



*Reading the Book  
of Oneself*

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AN INTRODUCTORY TALK BY J. KRISHNAMURTI

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## READING THE BOOK OF ONESELF

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**THE FOLLOWING TALK** is a relatable introduction to Krishnamurti's vast body of work. Using the metaphor of reading a book, he unfolds the human condition chapter by chapter, suggesting a novel approach to understanding oneself, one's life and our shared humanity. Krishnamurti's language is straightforward, with a simplicity that belies its depth. The talk looks at how the arts of listening, seeing and learning are central to being able to read ourselves and others. It reveals the causes of contradiction and conflict, inquires into order and authority, and illuminates the darkness of fear by understanding how time and thinking define our lives.

This 'book of oneself' includes the fundamentals of Krishnamurti's universal teachings and confirms to those willing to read to the very end that the answers to the problems and challenges of the world and our lives come not from others but from within.

*An audio recording of this talk is available  
online at [youtu.be/GedkWqg7tMo](https://youtu.be/GedkWqg7tMo)*

## *Reading the Book of Oneself*

*J. Krishnamurti*

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The whole story of humankind is in you. The vast experiences, the deep-rooted fears, anxieties, sorrows, pleasures, and all the beliefs we have accumulated for millennia – you are that story, that book. To read that book is an art. The book is not printed by any publisher; you can't buy it in any bookshop. You can't go to an analyst or scientist to help you read it because their books are the same as yours. A scientist may have a great deal of information about matter and astrophysics, but their book, the story of humankind, is the same as yours.

Without carefully, patiently, hesitantly reading that book, you will never be able to change the society in which we live: a society that is corrupt, immoral, with a great deal of poverty and injustice. Anyone seriously concerned with things as they are in the world, with all the chaos, corruption, war – which is the greatest crime – and concerned with bringing about a radical change in our society and its structure, must be able to read the book which is oneself. That society is brought about

by each one of us, and by our parents and grandparents, and so on – all human beings have created this society. Unless it is changed, there will be more corruption, more wars and greater destruction of the human mind. That is a fact.

So, in reading this book, which is yourself, there is an art to listening to what the book is saying. This means not to interpret what the book is saying but just to observe it as you would observe a cloud. You can't do anything about the cloud, nor a palm leaf swaying in the wind, nor the beauty of a sunset – you cannot alter it, you cannot argue with it, you cannot change it. It is so. The book is you, so you can't tell the book what it should reveal. It will reveal everything. So there is the art of listening to what the book is saying, and that must be the first art.

There is another art: the art of observation, seeing. When you read the book, which is yourself, there is not *you* and *the book*. There is not the reader and the book separate; the book is you. So you are observing the book, not telling it what it should say, but reading and observing all the reactions the book reveals, seeing very clearly without any distortion the

lines, the chapters, the verse, the poetry, the beauty, the struggle – everything it tells you and reveals.

So there is the art of seeing and the art of listening, and another art: the art of learning.

Computers can learn, be programmed and repeat what they have been told. If a computer plays against a chess master, the master may beat it a few times, but through experience it learns. After a few games, it can beat the chess master. Our minds work similarly: we first experience, then accumulate knowledge, store it in memory, in the brain; then thought arises from memory, and then we act. From that action, we learn, and this learning is the accumulation of further knowledge. Then you begin again: experience, knowledge, memory, thought and action. This cycle is going on all the time with all of us. I hope I am making it clear, that our action produces further knowledge. This is what the mind is doing, like the computer: experience, knowledge, memory, thought, action, and the action modifies or adds more knowledge, and we go on that way. We call this learning, learning from experience, and this has been the story of man.

There is constant challenge, and response to that challenge. The response can be equal to the challenge or not up to it. But we learn, we accumulate knowledge, and in the next challenge we respond again, more or less fully. So this process, called learning, is going on all the time in our minds.

When you learn a language, you learn the meaning of the words, the syntax and grammar. You put sentences together and gradually accumulate a vocabulary. Then, if you have a good memory, you begin to speak the language you have spent time on. This is the human process of learning, that is, always moving from knowledge to knowledge. And the book is the whole knowledge of humankind, which is you. It is you, and you either keep this circle of knowledge going all the time or find a way of moving out of that circle. That is, we always function from the past, from knowledge, modified by the present, and moving forward. The 'forward' is modified again, which becomes the past. This process is part of our life.

I am putting all this into simple language, but the word is not the thing. The name *Sri Lanka* is not the land itself, with its beauty, rivers, marvellous trees, fruits and flowers.

So the word is not the thing. Please bear this in mind. The word *husband* is not the man; it is a word. By words, we measure. The symbol is never the actual; a picture is not *that which is*. If this fact is deeply rooted in our minds, then words have very little significance: the thing matters, not the word.

As we said, there is the art of seeing, the art of listening and the art of learning. Learning is movement from the past to the present, modified, into the future. This whole cycle is what we call learning; psychological learning as well as technological learning. What does this mean? The mind is never free from the known.

Are we getting somewhere together, or am I making this awfully difficult? It is not difficult. If I may point out, you are probably not used to this kind of thinking, this kind of inquiry, constantly moving.

So, our learning is always within the field of the known, and the mind therefore becomes mechanical. If I have a particular habit and I live with that habit, my mind becomes mechanical. If I believe in something and I repeat, repeat, repeat, it becomes mechanical. We are saying that we are always living within the area of the known, and our minds have

become a network of words, never the actual, but words, words, words, and we move, change and alter only within the narrow, limited area of knowledge.

But learning implies something totally different, which we are going into together. We have said very clearly what seeing is and how to look at the book, to read the lines, the art of listening to the book, never distorting, never interpreting, never choosing what you like and don't like, what you appreciate and don't appreciate – because then you are not reading the book. And we also said that we live within the narrow limits of the known, and that has become our constant habit. Therefore our minds are repetitive, habitual and accustomed: you believe in God, and you believe in God for the rest of your life. If anybody questions whether there is a God, you call them irreligious. So you are caught in habit. We are saying that is not learning at all; learning is something entirely different. Learning means inquiring into the limits of knowledge and moving away from it.

So through the arts of seeing, listening and learning, never being caught in a pattern or inventing another pattern, but constantly

breaking down patterns, norms and values. This doesn't mean living without any restraint, permissively. It doesn't mean that at all, but a constant awareness of the pattern formation of the mind, and breaking it down so that the mind is constantly aware, alert.

Now, with these three basic factors – listening, observing, learning – let us read the book together, which is you and me and the rest of humankind.

Please give a little attention to this because we live in a society that is so unhappy, that is in such conflict, struggle, strife, and there seems to be no end to it. We are saying if we know how to read that book, which is yourself, all conflict, all noise, all travail comes to an end. Only then can truth come into your field. It is only such a mind that is a religious mind, not the believing mind, not the mind that does all kinds of rituals, not the mind that puts on strange garb but the mind that is free after reading the whole book completely. And it is only such a mind that receives the benediction of truth. It is only such a mind that can go infinitely far, beyond time.

What I am saying *is* your book. We are reading it page by page, chapter by chapter, till the

very end – if you can travel that far. And we must travel together if we are to solve human problems. We can solve them together, not as one person.

So, what is the first chapter? Please, think together, don't let me tell you. What is the first chapter in that book? Apart from our physical existence, the physical organism with all the travail of the body: disease, laziness, sluggishness, the lack of proper food, proper nourishment – apart from all that, what is the first movement? I am asking you; I am not telling you, which would be very easy for you, but if we do it together it will be yours. When you are able to read the book, you don't have to have a priest or psychologist; you don't depend on anybody. You will begin to have the extraordinary freedom that gives you tremendous vitality, the vitality of psychological freedom. So please let us share this book together.

Are you waiting for me? I am afraid you are because you have never looked at yourself deeply. You have looked at your face, but you have not looked into yourself. When you look into yourself, you discover for yourself that you are a second-hand human being. It may

be rather unpleasant to consider yourself second-hand, but we are full of other people's knowledge: what somebody, some philosopher, some teacher, some guru said, what the Buddha or Christ said – we are all full of that. And if you have been to school or university, you have also been told what to do and what to think. If you realise you are a second-hand human being, you can put aside that second-class quality of mind and look.

The first observation is that we live in contradiction; there is no order in us. Order is not a blueprint, putting the same thing in the same place every day. Order implies something far greater than the mechanical discipline of a habit, norm or sanction. We are saying order is entirely different from the accepted, normal discipline. Discipline means to learn, not to conform, not to imitate, not to copy or obey, but to learn. So, one discovers in the book's first chapter that we live an extraordinarily confused, disorderly life – wanting one thing and denying what we want, saying one thing and doing something else, thinking one thing and acting otherwise. So there is constant contradiction. Where there is contradiction, there must be conflict.



Conflict expresses itself as ambition, fulfilment, conformity, identification with a person, country or idea, and never living with the actual. We live in disorder, politically and religiously, in our family life and our relationships. So we have to find out what order is. The book will tell you if you know how to read it. It says you live in disorder; turn the page, and you will find out what it is to live in disorder. If we don't understand the cause of disorder, order will never come into being.

Disorder exists as long as there is contradiction – not only verbal contradiction but psychological contradiction. To understand the nature of disorder – not intellectually or verbally but actually – the book says not to translate what you read into an intellectual concept; read it properly. When you read it, it says your contradiction exists and can only end if you understand the nature of contradiction.

Contradiction exists when there is division: Hindus and Muslims, Jews and Arabs, communists and non-communists, and the constant divisive process between various types of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and so on. Where there is division, there must be conflict, which is disorder. And when

you understand the nature of disorder, out of that comprehension, out of the depth of understanding the nature of disorder, order comes naturally.

Order is like a flower naturally blooming. And that order, that flower, never withers – there is always order in one's life because you have really, deeply read the book, which says: where there is division, there must be conflict.

Have we read that chapter so clearly that we understand the nature of disorder? I'll go into it more deeply – that is the next chapter.

The next chapter says that there must be contradiction as long as you are working from a centre towards the periphery. That is, as long as you are acting self-centredly, selfishly, egotistically, personally, narrowing down the whole of this vast life into a little 'me', you will inevitably create disorder. The 'me' is a very small affair, put together by thought. Thought is my name, form, the psychological structure and the image it has built about itself: I am somebody. As long as there is self-centred activity, there must be contradiction and therefore disorder. The book says, don't ask how to be not self-centred. The book says that when you ask 'how', you are looking for a

method, and if you then pursue that method, it is another form of self-centred activity. The book is telling you all this; I am not telling you. I am not translating the book for you; we are reading it together.

You are bound to create conflict as long as you belong to any sect, group or religion. This is difficult to swallow because we all believe in something. You believe in God, another doesn't; another believes in the Buddha, another believes in Jesus, and Islam says there is only Allah. So belief brings division in relationship between man and man. Though you believe in God, you are not living a godly life. Belief has no value. You don't *believe* the sun rises and sets; you don't say, 'I believe the sun rises and sets' – so there is no need for belief when you are concerned only with facts. Facts are that which is actually happening, in your book.

The problem arises of how you read the book, and whether you are separate from the book. When you pick up a novel, you are reading it as an outsider, turning the pages, following the story, and so on, but here, the reader is the book. Do you see the difficulty? The reader *is* the book, so you are reading it as though part of yourself is reading. I wonder if you understand

this. We will go into it as we go along.

The book also says man has lived under authority: political, religious, the leader, the guru, the one who knows, the intellectual philosopher – we have always conformed to a pattern of authority. Please be very careful and listen carefully to what the book is saying. There is the authority of law. Whether you approve of that law or not, there is the authority of law. There is the authority of the police, the authority of an elected government, the authority of a dictator. We are not talking about that kind of authority; we are reading in the book about the authority the mind seeks to be secure.

The mind is always seeking security. The book says that when you seek psychological security, you are bound to create authority: the authority of the priest, the authority of the image, the authority of the one who says, 'I am enlightened, I will tell you.' So it says, be free of all that kind of authority. This means being a light to yourself and not depending on anyone for the understanding of life, for the understanding of that book. Reading the book, there is nobody between you and the book – no philosopher, no priest, no guru, no

god – nothing. You are the book, and you are reading it. So there must be freedom from the authority of another, whether it is the authority of the husband over the wife or the wife over the husband. It means to be able to stand alone. And most people are so frightened.

You have read the first chapters of the book, on disorder, order and authority. The next chapter says life is relationship, relationship in action. Not only relationship with the person nearest to you, but you are related to the whole of humankind because you are like the rest of humanity, wherever they live: you suffer, and all the rest do too. Psychologically, you are the world and the world is you. Therefore you have tremendous responsibility.

The next chapter says man has lived with fear from time immemorial. Fear – not only fear of nature, fear of the environment, fear of disease, fear of accidents and so on, but also much deeper layers: the deeper, unconscious, untrodden ways of fear. We are going to read the book together to the end. We are going to read the book together so carefully, so patiently, that when you come to the end of the chapter, your mind is free of all fear. And the book asks: what is fear? How does it arise? What is its

nature? Why has man not solved this problem? Why do we live with it? Have we become accustomed to it? Have we accepted it as the way of life? Why has the human being, you, not resolved that problem so that your mind is totally free from fear?

As long as there is fear, you live in darkness. You worship whatever you worship out of darkness. If your worship is out of darkness, your worship is absolutely meaningless. So, reading further about the nature of fear is very important. If you read the book closely, every word of it, it asks you: how does fear arise? Is it the remembrance of things past? Is it a remembrance of pain, or of something you have done which you oughtn't have; a lie that you have told and you don't want to be discovered and are frightened that it may be; or an action that has corrupted your mind and you are afraid of that corruption, of that action; or you may be afraid of the future, afraid of losing your job, or not becoming a prominent citizen in a particular little backyard of a country. So there are innumerable forms of fear: we are afraid of the dark, afraid of public opinion, afraid of death; we are afraid of not fulfilling – whatever that may mean. As well as the fear of disease,

one may have a great deal of physical pain. That pain is registered in the mind, and one is afraid it might return. You know all this.

The book says: go on, read more. What is fear? Is it brought about by thought? Is it brought about by time? I am healthy now, but as I grow older I will be ill, and I am frightened. That is time. Or thought says anything might happen to me: I might lose my job, I might go blind, I might lose my wife or husband – whatever it is. The book is asking you: is that the root of fear? Turn the page and you will find the answer in yourself; the speaker is not telling you. The book says thought and time are the factors of fear. It says thought is time. On the next page it asks: is it possible for the human mind, for you who are reading the book of yourself, to be completely free of fear, not a breath of fear?

I hope you are reading with me; I am not reading it by myself. Do you have the energy to go on with this? Again, the book says: don't ask for a method. A method means repetition, a system. The system you invent or adopt will not solve fear because you are then following a system rather than understanding the nature of fear. So don't look for a system, but only understand; understand the nature of fear.

The book asks: what do you mean by *understand*? We are going into it.

When do you say you understand something? What do you mean by that? Either you understand the verbal construction and meaning of the word, which is a particular form of intellectual operation, or you see the truth of it. When you see the truth of this, the thing disappears. When you see clearly for yourself that thought and time are the factors of fear – not as a verbal statement but as part of you, in your blood, in your mind, in your heart, that thought and time are the factors – then you will see fear no longer has a place, only time.

Fear has been brought about by time and thought: I am afraid of what might happen; I am afraid of my loneliness. I never examine loneliness and find out what it means. I am afraid of it, which means I run away from it. But that loneliness is your shadow. It pursues you; you can't run away from your shadow. So you have to have the patience of observation, which is not to run away but to observe, look, listen and hear what the book is saying. It says time is the factor, not fear. So you have to understand time. It says time is the factor, and if you can understand time, perhaps fear will end.

So, what is the relationship between time and thought? The book asks you to find out the relationship between time and thought. Thought is a movement from the known to the known. It is a movement: past memories meeting the present, modifying, and going on. This movement from yesterday to today to tomorrow is the movement of time. There is also psychological time. That is, I have known pain and I hope it won't occur again. This is the movement of the past through the present, modifying itself, and the future. There is time by the watch; there is time inwardly: I hope to be something or somebody. You are not, but you hope. You are violent, but you hope to be non-violent. You are greedy or envious, but through time, through evolution, you think you will gradually get rid of it. So time is a movement: past, present, future. Thought is also from the past: knowledge, memory and movement to the future. So time is thought.

The next question, of patience, is much more difficult to answer. I am using the word *patience* in a particular sense. Patience means the absence of time. Generally, we mean by patience to go slow, take time, don't react quickly, be quiet, take it easy, allow another to

express themselves, and so on. We are not using the word *patience* in that sense; we are saying patience means the forgetting of time so that you can observe. If you have time through which you are observing, you are impatient. Do you get what I'm saying? I am saying something extraordinary. So, you have to have patience to read the chapter that says time is the factor of fear. Thought is time, and as long as thought is functioning, you are bound to be afraid.

The next chapter asks: is there a stopping of time? Is there an ending to time? Time is a great factor in our life: I am, I will be; I don't know but I will know; I don't know a particular language but I will learn. Give me time, time to heal wounds. Time blunts sensitivity, time destroys relationship, time destroys understanding because understanding is immediate – it is not 'I will learn to understand.' So, the book says that time plays an extraordinarily important part in our lives.

Our brains have evolved through time. It is not your brain or my brain, but the human brain, the human brain which is you. You have identified that brain as your brain, as your mind, but it is not your mind or brain; it is the human brain that has evolved through millions

of years. The brain, which is conditioned by time, can only operate in time. So we are asking the brain to do something totally different, which is, the book says your brain, your mind, functions in time; time has played an important part in your life; time is not the solution to any problem, except technological problems; don't use time as a way to resolve a problem. This is very difficult to understand. Please give your mind to this, to read the book properly.

So the book asks: can time end? If you don't end it, fear will go on, with all its consequences. It says, don't ask how to end it. The moment you ask somebody how to end it, they will give you a theory. They have not read the book.

Now, this is real meditation. This is real meditation, which is to inquire whether time can ever stop. I say it can, and it does. Careful, please – I say so, not your book. If you say, 'Krishnamurti says it ends; I hope it ends,' and you believe in that hope, you are not reading the book but just living on words. And living on words does not dissolve fear. So you have to read the book of time, and go into it, explore the nature of time, how you react to time, how your relationships are based on time. To say, 'I know you,' is time. Go into this, which is, knowledge

means time. If you are using knowledge as a means of advancement, you are caught in time and therefore in fear and anxiety – and that whole process goes on.

So, to inquire into the nature of the ending of time requires a silent mind, a mind that is free to observe. A mind that is not frightened is free to observe the movement of time in yourself and how you depend on it. You know, if somebody told you there is no such thing as hope, you would be horrified, wouldn't you? Do you understand what I'm saying? Hope is time.

So you have to investigate the nature of time and realise that your brain, your mind, your heart, which are one, are functioning in time and are conditioned in time. Therefore you are now asking something totally different. You are asking the brain, the mind to function totally differently, and that requires great attention in your reading.

## Contact and Further Information

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*This place must be of great beauty, with trees, birds and quietness, for beauty is truth, and truth is goodness and love.*

— KRISHNAMURTI

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**KRISHNAMURTI FOUNDATION TRUST** • Established in 1968 as a registered charity, Krishnamurti Foundation Trust exists to preserve and make available Krishnamurti's teachings. The Foundation serves a global audience by providing worldwide free access to Krishnamurti videos, audio and texts to those interested in pursuing an understanding of Krishnamurti's work in their own lives. It relies on donations and legacies to accomplish this, cover its costs and keep the Centre accessible. In describing his intentions for the Foundations, Krishnamurti said: *The Foundations will see to it that these teachings are kept whole, are not distorted, are not made corrupt.*

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**BROCKWOOD PARK SCHOOL** • An international co-educational boarding school offering a personalised, holistic education for around 60 students aged 14 to 19. The school, the only one of its kind in Europe, is deeply inspired by Krishnamurti's teachings, which encourage academic excellence, self-understanding, creativity and integrity, in a safe, non-competitive environment. Education at Brockwood goes beyond more traditional kinds of learning. Not exclusively academic, its mission is to help students learn the art of living, bringing together aspects of learning, sensitivity, open-mindedness and self-reflection that are too often ignored.

*Here at Brockwood, we are responsible for creating the soil in which there is freedom. In that freedom, we can flower in goodness.*

— KRISHNAMURTI

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*We feel strongly that Krishnamurti's teachings are increasingly relevant to the various challenges faced by society and humanity. You can support us in this important work by making a donation, however small, or with a legacy. This can be done online at*

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