



PHOTO BY EDWARD WESTON

Krishnamurti, 1934 from 1000 Moons.

Krishnamurti was an enigma. He was a philosopher who wanted nothing to do with philosophy. He was a spiritual guru who refused to play that role. And he was a true world teacher—constantly traveling around the world, leading discussions, and giving talks. Yet the term World Teacher was the very first label for him that he repudiated back in 1929.

Of all his activities in the public arena, spanning almost eighty years, he was most proud of his work as an educator, a friend of children. And he was very pleased with the network of international schools that bear his name. Rarely, however, are these schools in Europe, India and America discussed in educational journals. Why? Because Krishnamurti's philosophy of education and school methodology are as much of an enigma as Krishnamurti the man. In this article, however, I shall identify a few general principles that characterize Krishnamurti's educational impulse.

I believe a brief history of Krishnaji (as he's affectionately called in India) might be in order, especially for readers unfamiliar with his name. He was born in South India in 1895. His father was a theosophist, a member of a worldwide organization dedicated to principles of religious unity and brotherhood of all peoples. One day the young Krishnamurti was playing on the beach a short distance from where the sluggish Adyar River empties into the Bay of Bengal. A theosophical researcher by the name of Charles Leadbeater observed the young Krishnamurti with his clairvoyant vision. He later reported that the boy's aura or energy field was larger and more luminous and sparkling than any aura he had ever seen. He decided this boy must be the expected World Teacher or Messiah for this age.

According to the theosophical world view the concept of the World Teacher is quite different than in Christianity, Islam or Judaism. It's a view expressed by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* when he says, "Oh, son of Bharata, whenever there is decline of righteousness and uprising of unrighteousness, then I project myself into creation. For the protection of the righteous and the destruction of the evil-doer, and for the proper establishment of the law of righteousness, I appear from age to age." (*Bhagavad*

Gita chap. 4, verses 7-8). Thus the theosophists would say that the prophets of various world religions are the emissaries especially sent to earth by the spiritual hierarchy at critical times of world history to assist struggling humanity. Krishnamurti they believed to be such a one.

To make a long and extremely fascinating story short, the Theosophical Society adopted the boy, educated him in England, and built an international organization, the Order of the Star in the East, around the premise that Krishnamurti basically was the new Messiah. One event that might be significant to relate involves the early experiences Krishnamurti had with his "process." The "process," as he referred to it for the rest of his life, had to do with awakening states of inner consciousness, and seemed to be connected with certain sometimes painful sensations in his neck, spine and head. The beginning of "the process" occurred in 1922 in Ojai, California, where Krishnamurti was staying with his brother, Nitya. While meditating under the now famous pepper tree outside of his cottage, Krishnamurti relates:

In front of me was my body and over the head I saw the Star bright and clear. Then I could feel the vibration of the Lord Buddha.... I was so happy, calm and at peace. I could still see my body and I was hovering and within myself was the calmness of the bottom of a deep unfathomable lake.... Nothing could ever be the same. I have drunk at the clear pure waters at the source of the fountain of life and my soul was appeased. Never more could I be thirsty, never more could I be in utter darkness. I have seen the Light.... The fountain of Truth has been revealed to me and the darkness has been disbursed. Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart: my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated! (Jayakar 1986, 48)

However, despite this and many further experiences of expanded consciousness, Krishnamurti grew increasingly disgusted with his label as being "the World Teacher" and in the incredible adoration (almost worship) that his followers had for him. Therefore, in 1929 the thirty-four-year-old Krishnamurti shocked

The Methodless Method: Krishnamurti Education

BY JAMES W. PETERSON

his followers by renouncing the theosophical claim of his divinity and dissolved the Order of the Star with the words, “The Truth is a Pathless Land ...” and no organization can hold it.

Over the course of the next fifty-five years, Krishnamurti lectured around the world on the theme that everyone must find Truth in one’s own consciousness by breaking the hold of the conditioned mind. Many religious and esoteric systems share the notion that it is the stored residue of experiences on earth, stored in the brain and also in higher, unseen mental structures, which veils us from God or Truth consciousness. When one can remove these mental impressions—decondition the mind—all that will be left is the consciousness of unitary oneness with life. But, according to Krishnamurti’s philosophy, no beliefs, no gurus, no system of consciousness expansion could help in this search for the “pathless land.” These systems are simply another level of mental constructs.

When Krishnaji was in his eighties and living in the Ojai Valley in southern California, he once said that after lecturing for fifty years, he found that there was still not one single person living the life of which he spoke. He, therefore, liked to put his faith in children. If one could raise and educate children differently, perhaps they could be able to live life with that quality of consciousness Krishnamurti unceasingly discussed: this state of deconditioned, choiceless awareness of living completely in the Now—with no thoughts of the past or future.

But if grown-ups cannot fully understand or be transformed by his philosophy, how could one hope to raise and educate children who can? I am sure that is the question educators at Krishnamurti schools all across the world wrestle with every day. What is the method of teaching children that will help bring about this radical transformation of consciousness and help them decondition their minds?

The first principle one discovers about Krishnamurti’s philosophy of educating children, however, is that there is no method, no system to follow in the educational process. Krishnamurti states in his *Letters to the Schools*:

The awakening of intelligence is our concern in all these schools and the inevitable question that arises: how is this intelligence to be awakened? What is the system, what is the method, what is the practice? The realization that it is a wrong question is the beginning of the awakening of intelligence. (1981, 16)

He continues this line of thought in *Education and the Significance of Life*:

Life cannot be made to conform to a system; it cannot be forced into a framework, however nobly conceived. When we train our children according to a system of thought or a particular discipline, we prevent them from growing into integrated men and women, and therefore they are incapable of thinking intelligently, which is to meet life as a whole. (1968, 24)

Krishnamurti has created a worldwide network of schools with no communicable method or system of education! That fact, in itself, is very intriguing.

Actually the “methodless system” is both a help and a hindrance to the teachers in Krishnamurti’s schools. I have spoken with several of them in Asia and North America over the years, and they have all suggested that there are two sides to this fact that Krishnamurti has given them no system to follow; there are advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the teachers are creatively free to come up with their own methods and ideas, corresponding with age, needs and aptitudes of their students. Yet, on the other hand, they have little guidance and no set text or plan to fall back on, and because of this, teaching at a

James Peterson has been an elementary teacher for thirty-one years. He was graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, where he did his master’s degree thesis on the subject of clairvoyant children. This thesis led to his 1987 book *The Secret Life of Kids*, which explores children’s paranormal experiences. He has utilized aspects of Montessori and Waldorf educational approaches in his teaching and has published three articles on “Waldorf in the Public Schools.” He currently teaches kindergarten and first grade in a small, rural public school in California.



PHOTOS BY ASIT CHANDMAL

Top photo: From Krishnamurti: A Biography.

Bottom photo: A child approaches Krishnamurti with a flower at the end of his last talk, which ends with silence.

Krishnamurti school can be demanding and quite stressful at times. In several of these schools I understand there is a frequent turnover of teachers. And yet the teachers at the schools seem very alive and excited about their work. They are enthusiastic about the curriculum they have devised for the children and eager to discuss what is going on in the classroom. The fact that so much responsibility for learning is placed on their own creativity is a very stimulating challenge for the teachers.

Even back in 1923 when Krishnamurti first wrote about education in a little book entitled *Education as Service*, he was not focussed on a definite curriculum or a specific educational method. The philosophy he offered then was that education came down to the attitude of the teacher and the attitude of the child, and how they both related to one another. In this volume he discussed qualities that a teacher should have, such as love, discrimination, ability to control anger, patience, etc. and knowledge of how the character of the teacher profoundly affects the children. Indeed at this early stage of his development, Krishnamurti felt that the characteristics of the teachers' personality modeled continuously in front of the children created the foundation of the educational process.

In these schools I have seen teachers borrow ideas and curriculum from public schools, from Waldorf schools, and from

Montessori schools. The teachers are intelligent and knowledgeable, but they are not bound philosophically to any particular technique they may utilize in the classroom.

This idea about not being bound or conditioned to think one method is the answer to all educational issues is a reflection of Krishnamurti's general teachings, and another identifiable principle of his schools. Children are not only helped to be free from boundaries and constraints, but they are also encouraged to inwardly examine and observe the thinking mind and how it works. Krishnamurti states in his *Letters to the Schools*, for example:

Memorizing, recording information, is considered learning. This brings about a mind that is limited and therefore heavily conditioned. The art of learning is to give the right place to information, to act skillfully according to what is learned, but at the same time not to be psychologically bound by the limitations of knowledge and the images or symbols that thought creates. (1981, 32)

The academic subjects are very thoroughly and skillfully taught by the teachers, but they always communicate that these things are not the foundational issues of life, and therefore not the foundational issues of the school.

This point is emphasized in the "Philosophy of the School" paper of the Oak Grove School in the Ojai Valley of California: "The intent of the Oak Grove School is for students to develop the skills necessary to function in the modern world, and at the same time to develop a foundation for inquiry into perennial questions of human life." A history teacher at the Oak Grove School, Patrick Foster, recently picked up this theme in the winter (1999-2000) newsletter of the Krishnamurti Foundation of America: "We also try to integrate Krishnamurti's insights into the curriculum—not as dogma but rather as a tool for exploring issues. So in World History, as we're studying the social matrix of militarism in history, we also explore the contribution of personal violence to that structure. And while we're at it, we will look at the economic structures and attitudes that create socially organized violence.

"I don't teach or preach any particular set of values at Oak Grove—in fact I try to explore the very phenomenon of value to see what's at the bottom of it. But I do help my students see how values figure into history. History is made following or ignoring some set of values—so it is important to see how values are manipulated to justify, excuse or even camouflage personal selfish desires. Getting this across to teenagers about to enter the larger world is part of my responsibility as an educator."

Krishnamurti often disparaged the British system of education and the inappropriate system they exported to India as being a rigid, conditioned system that does not give room for true intelligence to flower. Competition, pressure, fear and stress Krishnamurti saw as the enemies of true learning. The model of this old, traditional system includes strictly disciplined children; a typically intellectual, detached and sometimes fearsome teacher or professor; and a curriculum based on competition for the best grades and studying for and passing difficult examinations. Stress

and fear can easily become constant companions of children in such a system. And fear, Krishnamurti said, cripples learning. In 1963 he said this to some students in north India: "Look at your faces! You are frightened children—and it is a terrible thing to be frightened, especially while you are so young. Fear prevents you from studying properly. You can study well and learn quickly only in a happy atmosphere, and not in a state of fear.... Fear is a crippling thing: it destroys love, sympathy, compassion—and you must have love, sympathy, compassion, for otherwise you will not be a human being" (Krishnamurti Foundation of India 1993, 33).

The traditional British system of education is also a very intellectual system—certainly not holistic in any sense of the word. Krishnamurti saw the human being and the human mind as multi-dimensional. Rather than have an educational system basically oriented around the training of only the most superficial layers of the mind, he asked high school students in south India: "Is it not possible to cultivate the whole of the mind? [In traditional education] we are neglecting the more active, deeper layers of the mind" (*Education and Life's Challenges* 1970).

But to help children recognize these deeper layers, the traditional, competitive atmosphere of most schools must be abolished and education must start with the youngest children and show them that school is a happy place, free from pressure. Krishnamurti continues in his *Letters to the Schools*:

With the very young what is most important is to help them to free themselves from psychological pressures and problems. Now the very young are being taught complicated intellectual problems; their studies are becoming more and more technical; they are given more and more abstract information; various forms of knowledge are being imposed on their brains, thus conditioning them right from childhood. Whereas what we are concerned with is to help the very young to have no psychological problems, to be free of fear, anxiety, cruelty, to have care, generosity and affection. This is far more important than the imposition of knowledge on their young minds. This does not mean that the child should not learn to read, write and so on, but the emphasis is on psychological freedom instead of the acquisition of knowledge, though that is necessary. (1981, 82)

This openness and freedom that Krishnamurti speaks about are nowhere more evident in his schools than in the teachers themselves. In this regard, I particularly remember two school visits: one to the Oak Grove School and one to The School in Adyar, India, several blocks away from Vasanta Vihar, Krishnamurti's south Indian residence. During my visits I was welcomed into the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. What struck me so much in both schools was that the teachers were more keen on learning about what I did in my class back home in California than in trying to demonstrate to me all their own innovative methods and curricula. In India the teacher coaxed me to come back and join her later for a meal so that she could ask me more questions. I am so used to visiting private schools such as Montessori or Waldorf schools, in which all the teachers have the definitive answers to all educational issues. All that's needed is to tell visitors everything.

But in Krishnamurti's schools the teachers truly are not "conditioned" to follow some set system—whatever it may be. It seems as if their technique is to take cues from the children themselves, use their own creativity, and to borrow and integrate ideas from any and all other schools. Much of the learning in all grades might be characterized as "learning by doing." In this way teacher and children work as a team to explore issues and skills in their studies. Patrick Foster, the teacher previously cited from the Oak Grove School, speaks of his history lessons: "[I]n World History, for example, we make fire with sticks and tinder, build pit and adobe ovens and bake bread, plant and harvest grains, build models of historical structures, experiment with early foods, etc.... thus appeal[ing] to various learning styles and interests. This exposes students to the pre-intellectual life skills that underlie our civilization and all subsequent development of technology. A deeper understanding of human life requires at least some familiarity with the ways humans order and organize their cultures—and the technological impulse is one rubric with which to view human nature. Balancing hands-on projects and historical information with students' interests and learning styles requires continual experimentation" (Krishnamurti Foundation of America 2000).

Krishnamurti's schools are concerned with, as he put it, "the cultivation of the total human being!" And the role of nature plays a tremendous part in this cultivation. There was nothing in the world Krishnamurti loved as much as the mountains, rivers, plants and animals of the natural world. Up until a few months before his death, he took long daily walks in nature—whether in the hills of Ojai or on a beach in south India. At the age of ninety, when he would sit in his garden in Ojai, wild birds would actually perch on his shoulder. As he put it, "If you have lost touch with nature, then you will inevitably lose relationship[s] with one another.... We consider that nature exists for our use, for our convenience, and so lose communion with the earth. [But] sensitivity to a falling leaf [or] to a tall tree on a hill is far more important than all the passing of examinations and having a bright career. Those are not the whole of life. Life is like a vast river..." (1981, 42).

Sensitizing children to the beauties and wonders of nature does not merely involve nature walks or camp-outs with the children. Students are encouraged to become true environmentalists and ecologists: "In these schools of ours responsibility to the earth, to nature and to each other is part of our education...." (1981, 20). It is not uncommon to hear of children in Krishnamurti's schools journeying to a beach where there has been an oil spill to help with the clean up, or having a letter writing campaign to stop the use of some dangerous toxic chemical. A recent example of this activism at the Oak Grove School is that the entire elementary and junior high camped at the Matilija Environmental Science Area in southern California. During their three-week stay the students worked with "habitat restoration," i.e., they removed non-native plants such as cane and rye grass, and planted coast live oaks, alder, sycamore, willow and black walnut trees. The children are helped to understand that the problems of the earth, anywhere on the earth, are everyone's problems. The whole concept of national issues, or narrow, patriotic perspectives are de-emphasized and replaced by a vision of

a global world community in which everyone lives together and helps one another.

The last topic I wish to mention is silence. Though for sixty-five years Krishnamurti traveled the world speaking to groups of people, what he most loved was silence. Words arise from thoughts and thoughts arise from the conditioned mind. So the state Krishnamurti helped people manifest was the state (as he called it) of choiceless awareness: silent listening, silent observing of both the inner world and the outer world—which are really one. Since this silence has to do with a conditionless state of mind, Krishnamurti valued very highly the power of children to be silent at times. He frequently observed from visiting his schools around the world and holding meetings with the pupils how much more effortlessly children from the East could sit quietly than could children from the West, who are conditioned to the ceaseless noise of our western technological culture. The constant barrage of music, television and radio often make it hard for western children to value sitting still in silence.

Of course the children in Krishnamurti's schools are not asked to sit silently in class. On the contrary they move around freely, have discussions with peers and with the teachers, and are lively and playful. Being silent, however, is also seen as a joyful, happy experience and it is practiced daily, especially in nature. Times are set aside in many classes for the children to silently observe nature, listen to the sounds around them, or simply to be quietly aware of the chatter (or lack of chatter) of their own minds.

I remember very clearly my first encounter with J. Krishnamurti and how he brought about this experience of inner silence. I was a twenty-year-old college student at U.C. Berkeley. I saw him in February of 1969 at the Berkeley Community Theatre. He had just spoken for some two hours to a packed auditorium. When he finished he said, "Are there any questions?" There was a very full and pregnant and rich silence in the hall. No one spoke up. After a very long pause Krishnamurti said, "Isn't this silence better than words?" Another long pause. "May I go now?" And with this he stood up and glided offstage. The silence was so incredibly full, full of an immense presence, that the audience could not even clap: we just sat there and bathed in that silence.

Krishnamurti was indeed a remarkable man, and a remarkable world teacher. His schools for children, I think, are remarkable as well. This may be partly due to the fact that it's so frustratingly difficult to really say what a Krishnamurti school is and what are the fundamental principles of a Krishnamurti education are. Even though it is difficult to completely understand Krishnamurti's teachings intellectually, it is very easy to sense emotionally that he is offering something of immense value. After reading his books one senses that Krishnamurti experienced a state of consciousness quite different from our normal, daily-life consciousness. And one is intrigued with the possibility that perhaps such an experience is within the grasp of everyone. With the schools somehow it is similar. When I visited various Krishnamurti schools I was not so much impressed by the curriculum or the articulated way the teachers explained their philosophy of education. But the children had kind of a joyful sparkle, a lightness that I have not seen in other schools. Maybe they are in some way kept from being overly burdened by western cultur-

PHOTO BY ASIT CHANDMAL



Krishnamurti at 85.

al conditioning. That was certainly Krishnamurti's aim in founding the schools. There's a common atmosphere in the various schools, which, although vague and intangible, always left me feeling that I wish my own child could go to such a school. And one can understand why Krishnamurti himself was so pleased with this aspect of his life's work. Helping children to meet life's challenges in a radically different way from the ways in which children are trained to meet them in other schools can bring about a revolution in society—and a revolution as well in what Krishnamurti called the "religious life." Krishnamurti sums up his vision for his schools in these closing remarks:

What then is the total responsibility of these schools? Surely they must be centres for learning or a way of life which is not based on pleasure, on self-centred activities, but on the understanding of correct action, the depth and beauty of relationship, and the sacredness of a religious life. When the world around us is so utterly destructive and without meaning, these schools, these centres, must become places of light and wisdom. (1981, 84)

REFERENCES

- Chatterji, M. 1960. *The Bhagavad Gita*. New York: Julian Press.
- Education and Life's Challenges. 1970. Rishi Valley: Krishnamurti Foundation of India. Audio cassette.
- Jayakar, P. 1986. *Krishnamurti*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Krishnamurti Foundation of India. 1993. *Krishnamurti at Rajghat*. Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation.
- Krishnamurti Foundation of America. 2000, Winter. Krishnamurti foundation of America newsletter. Krishnamurti Foundation.
- Krishnamurti, J. 1923. *Education as service*. London: Theosophical Press.
- Krishnamurti, J. 1968. *Education and the significance of life*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Krishnamurti, J. 1981. *Letters to the Schools*. London: Krishnamurti Foundation Trust.

Now What? **Reflections by Robin Martin**

After reading about Krishnamurti's methodless method, you may be intrigued to learn more about this "enigma" of a man. How did this man believe that he could create an openness and freedom within schools that follow no system, indeed no prescribed ideals whatsoever for what each school should do or what it should look like? His schools, which are today still flowering around the world, are relatively unknown and obscure, even as his philosophies become increasingly popular.

Krishnamurti Schools

What exactly constitutes a Krishnamurti school? What are the intentions and aims of these schools? These questions are addressed directly in Krishnamurti's own words at <http://www.kinfonet.org/Community/Schools/index.htm>.

Anyone interested in learning about specific Krishnamurti schools can find a full listing with contact information and brief descriptions at http://www.kinfonet.org/Community/Schools/School_Listings/.

Also, here are a couple of resources on specific Krishnamurti schools:

There is an out-of-print book called *Life at School*, by Meenakshi Thapan (Oxford U. Press, Delhi, 1991), that James Peterson recommends and that outlines daily routines at Krishnamurti's school in Rishi Valley, India.

Rishi Valley School also has a growing alumni website at <http://www.rvs.org/welcome.htm> that is interesting to explore.

Brockwood Park has a video that was compiled by students, available from the Krishnamurti Foundation, at <http://www.brockwood.org.uk/kft/>.

Recommended Books, Videos, and Audio Tapes

Perhaps the most famous and easy-to-read book by Krishnamurti is *Education and the Significance of Life* (Harper and Row, 1953). In this book, Krishnamurti explains that our reliance on dogmas, institutions, and authority figures prevents individuals from achieving the deep self-knowledge that leads to genuine wisdom. He argues that conventional forms of education "suffocate" the mind and heart by forcing young people to conform to adults' stale and incomplete understanding of the true meaning of life. (This out-of-print book is available by online search of the used bookstores at <http://www.bibliofind.com>; it is also available at most local libraries.)

The Krishnamurti Foundation of America has created a web page especially for educators, which describes (and sells) most of Krishnamurti's best books related to his philosophies of education. You can link to this page at <http://www.kfa.org/catalog/>.

To purchase other books, videos, or audio tapes on Krishnamurti's teachings, you can also check directly with the Krishnamurti Foundation, Brockwood Park, Hants S024 0LQ, England. Or, some of the websites below also have options for purchasing materials.

Websites to Explore

If you don't have a computer or Internet access from home, try your local library to access these expanding web resources.

Krishnamurti Foundation Trust—<http://www.brockwood.org.uk/kft/>

Krishnamurti Information Network—<http://www.kinfonet.org/>

Krishnamurti Information Homepage Berlin—<http://flp.cs.tu-berlin.de:1895/>

The Core of the Teachings, <http://flp.cs.tu-berlin.de:1895/excerpts/core.html>

Krishnamurti Foundation of America—<http://www.kfa.org/>

Inquiry into the nature of thought and the source of conflict in the world—a series of reflections by Krishnamurti and David Bohm—http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/K/

Moving From Ideals to Integration

How can you be in genuine relationship with a child if you have images in your head about who you are, who the child is, and who you are in relation to each other? According to Krishnamurti, these images put us into interactions with our images of each other and keep us from genuinely relating to each other and who we really are in each moment. The challenge to action is to not live by our ideals or images of one another, but instead to recognize the limited place of thoughts/images/ideals as we discover how to live in genuine relationship with others. This happens by recognizing the internal divisions within our own thoughts and selves, because in that moment of recognition we can change ourselves. The ultimate goal, then, is the "integrated life," in which we find the balance of right action and right thought within ourselves. Understanding the deeper meanings of Krishnamurti and learning to live an integrated life is no small task, yet it is the task of teachers who believe in the truth of Krishnamurti's philosophies of education. There are no methods, no "how to" book or resources with the answers, of how to reach this place of deep understanding and integration within oneself; the integrated life is found only within yourself.

For more detailed resource descriptions about Krishnamurti and education, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides, at <http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm>, where you can more easily link to the referenced books and websites. Or, for a printed version of this Online Action Guide on Krishnamurti education, please call 1-800-639-4122.