

What is *is* Tao

Krishnamurti explained

The world is sick and there is no one outside you to help you except yourself. We have had leaders, specialists, every kind of external agency, including god—they have had no effect. They cannot guide you. No statesman, no teacher, no guru, no one can make you strong inwardly, supremely healthy.

As long as you are in disorder, as long as your house is not kept in a proper condition, a proper state, you will create the external prophet, and he will always be misleading you. Your house is in disorder and no one on this earth or in heaven can bring about order in your house.

Unless you yourself understand the nature of disorder, the nature of conflict, the nature of division, your house, that is you, will always remain in disorder, at war.

K, His Last Journal

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Contents

The core of the teachings	5
K's summary	5
A theoretical physicist's summary	6
My own summary	7
The psychological realm	9
Words and things	9
The movement of existence	12
<i>Tao</i> vs the story	13
Physical, mental and spiritual	16
Consciousness, observation and imagination	18
Stories and meaning	20
Society	23
The natural life	24
Understanding and explanation	31
Order and emptiness	31
Image and relationship	32
Communication and assumption	33
Conditioning	34
Fear and freedom	35
Change and fixity	37
Time, <i>now</i> and the present	37
Meditation	39
Knowledge and belief	43
Intelligence, education and learning	44
Love and other emotions	49
Problems and conflict	53
Gurus and practice	55
Epilogue	57
There's only one step	57
How does K differ from Vedanta?	60

The core of the teachings

K's summary

This was written by Krishnamurti in 1980 at the request of his biographer, Mary Lutyens

The core of Krishnamurti's teaching is contained in the statement he made in 1929 when he said, "Truth is a pathless land". Man cannot come to it through any organisation, through any creed, through any dogma, priest or ritual, not through any philosophical knowledge or psychological technique. He has to find it through the mirror of relationship, through the understanding of the contents of his own mind, through observation and not through intellectual analysis or introspective dissection.

Man has built in himself images as a fence of security—religious, political, personal. These manifest as symbols, ideas, beliefs. The burden of these images dominates man's thinking, his relationships, and his daily life. These images are the causes of our problems for they divide man from man. His perception of life is shaped by the concepts already established in his mind. The content of his consciousness is his entire existence. The individuality is the name, the form and superficial culture he acquires from tradition and environment. The uniqueness of man does not lie in the superficial but in complete freedom from the content of his consciousness, which is common to all humanity. So he is not an individual.

Freedom is not a reaction; freedom is not choice. It is man's pretence that because he has choice he is free. Freedom is pure observation without direction, without fear of punishment and reward. Freedom is without motive; freedom is not at the end of the evolution of man but lies in the first step of his existence. In observation one begins to discover the lack of freedom. Freedom is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence and activity.

Thought is time. Thought is born of experience and knowledge, which are inseparable from time and the past. Time is the psychological enemy of man. Our action is based on knowledge and therefore time, so man is always a slave to the past. Thought is ever limited and so we live in constant conflict and struggle. There is no psychological evolution. When man becomes aware of the movement of his own thoughts, he will see the division between the thinker and thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience. He will discover that this division is an illusion. Then only is there pure observation which is insight without any shadow of the past or of time. This timeless insight brings about a deep, radical mutation in the mind.

Total negation is the essence of the positive. When there is negation of all those things that thought has brought about psychologically, only then is there love, which is compassion and intelligence.

A theoretical physicist's summary

This was written by David Bohm, a theoretical physicist in his book *A Brief Introduction to Krishnamurti's Teachings*, 1982. Copyright © Krishnamurti Foundation of America

My first acquaintance with Krishnamurti's work was in 1959 when I read his book 'The First and Last Freedom'. What particularly aroused my interest was his deep insight into the question of the observer and the observed.

This question had long been close to the centre of my own work as a theoretical physicist who was primarily interested in the meaning of the quantum theory. In this theory, for the first time in the development of physics, the notion that these two cannot be separated has been put forth as necessary for the understanding of the fundamental laws of matter in general.

Because of this as well as because the book contained many other deep insights, I felt that it was urgent for me to talk with Krishnamurti directly and personally as soon as possible. And when I first met him on one of his visits to London, I was struck by the great ease of

communication with him, which was made possible by the intense energy with which he listened and by the freedom from self-protective reservations and barriers with which he responded to what I had to say.

As a person who works in science, I felt completely at home with this sort of response, because it was in essence of the same quality as that which I had made in contacts with those other scientists with whom there had been a very close meeting of minds. And here, I think especially of Einstein who showed a similar intensity and absence of barriers in a number of discussions that took place between him and me. After this I began to meet Krishnamurti regularly and to discuss with him whenever he came to London.

Krishnamurti's work is permeated by what may be called the essence of the scientific approach, when this is considered in its very highest and purest form. Thus, he begins from a fact like the nature of our thought processes. This fact is established through close attention, involving careful listening to the process of consciousness, and observing it assiduously. In this, one is constantly learning, and out of this learning comes insight into the overall or general nature of the process of thought. This insight is then tested. First, one sees whether it holds together in a rational order. And then one sees whether it leads to order and coherence in what flows out of it in life as a whole.

Krishnamurti constantly emphasizes that he is in no sense an authority. He has made certain discoveries, and he is simply doing his best to make these discoveries accessible to all those who are able to listen. His work does not contain a body of doctrine, nor does he offer techniques or methods for obtaining a silent mind. He is not aiming to set up any new system of religious belief. Rather, it is up to each human being to see if he can discover for himself that to which Krishnamurti is calling attention, and to go on from there to make new discoveries on his own.

My own summary

Krishnamurti's thought is not complicated at all, but because he was a talker, each time he spoke he had a different audience whose members

were coming from different experiences. Inevitably, his descriptions and examples were varied, and the metaphors he was forced to use were taken as directives.

He talks of love, freedom, goodness, beauty, truth, meditation, intelligence, religious mind, austerity, attention, choiceless awareness, enlightenment, desire, insight, relationship, mirror of relationship, ending of sorrow, inward order, peace, humility, simplicity, wisdom, silence—and unfortunately, people take those words in their ordinary meaning.

The thing is, if you read him carefully it's clear that he uses all these words to indicate a single state: of immediate, unthinking, connection with what is. The many conscious interpretations of that state give us feelings of love, freedom etc.; but these are words, descriptions, not experiences, and only experiences count.

Only by dropping the source of the interpretations—abstract thought—can we experience *what is*, which is a primitive state of will-less attention where things just happen: no ego exists and so no memories can be formed. Other people call this being 'in the zone', or 'one with the Tao', and so on. In this book I call this state *Tao*. An orgasm is a taste of it. No wonder it's attractive.

So there's no point asking Krishnamurti or anybody else questions, or thinking about what he says. What you have to do is encourage the circumstances in yourself wherein that non-thinking *Tao* state arises. You can only do that if you watch yourself continuously, and you can only do that in a simple, immediate—non-industrialised—society.

'When you listen to K, he is not instructing you. He is putting up a mirror in front of you to see yourself. And when you see yourself very clearly, you can break the mirror and the man who holds up the mirror.'

But there's a catch: you can't intend to reach the *Tao* state, it just has to arise.

The psychological realm

Words and things

The psychological realm is where consciousness assesses thoughts, makes plans, creates explanations and scenarios, recalls the past and imagines the future. These are psychological thoughts, that I call just ‘thoughts’, and which occur whenever your attention is not directed entirely on what your body, your senses, are telling you.

Consciousness creates the psychological realm using words.

It’s tempting to think that words have some kind of direct link to what they describe, and that the existence of a noun, especially, signifies the existence of a thing that it describes. It’s equally tempting to think that if you understand the noun correctly, you have an understanding of the thing described by the noun, that you have a relationship with a thing.

You know it is very difficult to understand the meaning of words and also to be free of words. Most of us who understand English understand more or less the meaning of words.

Words have their reference in the dictionary, or we give a particular significance to words. And I feel it is very important not to be caught in words. Most of us live with words; for us words have an extraordinary significance.

All our thinking, our feeling, is limited by words. Words and symbols play an enormous part in our life; and to really comprehend those words and to be free of words and to go beyond the words is very important for the man who would really understand what is truth.

K, Delhi 1963

K insists that ‘the word is not the thing’, implying that you can’t use words to understand the things of which the world is made. You can’t have a relationship with a description. You must go beyond words, beyond the psychological realm that they create, beyond the storytelling.

K spent his life explaining, illustrating and reworking this message in various ways, but his attempts at explanation generally serve only to confuse his audience because they, not surprisingly, don't get it. It's like seeing a sign on a door saying, 'Do not read me'. You have to read it in order to obey it, don't you? How can you unread it?

But he was serious. You have to go beyond words, beyond what he says, but since he used many words over many years, going beyond them seems impossible. Don't you have to read everything he wrote in order to understand him properly? And when you've read him, and read interpretations of him, and commentaries, and judgements, and formed an opinion, then what do you do? You're back at square one but now you're drowned in so much information you've no idea what to do.

Questioner: In your teaching there are a thousand details. in my living I must be able to resolve them all into one action, now, which permeates all I do, because in my living I have only the one moment right before me in which to act. What is that one action in daily living which will bring all the details of your teaching to one point, like a pyramid inverted on its point?

[...]

Krishnamurti: To have inside you that light that has no beginning and no ending, that is not lit by your desire, that is not yours or someone else's. When there is this inward light, whatever you do will always be right and true.

Questioner: How do you get that light, now, without all the struggle, the search, the longing, the questioning?

[...]

Krishnamurti: You can have it immediately when the "me" is not. The "me" comes to an end when it sees for itself that it must end; the seeing is the light of understanding.

K, The Urgency of Change

So what is that light of understanding? It is the experience of living in the flow of *Tao*. No knowledge is needed, no preparation is needed, no experience is presented or can be described.

There is only one step, no other steps

K, Talk 7, Saanen 1966

That seems pretty clear, and yet it doesn't appear to be clear enough for anyone. Why not? Is it because we're addicted to knowledge? Do we want answers that we can recite?

We're not alone. When K dissolved the Order of the Silver Star, the organisation set up for him by Annie Besant, he made a speech in which he told the 3000 members that not one of them understood him. After 17 years of teaching, not one member understood him—but what were they trying to understand?

They were trying to understand what is. The main problem they had is that 'what is' are words. They wanted a description of what is—they wanted 'the Truth'—when the words 'what is' signify that a fuller description isn't available. 'What is' are words, not a thing, and words have no attributes, are not locatable and have no behaviour, so you can't describe them or show a path to them. There is no statement about them that can be true. There is no truth about their nature that can be communicated.

Truth cannot be given to you by somebody. You have to discover it; and to discover there must be a state of mind in which there is direct perception.

Krishnamurti, The First and Last Freedom

So the light is a state of direct perception. 'Direct perception' is a misnomer, as explained later, but it is anyway just a metaphor. You can't avoid metaphors in speaking of thoughts, which are not objects in the world but are treated in language as the same kind of thing as objects:

'That's a sweet thought, thank you'

Can a disembodied thought be sweet? No, but it still makes sense. Nobody would think 'sweet thought' is unintelligible, even though a

thought is not a thing and can't be sweet. This is how we are misled by words.

We are in love with metaphors and we often speak in metaphors, but we take his use of metaphors as descriptions of things. For example, he sometimes talks of love:

When you say you love somebody, is that love? For in that love is there not both the "observer" and the thing you love, the observed? That "love" is the product of thought, divided off as a concept and there is not love.

When we speak of love, it has the characteristics of a thing that can be found in the world. 'They found love' is a perfectly understandable statement. But can you find love in the perceptual world? Is it a kind of touch, a kind of smell, taste, sound or sight? No, it isn't. It's a word for a feeling, a sentimental thought concerning an ideal human relationship. It's just a word that's part of a story.

K rejects this sentimental version, and proposes that the love connection, stripped of its idealised fantasy, is not between thought-objects in the story—me, you, him, her, that—but is simply unmediated connection between you and what is. If you love someone properly, it's not personal love, it's meeting in *Tao*, where there is no you. In other words K uses it as a synonym for 'light', etc.: living the flow of *Tao*.

The movement of existence

What is, is the movement of existence. Others call it *Tao*, and so shall I in this attempt at de-obfuscation. Not 'the Tao', because then there is a suspicion of objectness, of a thing with the name 'Tao'. But *Tao* is not a thing and you cannot strive to join it. It's the process of living.

All human beings are descendants of tribal people who were spiritually alive, intimately in love with the natural world, children of Mother Earth. When we were tribal people, we knew who we were, we knew where we were, and we knew our purpose.

John Trudell

Less romantically, when we were tribal people, the questions of who we were and what purpose we had did not arise, because they are questions

that only get asked when fictions of the mind take precedence over sensations of the body.

In these fictions of the mind we are filled with heroic chutzpah, we are heroes of our story:

*You are all so damned clever, that's what's wrong
with you*

K, the way of intelligence

Tao vs the story

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, you are participating in *Tao*. If you are speaking to your lover, pressing your shirt, arguing with a shopkeeper, filing your nails, you are participating in *Tao*. However, 'You' and 'speaking to your lover' etc are stories, fictions, about that participation.

There are more names for this participation:

*Love, freedom, goodness and beauty are one, not
separate.*

Krishnamurti in Bombay 1984

K speaks of light, love, freedom, goodness, beauty, truth, meditation, intelligence, religious mind, austerity, attention, choiceless awareness, enlightenment, desire, insight, relationship, mirror of relationship, ending of sorrow, inward order, peace, humility, simplicity, wisdom, silence, as if they all indicated the same fundamental state.

*The mind that loves is really a religious mind because
it is in the movement of reality, of truth, of God, and it
is only such a mind that can know what beauty is.*

K, The Matter of Culture

--

*Wisdom is simplicity of the heart. In this simplicity
the supreme is realised.*

K, The World Within

--

When there is love and beauty, whatever you do is right, whatever you do is in order.

K, On Love

They all reduce to what I would call ‘alert presence’, the state of dwelling in or directly experiencing the thing that K calls ‘what is’ and that I call ‘living the flow of *Tao*’, a state unmediated by psychological thoughts and interpretations and so free of ideological doctrine, intention or purpose. A state of simple being and immediate response.

K sometimes talks of being ‘aware’ as a kind of intermediate step between the conscious delusional life and the immediate relational life: a conscious way of preparing the hero of your story for the ending of the story.

“Aware” means to be sensitive, alive to the things about one, to nature, people, colour, to the trees and the environment, to the social structure, the whole thing, to be aware outwardly of all that is happening and what is happening inside. To be aware is to be sensitive, know, observe, what is happening inside psychologically, and what is happening outside, environmentally, economically, socially. If one is not aware of what is happening outwardly and begins to be aware inwardly, one becomes rather neurotic. But if one begins to be aware of what is exactly happening in the world, as much as possible, and then from there moves inwardly, one has a balance. Then there is a possibility of not deceiving oneself. One begins by being aware of what is happening outwardly and then moves inwardly – like the ebb and flow of the tide, there is constant movement – so that there is no deception.

K, Freedom from the known, Brockwod Park 1977

He speaks of dying each day to the past, but this too is just a preliminary exercise for the heroic seeker. Awareness is not alert presence.

Alert presence is living the flow of *Tao*, which is a non-specific concept, an abstract thought that signifies *unknowable*. It represents the idea that the stories we tell using words are unable to include either the unknowable

thing itself or the nature of that thing. In the story we have to use metaphors, and the usual way to describe *Tao* is ‘movement in a flow’, or ‘continuous, immediate interaction’, but *Tao* is neither of these, and ‘alert presence’ too is only a metaphor. *Tao* is unknowable.

And yet the stories in our heads include a thing that is *Tao*, and that thing exhibits attractive qualities of ideals such as silence, love and beauty.

Our consciousness is reading the stories and trying to make sense of them, but how to make sense of them? All we can do is relate them to sensory experiences, and we use metaphors suggesting that *Tao* is ‘some sort of state in which I’d feel satisfied’ or ‘happy’, even though *Tao* cannot contain individuals or sentiments and is in any case *unknowable*.

*Emptiness comes as sunset comes of an evening, full
of beauty, enchantment and richness; it comes in
naturally as the blossoming of a flower*

K, Madras, 1964

Emptiness too is the experience of living the flow of *Tao*. How is it possible that we have thoughts that we don’t know the meaning of? How can we have a thought about something we are unable to describe?

K says that the stories are a re-presentation of brain states. Consciousness is manifested by the physical body, and there are no separate mental or spiritual universes. It’s an example of a brain-mind identity theory, similar to Spinoza’s or Russell’s.

There are three key points in the above theory. The first is that the entities that occur in mathematical physics are not part of the stuff of the world, but are constructions composed of events and taken as units for the convenience of the mathematician. The second is that the whole of what we perceive without inference belongs to our private world. The starry heaven that we know in visual sensation is inside us. The external starry heaven that we believe in is inferred. The third point is that the causal lines which enable us to be

*aware of a diversity of objects, though there are some
such lines everywhere, are apt to peter out like rivers
in the sand.*

*Bertrand Russell, My Philosophical Development
(1959), Ch. II, My Present View of the World*

In other words, what we see—and what we think—is unique to each of us because I is a creation of a particular brain.

Physical, mental and spiritual

What do we mean by *physical*? Modern physics deals in probabilities of existence, and various metaphors for possible interactions—strings, rubber sheets and so on. There is no longer a concept of matter as a solid material, as balls whirling at vast distances. Traditional physics visualises an atom consisting of tennis-ball-sized protons and neutrons surrounded by smaller electrons whirling in ‘space’ a kilometre away. But this material world is an illusion, according to modern Physics.

*Light and matter are both single entities, and the
apparent duality arises in the limitations of our
language.*

Werner Heisenberg

All that’s in our head are ideas and models, and *physical* is just another idea. Physics is an ideological story, as magical as you want to make it. One problem is that if the only thing that exists is matter, then ‘space’—no-matter—cannot exist. You cannot have ‘empty space’ separating ‘things’.

‘Mind’ is an idea, ‘spirit’ is an idea. They are all just names for ideas, so it doesn’t actually mean anything to say ‘all is material’ or ‘all is mind’, or ‘all is spirit’ because none of those terms can be pinned down to anything real except in the stories we tell ourselves. That K chooses to focus on *physical* just means that all these ideas in our stories refer to a single underlying thing, and the physical world, the world known through our physical senses, is the one that we assume is common to all our stories and is the easiest to describe. It is located in space and time, we are familiar with its descriptions and we can talk about them.

But the sensations we are conscious of are *interpretations* of the data supplied by the senses about the physical world. K calls these

interpretations *images*. The physical is no more real than the mental or the spiritual, but the vocabulary we use for it is more familiar, and in the West we have settled on that vocabulary as more 'provable', ie more *useful*. It's useful for making toasters and phones, yes, and for those only interested in toasters and phones, it's enough. Being zoo animals is a small price to pay for the promise of unlimited toasters and phones.

What is responsible for this judgement that 'it's a small price to pay'?
Conditioned consciousness.

However, consciousness is not a thing, not the container, but a name for the contents, which are thoughts, just as 'molecule' is a name for a collection of atoms. 'Molecule' is a thought, not an object. There is no molecule without the atoms. Consciousness is the collection of thoughts.

What is a thought? A thought is a set of arranged and interpreted sense data, presented as a conclusion. It is not a thing and is not the result of a miraculous coming-into-being of a non-physical form.

Consider: the picture you 'see' on your computer does not exist. What you see is a collection of electrical signals, presented as dots of light. Equally, the picture you see on your mantelpiece is splashes of pigment. In both cases your brain connects the dots or pigments, bounds them, gives them meaning and then re-presents them internally as a coherent whole. But even then, there is no picture in your brain, just a coded electronic description. There is never a 'picture', anywhere. There are no pictures.

There are no 'thoughts' either, so there cannot be a thinker as we conceive it. There cannot be an agent of thought, a thing that is an 'I', or an individual self that perceives a thought. 'I' is just the name we give to the hero of the story into which the internal re-presentation is slotted.

There is no thinker apart from thought; thought has made the thinker.

Krishnamurti to Himself

Just as an eye is a mechanism by which a particular frequency of light is converted into electrical signals that are interpreted as 'sight', so somewhere there is an organ that arranges other electrical signals into 'thoughts'. That organ is the 'thinker'.

‘Consciousness’ too is a thought, not a thing or state of a thing. There is no self-consciousness without thoughts. When the mind is empty of thoughts—when the organ of thought has no data—there is no mind. Mind *is* the story.

Consciousness, observation and imagination

What we are conscious of consists of two elements, things we observe and things we imagine. Both elements are synthesised by organs of perception.

The observer is the *subject-you*, the parrot on your shoulder, and it only observes, it does not act, nor does it instigate action.

The *subject-you* cannot be aware of itself, for then it would be an object. Your identity, your self-awareness, the *I* that is the apparent creator of your thoughts and initiator of your actions, is the *object-you*, a fictional character in the stories heard by the observer, the *subject-you*.

The *subject-you* doesn't experience consciousness, it only reads the story of 'interior' and 'exterior' observations. In the story, exterior events are inferred to be caused by material cause-effect. Interior events—thoughts—are inferred to be caused by a mind belonging to an immaterial I, the *object-you*.

Although the *object-you* is the hero of the story and the apparent generator of the thoughts in the story, it doesn't create them. This 'you', this 'self', is only a character in the story, a brain state—a thought itself. The connection is provided by the story.

The *subject-you*, the observer, is also not 'you'. The only thing that is 'you' is the character in the stories, the *object-you*. K expresses this by calling himself 'the speaker'. 'The speaker' is an *object-you*, the hero of K's story.

Imagination is firmly in the psychological realm. It is not a sense, and cannot aid the body's tasks, which are not acts performed by the body on other things, not interactions between discrete objects, but movements in the flow of *Tao*. Objects are *images*, interpretations of sense data, fictions in the story the imagination creates and that the observer, the *subject-you*, observes.

Imagination makes an entertaining story, but when indulged, it is a hindrance to observation. In order to live in the flow of *Tao*, the story of

the *object-you* must be avoided: it is the story that creates the thought-world.

This leaves the *subject-you*, the observer, which is aware, but not self-aware. It has no stories or memory. It is of the nature as *Tao*, and of the mechanisms of perception, which dwell in *Tao*. It lives entirely in the timeless, unmemorised, present.

A mechanism of perception is an organ for interpreting the movement of *Tao*, which cannot otherwise be observed. It is physical—whatever ‘physical’ means. It is a tower planted in a forest. But it is primarily a concept.

*We live in a world of concepts, in a world of thought.
We try to solve all our problems, from the most
mechanical to psychological problems of the greatest
depth, by means of thought.*

But you can’t solve a problem using thought, because thought creates the problem. A ‘solution’ doesn’t solve a problem, it just re-presents the problem in a way that gives us comfort.

*If there is a division between the observer and the
observed that division is the source of all human
conflict...*

That’s to say, when the *subject-you* is observing the things and events of your story, the *object-you* appears to make choices and decisions, has needs, rights, and desires, acts with intention, and so on. This all creates a story of drama and conflict.

*Is thought the only instrument that we have to deal
with all our human problems? For it does not answer,
it does not resolve our problems. It may be, we are just
questioning it, we are not dogmatically asserting it. It
may be that thought has no place whatsoever, except
for mechanical, technological, scientific matters. When
the observer is the observed then conflict ceases.*

No ‘you’ exists in *Tao*, neither *subject-you*, the observer, nor *object-you*, the observed, the apparent actor in your stories. There are no choices or expectations, so no conflict or drama. There is only uninterpreted movement of existence.

This happens quite normally, quite easily: in circumstances when there is great danger there is no observer separate from the observed; there is immediate action, there is instant response in action. When there is a great crisis in one's life—and one always avoids great crises—one has no time to think about it. In such circumstance the brain, with all its memories of the old, does not immediately respond, yet there is immediate action. There is an immediate change, psychologically, inwardly, when the division of the observer from the observed comes to an end.

The thing is, we humans think a lot of ourselves and K's core message is clear enough: it's the same message as many others have given. It's the same message that I was busy writing to myself, and this is it: there's nothing special about humans. They don't have privileged access to a mental or spiritual universe. Their language and thoughts are fantasy. To understand what is—to dwell in the simplicity of *Tao*—all that is needed is to avoid psychological thought.

That's not easy, because the essence of the *object-you* is survival, and its ego-drive is the passion to survive and succeed. It needs to feel heroic, and its story is an epic struggle between drama and emptiness, and drama is what heroism is all about. It's hard to stop being a hero unless the hero is exhausted by the struggle and emptiness seems preferable.

Quite how the simple machine that is a human being ended up building cities and computers and the other detritus of modern life is the greatest mystery.

Stories and meaning

Thinking and saying is a process of manipulating tokens. Tokens are simplified models, abstractions—interpretations that add a story—meaning to meaninglessness.

You might become proficient in handling these word-tokens, or in witchcraft or crystal healing. So what? You could ask 'What colour fairies do I make a sacrifice to in order to become a guardian angel?' or, 'What rules must I follow to be considered civilised?' or 'How can I improve my society?' or 'What does Science say'.

Tao manifests through physical interactions and relationships that are unknowable and cannot be part of your story, so it's irrelevant what you

think you're doing or saying, as it is irrelevant what you think others are doing or saying, including Science and scientists, and including K. Nobody has answers in the sense you want. There are no answers because there are no questions in *Tao*. What you think and say cannot influence your relationship with *Tao*.

If there is no 'meaning', which is a thought-object, then what is the point? 'The point' too is a thought-object. Only stories need to have a point or a meaning. Free yourself from the idea that you are an important or significant part of an heroic story, and half the job is done. This is what K means by humility. It's what Alcoholics Anonymous advises drunks to do in order for them to contain their pathological addiction to their ego—submit to a higher power. You have a pathological addiction to your story and the advice is the same—ignore the story, stop trying to be a hero.

The hero of your story is your ego, the object-you, which wants to influence the flow of *Tao*, but the hero is fiction and is powerless. Imagination writes an heroic story, but the hero's quest is inevitably blocked or derailed, which produces conflict and tension, and while the story continues there can be no resolution.

Q: I have been a member of a Gurdjieff group. I find it has given me a background to better understanding of what you are saying. Should I continue with such a group in order possibly to help others, as I was helped? Or does a group make for fragmentation?

We are reluctant to forgo the ego and its illusion of choice and constantly seek ways to be 'good' or 'virtuous'.

A: This is an extraordinary idea, this idea of helping others, as though you have comprehension, beauty, love and truth, the whole world of order, and that great immense sense of wholeness. If you have that you do not talk about helping others.

Why do we want to belong to something, belong to some sect, some group, some religious body? Is it because it gives us strength? Is it that we cannot stand alone? The word 'alone' means all one. Is it that we need encouragement, need somebody to tell us this is the right way? The questioner says: As I belong to a

*certain group, it has helped me to understand you.
Understand what? Me? Do please look at it.*

K's writing and speeches are repetitious and only elaborate on the core premise.

Understand what we are talking about? Do we need interpreters to understand what we are talking about, to be kind, to love, to have no sense of nationality? Does it need anybody to tell us that? Why do we depend on others, whether the other be an image in a church, in a temple or mosque, or the preacher, the psychologists? Why do we depend on others? If we do depend on others psychologically we become second-hand people, which we are. The whole history of mankind is in us—the story of mankind is not in books except for outward things; the whole history is here. And we do not know how to read it.

You understand what I am saying? You are the book. But when you read the book as a reader it has no meaning. But if you are the book and the book is showing you, telling you the story, then you will not depend on a single person, you will be a light unto yourself.

But we are all waiting for a match, the fire of another, to kindle the light. Perhaps that is why you are all here. And that is where the tragedy lies, because we cannot see clearly for ourselves. Before we help others we have to see clearly, for God's sake! It is like the blind leading the blind.

K, Brockwood Park, 2nd Question

'You' are the story of the *object-you*, and once you recognise that, the story dissolves and you become the book, the light unto yourself, *Tao*.

Living is action; living is not memory; the ashes of memory is not the fire of life. Ideation is of these ashes. Living and dying, every moment without time is action. Continuity, permanency is mechanical inaction which needs conflict to keep it going. Conflict and sorrow, self-pity and memory are the fuel of inaction. Complete living is total action.

Outside the story, there is no point, there is no meaning, there is nothing to understand and there are no problems to solve. There is only unmediated action and relationship, the movement of existence.

Society

I am a civilised man. The thinking and perceiving that takes place in civilised society is almost entirely psychological—artificial—and civilised people behave pathologically. I behave pathologically.

This is because civilised people believe they have selves and abilities and powers that they do not have. They believe that conceptual thinking is everything, when it is nothing. They worship thought, they worship fantasy, they worship the drama, because it makes them heroic.

A ‘society’ is a description of abstractions extrapolated for some purpose—just a label for an intent, just a word. Nobody lives in a society. We live in a succession of interactions, and it is the quality of our engagement in those interactions that determines the quality of our experience, the quality of our life. In civilisation, you don’t meet people as a participant in Tao. Everyone is a stranger, and your experience is polluted with intentions dictated to you by conscious rules, expectations and effort.

We regard society as something with which we have to live, conform and adjust ourselves; we never think it is really the enemy of man, the enemy of freedom, the enemy of righteousness. Do think about it, look at it. Environment, which is society is destroying freedom. It does not want man to be free; it wants the saints, the reformers who would modify, bolster up, uphold the social institutions.

K, A Psychological Revolution

We are trained to believe in the story of a society that exists for your benefit, a story of work and rights and laws, and the story is told through education and propaganda. Today ‘society’ is a narrative controlled through manipulation by corporations and governments.

You can’t change society, because it’s a word, a thought, not a thing and it is not under your control. It exists only in the story, whose options are strictly controlled. We are easily trainable.

The natural life

Living a pathological life means living in a way that ignores the immediate circumstances of the body and its environment, the connection with *Tao*. Living the flow of *Tao* is what we might call the natural life.

Those who are concerned about living naturally come to realise that most of their thoughts and analyses (such as ‘I’m living a pathological life’) have no consequences. They realise that they can’t change things or know what ‘naturally’ even means.

We cannot judge what is and what is not natural, nor can we judge what is good or bad. These are all conceptual thoughts—ideologies fed by interpretations.

The only thing we can do is to believe that there is a struggle and that the struggle is between what naturally occurs and what we want to occur, between the flow of *Tao* and the story, and the only solution is to relinquish that struggle. The closest we can come to suggesting what naturally occurs is what thoughtlessly occurs—but we can’t direct what thoughtlessly occurs.

To avoid that struggle, to deprive the hero of his vainglorious imaginings, the only thing we can suggest is that the observer becomes aware that ‘he’ is not the hero of a story but a reader of that story.

Truth must come to you, the mind cannot go to meet it. You think that if you practise overcoming your passions it is going to lead you to reality, and so for you the method is very important; but such a mind, which is always hoping, inviting, expecting, can never under any circumstances reach that which is beyond the mind. There is no path, no yoga, no discipline which will lead you to it.

All that the mind can do is to know itself. It must know its own limitations—the motives, the feelings, the passions, the cruelties, the lack of love, and be aware of all its many activities. One must see all that and remain silent, not asking, not begging, not putting out a hand to receive something. If you stretch out your hand, you will remain empty-handed forever.

But to know yourself, the unconscious as well as the conscious, is the beginning of wisdom; and knowing

yourself in that sense brings freedom—which is not freedom for you to experience reality. The man who is free is not free for something, or from something; he is just free; and then if that state of reality wishes to come, it will come. But for you to go seeking it is like a blind man seeking light; you will never find it.

The man who understands himself seeks nothing; his mind is limitless, undesirous, and for such a mind the immeasurable can come into being.

K, Collected Works Vol. 10

The immeasurable is the state of conceptlessness/thoughtlessness that some call ‘mindful’ or ‘aware’, and what I call ‘alert presence’ or ‘living the flow of *Tao*’. It is conceptually in the same group of metaphors as ‘natural’, where natural is defined as something with the sense of ‘behaving in accordance with the flow of history’, which is a metaphor derived from a state of contentment, such as eating when you are hungry or warming yourself by the fire when you are cold. It indicates a state of non-conceptualisation and non-judgement that brings mental and physical rest. It is often described as *shunyata*, ‘emptiness’.

In this case, Shaariputra, form is emptiness and emptiness is itself form; emptiness is not different from form, and form is not different from emptiness; that which is form is emptiness, and that which is emptiness is form

So it is for perception, conception, volition and consciousness.

In this case, Shaariputra, all things have the characteristics of emptiness; they neither arise nor perish; they are neither defiled nor pure, neither deficient nor complete.

Therefore, Shaariputra, within the emptiness, there is no form, no perception, no conception, no volition, nor consciousness.

Neither is there eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind.

Neither is there form, sound, smell, taste, touch nor concepts

Neither is there realm of sight, etc., until we come to the non-existence of realm of consciousness.

Neither is there wisdom, nor ignorance, nor extinction of wisdom, nor extinction of ignorance, etc., until we come to the non-existence of old age and death and the non-extinction of old age and death. Neither is there suffering, cause of suffering, extinction of suffering, nor the path leading to extinction of suffering. Neither is there wisdom nor acquisition because there is no grasping.

Heart Sutra

This sutra is saying that all these terms—form, perception, conception, volition, suffering, consciousness etc—are words, thoughts, and that words are intrinsically divisive.

While this sounds crazy and unreal to most modern humans, there still exists people that live this unexamined, virtually uncategorised, life. The Hadza of Tanzania and the Paraha of south west africa live something like this. They have little concept of the past and the future. They don't know how old they are because they can't count beyond 2. There are no 'same things' for them, everything is individual: they don't walk past five trees, they walk past *that* particular tree, then *that* particular tree, then *that* particular tree...

Categorisation causes difference, conflict and suffering, as can easily be seen when people and actions are labelled. Labelling itself is divisive. In other words, words only create stories they don't describe anything in the *Tao* of relationships.

'Flow' is a metaphor for causal relation, and assumes that there is a flow to join. We want to feel joined to something, and the only something we can experience is that provided by the senses, so we invent metaphors—lies.

These metaphor-lies, that are fantasies of the interpretation of sensations, might please the hero but at the expense of the hero being continually disappointed when things turn out to be different from those hoped for or expected. However, heroes can't let go of their hopes and expectations intentionally.

You can't let go. What is important is not letting go, but finding out why you are dependent. If that is clear, then it's finished.

But if you observe the ways you are led to your beliefs and thoughts—your conditioning—then those beliefs and thoughts can be ignored, along with the conclusions arising from them. Persistent simple observation causes the things consciously ignored not to signify.

One has to watch like a hawk every movement of thought, every movement of reaction, so the brain can be free from its conditioning.

K, Saanen, 1983

...that is, so the story can be freed from its habitual themes, its psychological conditioning, its interpretations. That psychologically neutral condition is what others call pure consciousness or bliss, or mindful, or aware.

Remain with envy and look at it; observe it. Do not try to transform it into something else. As you observe, it dissolves. In that observation, there is no time.

K, Bombay, 1982

There's nothing supernatural about this, nothing 'superior' or 'advanced' or 'spiritual'. The Hazda and Paraha live in that way. Its main characteristic is relief from memories of the past and predictions of the future, and so from choice and struggle. It is primitive, it is natural, and it brings psychological rest.

Meditation is to be aware of every thought and of every feeling, never to say it is right or wrong but just to watch it and move with it. In that watching you begin to understand the whole movement of thought and feeling, and out of this awareness comes silence.

In this neutral condition there are no events as such. 'Events' are created as props to the story. If you write things down you'll realise that you are creating identifiable characters and actors and events by ideologically selective attention, by apportioning significance and importance, because it is not possible to describe the world as it is. It is impossible to share the

same fiction, the same story. 'Same' is a concept. There is nothing that is 'the same' as anything else. The story is uniquely 'your' story.

The Paraha people of the Kalahari have no concept of 'same'. Each tree is a particular tree, and they can say for example that one particular tree is big and another is small, but there are no comparatives, and no words for more than one thing of the same kind. So no 'that tree is bigger than that tree'. You see two 'trees', they only see *that* sycamore and *that* Brazil nut. There is no category 'tree'. There are no trees. This is a concept that is impossible for most people to grasp because we do not see things any more. Everything we think we are 'seeing' we are actually imagining according to learned conditioning. We live in an actual fantasy.

In order to have *any* description, it is necessary to have a focus—a viewpoint, a tower in a forest. Each person, each event you remember, is a character or situation in a fiction, the fiction is created from the viewpoint of the *object-you*, and only the *subject-you* is aware of and can read that particular fiction.

Your stories are fiction and you're living that fiction. This is your fictional life in all its glory.

*You should never be here too much; be so far away
that they can't find you, they can't get at you to shape,
to mould.*

*Be so far away, like the mountains, like the
unpolluted air; be so far away that you have no
parents, no relations, no family, no country; be so far
away that you don't know even where you are.*

*Don't let them find you; don't come into contact with
them too closely.*

*Keep far away where even you can't find yourself;
keep a distance which can never be crossed over; keep
a passage open always through which no one can come.*

*Don't shut the door for there is no door, only an
open, endless passage; if you shut any door, they will
be very close to you, then you are lost.*

*Keep far away where their breath can't reach you and
their breath travels very far and very deeply; don't get
contaminated by them, by their word, by their gesture,*

by their great knowledge; they have great knowledge but be far away from them where even you cannot find yourself.

For they are waiting for you, at every corner, in every house to shape you, to mould you, to tear you to pieces and then put you together in their own image.

They are waiting for you, the churchman and the Communist, the believer and the non-believer, for they are both the same; they think they are different but they are not for they both brainwash you, till you are of them, till you repeat their words, till you worship their saints, the ancient and the recent; they have armies for their gods and for their countries and they are experts in killing.

Keep far away but they are waiting for you, the educator and the businessman; one trains you for the others to conform to the demands of their society, which is a deadly thing.

They have a thing called society and family: these two are their real gods, the net in which you will be entangled.

They will make you into a scientist, into an engineer, into an expert of almost anything from cooking to architecture to philosophy.

Keep far, far away; they are waiting for you, the politician and the reformer; the one drags you down into the gutter and then the other reforms you; they juggle with words and you will be lost in their wilderness.

But besides all these, there are hordes of others to tell you what to do and what not to do; keep away from all of them, so far away that you cannot find yourself or any other.

You too would like to play with all of them who are waiting for you but then the play becomes so complicated and entertaining that you will be lost.

*You should never be here too much, be so far away
that even you cannot find yourself*

You have to lose the illusion of self, the story of the object-you, which is a difficult thing to do in civilisation, where the hero is constantly reminded, provoked and encouraged to 'develop' its self in order to be useful, to fit in, to survive, to succeed in a society that is entirely artificial, a conception of the propagandists who design and run it for their own profit. A 'society' now is not run for the benefit of its members, only for that of its instigators.

Understanding and explanation

Order and emptiness

When we try to understand something, we begin a relationship with it. We observe that relationship, looking for an essence or an authoritative account. We look for patterns of behaviour, and we make equivalences and we design categories, models and conclusions. Then we look for further abstractions and simplifications, fundamentals and resolutions, and the ultimate simplification is unity, which can be expressed as the desire for order, which is a desire for predictability and ultimately, control.

K uses it in another sense.

The seeing of this whole complex process is meditation from which alone comes order in this confusion. This order is as absolute as is the order in mathematics, and from this there is action the immediate doing. Order is not arrangement, design and proportion; these come much later. Order comes out of a mind that is not cluttered up by the things of thought. When thought is silent there is emptiness, which is order

K, Meditations 1969

If we could manufacture unity we would be comforted, for then we could stop searching, because the pattern is complete and order reigns, comfort and security reigns. But all these are words in the comforting fiction that is our story.

Many people like to use the word 'love' for that sense of order. But there can never be unity in thought-objects, if only because to recognise unity there would need to be an observer outside of unity, and so on. The concept of unity itself is a thought-object. There is nothing that is unity in the world, it exists only in our imaginations. There is nothing that is enlightenment, nothing that is safe, nothing that is final, nothing that is love, nothing that is orderly in the normal sense of the word. These are elements of the story.

This is why K continually rejects the normal definitions of words. He is attempting to tell a story without words.

Image and relationship

What is a relationship? There is a word 'relationship' that we talk and talk and talk about, and K uses that word to mean the fundamental characteristic of existence. But he doesn't mean the conceptualised 'relationship' rooted in thought and ideology that is what we mean, but that we don't realise we mean.

Jealousy, distrust, feeling lonely deeply inside but trying to escape from it, that is my life, and that is what we call relationship, and that is what we call love.

K, Brockwood Park 1983

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In all our relationships each one of us builds an image about the other, and these two images have relationship, not the human beings themselves.

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If I have an image about you and you have an image about me, naturally we don't see each other at all as we actually are. What we see is the images we have formed about each other which prevent us from being in contact, and that is why our relationships go wrong

K, Freedom from the known

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Is it possible to have a relationship with another in which there is no friction whatsoever? It is possible only when I understand what love is.

K, The Awakening of Intelligence

The image is the storybook character that has been inserted into my story to represent you. No personal relationships exist except in our fantasy stories about imaginary characters. There is no you to have a relationship with. What is love? What is relationship? Living the flow of *Tao*.

Communication and assumption

What would we do if we thought we were on the way to solving the problem of life? Most of us would want to share their solution and their progress towards that solution with others, but how can we do that? K has said that relationship in *Tao* is the only reality, and that that connection can't be described, let alone communicated.

So what are we doing when we are trying to communicate? What does communication mean? What is being communicated?

We can relate ideas, opinions, descriptions of feelings and events, and so on, and we assume that these ideas are transferable, as if we were playing *Pass the Parcel*, and that all that's required is that our audience listens correctly.

We assume that if someone listens correctly, they will somehow absorb our words, our ideas, into some kind of information container—their mind—and that that absorption will be demonstrated in the listener's actions or words, perhaps by following instructions or taking an exam. We assume that if they repeat the words of our idea they have also absorbed our feelings about our idea, that it's good or bad, or that it's workable or not workable.

This kind of communication is assumed to take place between minds, and it is assumed that listening is accompanied by more-or-less accurate recording of the idea-parcel into the audience's memory, their postbox.

That is not K's idea of communication.

The art of listening demands a quality of attention in which there is real listening, real sense of having an insight as we go along, each second, not at the end but at the beginning.

What does this mean? That the listener is not parsing the grammar and interpreting the vocabulary and recording the result, but instead that the listener and the speaker are interacting as participants in *Tao*.

It's not about transferring the meaning of the words, as such. The listener is not learning in the usual sense of committing words and interpretations to memory and manufacturing an intellectual response. The listener is not living the speaker's story, and inserting what he hears into his own story, but is simply present.

This person is speaking and you are attending. Are you comfortable or uncomfortable? Are you being instructed or bullied? Are you forcing yourself to pay attention? Are you present and alert? What thoughts and emotions are being aroused? This is what is being communicated, not the speaker's thoughts, not their opinions, which are uniquely relevant to the speaker's story.

Understanding comes in the space between two words, in that interval before the word shapes thought.

K, Series 1, chapter 74

In *Tao*, words fall away and the stories disappear. There is no more you, no more attention, no more thoughts to be memorised and emotions to be manufactured, there is only action, only flow, only *Tao*.

A man who knows that he is silent, who knows that he loves, does not know what love or silence is.

Truth can only come to the mind that is empty of the known.

K, Rajahmundry 1949

If you are conscious of being silent, you are living in the thought-world and applying thoughts and concepts: you are still engaged in the story.

Conditioning

Conditioning is what happens when you live. It's a name for the ways you are changed by interaction with the rest of the world, a description of the results of interactions. As such, it isn't added so it can't be taken away. You can't lose your conditioning. It's not a thing.

We change, what we pay attention to changes, our senses vary in their acuity, and conditioning continues. And all that time, in spite of the story we are telling ourselves, we dwell in *Tao* and we flow.

Life is like a vast river with a great volume of water without a beginning or an ending. We take out of that fast-running current a bucket of water and that confined water becomes our life. This is our conditioning and our everlasting sorrow.

K, from The Open Door by Mary Lutyens

The story of you is a result of your interpretations of interactions with the people and things in your environment, which are also interpretations, fictions.

The current happenings in the story constitute now, but now is not a time. The present now does not precede any future now. There is no time except in the story, where it is an abstract thought.

If there is no time, your hero's intelligence, or lack of such, cannot influence, become a cause of action in, or organise the world. Intentional action is not possible except as an artifact of the story.

As we age, what we experience as now is increasingly coloured by memories, which are fabrications designed to fit the story. This is necessarily so, and it means that the story sometimes does not distinguish between the parts of now that result from mediated sense input, and the parts that result from resurrected—recreated—memories. You lose track of time. Your senses dim. The story continues.

Fear and freedom

What are we afraid of?

There is fear of the present, of the future, fear of death, fear of the unknown, fear of not fulfilling, fear of not being loved—there are so many fears, all created by the machinery of thought.

K, The Awakening of Intelligence

We're afraid of plenty of things, but the problem isn't the proliferation of fears, it's that fears are thoughts. Thoughts are of the mind, not the world, and we can't arrange the world to rid itself of fearful thoughts. We don't have much control over thoughts, they just appear, but we can distance ourselves from them, so that we see those fears for what they are—learned reactions to fantasies of control—leaving only the primitive responses that give rise to spontaneous action.

K elaborates on the fear of the unknown:

One is never afraid of the unknown; one is afraid of the known coming to an end.

K, You Are the World

We are afraid of letting go of knowledge, afraid of being ignorant. This ignorance is frightening because in our story we are the hero, and in the modern world the hero must be educated about abstract techniques, and artificial processes and protocols and so on. It's a matter of life or death.

To stay with fear means not to escape, not to seek its cause, not to rationalise or transcend it. To stay with something means that. Like staying with looking at the moon—just look at it.

K, To Be Human

If the *subject-you* reads the story but doesn't identify with the hero, the *object-you*, it is free from the story, and that is the only freedom to be had.

Freedom is to look at a fact without any idea, to look without thought.

K, New Delhi 1962, Talk 8

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Not-knowing is freedom. Knowing is prison.

K, Tradition and Revolution

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We think having capacity to choose gives us freedom. Choice is the very denial of freedom.

K, Truth and Actuality

Fear is created by memories of the past and predictions of the future, which are thoughts. And freedom is freedom from thought, which means freedom from memories, freedom from the story, which is the only place the concepts of time and choice exist. Freedom from the story means becoming the mechanism of perception, and being free both from the observer, the *subject-you* and the hero, the *object-you*.

Real freedom is not something to be acquired, it is the outcome of intelligence.

K's 'intelligence' has nothing to do with cleverness, it is the state of unreflective living in *Tao*.

K doesn't characterise *Tao* except in terms of a state of mind when in its flow: *Tao* is gentle, beautiful, etc. However, there is no state of mind when flowing in *Tao* because mind is an idea, a collection of thoughts, and living the flow of *Tao* requires the absence of thought. There cannot be categories or descriptions. There are no words in *Tao*.

Change and fixity

How can anything be fixed? Relative to what? How can anything change? If it changes, surely it is something else? What happened to the original thing? Has it gone from existence to nonexistence? How? Where? And so on.

Change and fixity are not things, they are consequences of analysis and ways of imagining. K says that the world exists in a single mode whose characteristic is flow, and that there are no divisions into separate existences except in the human mind. Consequently there are no outside influences on the one flow. Human actions and choices exist, objects and ideas exist, only as thoughts in the human mind, in the hero of the story. And because we imagine these separate existences, we use the word 'relationship', a metaphor based on physical proximity, to signify meaningful interaction.

And yet K's teachings seem to require individual existences to do something, if only to observe themselves without judgement. This action, he says, leads automatically to the dissolution of the observer and of the observed, to being the mechanism of perception.

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change.

Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person

The story of change and fixity, individuals and action, success and failure, cannot illuminate, it can only end.

Time, *now* and the present

When do things happen? In the story, things happened in the past, things continue to happen, and things will happen in the future. The future will soon be the past.

But what happens in the present is all there is: what happened to me in the present five years ago is still in the present to my five year old

remembered self, and what will happen in the future will happen in the present to my imagined future self.

You cannot experience time, only memory and imagination, both of which are ideas in the thought-world, part of the story.

...most of us think in terms of time, we think that inward order can only come about through time, that tranquillity is to be built little by little, adding every day. Time does not bring this inward order and peace, so one of the important things to understand is how to put a stop to time so as not to think in terms of gradualness, which is quite an immense task, which actually means there is no tomorrow for you to be peaceful. You have to be orderly on the instant, there is no other moment.

K, 3rd Public Talk, 13th July 1967

We can be conscious only of stored interpretations, because our experiences are constructed, and need to be stored and sorted in order to be given significance. There is no experiencing the present, no world ‘events’ that can be described.

Psychologically, inwardly, what are we? We are memory, nothing else.

K,

And that memory is only of our constructed story. Each of the five senses are inputs to the mechanism of perception, and those inputs have to be organised into related parts, and the whole and the parts have to be interpreted and given significance for the purposes of the story.

As well as the senses, the inputs to consciousness include memories, which are selected, filtered fragments of former inputs and interpretations. Those memories are as present and significant as the ‘sense’ inputs.

The inputs are continuous, but they must be organised into a scene. When the scene is complete a snapshot is taken. This is what we experience as now, which is not a time, but the point at which a scene is complete enough to offer to the story as a memory. It is consciousness, the mechanism of perception, itself that is *now*, not the things that it works on.

What you remember is storified interpretations concocted in the present. The memories you are making now, concocted from interpretations in this present, will become the past reinterpreted—imagined—in a future present.

There is no other moment than the present and you can act only in the present, which is not a time. Everything else is imaginary, even now, which is only a word within a story. Memory is imaginary, consisting of interpretations made in that present overlaid with interpretations made in this present. There is no truth in imagination, and so there is no order, which K means as the orderly flow of Tao.

Nothing exists as we see or remember it, except for immediate responses activated by presence in *Tao*, so divorced from the names, excuses and explanations we manufacture for the story as reasons for those responses—fear, rage, friendliness, distrust, etc. Those responses are made without interpretation, and are simply movements in the flow.

To avoid the story, the only possibility is to live in the timeless present as an alert presence, thoughtlessly. In the timeless present there is no now because no story is being constructed.

This way of living is impossible in the modern world, which is a nightmare of other people's conceptions and requirements.

Meditation

K practised meditation as normally understood, but in his teachings 'meditation' is just another word for living the flow of *Tao*.

Man, in order to escape his conflicts, has invented many forms of meditation. These have been based on desire, will, and the urge for achievement, and imply conflict and a struggle to arrive. This conscious, deliberate striving is always within the limits of a conditioned mind, and in this there is no freedom. All effort to meditate is the denial of meditation. Meditation is the ending of thought. It is only then that there is a different dimension which is beyond time.

Meditate alone. Get lost. And don't try to remember where you have been. If you try to remember it then it will be something that is dead.

Meditation is the whole of life and that is the beauty of meditation, it is not something set aside, it covers and enters into all our activities and to all our thoughts and feelings. So it is not something that you practise or give attention to once a day or three times a day or ten times a day and the rest of the day live a life that is shoddy, neurotic, mischievous, violent

K, Talk 4 New York 1974

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Meditation is to be aware of every thought and of every feeling, never to say it is right or wrong but just to watch it and move with it. In that watching you begin to understand the whole movement of thought and feeling. And out of this awareness comes silence.

I am going step by step into what is meditation. Please don't wait till the end, hoping to have a complete description of how to meditate. What we are doing now is part of meditation.

Now, what one has to do is to be aware of the thinker, and not try to resolve the contradiction and bring about an integration between thought and the thinker. The thinker is the psychological entity who has accumulated experience as knowledge; he is the timebound centre that is the result of ever-changing environmental influence, and from this centre he looks, he listens, he experiences. As long as one does not understand the structure and the anatomy of this centre, there must always be conflict, and a mind in conflict cannot possibly understand the depth and the beauty of meditation.

In meditation there can be no thinker, which means that thought must come to an end—the thought which is urged forward by the desire to achieve a result. Meditation has nothing to do with achieving a result. It is not a matter of breathing in a particular way, or looking at your nose, or awakening the power to perform certain tricks, or any of the rest of that immature nonsense....Meditation is not something apart from life. When you are driving a car or sitting in a bus, when you are chatting aimlessly, when you are

walking by yourself in a wood or watching a butterfly being carried along by the wind—to be choicelessly aware of all that is part of meditation.

K, The Book of Life

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When you listen attentively, in that attention there is no 'you' attending. You are listening. Not that you are listening, there is only the act of listening. So where there is attention there is no centre which is the self, the 'me', the psyche. That is meditation, to attend so completely and diligently there is nothing of negligence, then there is the beginning, the real depth of meditation. For in that there is no measure, no time, no thought.

In other words, there is no story being constructed.

And out of that, or in that, there is deep abiding silence. That means the brain is utterly quiet, not chattering. The brain has its own rhythm, let it act out of itself, but not the self-imposing, thought imposing something on the brain. The whole structure, the organism, and the mind are utterly quiet.

This is effectively the Zen state, the experience of existence in silence, ie with no sensation.

I don't know if it has ever happened to you. It may happen occasionally when you are walking in a beautiful lane, in a wood of trees and birds and flowers, and the beauty of a sunset, or a morning dawn, then for a second or two you are quiet, breathless, watching the beauty of the world. But that is external. But when the brain is quiet, though it has its own activity, quiet in the sense thought is not functioning, so time and thought come to an end where there is deep attention.

And then in that silence, which is not the man-made silence, silence has no cause, then in that silence, there is that which is nameless, which is beyond all time. Such a mind is a religious mind. And it is only such

minds that can bring about a new culture, a new society. And because that is eternal it has immense significance in life

K, Talk 2, New York, 1983

You can't train yourself to be mindless, because intention and goals themselves are thought-objects in the story.

You cannot quieten the mind, full stop! Those are tricks... you absolutely cannot make the mind quiet because you are the mind.

K, Awakening of intelligence

Mindlessness happens when you are not distracted by the story of your hero. It is not a consequence of practice. The only thing you can practice is observation and detachment from the ego, the hero and his story.

Knowledge and belief

Knowledge of what we can loosely term ‘technology’ is useful. It is useful to know how to light a fire, and that fire-raising technique can be committed to memory, refined and re-used.

Knowledge that is not practical and immediately useful is, in the simple life, useless. That a mountain is ‘tall’ is useful, because a tall mountain is hard to climb. That it is 28,002 feet high and can be seen for 500 miles is useless. That you believe it can be seen for 500 miles is useless. That you believe that the sky is blue because of reflections of the water is useless. That you believe someone is ‘guilty’ is useless. In the simple life, anything that doesn’t inspire immediate, unconsidered, action is useless.

In civilisation, useless knowledge is required and rewarded. You need to make plans and schedules, and accommodate other people’s demands and instructions, obey laws, be tactful, be friendly, be honest and so on, and you will die if you don’t know and do a lot of otherwise useless things such as remembering what the colours of traffic lights mean. You have to fit in with the story you have been taught, and you can only live in the flow of *Tao* for moments at a time. Shunryu Suzuki says it most memorably:

How much ‘ego’ do you need? Just enough so that you don’t step in front of a bus.

Life in civilisation is completely artificial. Our bodies are not built to exist in this way. The rules and customs are there to maintain civilisation, which is a plant that must be watered and fed: but civilisation is a dead thing, and its structures and rules are dead things.

Instead of immediate relationship and participation there are rules, and you must consciously follow those rules. The rules create a game called ‘be civilised’, and in civilisation the *subject-you* watches the *object-you* play the civilisation game as a storybook Ulysses, using cunning to overcome problems and win the prize, just placate the maintainers of the story, the propagandists who design your education and life choices.

Together we have to create a new world. Together. Therefore you have to have such a mind, not the speaker, who is not important. What is important is

that you have such a mind. Then you will find out how to operate, how to live a life in this world, of a mind that is religious.

So first bring order in your life, be aware of the disorder that you live in, saying one thing, doing another, thinking something and professing something else—the dishonesty, the unscrupulous way of living when you are talking about God, going to ceremonies but living in corruption. To be aware of all that is to bring order in your life. Without that order in your daily life, meditation has no place. You cannot come upon that which is nameless, timeless, which is the very essence of beauty and love, if you have no order, beauty or love in your daily life.

K , Madras 1974, Talk 4

Remember that for K these words—order, love, meditation and so on, all signify the same thing, living the flow of *Tao*. There are no choices, no prizes; there is no game, except in the story. The best you can try to do is interpret the story as a life lived simply and in an orderly way. This brings its own comfort.

Intelligence, education and learning

Intelligence, as normally understood, is the ability to analyse situations in the thought-world and act rationally from the analysis. Education is the intelligent analysis of previous situations, evaluation of the actions taken, and discussion of the outcomes with the intent to optimise those outcomes in the future.

But, as an entity of the thought-world, the *object-you* cannot be shown how to affect or escape the thought-world, so the usual definitions of intelligence and education cannot apply. K uses the words ‘intelligence’, ‘education’ and ‘learning’ only in relation to living the flow of *Tao*.

Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, the what is; to awaken this capacity, in oneself and in others, is education.

K, Education and the Significance of Life

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Whatever you do is in the pattern of habits. So to do nothing, to have the feeling that you don't have to fight it, is the greatest action of intelligence.

K, Eight Conversations

Freedom from the known is the essence of intelligence. It is this intelligence in operation in the universe.

K, Krishnamurti's Journal

That is to say, intelligence is an informing principle of *Tao*, and when you are flowing in *Tao*, you are intelligent.

Training the intellect does not result in intelligence. Intelligence comes into being when one acts in perfect harmony, intellectually and emotionally.

K, The Book of Life

His way of speaking about education sounds as if he is advocating a standard view of learning as staying interested, in learning to be curious.

Education implies that you learn: learn to observe, to look and to see what is happening round you and inside yourself

K, Rajghat 1969

But education and learning for K has nothing to do with acquiring knowledge of the thought-world, they are simply other words for meditation, intelligence etc, ie. living the flow of *Tao*. The *object-you* can't learn to observe because it is a thought-object. The only observer is the *subject-you*, which does not act in the world.

If it is not possible to explain how to live in the flow of *Tao*, then why does K say anything at all? Are there techniques that nudge you in the right direction? Are K's words illustrations of or instructions for action? Of course not: you are already living the flow of *Tao* but your attention is on the story you have been given, you are living in your head.

You are looking for intention, for direction, but K has said that right action, ie living the flow of *Tao*, arises spontaneously, not through intention. And since K claims to be living the flow of *Tao*, what he is doing is not consciously intentional.

We want to have our thinking confirmed and corroborated by another, whereas to ask a question is to ask it of yourself.

What I say has very little value. You will forget it the moment you shut this book, or you will remember and repeat certain phrases, or you will compare what you have read here with some other book—but you will not face your own life.

And that is all that matters—your life, yourself, your pettiness, your shallowness, your brutality, your violence, your greed, your ambition, your daily agony and endless sorrow—that is what you have to understand and nobody on earth or in heaven is going to save you from it but yourself.

K, Freedom from the Known

You can't be saved. The only thing you can learn from K is negative: do not look for guidance or solutions or for a saviour. Salvation is only a word, only a judgement by the hero of your story. Any solution requires knowledge, and knowing takes place in the story, in the thought-world. Outside the story there is only action.

In intense crisis there is direct action, free from idea. It is against this spontaneous action mind has disciplined itself; and as with most of us the mind is dominant, ideas act as a brake on action and hence there is friction between action and ideation.

Equally, don't trust your so-called intuitions, which are also thoughts. 'Real' intuition does not inspire storybook judgements, only immediate action.

The word intuitive is one of the most dangerous words, like nationalism. I can have an intuition because it is what I want. Deeply I want something, and I feel that it is right, and I call that intuition. So one must distrust every word because every word,

unfortunately, is loaded. All that we know is one thing: our mind is like a monkey, restless, chattering, moving up and down, everlastingly moving, thinking, worrying. How can such a mind look or listen? Obviously, it cannot. Then we say, 'How am I to train it to be quiet?' and we spend years training it to be quiet. Then it becomes another kind of monkey. People have spent their whole life moving from one monkey world to another.

K, Saanen, 1966

In fact, you must give up seeking and intention altogether. Don't look for authority, even from yourself. Shed any thoughts about 'the best way' or 'the holy way' or any way.

To see the present as it actually is without condemnation or justification is to understand What Is and then there is action which brings about transformation in What Is.

Just be what you are, a human animal. Animals don't 'trust their instincts', they just act. If you can conceptualise 'trust' and 'instinct' you're already lost.

Whether it is the thought of the Buddha or anyone else, all thought is limited. So our inquiry must be negative, we must come to that freedom obliquely, not directly.

Am I giving some indication, or none at all?

That freedom is not to be sought after aggressively, is not to be cultivated by denials, disciplines, by checking yourself, torturing yourself, by doing various exercises and all the rest of it. Like virtue, it must come without your knowing.

Cultivated virtue is not virtue; the virtue which is true virtue is not self-conscious. Surely a man who has cultivated humility, who, because of his conceit, vanity, arrogance has made himself humble, such a man has no true sense of humility. Humility is a state in which the mind is not conscious of its own quality, as a flower which has fragrance is not conscious of its own

perfume. So this freedom cannot be got through any form of discipline, nor can a mind which is undisciplined understand it. You use discipline to produce a result, but freedom is not a result. If it is a result, it is no longer free because it has been produced.

K, To Be Human

When you're living the flow of *Tao*, ie. in a state of alert presence, you can't know why you're doing what you're doing in a consciously premeditated or otherwise considered way, because 'you' no longer exists. So 'you' can't be characterised as humble or virtuous or anything else. Nothing is being memorised because there is no conception of an individual or of *now*. *Tao* is timeless and does not have a conceptualised goal or aim, there is only action.

It's a showstopper. You can't intend or do anything virtuous, because intention and directed action produced by thoughts means you're still thinking, and stopping thinking is a prerequisite of living the flow of *Tao*. You can't think your way there. Objectives are only thoughts. Thoughts influence the story, but not the world.

The moment I am aware that I am aware, I'm not aware.

K, The Awakening of Intelligence

K sometimes seems to use 'awareness' as another word for living the flow of *Tao*, but if you intend to be aware, you're thinking, which precludes living in *Tao*. So what's K doing? He's just acting. He's not teaching.

I desire those, who seek to understand me, to be free; not to follow me, not to make out of me a cage which will become a religion, a sect. Rather should they be free from all fears—from the fear of religion, from the fear of salvation, from the fear of spirituality, from the fear of love, from the fear of death, from the fear of life itself. As an artist paints a picture because he takes delight in that painting, because it is his self-expression, his glory, his well-being, so I do this and not because I want anything from anyone.

K, dissolution of the Order of the Silver Star

His not-teaching is being perceived and interpreted by you to fit in with his role in your story. But K is not the character 'K' who appears in your story. Your story is unique to you and is fiction.

Friend, do not concern yourself with who I am, you will never know. I do not want you to accept anything I say. I do not want anything from any of you. I do not desire popularity. I do not want your flattery, your following. Because I am in love with life, I do not want anything. These questions are not of any great importance. What is important in the fact that you obey and allow your judgement to be perverted by authority. Your judgement, your mind, your affection, your life are being perverted by things which have no value, and herein lies sorrow.

If you were in a state of alert presence the whole imagined scene would disappear and there would be no more questions about circumstances and meaning, no learning of knowledge, no listening to a person, just action and non-action.

To be aware, not condemning, not judging, just to observe choicelessly, to look without any condemnation, interpretation, comparison—there is great beauty in that, there is great clarity in observation. If you observe yourself

in that way, choicelessly, then in that awareness there is attention, there is no entity as the observer and the observed. There is no watcher, looking at the thing which he is watching.

K, The New Mind

Love and other emotions

Emotions or sensations are natural, healthy, normal. But when thought takes over, all the mischief begins.

K, Truth and Actuality

What emotions is K talking about? Not the ones whose names you've been conditioned with, which are interpretations, thoughts. K's *emotions* are rather the spontaneous responses of the body, which are not named, not classified into good or bad, not unpleasant or pleasurable. Until the

mind classifies them—until thoughts give them names—they are just responses to stimuli, movements in Tao.

Thought destroys feeling, feeling being love. Thought can offer only pleasure, and in the pursuit of pleasure love is pushed aside. The pleasure of eating, of drinking, has its continuity in thought, and merely to control or suppress this pleasure which thought has brought about has no meaning; it creates only various forms of conflict and compulsion.

K, Meditations 1969

The body reacts, then the mind/brain describes the reaction in accordance with its conditioning, its story. So-called ‘feelings’ such as happiness, as commonly understood, are thoughts, interpretations of reactions. K’s version of feelings such as happiness and so on is a state of living the flow of *Tao*.

Happiness is not a product of time, happiness is always in the present, a timeless state.

To find the timeless, to realise that which is eternal, time must cease. Which means that the whole process of thought must come to an end.

It is timeless because there is no interpretation of a memorised state: once you decide you’re happy, you’re not happy, ie. you’re not living in *Tao*. Memorising and judging is storytelling.

When thought has ended and memory has ended, you are living in *Tao* and in that state there is no separate ‘you’. So ‘you’ cannot be happy, which is not a feeling of elation or comfort, it’s just another name for dwelling in *Tao*.

And what of love?

It is love alone that leads to right action. What brings order in the world is to love and let love do what it will.

K, Think on These Things

What is the love that K is speaking of here? Not romantic love or any other of the common varieties. Not eros, not agape, none of them.

When you say you love your wife, I wonder if you ever do, perhaps not in India, but they do abroad, I don't know what that means, and you don't know what it means either. So we are asking—please, sirs, be serious, this is terribly important in life. Life is relationship, because all life being relationship, if it is based on memory, then it's only partial—right? Your relationship based on knowledge, which means that sexual knowledge, the pleasurable knowledge, the irritations, the possessiveness, the jealousies, the hatreds, the anxiety between two people, the agony of not being loved and loved—you know all that. All that is based on memory. Right? Do look at it, sir, for god's sake, look at it. When we say, I mean we are asking, if that is a fact, which it is, then what is your relationship? Just a word—a piece of paper that says you are man and woman, married, either in a church or this or that.

Sir, go into it, find out sirs, don't sit there, that is, if there is no relationship except in memory, see the tragedy of it, see the sadness of it, see the appalling condition which we have made ourselves into.

Which means thought has brought about this relationship and therefore thought excludes every kind of affection and love. And therefore there is this constant struggle between man and woman.

Thought cannot bring about love. You can't practise it, you can practise politeness, even that's doubtful. Politeness requires care, concern for another. So, whole generation

after generation of people without love—you understand, sirs? So your children are not loved, your education has no meaning, everything is degenerating. After a million years we are like this.

K, The Immeasurable

Passion implies austerity – not the austerity of the monk or the disciplinarian but to be austere without any cause, without any demand. Austerity is like a

sharp sword. Austerity can only be when there is complete simplicity—not in clothes, expression or food but the simplicity of a mind that has no problem, that is not seeking self-expression, that is not influenced, that is not craving more experience.

For passion to be, there must be simplicity and austerity, and where there is austerity, there is beauty. It is that passion only that sweeps all things aside, not self-pity, not clinging to old habits and images, which is a waste of energy. Do we have this passion? From that, you can act, and it will never diminish. You don't have to add any fuel to keep this passion because, at the root, you are simple. At the root, there is no problem. At the root, there is a sense of complete austerity. At the root, there is this extraordinary sense of gentleness and beauty. Out of that, or in that, there is the flame of passion, and with that you can act, live. Then do what you will because that is love.

Eternity is not a thing of the mind; eternity comes into being only when there is love, for love in itself is eternal. Love is not something abstract to be thought about; love is to be found only in relationship with your wife, your children, your neighbour. When you know that love which is unconditional, which is not the product of the mind, then reality comes into being, and that state is utter bliss.

K, New Delhi, 1948

These are romanticised restatements of living the flow of *Tao*. K is saying that when you are connected with *Tao*, no thoughts complicate or confuse the connection (austerity) so you experience no resistance (only gentleness) and no discrimination (all is beautiful), and when the connection inspires action, that action occurs immediately and without conscious intention (passionately).

Beauty, too, is just another word for connecting with *Tao*.

The feeling that is aroused when you see something extraordinarily beautiful has nothing to do with sentimentality or emotion.

K, Bombay 1964

Problems and conflict

Civilisation requires conscious participation, conscious problem-solving. It requires sticks and carrots, and it requires fear and satisfaction, so it requires memory and imagination. It requires storytelling. It is impossible to live in the flow of *Tao* in civilisation. In civilisation, there is always 'you'.

The problem is self-created, so there must be self-knowledge. You and the problem are one, not two separate processes. You are the problem.

K, Commentaries on Living

When the story ends, the *object-you*, which is the problem, disappears along with its conceptual framework and your story, which is the thing that creates and maintains the *object-you* and the events that cause the problem.

So, if you will kindly find out for yourself how you approach the problem, because the approach dictates the answer or the solution. If you approach it freely the answer is in the problem, because problems exist only when you have not comprehended fully, when you have not seen the full context, full implications, the consequences of all that, and that's why it remains a problem.

K, Public talk 6 Madras

How do you comprehend fully, see the full implications? Your stories can't include anything full or complete because the story is constantly being rewritten and revised, and although it appears to contain conclusions, those conclusions change.

Conflict can exist only if the concept of choice exists, only if the concept of an agent 'you' exists, and only if that agent is a character in the story, the heroic myth that is the *object-you*.

A problem is a judgement that is attached to an observation. The judgement arises from the creation of an event in the story that requires choice, and depends on whether the choices help or hinder the hero's progress, so to get rid of the problem, to divorce the judgement from the observation, you have to give up the story.

Full comprehension—alert presence—is only available by living in *Tao*. But being alert and present does not solve any problems, it removes the problem-creating mechanism.

The conflict is between the actual and the myth, between that which you are and that which you would like to be. The pattern of the myth has been cultivated from childhood and has progressively widened and deepened, growing in contrast to the actual, and being constantly modified by circumstances. This myth, like all ideals, goals, Utopias, is in contradiction to what is the implicit, the actual; so the myth is an escape from that which you are. This escape inevitably creates the barren conflict of the opposites; and all conflict, inward or outward, is vain, futile, stupid, creating confusion and antagonism.

K, Commentaries on Living

In civilisation, being alert and present is hard work. You are continuously distracted by the story and cannot even intend or try to be present in *Tao*.

If you don't see the madness, you will never step out of it. If you don't see why you function the way you function, you will never step out of that. If you don't see the falseness and meaningless-ness of what you pursue, of your goals, targets, meanings and purposes, you will never step out of that. And this, nobody can teach you. No practice can take you to this recognition.

—Cesar Teruel

Does that mean that you have to wait for the connection to just happen, or is there a way to encourage connection? K's most famous quote implies that there can be no guidance

Truth is a pathless land

And yet he gave talks on how to find the gate to the land, by avoiding thought. That guidance is just an example of useful, technical knowledge, of the same kind as 'Don't put your hand in the fire'. There might be no you or fire in *Tao*, but the instructions are for the hero of your story, who might burn.

It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society

By listening to K, your hero knows there is a gate, a grail, a way out of conflict that he cannot pursue; and also that he need not panic, but instead should meditate. These are only words but they have meaning for your hero.

Gurus and practice

K's opinion of gurus and the various forms of practice and meditation follows from his idea of learning. Committing formulas and practising postures and pursuing thought experiments are events created for stories where the hero is a follower.

We listen with hope and fear; we seek the light of another but are not alertly passive to be able to understand. If the liberated seems to fulfil our desires we accept him; if not, we continue our search for the one who will. What most of us desire is gratification at different levels.

What is important is not how to recognise one who is liberated but how to understand yourself. No authority here or hereafter can give you knowledge of yourself; without self-knowledge there is no liberation from ignorance, from sorrow.

K, The book of life

That is not to say that these practices have no value—K practised this kind of meditation himself—but they do not equate to living the flow of *Tao*.

Look, Sirs, you know in all this are various powers of clairvoyance, reading somebody's thought. There are various powers, you know what I am talking about, don't you? You call them siddhis, don't you? Do you know all these things are like candles—candlelight in the sun?

When there is no sun, there is darkness, and then the light of the candle is very important; but when there is the sun, the light, the beauty, the clarity, then all these powers, these siddhis, are like candlelight. They have

no value at all. and when you have the light, there is nothing else—developing various centres, the chakras, kundalinis, you know all that business.

You need a sane, logical, reasoning mind, not a stupid mind. A mind that is dull can sit for centuries breathing, concentrating on its various chakras, and you know all that playing with kundalinis—it can never come upon that which is timeless, that which is real beauty, truth and love.

So put aside the candlelight which all the gurus and the books offer you. And do not repeat a word that you yourself have not seen the truth of, which you yourself have not tested.

K, 4th Public Talk, Bombay, 1971

The only kind of practice K recommends is adopting a detached attention to your thoughts and to the sensations of your body. This is the gate to *Tao*.

The interesting question would seem to be, How is the story of ‘you’ created, and by what, and what is its purpose? Why do we have an imagination if it must be subdued?

K says that the story is the result of stored interpretations, reinterpreted, where those interpretations are interactions in the physical brain, which are *Tao* modulated by the mechanisms of perception. The mechanisms of perception themselves are modulations of *Tao*.

‘How is the story created?’ is a dramatic element of the story. When the story disappears so do all questions.

Questions about the reality of the world and about the existence of pain or evil in the world will all cease when you enquire ‘Who am I? and find out the seer.

Ramana Maharshi

That sounds too neat an explanation even to me, but it can’t be otherwise.

Epilogue

K's life is not an example of his teaching, because the K you know is a character in your story, is fiction. The words he speaks you cannot know; you hear only your own interpretation.

You understand negatives, and experience thought, and your story has meaning for you, so you know what no-thought means, yet you will never experience a state of no-thought. If you chance to connect with Tao, there will be no-one to remember.

There's only one step

You can connect with *Tao* by losing yourself, by fading out the story, by retiring your ego-hero. Training yourself to be sensitive to your body's physical sensations, which means training your attention, reduces the story's importance.

You are not in love with life, you are in love with the past, and life is not concerned with the past. Life, like the swift running waters, is always going forward and is never still and stagnant.

Paying attention doesn't mean concentrating, it means being sensitive and open to your senses without trying to label or judge them (as 'painful', for example). Do it now: relax, pay attention to where your body touches your chair, your desk, your clothes.

We are always pursuing beauty and avoiding the ugly, and this seeking of enrichment through the one and avoidance of the other must inevitably breed insensitivity. Surely, to understand or to feel what beauty is, there must be sensitivity to both the so-called beautiful and the so-called ugly. A feeling is not beautiful or ugly, it is just a feeling

K, Life ahead

Did you readjust your position? Very likely you did, automatically, without thinking...

You can spread even a tiny part of what I have been talking about, only as you live it. It is by your life that you communicate profoundly, not through words

Life is action.

Tao has no means of perception, and cannot be perceived, but instantiated in *Tao* are mechanisms of perception that selectively create pieces of data out of the universal hum.

I am one of the mechanisms of perception, and so are you.

Now what is the machinery that puts together this image? Just observe it, don't try to translate it and act upon it; just observe what the speaker is saying, listen to it, and observe the action of perception on yourself. You tell me I am a fool. The word with its associations has set in operation memory in the brain cells. The word "fool" has its associations, which is the memory, which is the old brain. The old brain says, "You are another; you call me a fool and I call you another". So the response is the response of the old memory. Now the machinery operates as you observe when the wife or husband nags, when at the moment of nagging there is no attention. When there is attention at the moment of nagging there is no operation of the machine.

K, Madras, 6th January 1971

The pieces of data are given significance and organised into scenes, which are themselves given meaning and presented to the observer, the *subject-you*, as *now*, which is not a time but a point of organisation.

Now is created by the mechanisms of perception, and is the point of view, the consciousness, that is called 'I' in the story. 'I' is the hero, the *object-you* as observed by the *subject-you* via a mechanism of perception.

No volition is involved. What appears as agency is organisation of mechanised hum into scene, into story. The only freedom is in the creation and interpretation of the story.

It doesn't matter what you think you're doing—you could be creating something you call the K diet, or you could be dedicating your life to psychotherapy or finding the best budgie food or launching yourself into

selfless service, or being a porn star, it doesn't matter, nor do you. There's no-one to be and there are no choices. It's all story.

The mind is a collection of thoughts. All the activity of thought is separation, fragmentation. Thought is the response of memory which is the brain. The brain must respond when it sees a danger. This is intelligence, but this same brain has somehow been conditioned not to see the danger of division.

K, The urgency of change

Internalise that and be still. Live quietly and simply and pay attention to your senses, so you are not overwhelmed by fictional experiences and judgements. Forget about beauty and evil, intelligence and justice, and all the other idealistic, civilised, words.

Instead, think about becoming skilful. Skilful actions are those that promote or display accuracy, economy and completeness in a task. In order to become skilful, pay attention to the way you physically relate to what is immediately around you, the things and people you are interacting with—touching, hearing, smelling, watching, kissing.

Pay attention to your responses, but do not consciously initiate or judge them and you will realise the only function of the emotion-thoughts that permeate your story is heroic drama. The very presence of these stories indicate that your thoughts are not at peace with your environment. Your stories create conflict. Let the stories go.

The observer, the *subject-you*, is *Tao* witnessing the unfolding of its creation via mechanisms of perception—you and me. We are the eyes of *Tao*, and we are pictures on a screen.

What is the purpose of life? To be the eyes and ears of the creator of the universe, you fool.

Kurt Vonnegut, Breakfast of Champions

Tao is neither subject nor object. 'Subject' and 'object' are themselves thought-objects, as is 'Tao' itself. The observer, that I have called the *subject-you*, is a metaphor for the point of view created by the perceptual mechanism of *Tao*. The *subject-you* participates in *Tao*, which is another metaphor.

How alert presence, and therefore *Tao*, manifests itself outside your story is unknowable. This is all metaphor. The way you understand a metaphor depends on how the words fit into your story, and is yours alone.

How does K differ from Vedanta?

The Real is ever present, like the screen on which the cinematographic pictures move. While the picture appears on it, the screen remains invisible. Stop the picture, and the screen will become clear. All thoughts and events are merely pictures moving on the screen of Pure Consciousness, which alone is real

Ramana Maharshi

Just as light destroys darkness by its very presence, so does the absolute destroy imagination.

To see that all knowledge is a form of ignorance is itself a movement of reality. The witness is not a person. The person comes into being when there is a basis for it, an organism, a body. In it the absolute is reflected as awareness. Pure awareness becomes self-awareness. When there is a self, self-awareness is the witness. When there is no self to witness, there is no witnessing either.

It is all very simple; it is the presence of the person that complicates. See that there is no such thing as a permanently separate person and all becomes clear.

Nisargadatta Maharaj, I Am That

K was asked a question:

I have heard you talk and what you are saying is pure Vedanta, brought up to date but of the ancient tradition [which asserts that] there is only Brahman who creates the world and the illusion of it, and the Atman—which is in every human being—is of that Brahman. Man has to awaken from this everyday consciousness of plurality and the manifest world, much as he would awaken from a dream. Just as this dreamer creates the totality of his dream so the individual consciousness

creates the totality of the manifest world and other people.

You, sir, don't say all this but surely you mean all this for you have been born and bred in this country and, though you have been abroad most of your life, you are part of this ancient tradition. India has produced you, whether you like it or not; you are the product of India and you have an Indian mind. Your gestures, your statue-like stillness when you talk, and your very looks are part of this ancient heritage. Your teaching is surely the continuation of what our ancients have taught since time immemorial.

K replies:

Let us brush aside whether the speaker[K] is an Indian brought up in this tradition, conditioned in this culture, and whether he is the summation of this ancient teaching. First of all he is not an Indian, that is to say, he does not belong to this nation or to the community of Brahmins, though he was born in it. He denies the very tradition with which you invest him.

He denies that his teaching is the continuity of the ancient teachings. He has not read any of the sacred books of India or of the West because they are unnecessary for a man who is aware of what is going on in the world—of the behaviour of human beings with their endless theories, with the accepted propaganda of two thousand or five thousand years which has become the tradition, the truth, the revelation.

To such a man who denies totally and completely the acceptance of the word, the symbol with its conditioning, to him truth is not a secondhand affair. If you had listened to him, sir, he has from the very beginning said that any acceptance of authority is the very denial of truth, and he has insisted that one must be outside all culture, tradition and social morality. If you had listened, then you would not say that he is an Indian or that he is continuing the ancient tradition in modern language. He totally denies the past, its teachers, its interpreters, its theories and its formulas.

Truth is never in the past. The truth of the past is the ashes of memory; memory is of time, and in the dead ashes of yesterday there is no truth. Truth is a living thing, not within the field of time.

So, having brushed all that aside, we can now take up the central issue of Brahman, which you postulate. Surely, sir, the very assertion is a theory invented by an imaginative mind—whether it be Shankara or the modern scholarly theologian. You can experience a theory and say that it is so, but that is like a man who has been brought up and conditioned in the Catholic world having visions of Christ. Obviously such visions are the projection of his own conditioning; and those who have been brought up in the tradition of Krishna have experiences and visions born of their culture.

So experience does not prove a thing. To recognise the vision as Krishna or Christ is the outcome of conditioned knowledge; therefore it is not real at all but a fancy, a myth, strengthened through experience and utterly invalid. Why do you want a theory at all, and why do you postulate any belief? This constant assertion of belief is an indication of fear—fear of everyday life, fear of sorrow, fear of death and of the utter meaninglessness of life. Seeing all this you invent a theory and the more cunning and erudite the theory the more weight it has. And after two thousand or ten thousand years of propaganda that theory invariably and foolishly becomes "the truth".

But if you do not postulate any dogma, then you are face to face with what actually is. The "what is", is thought, pleasure, sorrow and the fear of death. When you understand the structure of your daily living with its competition, greed, ambition and the search for power, then you will see not only the absurdity of theories, saviours and gurus, but you may find an ending to sorrow, an ending to the whole structure which thought has put together.

The penetration into and the understanding of this structure is meditation. Then you will see that the world is not an illusion but a terrible reality which man, in his relationship with his fellow man, has constructed. It is this which has to be understood and

not your theories of Vedanta, with the rituals and all the paraphernalia of organised religion.

When man is free, without any motive of fear, of envy or of sorrow, then only is the mind naturally peaceful and still. Then it can see not only the truth in daily life from moment to moment but also go beyond all perception; and therefore there is the ending of the observer and the observed, and duality ceases.

But beyond all this, and not related to this struggle, this vanity and despair, there is - and this is not a theory - a stream that has no beginning and no end; a measureless movement that the mind can never capture.

When you hear this, sir, obviously you are going to make a theory of it, and if you like this new theory you will propagate it.

But what you propagate is not the truth. The truth is only when you are free from the ache, anxiety and aggression which now fill your heart and mind. When you see all this and when you come upon that benediction called love, then you will know the truth of what is being said.

K, The Only Revolution

K's answer is a mess of flannel and contradictions. His dismissal of Vedanta applies equally to his own thinking. He is proposing a theory, despite what he claims, that "beyond all this, and not related to this struggle, this vanity and despair, there is—and this is not a theory—a stream that has no beginning and no end; a measureless movement that the mind can never capture."

Maharaj: What is, is. It is neither subjective nor objective. Matter and mind are not separate, they are aspects of one energy. Look at the mind as a function of matter and you have science; look at matter as the product of the mind and you have religion.

Questioner: But what is true? What comes first, mind or matter?

Maharaj: Neither comes first, for neither appears alone. Matter is the shape, mind is the name. Together they make the world. Pervading and transcending is Reality, pure being — awareness — bliss, your very essence

Nisargadatta Maharaj

What is, is Tao, Brahman, the Self, spirit, pure energy, God. These are words for unknowable. That Brahman, for example, has the same non-qualities as K's own *what is*, and that the way to find Brahman is identical to the way to find *what is*, seems to escape him.

What is the purpose of all my talks? asks Maharaj. It is to make you understand, to see, to apperceive your true nature. But first there is a hindrance to be removed; or rather, a hindrance that must disappear before you can see and be the what-is.

All 'thinking', 'conceptualizing', 'objectivizing' must cease. Why? Because what-is does not have the slightest touch of objectivity. It is the subject of all objects, and not being an object it cannot be observed. The eye sees everything else, but cannot see itself.

The only effective effort is instant apperceiving of truth. See the false as false and what remains is true. What is absent now will appear when what is now present disappears. It is as simple as that. Negation is the only answer.

Pointers from Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. Compiled by Sri Ramesh Balsekar. Ch.22

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Cease to be the object and become the subject of all that happens; once having turned within, you will find yourself beyond the subject. When you have found yourself, you will find that you are also beyond the object, that both the subject and the object exist in you, but you are neither.

Nisargadatta Maharaj, I Am That

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On April 23 1946 a Muslim youth came with friends and asked. "How can one know Allah?"

As usual Bhagavan said, "If you first find out who it is that is questioning, you can then know Allah. That real thing which is never destructible, is known as Allah. If you first find out the truth about yourself, the truth about Allah will present itself."

That was enough to dispose of him. He went away with his friends.

A Hindu asked Bhagavan, "Is Omkara a name of Ishwara?"

Bhagavan said, "Omkara is Ishwara, Ishwara is Omkara. That means Omkara itself is the swarupam (the real Self).

Some say that the swarupam itself is Omkara. Some say that it is Shakti, some say it is Ishwara, some say it is Jesus, some say it is Allah. Whatever name is given, the thing that is there, is only one."

Ramana Maharshi, Letters from Ramanashram

Place is essential, and not only a metaphorical place. To relax into *Tao* requires a restful physical place to be, and this is the life journey: to follow the senses to a place where they are quiet, and to sojourn there. The rest is silence.

A book by Vonny Thenasten

Vonny Thenasten is a poet and part-time odd-job man

5 July, 2026

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