



**INSIGHT INTO
INDIVIDUAL LIVING**

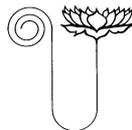
PHIROZ MEHTA

INSIGHT INTO INDIVIDUAL LIVING

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A transcript of a talk given by Phiroz Mehta at his London home.

Edited and introduced by his son Robert Mehta.



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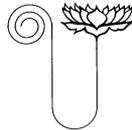
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The Phiroz Mehta Trust was formed in 1988 to continue the work and promote Phiroz Mehta's ideas and deep understanding of the art of "Religious Living".

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PHIROZ DORAB MEHTA (1902 – 1994)

Phiroz Mehta was regarded by many people as the foremost authority on Buddhism in Great Britain.

In his introduction to Phiroz Mehta's book "Buddhahood" the editor John Snelling wrote:

"Even in a spiritual dark age like our own, the light is never completely extinguished. It survives, transmitted by a handful of true luminaries, who shine all the more brightly amidst the prevailing gloom. The late Jiddu Krishnamurti was one; the author of the essays collected in this volume, Phiroz Mehta, is another. Both can be fairly called authentic sons of the great Indian spiritual tradition.

"Phiroz Mehta has lived the modest life of an ordinary householder, marrying and raising a family, to support whom he worked firstly as a lecturer on Indian religion and culture and later, down to his retirement, as a school-teacher specializing in science. He has written five major books and numerous articles, been a tireless and inspiring lecturer, organized summer schools and held regular group meetings at his home for many years. Yet he has never sought to elevate himself as a master or guru but has remained always the humble 'fellow student', proclaiming like Socrates that his vast learning has merely shown him the enormity of his own ignorance.

"Though he never had a personal guru and on the whole kept a certain distance from even the best spiritual groups, Phiroz Mehta has benefited from a close association with many fine minds. In particular in 1963 he was privileged to receive four days' personal instruction in Mahayāna Buddhism from H.H. the Dalai Lama.

"All these influences have gone into the melting-pot, or perhaps better, the alchemical crucible, out of which Phiroz Mehta has extracted the refined gold of his own writings and teachings. But we must mention another vital ingredient too: his own experience in striving to live the *brahmacariya*, the holy life. This is most important; mere book learning is not sufficient. Many people can write knowledgeably and inspiringly about spiritual matters; comparatively few are able to live out what they know and write. In this existential respect, as a living exemplar of the *brahmacariya*, lies Phiroz Mehta's true greatness."

He was born of Parsi parents in Cambay, India, on 1st October 1902, and was brought up in the Zoroastrian religion.

After his schooling in Colombo, [Sri Lanka], he won a scholarship to Cambridge to study Natural Science. The scholarship was not allowed however because he had no birth certificate and even though the case was taken as far as the House of Lords no grant was given! Fortunately private sponsorship was found and he was able to commence his studies. During his final year at Cambridge he fell ill and was unable to complete his studies. Twenty six years later after studying intensively for only ten weeks, he took the finals exam in history and was awarded his Master's degree.

From 1924 until 1932 he studied the piano with the world renowned pianist Solomon. Again illness struck and he was unable to follow his chosen career as a concert pianist and piano teacher. The conductor Zubin Mehta was one of his early piano pupils.

He now devised his own system of physical education to promote health and self-expression through rhythmic movement and breathing and taught this method for fifteen years. People as diverse as C.B. Fry, the England cricket captain, and Douglas Kennedy, English Folk Song and Dance Society president, came to him for lessons.

From early childhood Phiroz Mehta had a burning interest in religion and philosophy and he was closely involved with the Theosophical Society for many years. At the age of 16 he was running the Colombo branch.

In 1956 his first major book *Early Indian Religious Thought* was published. It was not however until 1976 after extensive study, research and travel in India that he completed *The Heart of Religion*, a profound study of the essence common to all religious experience. During these years a frequent visitor to his south London home for advice on Eastern religions was Fritjof Capra, author of *The Tao of Physics* et alia.

He subsequently published three more books, *Zarathushtra* (1985), *Buddhahood* (1988) and *Holistic Consciousness* (1989) [Element Books]. Through his knowledge of current scientific thinking and his lifelong study of all the major religions (notably Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism) together with life experience in both India and Great Britain, Phiroz Mehta not only bridged the fields of Science and religion but also linked the cultural heritage of East and West.

Robert Mehta

INSIGHT INTO INDIVIDUAL LIVING

I think you all know that in past civilisations it was the whole family, father, mother and the sons and daughters who were regarded as the social unit, not each individual person. As the centuries went by greater and greater emphasis was laid upon the worth of each individual as such. The individual came to be regarded as the unit of society. Now it is very interesting that in recent times amongst the most individualistic peoples of the world, such as ourselves in Britain, there have arisen scientists, mainly medical people, who have investigated this matter rather closely for several years and have presented their findings. And they say quite unequivocally that in actual biological fact it is the family which is the social unit, the biological social unit, not the separate individual. Now if we go into this deeply there are some very remarkable consequences, if we take care to understand this fully. As far as these doctors have gone, they have spoken in biological terms. Biological does not mean in this context confined purely to the physiology and anatomy of the body. But these doctors have regarded the person as a psycho-physical being. So far as our psycho-physicality is concerned, it is the family which is the true unit and not the individual.

These doctors have not gone further than that, but we might consider one or two points in relation to this. Whilst I believe it *is* true that speaking psycho-physically only, the biological unit of society is the family, if we consider the question of mind in its depth and consciousness, then each individual person has to be regarded as a unit of mankind as a whole. Each individual person is a unit fundamentally because he has the potentiality to realise the true meaning contained in the common-or-garden phrase “I am I. I am myself.” Whilst it is true that biologically speaking the family is the unit, each member of that family and therefore each and every single member of the human race, has this inner sanctum, so to say, of the mind and consciousness, which no one else has in the same manner and functioning. Therefore in that sense we are distinct individuals. We are unique creatures.

But it doesn't end there. If it ended there, then the misapplication of this sense of individuality leads to rampant egoism and all the ghastly consequences of that rampant egoism, the oppression, the domination, the insensitivity of the strong and the powerful individual in relationship with others. We have to go deeper still. This very mind and consciousness which is associated with our sense of distinctive personal individuality, when truly mature and come to fruition, once again restores us to the whole, so that in mind and consciousness the separateness of individuality vanishes and the individual is only – I don't mean only in a diminutive sense – but, let me say, the individual is *truly* the living vehicle of fulfilled mankind. So you see what has happened. We start with a biological unity with respect to a few members of the human race. We form part of that unity. Then we move out of that state into this state of very distinct, self-assertive, separate individualism, and then if we do mature, we return again to a unity, this time not a unity confined to the family, confined to our psychophysicality, but inclusive of totality, of transcendence. I think it is very important for us to be more and more intensely aware of this for several reasons. One is this. You know the habit people have throughout the world of separating religion and the religious life from the secular life, as it is called, from what they call the other aspects of life. This simply indicates the fragmentariness of the mind of the person who sees thus and talks thus and acts upon this view. But if we see the wholeness then the fragmentariness disappears. Each individual person, as well as all mankind, has the chance to move towards true human fulfilment which is denied if we are restricted to our egoism and our separate individualism.

This is one very important reason why we should become more and more intensely aware of this. And there is another reason. Throughout the centuries this separation of the religious life and the secular life, and this habit of regarding the “Holy One” as something apart from the rest of mankind, from the rest of the whole world, has been responsible for the accusation levelled at the Holy One, that he retreats from life, refuses to face the problems of life. That is part of the accusation. And the other part is even more awful with regard to its social implications. It is said that the one who devotes himself entirely to the religious life is a person who does not face the world’s problems and help towards their solution. Why? Because he is selfishly, exclusively concerned with his own salvation. So strong has been this point of view that we have one of the classic examples of it in the distinction drawn by so many between the two great branches of Buddhism. The Hinayāna, with the Pali Canon as its fundamental teaching, is regarded as the means by which a person devotes himself just to his personal salvation. He is concerned with realising Nirvana and he is unconcerned with the rest of humanity. The Mahayāna presents the doctrine, therefore, of the ideal of the Bodhisattva who forswears Nirvana and fulfillment for himself and is devoted to the salvation of all mankind, not only all mankind but everything that is alive. You have the beautiful, exaggerated expression “Until every blade of grass has entered Nirvana.” So you will always be mowing the lawns of Nirvana! Don’t forget: we must have a little sense of humour with respect to this sort of thing!

Now, let us use our good sense. It is so easily, so glibly said, and this applies not only to the sphere of religion, but in every sphere of human life throughout the ages, “Oh, that man is only concerned with himself, he doesn’t care two hoots about anybody else or anything else.” Let us enquire, and the enquiry doesn’t need to go very far. It’s so obvious, the answer is so obvious. Could I exist at all without you? Could this which I call myself subsist a single moment in time and space if that which I call the not-self, which means you, human beings, all creatures, the earth, the plants, sun, light, air, if all that were not there? Could this then possibly be here? So we see at once that there is no such thing as the possibility of a person being a hundred per cent concerned with himself and with his own salvation. What is the relationship between myself as one single individual and all the rest? What is the relationship? It is a relationship of interaction, and what I have called in my new book “interfluence.” We influence each other continuously by the mere fact of our existence. It is not possible to be free of it. Whether I deliberately and consciously try to help somebody else or whether I don’t, the very fact that I exist means that I am affecting his life. You can’t get away from that. Now, in what manner do I the individual affect my environment, affect my fellow human beings, affect the whole world? In what manner do I affect? Exactly what I am in myself from moment to moment exercises its whole influence immediately upon myself and upon my environment. If I am in a rage inside myself, certain chemical processes take place which medical science knows are not exactly health promoting. They are rather detrimental to myself to start with. There, if you like, is a marvellous example of the immediacy of the operation of karma, not tomorrow, not merely two hours hence, but in my rage right now there are chemical processes taking place which are detrimental. Now, that’s purely on the physical side as pure chemistry of the body. Being in a rage makes me react towards those who are in my milieu, in my environment, in a detrimental way to them. And that reacts back on me.

You see how complex karma is and how it works. We, if we are sensible – that’s why I started off by saying “let us look at it sensibly” – if we are sensible, we will be intensely cognizant of the immediacy of the operation of karma. That means the immediacy of the effect of every single thought and feeling, of word and of action. You see what it means to

live the human life, the religious life. I am constantly interacting with the environment, with everybody else. There's a constant interplay, and an interplay which cannot be stopped. It stops as far as I am concerned only when the organism is dead, that is to say as far as the immediate interaction is concerned. But what I have spoken, thought, what I have done, in so far as it has introduced changes in the life of my environment, goes on and on and on, undergoing an extraordinary transformation process throughout the years, throughout the centuries, until these particular influences in the course of the transformation have completely worked themselves out and become something utterly new and rich and strange. Let's hope it is rich. Strange it is certainly going to be, but I don't know about the rich! You see? We have to be very sensitive and touch the activities of the self and their effect upon the environment on a universal scale, not just in a limited action. Be very sensitive to the universality of every single thought and feeling and action. Consider for a moment how a single look by someone in authority, a parent, a teacher, an elder, upon a child can, may, completely alter that child's life for good or evil. And if it happens that the alteration takes place in a child whose destiny it is to affect the world very powerfully, the world will suffer terrible effects. Or the other way round. If a look, just a look, at a child influences that child in such a manner that it opens up something marvellous within him or her, and if it is in his or her destiny to be an instrument for world change, the world will be changed for the better.

Now how can we ever say then that we are unconcerned with the world, we are concerned with our own selfish salvation? There is no meaning to the term selfish salvation. That adjective *selfish* completely denies the meaning of the word and the implications of the word salvation. There is no such thing as an exclusive salvation for me. It is *with* everybody, it is *for* everybody. Take an absurd example. When I breathe out I can't hold that air and say "This is mine, let no one else breathe it." It's impossible. It just goes into the universal store. And it is the same with the influence of thought and feeling – into the universal store. We have to wake up in inner awareness to the reality of the unity of the universe. We just use that word *universe* very glibly. "The whole world" we say, and so on, but we are not at all inwardly sensitive to the meaning of the word *world*, when we use it.

So there is no such thing as living the religious life for the sake of one's personal salvation. There, the religious, however sincere he or she may be, who strives to realise just his personal salvation is somewhat absurdly, charmingly, pathetically, childishly foolish. You can't strive for your exclusive personal salvation. On the other hand the person who gets an idea, who is enthused with some ideal, who has, as he says, "seen the light" or heard the message from God, and so forth, even if it is only a case of making the tennis ball go in the right way, in the right direction, in order to win Wimbledon, you see, is equally stupid. He or she goes about saying, "The Lord has spoken unto me, and 'lo and behold' we must all – come on boys and girls! – compel them to get on the band wagon to Heaven." You see, the stupidity with which we suffer is something tragic. Is it surprising that the Buddha, in his teaching, laid so much emphasis upon stupidity which was associated with delusion and illusions?

How awful are its consequences! So neither the one extreme nor the other extreme makes any sense. Both belong to the realm of delusion and both are stupid.

Now the fact remains that everyone of us influences everyone else. We look at the state of the world today, and there's no need to labour the point, we all know it is moving towards the precipice. It is almost looking over the edge now. And it may not be ten or fifteen years even before some terrible catastrophe will overwhelm a very large proportion of the human race unless we wake up in time. There is very little sign that mankind as a whole will wake up in

time. You may say, have you any evidence for saying this, that there is very little sign that mankind will wake up in time? Yes, I put it to you, what is it that human beings look to for saving the world situation? What is it that they look to? All over the world, we are always looking for a system, a method, which will prove a panacea for the world's ills. The system, the method, is external to ourselves, meaning the sincere, those who are concerned, are willing to adapt themselves to a certain extent to a system. The rest are blindly ignorant, they are hopelessly unaware and they just don't care. Now isn't this the sheerest folly? What is the root of the world's ills? What is the true root of the world's ills? Myself, the living being. It is my untransformed greed and violence and ignorance and so forth which is the root source of my ills. The external circumstance, the external horror, catastrophe, will certainly bring pain to me whether I be saint or sinner. But the ills which really afflict me are the ills which are born of *my* flaws. There is no system or method in political or economic or sociological or educational or any other form, external form, which can heal me of my ills. I alone can do that. I alone can look at myself, be intensely, very sensitively aware of myself and my reactions, my behaviour and so forth, and in the intensity of the seeing, seeing intelligently, heal the ills. And when I say intelligently, I decidedly do not mean get rid of ills. The ills are the external symptoms – they are the consequence of the source inside me which produces these ills. Because in so far as the source is in *my* psyche, in *my* mind, inside this living being, it is constantly interacting with you. You see the utter futility of this externalisation, of the system, the method, “somebody else is going to do the job.” No one else *can* do the job, however willing he or she may be.

Do let us be sensible about this. When you are hungry, do you ask *me* to eat on your behalf? Would you *like* me to eat on your behalf? That's a little bit doubtful. Would you *allow* me to eat on your behalf? That's completely doubtful! You'll shout out “Hey, it's I who am hungry. Why are you eating therefore?” It is like that. But you see, whilst all of us, I am sure, and a great many, by the thousands in fact in the world, will give their intellectual assent to this, they are only superficially in sympathy with real understanding. The most important aspect of religious living is to wake up to the truth. The truth is not a set of statements or commandments or wonderful revelations inside a book or coming from a person. To wake up to the truth means to see and fully understand *here now* exactly what is present *here now*. You all know that you are for example in this room, listening to some one who is speaking. You all know that as a fact. And unless you were completely out of your senses you wouldn't deny that simple straightforward fact. That is the truth of the matter. Now when we can become aware of the truth of the matter with regard to our own inward state in *that* manner, then we know exactly how to behave. You sit courteously, patiently, listening to the speaker. This is right behaviour. If the speaker says something outrageous, something evil, well, if you do get very angry you might seize hold of some of the books and throw them at his head, or if you had stones in your hands you might like to throw them! But I doubt whether any one of you would quite behave in that way. You'd just quietly walk out or never come again, which is sensible behaviour, is it not? Now can we be sensible in that manner with respect to what is inside us? This is our personal responsibility, not only as people who are fundamentally, profoundly concerned with the religious life, but fundamentally, profoundly concerned with being true human beings.

There is another important aspect. We started off with understanding, or trying to understand, that every single being inevitably affects everyone round him, which means that you and I inevitably condition each other. It is not possible to escape the fact of conditioning. For better or for worse, every single new born infant can never escape the conditioning he or she will undergo, by virtue of his home, his parents, his friends, his teachers and those who

come in touch with him. Now consider again, where does the world's evil start? Who is it that has really failed if we look now not just at ourselves but look at society as a whole? Who has failed and has constantly failed through the ages, and will continue to fail for many, many years yet, because progress is slow? It is fundamentally the mothers and fathers of the world who have failed, and who keep failing. Look around and see what the mothers and fathers do, how they bring up their little ones. I constantly have quite a good little opportunity, well, not all day long, but now and again I just pop up and look out of the window and I see how parents behave towards their children. I hear how they talk to and about their children and how those parents are influencing their children. The mothers and fathers of the world have failed en masse, hence the misery and trouble in the world. And just observe what society does in order to deal with this trouble and misery. It introduces counteracting measures, something to counteract the ill. But this is merely giving dope, because you're tackling the system, you're tackling the symptom. It's no good doping the person and tackling the symptom. Heal the person of the root ills which are the source from which these painful symptoms, the terrible symptoms appear. So you see, we are all in a mess. With the best will in the world, all the systems and the methods and the panaceas and the utopias which we put out are utterly useless in the long run.

We all pride ourselves on our social and educational services. And, just precisely what does our education amount to? Turning out another cog in the wheel of a machine which has been acting through the centuries like a juggernaut which crushes living human beings under its relentless wheels. And what does our education consist of? With few exceptions it imposes fixed ideas, beliefs, and ideals, some of which are certainly in the direction of fruition and growth, but are they all that? And even those which are in the direction of fruition and growth, do they work in the direction of releasing the light of pure intelligence in the person, or merely make him the victim of fixed beliefs, which are the illnesses of the mind? Those fixations may be most attractive dogmas and doctrines and so forth! – “I believe in God the Father”!!! If I am truthful, I do *not* believe in God the Father. To believe means in the first place “to be faithful unto”. Do we ever consider that fact? That is the first meaning of belief, to be faithful unto.

So you see the mothers and fathers have failed, and certainly the state always fails in these matters because it is all externalised. There is nothing to wake up the individual. Conventional religion also fails because conventional orthodox religion is presented as fixed ideas, doctrines, beliefs, musts and must-nots which only land us in the realm of conflict.

Only from within ourselves can come the light, can come the balm, the ointment which will heal. And that which truly heals does not hurt, does not hurt in the real sense, and then afterwards there is joy, there is fulfilling. This is the real meaning of religion and the religious life. So let this grow from within. By all means let us read the books and be sensible with it all and use our own intelligence to understand. Clear understanding comes when the mind is calm and quiet and not trying to ferret out all sorts of wonderful truths and meanings. The truth may be just utterly simple, so simple you hardly need to say one word to express it. And then, only then, it may be possible to bring about such a state of consciousness that the world, which is rushing towards destruction, may draw back just in time, because of *you, you yourselves*.