

The Teachings of Jean Klein, article by Billy Doyle for InZicht, the Dutch magazine

I first met Jean Klein in 1982 in London. I had read two of his books whilst living abroad and a few days after returning to England I discovered he was giving dialogues near where I lived.

I already had a deep interest in Advaita Vedanta and was teaching yoga.

His books already had an impact on me, but listening to his words, which came from such a depth and with such a clarity and directness, I was struck very deeply. The words, often with a poetic quality, came from silence and communicated to a level beyond the mind.

After one of the dialogues a few of us went to a café with Jean. He explained to my surprise that he also taught yoga during his retreats.

I then attended the next retreat in Holland which was given in English and for the following 14 years I assiduously attended his retreats and dialogues in England and abroad.

Every teacher has their own flavour, but I experienced something quite unique with Jean. He did not point to the nature of reality in some abstract and intellectual way but spoke to our whole being. I will try to give a summary of some of his main teaching.

In his dialogues he would often give a short talk and then take questions or would go straight into accepting our questions.

He emphasised, as in all non-dualistic teaching, that we are not the body or mind, not the personality or any kind of perception. Our real nature is consciousness, awareness, but we take ourselves to be an expression of consciousness, a separate individual, a fraction of our real nature. It is this belief in an illusionary self that creates our endless problems. The self-image we come to take ourselves to be is just a mind creation.

The world always appears to us according to the point of view we adopt; for the senses it is form, for the mind it is idea, for the Self, the uniting consciousness, it is consciousness.

I Am

The question who am I? doesn't come from the mind, but from the Self. What we are we cannot think it, it is beyond the mind, but we know it in being it. Time and space are in consciousness, but consciousness is not in time and space. This was not some intellectual understanding, but being the understanding. It calls for a deep intimacy with ourselves. It is only through observing, he often used the word listening, to ourselves that transformation is possible.

If we try to change ourselves, it is still the mind trying to change the mind, we stay on the same level and go round in circles. As for the various spiritual techniques, they invariably involve forms of concentration, we become focused on some object, which leads to fixation and a dull mind. We need to understand that the mind can never bring us to the ultimate understanding, then it relaxes, and we are open to the unknown, that which is beyond the mind. However a clear mind is also important; we may have an 'experience' of non-duality, but without clarity of mind the integration may not happen.

Listening is without intent, we are simply open to what is. However we rarely listen in this innocent way, we judge and analyse. People would often ask Jean about their loneliness, anger, boredom etc. Of course his answer would vary according to the questioner, but he would ask us

not push away or try to escape our feelings, but to welcome them. Feel, for example, the fear on the level of the body and instead of reacting to it, let it be sensation. If we conceptualise it we are no longer with the feeling and it becomes fixed. In letting the tension unfold we give it the opportunity to dissolve. When there is acceptance we are no longer fuelling the problem, there is a space relationship. Then the emphasis is on welcoming itself and no longer on the object. This brings us back to our original nature, to openness. Questions were often on the psychological level, but the answer would take the questioner beyond the mind, pointing to our real nature, to what is changeless in us.

Jean was a teacher of the direct approach to self-knowledge, and not the progressive path where one advances through various spiritual stages. Some people questioned if we are not the body or mind why he brought yoga practices, which are generally seen as part of the progressive approach into his teaching.

He practised yoga himself, and he explains in his book *Transmission of the Flame*, that about a year after his return from India he found it necessary to expand the teaching to incorporate the psychosomatic level. It is our contraction on this level that reinforces our identification with what we're not.

"In getting to know the body-mind, one can discover more clearly the nature of identification, and let it go. The relaxed body is a relaxed mind. In a relaxed body and mind we are open to receiving, available, welcoming, open to the openness. The relaxed, light, energetic, sattvic body-mind is a near expression of our real nature. It is almost impossible for a conditioned body-mind to be receptive to truth, open to grace."

Jean would make it clear that there is nothing to achieve or become which would only reinforce the ego. Without this background understanding any exploration will never bear fruit.

Jean taught yoga in the Kashmir Tradition, incorporating the full range of yoga practices, postures and breathing. He taught the real body was not the physical body we see, but the energetic body that permeates and surrounds the physical body.

This subtle energy is paralysed by the tension in the physical body, so it is only by coming to a deep relaxation that we begin to experience our bodies as energy, as vibration. This comes about by a deep listening to the body, letting the new sensation awaken. Because of ingrained habits, this new experience of our body may take time, but once established, it becomes a global feeling, we are one with space, without the feeling of inside and outside, without borders. It gives us a forefeeling of our real nature.

The tensions we hold in our body is also reflected in our breathing. In observing the breath, he emphasised letting the exhale die and waiting for the gift of the inhale, allowing this empty moment between each breath. The breath comes from silence and dies in silence and is thus a pointer to our real nature.

I've been asked what was it like to be in his company. Over the years I was fortunate to spend time with him including an invitation to visit him at his home in Switzerland. He would sometimes say it was beautiful to be nobody and being in his spacious presence had the same effect on you.

In our meetings during the retreats I often felt it was the joy of coming together that was as important as any of the practices we followed.

He talked about how our senses tend to grasp, instead of letting things come to us. This tension in our seeing and hearing is a deep obstacle to a quiet mind.

Jean talked about meditation very much in the same way he used the words listening or openness. During the retreats we would sit in silence and usually he would give a guided meditation focusing on sensing the body and breath, bringing us to a global feeling, free of the forehead, 'the thought factory'.

Meditation, he taught, is not a cerebral activity of concentration or trying to stop thoughts which can only lead to further tension. We were asked to let thoughts come, and let them go, but without following them and to let the silence come to us.

He taught that silence is not an object, but we are the silence. In meditation there is no meditator and nothing to meditate on. So if there is a purpose to meditation it is to find the meditator, when we discover there is none, we give up meditation, we are meditation. It is the background of our life whether we're still or in activity.

He explained thought is the natural function of the mind, which when it arises out of silence it is appropriate to the situation and creative. However much of our thought revolves around our I-image, which it then endlessly perpetuates. The ego feels insecure in silence, where it has nothing to feed it, hence our constant day dreaming and mind activity. Jean emphasised those empty moments in the day when there is nothing to do, or being aware of the space between thought.

We tend to ignore these moments or see them as merely vacant, instead of letting them be windows into our real nature. He talked about coming to the 'absence of the absence' and in real emptiness there is fullness. Particularly important is how we go to sleep at night, letting go of all we hold onto and how we wake up in the morning before the world of objects appear.

He stressed the importance of understanding the nature of desire. As long as we are adrift from our real nature there is desire. Our real desire is to be desireless, but when this is not understood we compensate with objects and experiences. But when we come to understand nothing in this world can satisfy our deepest longing, we become open to a different dimension.

People sometimes asked how we can change the world. Jean points out to first find peace and truth in ourselves and then we are in the best position to act in the world, otherwise we're part of the problem. But when life asks us to help, then of course we help.

He explained how we may have a genuine insight into our real nature, but unless this understanding permeates all levels of our being, there is a danger we come back to identification. Here he describes this global understanding:

When you become more sensitive to your body you have the impression that the inhalation-exhalation is no longer localised. It is all around you. It is important to see how we live mainly in our heads. Think with your whole body, feel with your whole body. In the whole feeling, the global sensation, you go into your room and touch your whole room. You go outside and touch the clouds, the trees, the water. You do not live in isolation. In your radiation you are in communion with all things. In this expansion there is no place for the ego because the ego is a contraction. Love is expansion, a feeling of spaciousness.

The Ease of Being

Jean was a violinist, and would talk about the power of music and art, what he referred to as sacred art. All objects are pointers back to ourselves but objects of art bring us actively to ourselves. In the presence of art the usual thinking processes come to a halt. The beauty we feel here is beyond all representation, beyond time and space.

I finish with a few quotations:

You are built of beauty. There is the seed of beauty in you, so you can know beauty in your surroundings. Follow this beauty, seek it out. Cultivate it.

The Book of Listening

...when you are in this openness, the openness is absorbed in the openness.

Beyond Knowledge

Liberation does not concern the person, for liberation is freedom from the person.

I Am

The seeker is what he is seeking, the idea of attaining is only an evasion.

The Ease of Being

...when you know what life is, the question of death is irrelevant.

Who Am I

Only in the complete absence of yourself is there total presence.

I Am

Thinking where there is nothing that thanks and nobody to thank is for me the highest feeling of beauty.

The Book of listening



<https://inzicht.org>