

Book Review: School Without Fear

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This book is a compilation of the twenty six dialogues of Jiddu Krishnamurti while engaging with parents and teachers in 1954-55 at the Rajghat Besant school at the bank of the Ganges, which he founded in the 1930s. Jiddu Krishnamurti is a well known Indian philosopher, teacher and guide in the field of education who had his presence felt not only in India but across the globe in the 20th century through his radical and profound ideas on schooling and religion. On going through the dialogues you find that they still hold promise looking at the contemporary state of education in schools all across the country. The book especially throws light on the different dimensions of the role of a teacher and headmaster (should function as a Headfather) in unfurling the latent potential of each child in an atmosphere where fear is absent altogether. He further exhorts the teachers not to be mechanical in the discharge of their responsibilities and understand that any kind of authority and hierarchy should be removed in order to question things around you be it a set of ideas, teachings, beliefs etc. Krishnamurti builds the dialogues through raising pertinent questions time and again to clarify his intent. He adds that the major cause of misery is fear owing to examinations, constant comparisons of children to one another and pitching students in the rat race to surpass each other in scoring marks. Owing to constant pressures on children to fit into the societal mould they often fall in the trap of ambition whether they like it or not and as a result end up unhappy as individuals. It is important that children are given the freedom to choose for themselves what they want to pursue and thus in the process there is no conflict between ambition and belief. Another crucial question raised in this book is that: when we influence, guide, protect or compel children do we not snatch away their opportunity to think and act intelligently? If yes we should stop conditioning children to constantly adapt to whatever is comfortable rather than what is right. It is important to do away with any kind of conditioning as it is destructive for the child according to Krishnamurti. For this to take place it is crucial to understand that we need to abolish hierarchy, status, function in an institution so that irrespective of your role whether as a housefather, housemother, teacher, helper you collectively work together to nurture the free spirit of the child. When there is no hierarchy and status the child

feels free to talk, discuss, clarify and interact thus creating an environment where there is no fear of authority. Another issue which is clarified in the dialogues is that there can be no attention if it is based on intention. According to Krishnamurti Attention is a state wherein an individual is free from tension and motive. You can never be free of tension whenever there is a motive attached to being attentive. Krishnamurti also delves deeply into understanding that there is nothing called permanence in the world. We need to understand that the only thing that is permanent is impermanence. He also builds a case for being awake to our thoughts all the time. Instead of waiting for a thought to come in examine it with the whole mind the moment it comes. One of the primary aims of teaching is to develop the personality of children as integrated individuals which includes the totality of my conscious and unconscious being, including my capacities, attitudes, fears, inhibitions, desires, compulsions, actions etc. The child needs to grow up into a questioning adult who does not succumb to the pressures of the society, who has the courage to pursue the calling of his/her heart and has character to face the challenges which life offers without any fear. Krishnamurti also clarifies that this integration is not merely outward, it is inward wherein the child is completely absorbed in doing what he /she loves to do with a deeply religious feeling. In order help or support the child in thinking for himself or herself it is important for teachers to engage in meaningful discussions with children without entering into any kind of argument or debate. Krishnamurti also cautions that for any productive discussion with the students it is important that we leave the baggage of experience, opinion and belief behind to start afresh. He also lays emphasis on cultivation of good taste in students with respect to how they dress up. He says it is important for students to understand that they must dress properly i.e either be entirely European or Indian but do not mix and match as it is not aesthetic. Krishnamurti also discusses the concept and implication of discipline and clarifies that: "discipline implies tremendous energy, directed, controlled, shaped, moulded in a particular direction" It also means imposing checks, balances, sanctions and counter sanctions so that an individual is completely dissipated of the energy he/she has. He raises a difficult question: A really deep

and strong man why should he be disciplined? According to Krishnamurti his very depth and strength is its own discipline. He feels the term discipline has been introduced to put a check and balance on ambition. Through a check on our mental energy, emotional energy, sexual energy we are taught to conform, resist and adjust even if that means being nearly dead in the process. As teachers we need to think about how best we can make students think for themselves, enable them to develop the capacity to think for themselves, develop a good taste with respect to colours and mannerisms and to use their mental faculties creatively. In the last dialogue in the book Krishnamurti also exhorts parents to first indulge in self knowledge in order to create any fruitful knowledge with their own children or with their neighbourhood, society or nation at large. Parents need to understand the meaning of giving freedom to their children based on their instincts instead of exercising control and making them fit the societal mould all the time. Parents need to be ready to be educated to find the ill effects of examinations, constant comparisons and controlling young minds to conform and submit.

The twenty six dialogues in this book do shake you from deep slumber thinking of what actually is being done in

schools in the name of education. The book provokes you into thinking what exactly is teaching? What is the role of the teacher in the life of a child? How do you teach and still not influence the child? How do you ensure that you unfurl the capacities of the child in a friendly atmosphere without any fear? How should you use the Socratic method of teaching-learning dialogically in the present system of education? How discipline cages you and is detrimental for the unleashing of your creative energy? Many of these questions have been answered or pondered upon in this book through dialogues of Krishnamurti with teachers and parents. However the book does confuse you on issues of attention without any motive and incentive and what exactly do we understand by the term 'cooperation'.

Although it is well taken that examinations are detrimental and they instill fear but how do we build an alternative culture of evaluation which nurtures the creativity of the child ...the answer is not provided for in the dialogues. On the whole a book which does not provide you with answers but definitely sets the tone of your thinking to find answers for yourself through self discovery.

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