

On the 125th anniversary of Krishnamurti's birth, it was thought fitting that a special issue of the Journal be brought out with contributions invited from persons whose lives and outlook have been deeply affected by his teachings. We have here a collection of eighteen articles from persons who have in their own unique ways engaged deeply with the teachings. Our authors come from varied fields of endeavour—education, academic philosophy, traditional religious teachings, management of organisations, concern with the natural environment. A common theme that recurs implicitly or explicitly across these writings is that all of them have seen that “the inner always overcomes the outer” and that “what you are within, you bring about outwardly.” Though their fields of endeavour in the outer world differ, each of them appears to share in the insight that if we wish to bring about order in the outer world, it is of much greater and fundamental importance to establish order in the world of our inner experience, rather than simply aim to find solutions to ‘fix’ the problems in the outer world.



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“I Want to Know What Truth Is”

Lessons learnt from
Krishnaji

KIRAN KHALAP



It was 1975. I was seventeen years old.

I stood before our family deity, Goddess Shantadurga, in the inner sanctum of her temple in Dhargal, Goa, our family home, along with my Dad.

The priest placed four petals on each shoulder and arm of the heartbreakingly beautiful idol carved in black stone, and my father said, “What do you wish for most in life? Hold that wish in your mind.”

The priest waited for the Goddess to decide my future.

One petal fell.

The priest smiled. “Your wish will be granted.”

What was my wish?

“I want to know what truth is.”

It is 2019, I am 61, and I have no clue what truth is.

But I know with certainty the man who pointed out the pathless path to it.

It was 1977.

In my pursuit of truth, I had read, *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant, *Being and Nothingness* by Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Hermann Hesse, the Upanishads, the Vedas, watched my Dad practice kundalini yoga...and understood nothing.

All so confusing, all words and concepts.

Then on a Colaba sidewalk shop, I spotted a book that said, *Talks and Dialogues by J. Krishnamurti*.

It had a striking black and white portrait photograph of Krishnaji (as I later started referring to him in Benares) by Cecil Beaton,

one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century, and the back of the book blurb said, "...leads you to clear-eyed consciousness without drugs".

I read the book once, twice, thrice, and the scalpel-like words finally cut through my addled brain.

They cut off the mooring of thought and allowed object-less awareness to surface.

I was ecstatic. It was as if my skull was filled with light.

I wrote an airmail letter to the address at the back of the book, stating my intention to help this gentleman in his objective of changing society through education. The addressee was the Krishnamurti Foundation of the USA.

They dutifully sent the letter back to the Krishnamurti Foundation India, who asked me to meet Ms Pupul Jayakar¹ since she was in Mumbai.

She gave me sage advice, "Look son, we don't know how life changes, so at least finish your college degree, you don't know when you might need it, and then go teach. After all, it's just two more years."

Two years later, on the day I finished my practical exams for my organic chemistry degree, I was on a train to Mughalsarai.

My family stood on the platform, helpless against my madness.

"What will you teach?"

I don't know.

"How much will they pay you?"

"I don't know."

"How long will you be gone?"

“I don’t know.”

And so, I landed in Rajghat Besant School in Benares thirty hours later, where the school Principal received answers similar to what Dad had received.

“Where is your BSc certificate?”

“The results are not yet out.”

“Will you pass?”

“Yes.”

“Will you get a First Class?”

“I guess so.”

I stayed in Rajghat for four years, 1979 to 1983, and it changed my life as much as reading Krishnaji’s *Talks and Dialogues* did.

Once there, I learnt about Krishnaji’s epic story—renunciation of the World Teacher role, renunciation of wealth and land and titles and becoming the one human being in history to have conversations with the maximum number of human beings over decades (this being my interpretation).

The first ‘effect’ of Krishnaji’s teachings was a sense of no separation—that the student and I were the same human beings. And therefore, sharing was seamless. I shared every single thing I had learnt in my twenty-one years of life—gymnastics, judo, yoga, calligraphy, swimming, rock climbing, cycling, dumb charades, film screening, general science, botany, English grammar...it was a riot.

The second ‘effect’ was a total loss of ambition. That most insidious four-letter word, ‘more’, vanished.

The third ‘effect’ was a disinterest in Krishnaji the person, even though I ended up going on walks with him, meeting him at breakfast, lunch and dinner in Chennai, Rajghat and Rishi Valley.

“He’s shown the way, now it’s my job to walk”, was the refrain my head.

Nevertheless, I had one final meeting with him in Rishi Valley, where I said I didn’t have any questions, really. So, he had one for me. ‘Will you be a teacher all your life?’

With both parents ill (one with cancer, the other Parkinson’s) I had to return to Mumbai for a job that could pay their medical expenses as well as share with my gallant sister the responsibility of their care.

Since my father was one of India’s best commercial artists, I had grown up with pantographs, Winsor and Newton brushes, 4H and 6B pencils, and since I was a published writer (while in Benares I wrote on the ‘Burning Ghats of Benaras’ for *Celebrity* magazine), I decided to join advertising, hoping this combination of art and words would prove an advantage.

How disappointing...in the eyes of most of my friends and enemies!

From the noble work of teaching in a Krishnamurti school to crass advertising!

I continued spreading the word.

Having experienced the disappointment of the total absence of Krishnaji’s books in my own college (SIES) library, I started a programme to buy a set and donate it to colleges in Mumbai.

The results were amazing. The colleges wouldn’t believe they were getting anything free and some were suspicious enough to refuse the offer!

So, what happened to Krishnaji in my life in advertising?

When I left Rajghat, I was warned of the ‘big bad world’ out there.

As it turned out, I realised my first instinct in Rajghat was right—the place does not change you, you change yourself.

The individual changes society because the individual is a reality, society is a concept.

I had seen a long procession of youngsters who came to Rajghat all charged up, hoping that the environment would lead them to a higher state of consciousness, and left, disappointed, within six months.

I discovered the same law applied to advertising. There were enough individuals who pursued advertising as a profession, but as individuals, were untouched by its ‘reputation’ of a ruthless, shark-eat-shark world.

On day two, I met a creative director who had studied in Rishi Valley. She was easily the most ‘grounded’ person I would meet. On various occasions I met individuals who were compassionate, empathetic, ego-less. That idea of a ‘big bad world’ out there was just another idea.

Between 1983 and 1991, I grew from a trainee copywriter to a creative director, and the role involved looking after a team of ten highly creative individuals. Between 1991 and 1999, I had grown to become the chief executive officer and chief creative officer, a rare combination of roles combining business acumen and creativity, of a multinational advertising agency, and had the sinking feeling that I was disastrous as a business leader, and worse, would not be able to live up to the global directives of ‘management by Excel Sheet’.

We now arrive at a point when I took the plunge and started my own company, *chlorophyll*.

In 1999.

How exactly did the lessons I learnt from Krishnaji manifest in most things, if not everything, I did?

Our brand name, *chlorophyll*, was spelt with a lower-case ‘c’. Our homage to the belief that we are unequal as professionals

(obviously) but equal as human beings, each of us with the same level of access to the next level of evolution.

As an organisation, we urged ourselves to become the highest level of organisations, the ‘Teal’ level², because I realised that many of the practices they prescribed were already *chlorophyll* corporate habits.

chlorophyll as an organisation abandoned lucrative and ‘big name’ relationships whenever they compromised the self-respect of our employees. We abandoned designations when we started, but large formal organisations insisted they know who was who. So, ten years later, we added designations.

We abandoned management by fear and control, we adopted management by responsibility. Each member of the community called *chlorophyll* decides when they will arrive at the office and when they will leave, or whether they will arrive at all, or work from home!

At one point, I even requested the employees to decide their own salaries—but that was probably too radical!

All we pursued was excellence—we wanted to be the best at what we did.

Result?

chlorophyll has worked with over 300 of the world’s best brands, defining, clarifying, helping aligning behaviour with values...

Telling each one of them that the new social media environment has made all organisations naked.

We have to be totally transparent in what we do.

Contrary to popular belief, the corporate world has understood the new reality.

Most of the world’s biggest brands now explain their actions.

“I Want to Know What Truth Is”

So, I continue to be involved with the Krishnamurti Foundation work. I am helping align the communication for all schools. I attend the Rajghat Student Reunion every Christmas, when possible, because the students are friends now.

My dream is to make a feature film on Krishnaji. I've even written the script.

I believe a feature film would create greater awareness of his teachings, and the world needs his teachings desperately.

Did I answer the question that Krishnaji asked me in Rishi Valley?

I don't know. It's for others in my life to answer.

Endnotes

- 1 Padma Bhushan awardee, then Vice President of the Krishnamurti Foundation India, confidante of Indira Gandhi and reviver of the handloom movement
- 2 To know what a 'Teal organization' means, refer to the website: <https://www.the-geniusworks.com/2019/10/reinventing-organisations-frederic-lalouxs-transformation-from-corporate-hierarchies-to-living-organisms/>

