essential for well-being in both academic and real-world contexts.

Krishnamurti says, "To me, cooperation is entirely different. Co-operation is the fun of being and doing together, not necessarily doing something in particular." Cooperative games in Pathashaala are an initiative in that direction. Having organized and evolved these cooperative games for two years now, I sense the truth of what Krishnamurti is saying every day.

Balaji has, with a Master's degree in Biological and Biomedical Engineering, been a teacher at Pathashaala for eight years now. Of his choice to teach, he says, "I am interested in learning about life and contributing to school education, as I find it a very meaningful endeavour."

Navigating Uncertainties

JANANI VENKAT

Change, the oft-overused cliché, is as real as birth and death. One may romanticize it, anticipate it, welcome it, dread it, fear it or go through all of these emotions at various points in time. As an educator, an adult, a human being struggling to make sense of the uncertainties around me, I ask myself the following question: if change is all-encompassing, omnipresent and imminent, how do I make sense of education, relationships, social media, work and the world around me while navigating uncertainties all the time? How can I attempt to live meaningfully in this world without feeling a sense of inadequacy and hopelessness?

Borrowing from Mark Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, I must say I write here not to answer questions but to raise more of them. Perhaps that is the first step.

While speaking of navigating uncertainties, it might be prudent to also speak of the concept of clarity. Seeking clarity seems like a natural process for a thinking mind engaged in a question or faced with a change or uncertainty of some sort. But what is clarity? Is clarity an absolute, unchanging entity that one is seeking? Is it a goal that one aims to reach or is it a dynamic, living concept that changes or refines as we engage with questions in life? In other words, what does it mean to 'seek clarity'?

A colleague once offered her insight on the subject: if we were to look at the bewildering and confusing messages that hit us every day in the media, if we were to understand nuances of our own upbringing (much of them born through privilege) and if one were to set a path for oneself that comes through reflection, as a revelation—not as a popularly accepted notion, not from hazy notions of being liberal and democratic or secular, but through notions that are crystal clear to you through engaging with that mess—then perhaps one could call that realisation clarity. The act of seeking clarity means not taking what is given to you, or thrown at you, for granted; not

taking your situation at face value; recognising the questions, the pain and not brushing those aside.

And now I set forth bravely to refine my question and find, while attempting to do so, that I have more to add to the pool.

- How do I equip myself to meet uncertainties?
- Would evolving a system of beliefs or principles anchored in texts or long-forgotten voices of the past help?
- Do I nurture and strengthen the 'certainties' I know and use them as a shield in my encounter with uncertainties?
- What can I draw from within me to navigate this space when I know nothing more than the fact that something is changing?
- What is the right place of knowledge?

It is a Pandora's box! And the questions do not stop! My attempts to reflect on these questions have led me to some insights, three of which I share below.

During a conversation about the current state of politics, a friend of mine asked me one day if I have ever changed the newspaper I consumed news from. The question caught me off guard and I sat on it for a long time. The more I thought of it, the more uncomfortable I became. For, if one extends this question to any other source of information, media and even the people we surround ourselves with, it is really asking if we unconsciously only seek what we want to hear, like to hear. Being relatively unruffled and comfortable in an echo-chamber, a comfort zone of sorts, surrounded by people and views we have been conditioned to accept, may bring a sense of comfort and certainty amidst the chaos. But this so-called illusion of certainty needs critical examination. *Stepping out of one's comfort zone to actively seek and engage with different views* (and people) becomes necessary for one to let go of the stronghold of unshakeable faiths, ideas and beliefs.

Often, one feels the need to debate passionately and put forth views effectively during a conversation. There appears to be a need for speaking and talking in today's world, resulting in a cacophony of noises, all waiting to say, speak, talk. In the ensuing din, one wonders about the need for listening and quiet. As teachers, we demand of our students to listen carefully. It is time we asked ourselves whether we fully, truly listen to another with an open mind while in conversation. When there is truly listening, one might notice that the burden to defend and respond lessens considerably. *Listening*

carefully to other voices and to one's own questions may be revealing, liberating and empowering in one's quest for life and meaning.

Holding on to an opinion steadfastly and remaining consistent are often glorified. In our relationship with people and things that evolve, change and morph with every passing second, there is a greater need for a certain tentativeness. Science has shown us that no theory is irrefutable; the numerous attempts to understand the origins of the universe are proof enough! Knowledge is valuable but may be limiting. *Education must encourage one to be curious, seek and question, all with a sense of openness, humility and tentativeness.*

The quest to discover what I can draw from within me to live in this ever-changing world ridden with uncertainties shall continue undeterred!

Gatherings:
A teacher's reflections

SIDDHARTHA MENON

Not long after I came to Rishi Valley as a teacher, we hosted a public Gathering. It was during the Diwali vacation and the weather was chill and wet. It had to be held during the break so that participants could be accommodated in the student hostels. At the time I was a house parent, in a hostel that was one of four in a vast grey building fronted by slender trees. It so happened that the other three house parents were away, and in effect I was the only host in a block of four hostels that would normally house 70 to 80 boys. During the Gathering it hosted perhaps 50 adults, most of them considerably older than I.

Of course I attended all the sessions: the talks, small group discussions, video screenings, and escorted walks in the campus and its surroundings. I don't remember, however, that they left a strong impression on me, or at least not as strong as that of being a vacation-time 'house parent' to adults. Even if I understood my role as being no more than to ensure that they were as comfortable as possible with the spartan arrangements—metal cots on bare cement floors, candles to counter the unpredictable power cuts, mosquito coils, Indian-style toilets, bath water from wood-fired boilers, drinking water from large canisters—it felt at times as if their entire wellbeing was in some way in my hands.

There was a group of elderly men who had come by train and bus from a town in Rajasthan. Some of them walked slowly and with difficulty on the uneven terrain, but they were never short of stamina. Late into the night I would hear their impassioned discussions on matters that had arisen from the day's sessions. These discussions seemed, at the time, a little surreal to me. Or at least after a day packed with this kind of engagement, it was hard for me to understand their wanting to keep at it through the night as well. For me, at 25, it felt as if life had other compulsions.

Yet, I was touched by the fact that they were here; that they had made these long and perhaps costly or uncomfortable journeys, for three days of intense hob-nobbing, as I saw it, with people like

themselves. Most of them were middle aged or older, and seemed intent on making use of every minute of their time here. I think I didn't quite understand what was driving them, but their presence was strangely moving. Clearly the fact that there was a Gathering to attend meant a great deal to the people who had come. I felt a little humbled by this.

In fact, I felt as I was to do a few years later at Kedarnath, the Himalayan shrine at 12,000 feet, reached in those days by way of a mostly uphill trek for 14 kilometres. You could hire a mule or be borne in a kind of palanquin, but most pilgrims chose to walk. The evening after I had myself made the trek (more trekker than pilgrim, it must be said), I stood at a tea shack near the entrance to the small but bustling settlement, and watched a party of mostly elderly men and women from somewhere in Tamil Nadu labouring, in short sleeved cotton shirts, saris, slippers, and in a drizzle and chill that far exceeded Rishi Valley's, the last few hundred feet to their destination. They stopped neither for tea nor to locate their lodgings, and made their way through the crowded rows of trinket shops and eateries to the small stone temple on its high platform. That is what they were here for and I felt again, with a certain deference, that I was in the presence of something I neither shared nor fully understood.

Curiously, I felt something similar another 25 years later when I participated in the first post-pandemic Gathering of the KFI, hosted at Sahyadri School. It was curious because this time I was one of the people invited to speak at the event. I had undertaken to do so after initial reluctance. I wondered if I would have anything useful to say about self-knowledge, which was the main theme. Did I even know what it was? Eventually this uncertainty is what induced me to accept the invitation: it seemed probable that the need to speak about it would help clarify matters for me, and that a deadline would energize my enquiry.

This it did. But when I stood at the podium to make my presentation, I felt that I could only offer questions rather than insights. I had arranged my questions, and tentative responses to some of them, in what I hoped was a cogent manner. I knew roughly what I wanted to say and had rehearsed in my mind how I might say it. But would this meet the expectations of the people who had taken the trouble to come? Did I understand why they were here and listening to me? Of what use could my tentativeness be to them? Perhaps they were seeking answers that I did not have.

Before I knew it the presentation was over and I found myself responding to questions, faintly relieved both that I wasn't fumbling for words and that I would soon revert to being more listener than speaker.

What I had not anticipated was that the questions did not end with the session. Straight afterwards and subsequently for the rest of the day and spilling into the next, people came up to comment on, or

ask me about, something or the other that I had said. Some came over at mealtimes and others stopped me on walks with their thoughts or questions, and, in a couple of instances, to ask me for suggestions on how to face specific dilemmas in their lives. (It appeared that this was the experience of the other speakers as well).

I was pleased that the session had stimulated such a response, but I was also uneasy. I was not used to being regarded as someone to consult in such matters. I felt I was in the limelight under false pretences, even though I was not conscious of pretending to anything. My unease was also at sensing that I was mildly conscious of having made a transition from providing creaturely comforts to being a 'keynote speaker' (as per the compere) and that this transition had been successful, apparently. Even though I attached no importance to it, what did my thinking about it in terms of a 'transition' imply for reflections on the self and the contradictions that the self engenders? And who was to say which kind of fulfilling of needs, physical or 'spiritual', contributed more to well-being? There was division here, and a deficit in clear thinking, even if I was aware of it!

But my unease had an older and more familiar cause as well. Despite the passage of more than thirty years, I hadn't quite resolved for myself why people found it necessary to take time out of their busy or retired lives to come at all (though with a higher proportion of young people this time). What was this need to seek out the elusive self, or its ending, in the company of like-minded people? Would I have come all this way myself, if I had not already been there as host or speaker? Probably not. And though I could identify reasons why they had come, and why I might not have, it felt that I was still missing something.

Not that I am deeply troubled by this: it's more a recognition that questions that first occurred to me half a lifetime ago remain somewhat unresolved. What I see, however, is that explanations might conceal as much as they reveal. In the face of the unknown, the space to 'keep on not knowing' is necessary, as Wislawa Szymborska indicates in her response to the question of what poetry is (in the poem 'Some People Like Poetry' that my presentation had drawn upon). In that space questions no longer have to be met with definitive answers. And in the presence of an attentive mind, things begin to be seen in unexpected ways: among them, in this case, that nobody's wellbeing lies entirely in anyone else's hands. Perhaps it is enough to acknowledge a human need even when explanations for it fall short. And perhaps that is what I had done intuitively all those years ago at Rishi Valley and at Kedarnath—and was doing more consciously now.

The Gatherings, then and now, served a purpose. This I am convinced of, from seeing and listening to the people who come. Their compulsion to be there indicates a lack, in society at large, of things that people who work in the Krishnamurti

centres perhaps take for granted. These include time for serious enquiry, in fact for shared enquiry, and the physical spaces that are conducive to it because they are peaceful, natural and sufficiently uncluttered to allow for reflective time and for being alone or in company. It is a rare privilege to live and work in such spaces.

And doing so raises the question of whether we who are in these places are aware of what a privilege it is, and whether we are taking sufficient advantage of it. The purpose of the Gatherings is not fundamentally different from the purpose of the schools. But it seems quite a challenge for us to retain that quality of enquiry and reflection that underlies both all through our everyday working lives in the schools. It would be a strange thing if we, like the outside participants in the Gatherings we host, needed to leave our homes and families, our work and schools, to pursue self-understanding!

Teacher-Student Relatedness

G GAUTAMA

Krishnamurti's invitation to teachers, "to be responsible for the whole" opened the doors to a thriving atmosphere of questions, arguments, debates and dialogues. It is easier for a teacher to feel ownership of teaching a subject in a class, than for all that the school stands for. Wishing that school be free of competition and comparison is one thing. Taking charge of this deeply is quite another matter. Sustaining ownership of the measurables is easier than sustaining ownership of intention. Good institutions work for shared ownership of intentions by many.

Without individual questioning, there would be no movement in institutions. For it is individuals who have questions. Institutions live the answers that individuals find or a group of people sustain. Organizations deteriorate and lose vibrancy unless individuals exhibit ownership. Moreover, if a particular approach does not find wider purchase it will not move ahead. It will dissolve like one more nucleus in a metal bath.

On teacher-student relationship

The article on 'teacher-student relationship' in the *Journal of Krishnamurti Schools*, Volume 26, invites readers to consider important questions on the role of a teacher, especially vis a vis the relationship with students and the teacher's passion. It also asks whether a teacher who is passionate about some particular concern can have a warm and caring relationship, without creating a sense of dependency? Many teachers may have encountered such questions or thought of them. In this article, I explore a few of these questions.

How should a teacher who feels passionately for something communicate this to his or her students?

One may need to question if passion is necessarily passion for something or a feeling that percolates all that one does. Or is it like, as Krishnamurti would say, the "feeling of cooperation", "not cooperation around an idea".

A teacher, particularly one who has sustained a particular activity or a vocation in her life, would speak with passion and enthusiasm to students. Of course, nothing wrong with it. However, one may ask if one's passion is something that one must communicate to students or is one's concern to help the student discover the courage to live passionately? The two are quite different. My particular interest, about which I am enthusiastic, can easily become a compulsion for students. Care needs to be taken how one's passion flows in emotionally strong areas such as human rights, environment, or poverty. The concerned teacher would create spaces for enquiry and exploration of the questions related to such issues. However, it is possible that unwittingly or by design, one may demand, invite, almost compel the listener, the student, to 'join in' as it is the 'right action' for a sensitive individual. The teacher needs to see that the windows of exploration stay open as the young find their own responses to equity, climate change and so on. It would help if the teacher were to explicitly and implicitly invite students to form their own views and, given them 'permission' not be part of his/her journey.

What are the contexts in which teachers may communicate their deep interests to students in a school?

One may ask, is the communication between a student and a teacher to become one-on-one, or can what the teacher says be available to the gaze of a larger set of students? If a teacher repeatedly engages with the same person or same small group, this reinforces, not only the individual or the group, but also their connection with the teacher. Agreement and acceptance become more prominent than questioning, arguing and disagreement or bringing different perspectives.

School assemblies, discussions in small and large groups, provide spaces for sharing and presenting one's deeper interests. It is important for a teacher to learn to speak in a language and manner that does not confine the conversation to just topics of interest to the teacher. This may then touch many others, opening different possibilities for different individuals. The teacher may thus avoid the pitfalls of becoming an 'influencer' of students, creating 'followers', which should be a red flag for any teacher.

In schools and colleges students do tend to hover around teachers whom they find interesting, or someone whom they unconsciously wish to emulate. This has always been so. K has pointed to 'setting man unconditionally free'!

While a teacher may not fully grasp what this means, it is obvious that the teacher's role is clearly not to constrain the options before students.

One might say that if a student is interested in something that I am interested in, it is a good fit. I am lucky and so is the student! This may be any sphere of activity—art, music, painting, writing, environment, physical activity. On the face of it there is no problem with this. However, if the student's interest is my justification for repeated engagement with an individual or a small group, there could be some questions I would need to ask. The teacher would need to examine if the teacher's need is separate from the student's need. If that is not so, it would be wiser to step back before the situation leads to habit, dependence and dysfunctionality in the relationship. The teacher would need to see oneself as one 'point of contact', one person in the 'village growing a child'. I would, as a teacher, need to guard against identification that leads to repeated 'gratification' of seeking out and engaging one or a small group of students.

What are some dangers for an institution if a teacher who feels passionately about something, engages with students largely through his/her central concern?

It is important that a teacher does not hold a student too close, and not fill the unfolding space of a young person with the teacher's choices and definitiveness. Repeated engagement between teacher and student, particularly when exclusive, can prevent observation and learning. It is necessary for students to experience a distance from where they can look independently and also be able to question the teacher and his or her choices. In this open communication, in front of people who may be critical, the teacher too retains his or her freedom, while ensuring that students do not get caught in the aura of the teacher.

There are obvious difficulties if students become intellectually, emotionally, or psychologically dependent on a teacher. Students' motivations are not clear even to themselves when approaching an adult repeatedly. While the young may be excused for not being clear, is it not the teacher's responsibility to watch out and not influence them with what might be one's certainties and compulsions? A passionate individual will, thus, have to guard against this with far greater alertness than someone who may not have deep interests. To use an environmental metaphor, if there is a 'monoculture' around a teacher, he/she may need to learn what it means to be 'soil for supporting a hundred species'.

Lastly, issues of child safety and possible abuse are real for schools. This could be physical, emotional, mental, or even sexual. Institutions face questions when a student experiences discomfort not only when a student in the school, but shares this discomfort in later years as well. Complaints when students are in school are relatively easier to handle than those that are made years later. 'Could we have done something more to forestall this?', is a painful question for schools, if a former student were to raise it. No redressal is possible! Thus, schools need to be watchful of excessive student dependence on a teacher, for whatever reason, whether it be emotional comfort, interest in a subject, other interests, or liking the style of a teacher. It can spin out of control and, if that happens, this may lead to adverse publicity and loss of reputation for the school.

Schumacher, in his book titled *Good Work*, speaks of two kinds of leadership. One is like a Christmas tree with a star on the top and a lot of nuts below. The other model is the balloon seller who holds strings in his hand and all balloons of different colours fly to a much greater height. In looking at one's own relationship with students, it may be easy to convince oneself that one is being the 'balloon seller'. Closer watching, and time, and caring colleagues, will show if all the balloons are blue or green or if we have many colours of balloons flying, each in its own way.

The phrase 'teacher-student relationship' itself suffers from an implied continuity and has a fixed quality about it. In the relationship between teacher and student, there can be no greater error than binding the student to the teachers' conclusions. On the other hand, *relatedness* has a quality of the here and now, without a sense of the future. Relatedness sets the student's spirit free, enabling her to question, even put aside the teachers' ideas in the light of her own understanding, and yet remain related. That is the challenge that Krishnamurti has left behind. We can learn a great deal from this statement of his, when he said of his teachings, "These are the teachings. Tear them to bits!"

The author has been a teacher and Principal at The School KFI in Chennai for 18 years and now works at Pathashaala having anchored its development from 2001 at many levels, identifying the land, construction and evolving the pedagogic and sanitation approaches. He may be contacted at gautama2006@gmail.com

Book Review
Face to Face and Side by Side

KANTI PHATAK

Parenting, an essential human activity, has seen several rapid changes and resulted in varying trends which are influenced by current events, and these trends are becoming widespread due to increasing global connectivity. *The Self Esteem Trap: Raising Confident and Compassionate Kids in an Age of Self-Importance* by Polly Young-Eisendrath is written basically for parents. At the time of publishing, the author was a Clinical Associate Professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Vermont. She has written several highly acclaimed books, many of which include her insights derived from Buddhism and other religious traditions.

The book is a very useful read for parents and teachers. In schools where conversations hold an integral role in the educational endeavour, it further provides a language and guidance to teachers, while conversing with children as well as with parents. The book helps us to see some of the issues that we face, to articulate our understanding to ourselves as well as others, and to find ways to address some of the issues. Though written in the lived context of North America, it has significant relevance to all who are engaged in raising the young.

The need for and relevance of a work such as this is aptly expressed in the blurb as follows:

> *Today's kids have heard how special they are from the moment they entered this world. A generation of parenting advice aimed at instilling self-esteem has unfortunately had quite a different outcome—children who:*
>
> • *lack a clear sense of value or perspective*
>
> • *pressure themselves constantly to be or to have the best*
>
> • *are excessively self-conscious*
>
> • *fear failure and are therefore afraid to take risks*

- *are hopeless about the future*
- *feel dissatisfaction with even the most desirable lives*

The chapters have thought-provoking titles, such as: 'The Trouble with Being Special', 'The Importance of Adversity' and 'The Value of Being Ordinary'.

The author's introduction dwells on her responses to the various difficulties that young people as well as adults seem to be facing and the confusions that arise in their minds with regard to relationships and the world of work. She draws on her experience as a psychotherapist, her knowledge of human development, her experience as a parent, and from contemporary psychology theory. She specifically mentions a sociological study conducted and published in 1985, called *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. The problems caused by individualism were being talked about even as individualism was being propagated at the same time. An excerpt from this study relates to our work in the Krishnamurti schools with regard to self-knowledge, relationships and the place of an individual in the world of humans:

> *We find ourselves, not independently of other people and institutions, but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our activity goes on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning. Our individualism is itself one such pattern.*

The author traces the history of the social context which overly emphasized individual achievements and expectations. She describes the times and parenting styles of those generations, highlighting the resultant problems in an empathetic and well-researched manner.

The first chapter emphasizes the genesis and development of an entity we recognize as the self. It is acknowledged as a fundamental, normal, and inevitable process. Further on comes the question of self-esteem, understanding its complex nature.

> *Good self-esteem comes from actual accomplishments and relationships; it is the by-product of doing some things well, accepting your limitations (when you need help from others) and seeing the good consequences of your own influences.*

She considers some parenting practices that might create an unrealistic sense of self leading to a heightened sense of self-importance. Too much approval and enthusiasm for every small action, or effusive praise for every single task

that is an ordinary part of day-to-day life, may be problematic. As children grow in such an environment, they may lose the capability of assessing themselves in relation to others and may end up with an exaggerated sense of a special and unique self, separate from others. Children may never make the valuable discovery of the underlying connection of being human, of the deep bedrock of similarity in the conditions of life. Realistic and compassionate responses in relationships may therefore be difficult to arrive at.

Adversities in the course of life are an integral, inherent and predictable part of living. Through adversity, adults can help a young person understand an unsettling experience, deal with the resultant discomfort and come to a sensible resolution.

> *Overcoming adversity and learning from difficulty teach us about suffering, both our own and others. They also pare down the special self, showing us that often we are not in control of our circumstances, but only (and imperfectly) of our own behaviour. Reducing self-blame and keeping faith in ourselves when everything seems to be going against our wishes or desires will allow us to climb out of the self-esteem trap, developing greater empathy and compassion for ourselves and others. We begin to understand through our own experience how people always and everywhere struggle with the demands that face them and are frequently thrown off centre in the process.*

The next chapter moves on to nurturing and cultivating a mind that leads to right action. In the quest to be the special and extraordinary one, many individuals resort to unfair means to attain success and then justify their actions. Many other tendencies, such as a feeling of entitlement and privilege, come into play along with easy justifications for cheating or lying. The example below illustrates how an adult could converse with very young children in this area.

> *Look for opportunities to cultivate an awareness of interdependence—of all the ways we are dependent on others—and gratitude for what others provide us. For instance, in eating with a child, speak often and with interest about all that has gone into bringing food to the table. Start with the insects and the soil and follow all the many transformations that take place (through people and other creatures) until the food reaches the table…Then it becomes natural to feel gratitude to those whose toil is of such benefit, and a deep sadness in wasting food; it wastes the work of so many. There are dozens of resources that we use every day that connect us to others who are invisible but essential. Tell those stories to your child.*

Adults must create an environment for the development of autonomy and emotional maturity that carries the child into adolescence. When a child grows up without a sensible and caring way of assessing herself and her place among others, it may lead to a fear of failure and a sense of shame, and this in turn could lead to a sense of depression. In the course of growing up, a child needs to see how, as families and groups, we are essentially interdependent. Seeing how groups cooperate, collaborate, and respect each other in living together could probably help them find their own place and role in human society. The pressure to be the first, the best or the most successful may be effectively diffused, which may help create a healthy sense of being 'ordinary'.

We realize the value of being ordinary through understanding how our lives are influenced by other people, the environment and our inner selves. So, being a part of, and not apart from others is what seems to create emotional intelligence as well as true autonomy. How is this to be done? The author draws from various religious traditions, reinterpreting words that have acquired certain connotations, such as generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom, and recommends them as mindful exercises. Put this way, it provides innumerable opportunities for creative ways in which we can build an atmosphere that would have all the above qualities.

'Religion and Reverence', 'Love and It's Near Enemy', and 'The Truth About Happiness' are chapters that unravel the meaning of religion, love and happiness. Religion is regarded as a quest to go deeply into finding out what is real.

> *Wanting to find out what is real on a deeper level is the best reason to turn to religion. Like science, religion answers questions about powers, meaning, and connections that underpin our lives, focusing especially on moral, ethical, relational, and existential issues… I want to make clear that by using the term 'religion', I do not mean a creed or even an organization of people. Rather I mean a careful and serious attitude about matters of transcendence. By transcendence I mean those feelings that break through the limits of our personal self and identity, conveying a connection to the source of our being.*

She mentions how the idealization of children, which parents inadvertently do, is not true love. Often, with all good intentions, idealization is seen as a tool to encourage or motivate a child, but some of the 'negative' aspects of such a practice are not realised or attended to. The author explains how an unhealthy dependency or attachment is created and how as parents and

teachers we could avoid this. To distinguish between mere attachment and healthy bonding is an important discernment to make, for parents and teachers alike. It is also relevant to all relationships in our lives as adults. Several anecdotes, case studies, and descriptions are given to explain what love is or is not.

> *Most of us think of love in terms of comfort, passion, closeness, or beauty it will bring us. We imagine the enjoyment of passing hours and days with our beloved who pleases us in touch, smell and conversation. Perhaps we even think of living happily ever after. Unfortunately, this is not love but its intoxicating sibling, idealization...*
>
> *The special self is the creation of idealization. Exceptional, extraordinary, perfect: these are not the descriptions of any real human being, a person with weaknesses as well as strengths. If we have heard repeatedly how talented, beautiful, smart or promising we are, we may grow up with an intolerance for weakness and difficulty in others, and a greater intolerance for imperfections in ourselves. Within such a self- esteem trap we are unable to connect with others or embrace ourselves in the messy difficult ambivalence of love.*

Happiness seems to be a feeling that comes to people when they grow up with a realistic picture of who they are, an acceptance of it, and being a part of a community built on affection, trust, collaboration, and cooperation.

In schools inspired by J Krishnamurti's teachings, there has always been an endeavour to understand the self and, more importantly, the self in relation to the world. The ambience that is carefully created is based on a core principle of the teachings, which is that comparison inevitably leads to competition, which is inherently destructive for the wholesome and healthful growth of a child. The attempt is to observe children, understand how they learn and, in K's words, help them "flower in goodness." How is this to be done? Having been a teacher in a Krishnamurti school for many decades, this question has been challenging yet deeply revelatory. I was not alone but in the company of a group of individuals, parents included, seriously and happily engaged in educating and caring for children. The academic part of the experience at school is only one among many other programmes for a child as well as a parent. There are several opportunities for students, teachers and parents to come together and converse on various topics that are of concern to an individual as well as to the world around us.

There are myriad ways in which a child can experience being part of a community at The School, KFI. The day, week and year are punctuated

with activities that foster interdependence, cooperation, collaboration and learning about the world around us. Some of these are: having meals together; cleaning and taking care of classrooms; and older students actively helping the juniors during the junior school events such as their Sports Day or Parents' Day. Conversations happen through various formats such as circle time, culture class and open houses where students come together to reflect upon many issues of concern or to explore the role of the self in relation to others. Field trips go a long way in enhancing their academic learning related to specific subjects such as history, geography, environmental studies. Trips in middle school are planned to places where they are challenged to explore their physical capabilities. All these trips provide the opportunity to learn about oneself, one's classmates and people living in different places in different ways.

In working towards all of the above, teachers and parents need to come together and work with care, affection and an awareness of the innate responsibility needed in raising the young. It seems rather overwhelming and arduous but it is also a journey that is joyous, fulfilling and may offer glimpses of 'love and compassion' when undertaken with a spirit of empathy and understanding. Our schools are indeed a way to translate many of the insights contained in this gem of a book.

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