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A Hindu Journalist and Teacher Tells How She Found, Fought and Finally Outgrew a Perplexing Philosopher

I first met Krishnamurthi between the pages of a very dusty, very old and poorly printed book while a graduate student at the University of Minnesota in the US. Those were troubled times for me, and I was searching every philosophical nook and cranny for answers to burning questions on the meaning of existence. I found his recorded speeches dry, unintelligible and dull and put the book down after half an hour with a sigh...I had not found what I sought.

I made my second acquaintance with this world-renowned philosopher three years later, sitting on the bed of the guest house of an ashram in Pondicherry [an hour's drive south of Madras], half a globe away. This time lightning struck, sparks showered and within a wink of my eye, I saw. I understood what he was talking about! What he said had complete relevance to my situation at that time...and veil after veil lifted as I eagerly devoured his words.

For the following four years I had what I term "Krishnamurthi fever." Nearly every sentence, nearly every thought, was punctuated with "But Krishnamurthi says this..." or "He says that..." When I opened the Bhagavad Gita to read its wisdom, I felt somewhat guilty, for Krishnamurthi had said we must not turn to any authority, however ancient, for spiritual knowledge, but must find it within ourselves.

When I found an Ashtanga Yoga Guru whom I respected and from whom I desired to learn, I felt guilty, for Krishnamurthi had cautioned me against "blindly following a guru" or following any methodical teaching, which he claimed would only "deaden the mind." In other words, I got "hung up," neither able to realize the high state of consciousness of which my idol spoke so poetically nor able to satisfy my inner yearnings along a more concrete path.

Be Award The one immense benefit which I reaped during those conflict-ridden years - when I was torn between what I perceived as Krishnamurthi's teachings and the path toward which my nature urged me - was the wonderful concept of choiceless awareness which Krishnamurthi propounds so well. "Be aware!," he says. "Be aware of whatever you think, whatever you say, whatever actions you perform. Simply watch passively. Do not condemn what you see. Do not justify it. Do not rationalize it. Simply see it for what it is in all its depth."

I was able to grasp this, and this whole concept helped me in detaching "myself from myself, and allowed me "to observe myself from moment to moment," a process which brought realization after profound realization to my consciousness. I was able to free myself of many psychological and physical "hang ups" through this subtle practice of "choiceless awareness."

The poet in me thrilled to Krishnamurthi's wonderful, spiritual descriptions of scenes of natural beauty, and his enchanting accounts of his own spiritual experiences. I also was deeply moved by many statements, which became "mantras" for me, mantras which I chanted over and over again. "You must be hardened and well-trained if you are to reach the highest," he admonished his followers. "You must find your own way, no one else can show you your path." So many statements, charged with the electric power of real truth, moved me deeply and inspired me in my spiritual search.

Paralyzing Conflicts: Yet, often I ran into the very conflict which Krishnamurthi taught sapped the seeker of all spiritual energy. And that conflict was caused by my natural inclination as opposed to what I perceived as his teachings. For example, whenever I would practice my yoga asanas, kriyas, mudras, pranayama, mantra or concentration techniques, I would hear the words of Krishnamurthi admonishing me, "There is no technique which can take you to God-Realization." Whenever I would feel a natural desire to read any of the scriptures - whether Hindu, Christian or Muslim - I would hear his voice, "Truth is not to be found in the so-called holy books of mankind." This conflict sometimes paralyzed me, so that I was not able to undertake any action at all. I simply sat, thinking and trying to be aware of my conflict; and escaping the conflict by reading one of Krishnamurthi's books.

This went on for several years. I continued my practice of the techniques and methodology of Ashtanga Yoga and taught it to others, observing the effects of the

various techniques in their lives. I read the scriptures and thrilled as much to the poetic wisdom found there as I had to Krishnamurthi's teachings. I still tried to practice "choiceless awareness," being conscious of the process of my thoughts and the nature of my actions, the quality of speech, and I tried to refrain from the blockage caused by condemnation, justification and rationalization. I continued to read passages from the various recorded speeches of Krishnamurthi, first daily, and then as the years passed weekly and finally only occasionally.

Today, seventeen years since I first was introduced to this remarkable man, I have a detached, appreciative relationship with him. But I have broken my dependence. I am grateful to him for the "chasm" he helped me to cross at a time when I needed such help. I am grateful for his teachings, which enabled me to break through many "hang ups" - physical, mental and emotional. But I no longer need him, as a drug addict needs his drugs. I am detached and have moved beyond that particular stage in my evolution.

I first heard him speak about ten years ago in Madras, but was not much impressed with his presence as a speaker. When our group requested an audience with him, for some private question and answer sessions, we were refused quite curtly by his secretary. "He is a busy man. He does not have time to see all those who wish to see him listen to his lectures. Be aware!" was the advice we were given.

But I noticed that this secretary was not very aware himself, that his speech was laden with clichés drawn from Krishnamurthi's talks, repeated parrot-like without depth or intensity of understanding. This disconcerted me. It struck me as strange to find so many people closely associated with Krishnamurthi, in executive positions in his organization, completely unable to listen even to elementary conversation. Their eyes would wander off (perhaps to the beauty of the evening light on the trees), their feet would shuffle, their fingers would twist one against the other. They certainly weren't "choicelessly aware" in their conversations with me! And I wondered how people so close to him could so completely escape his real message.

I was not content to have a relationship that was one to a million, and preferred a student-teacher relationship with a less difficult ratio! Of course, Krishnamurthi does not wish to be a Guru. Nevertheless, I personally feel that a teacher-even a spiritual teacher-should be personally in contact with his student and the

one-to-one relationship must occur if true spiritual knowledge is to be transferred.

For the Elite: I also noted as the years passed that most of Krishnamurthi's followers were from the very wealthy, elite and intellectual section of our Indian society. Many were "armchair philosophers" who loved to talk and discuss, but seemed incapable of any real action. The whole movement appeared to me to simply be a continuation of the sort of philosophical discussion and groupism which I had experienced in the university. There we all sat around, talked, discussed things, "got high on ideas" and then went home, exactly the same as we were before! I had experienced that, had been dissatisfied with that and did not wish to get involved in that again.

Nothing New: I also found that everything that Krishnamurthi says, all the great messages which he gives, are simply the teachings of the great scriptures, the Bible, the Gita, the Mahabharata, the great master's works. He simply put them into modern intellectual and psychological language. "Be a light unto yourself," he says. The great Hindu mystics and seers have been saying that for thousands of years. "Be aware. Be conscious has been the message of yoga masters since the dawn of time. Even Krishnamurthi's method - his path of negation in which "This is not the answer, that is not the answer" - is an accepted Hindu path to spiritual realization. It is called Neti Neti which means "Not this, not that." It is an attempt to find God by negation. There is also the opposite path available in the Hindu framework: Iti, Iti, which means "It is this. It is that" or "God is here, there and everywhere." There is nothing new about Krishnamurthi's teachings. His method of presentation, his "packaging" is new, suited for the 20th century intellectual. That's all.

Negative Authority: Krishnamurthi warns those who listen to him not to follow Gurus, not to follow tradition, not to go to ancient authorities for answers. But in doing this, he has set himself up as a "negative authority"! I have talked to people who don't want to practice hatha yoga asanas because "Krishnamurthi has said there is no method which will lead us to truth." I have met people who refuse to read any ancient scriptures because "Krishnamurthi said we cannot find our truth in books." I have spoken with those who refuse to study any spiritual art under a master, because "Krishnamurthi says no teacher will take us to God."

These people refrain from these actions only on the authority of Krishnamurthi! How are they then different from other people who do these things because the

Guru tells them to do them? One Guru says, "Don't do it!" The other says, "Do it!" Where is the difference in the Gurus? Isn't it best that we practice spiritual arts, chant mantras, seek a Guru, read the scriptures and find out for ourselves the value of these activities? If they have value in our lives, we can incorporate them. If they have none, we can discard them. But to refrain from doing them because one man says we should not is, to me, as much a "blind following" as those who follow any of the numerous cult figures of the 20th century.

I have had to break with the "negative authority" of Krishnamurthi, who tells his listeners "not to do such things" in order to come to my own sadhana, my own path, which works for me. Perhaps this is the point he wishes to teach his followers (they are followers, even if both he and they wish to deny it)...Krishnamurthi, an unquestioned master of consciousness and awareness often slips, ever so slyly, into his own talk this caution: "Do not be misled by anyone, especially do not be misled by me!"

In the end his basic premise is sound: "The Gum lies within." This bold, thrilling statement has been made since time immemorial by masters who have walked the earth. Men come to this realization in different ways. Some through negation, some through assertion. I am certain Sri Krishnamurthi would agree: "The paths to God are as many as the lives of men."

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