



GONER

The final travels of UG Krishnamurti

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the Guhas, Roger, Nancy, Aiden, Jesse and, of course, UG.

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You are trying to present me as a religious man, which I am not. You are failing to comprehend the most important thing that I am emphasizing. There is no religious content, no mystical overtones at all, in what I am saying. Man has to be saved from the saviors of mankind! The religious people—they kidded themselves and fooled the whole of mankind. Throw them out! That is courage itself, because of the courage there; not the courage you practice.

goner ['gɒnə]

n

Slang a person or thing beyond help or recovery, esp a person who is dead or about to die

Collins English Dictionary—Complete and Unabridged
HarperCollins Publishers, 2003

UG often professed a liking for American underground slang. More than once he told the story that while he was down and out in London with his 'head missing' he would sit in the British Library in the chair where Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital*. He spent hours reading a tome called the Dictionary of American Underground Slang to pass the time. *Goner* was one of his favorite words to describe the people who 'hung around' him.

CHAPTER 1

On March 13, 2007 I walked out the door to what we called his 'cave' knowing it was the last time I would see him alive. A life of constant travel with a sage was coming to an end and I was so exhausted I couldn't think. After spending day and night with him for almost eight weeks the door clicked shut behind me and a five-year encounter with oblivion ended, or so it seemed at the time. The curtains were pulled against the fresh smell of the garden where the grass was glistening with dew and the scents of a lush Italian garden. The two-hundred-year-old palm tree in the middle of the garden threw a long cool shadow across the sparkling green lawn where for eight weeks UG Krishnamurti spent his final days sitting up long enough to shout at us, collapsing after increasingly shorter bursts of invective against everything mankind thought, felt and believed.

He monitored his own death with indifferent curiosity.

"How am I doing, doc?" he would ask any one of his medical friends.

Yet, unlike the recovery after his last fall, he grew gradually weaker each day. He seemed incapable of or uninterested in doing anything that might 'prolong the misery'; that was his assessment of the usual medical treatment we seek in order to sustain life in a constant battle of ideas verses the natural order. Seeking medical help in any form was out of the question, so it took a while to realize that he might actually die, because of his indifference to the outcome of his situation. To the end of

his days there was a wild card up his sleeve. He'd come close to dying more than once in his life already. The fact is, by all accounts he'd already died and been re-born years before, not spiritually, but literally, physically.

Our last meeting was silent. He allowed me to come on the condition there would be no talking. For days I'd been thinking I should thank him, tell him what he meant to me, how lucky I was to have met him, but the timing never seemed right. Old friends were professing their love, giving heartfelt testimony about the gratitude they felt, asking for final blessings or just saying goodbye, yet I'd been in there with him every night and day for weeks and I knew that he knew everything I was thinking and feeling. It was unnecessary.

Suddenly I was out in the garden, swept into a new life on a fierce current. That was it. The human tornado that had been blowing through my life was gone.

Mahesh was waiting for me in the driveway. It seems fitting that a Bollywood director was taking over for the final days of 'packing him up'. Everything about the most obscure man in the universe was a contradiction that made perfect non-sense.

"Well?"

"That's it. He gave me everything I need; asking for more would be ridiculous."

"I know it doesn't look like it now, but when you look back on this day it will be the most important day of your life."

I wasn't so sure about that, but after Mahesh's pep talk, walking across the garden to the apartment, a warm fear wormed right up my spine. It felt like I was walking off a cliff.

I knew I was already lucky to have met, let alone spent so much time with a man like him. It was a stroke of dumb luck in an otherwise ordinary life. He had everything I wanted, or so I thought as long as I was sitting in front of him. He was a human wilderness, fearless and unpredictable. The first day I met him he confirmed my darkest suspicions about the bullshit world

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surrounding me; at the same time he was an affirmation of life at every turn. His words were simple and baffling, hilarious, repetitive and boring at times, but his actions were clear as a bell ringing in a forest.

When I left his side that day, I carried the words inside me where he left them like gifts to be opened later. His company was a teaching. He was so alive there was no room for understanding. He was too quick for that sort of crap.

I sensed all this more than I understood it from the first encounter with him. Very soon after meeting him I knew I'd stumbled into something like a cosmic lottery win. As my misery intensified, I stuck it out, knowing damn well that whatever happened to me as long as I was around him would be for the best. For a bunch of crazy reasons I was able to get close to him almost immediately and from then on my life raced in unforeseen directions like a log broken loose from a jam and thrown over a waterfall.

What can I say? Hanging around with him was just like that.

CHAPTER 2

My background is worthless: it can't be a model for anybody, because your background is unique in its own way. Your conditions, your environment, your background—the whole thing is different. Every event in your life is different.

I was born and brought up in small-town America at the height of the cold war and the explosion of capitalist pop culture. Being Catholic in my family meant attending church every Sunday which was more than enough to turn me off religion as a kid. Parochial school and the sadistic nuns who went along with it the rest of the week sealed the deal. By the time I escaped the clutches of that school I had lost any interest in religion or god, at least for the time being. Public high school was a relief from the force-fed religion my mother took more to heart than my father, for whom being Catholic was a matter of pride. My father was also proud of being Irish like the Kennedys and wore Brooks Brothers' suits and spit-shine wing-tip shoes. Being middle class in any country is like being sandwiched between a tortured urge to be rich and the terror of being perceived as poor. My response to my father's bullshit ambitions was juvenile delinquent behavior. Heavy drinking, drug consumption and shoplifting were my remedies for being habitually annoyed by adults and chronically short of cash.

Chapter heading and other quotations from UG Krishnamurti are taken from *The Mystique of Enlightenment* which is freely available without copyright from sources including: <http://www.well.com/user/jct/> and http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Mystique_of_Enlightenment

Yet among other things (like a talent for excessive drinking), I inherited my father's obsession with reading. As a teenager I read Herman Hesse novels, Carlos Castaneda's mystical trickster books, and Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*. It was the same stuff a lot of teenagers were reading back then. I also spent a lot of time at the school library poring over art catalogues and at an exclusive local art museum where I got the idea of being an artist. Maybe you're just born with that ridiculous idea. At the time I was mainly interested in anything other than what my parents were interested in. My father wanted me to be a lawyer or a golf pro. Safe to say I was heading in the opposite direction from those professions.

During my last year of college an art professor handed me a book by a man named Jiddu Krishnamurti. Having escaped the Catholic church, the last thing I wanted to do was get involved with a guru, but I read the book out of respect for her. The book surprised me. Here was a so-called spiritual man stressing that doubt was an essential tool for approaching life, truth, and so-called spirituality. His manner and expression gave me the impression that he'd had a spiritual transformation of consciousness. It sounded like what I'd read about enlightenment, an idea that seemed unusual to come across in modern times. He didn't quote other people when he spoke, and there *was* a certain quality to what he had to say. Could there actually be a man like Siddhartha out there?

Religion is the skeptical enquiry into the whole of our existence, which is our consciousness. If there is fear your meditation is utterly meaningless. A free mind is essential for enquiry and when there is fear there is no freedom.¹

The tone appealed to me, he was taking a new approach to the whole issue of religion that bothered me. I mean, there must be something to religion, but what? The references to his experi-

ences with some kind of ‘immensity’ were interesting in the sense they sounded like something real and reasonable. “Don’t accept a thing the speaker is saying,” he repeatedly emphasized, encouraging real enquiry, which was something I never encountered in the Catholicism of my youth; any questions I had about religion were met with stock answers, so unconvincing I dismissed them out of hand.

While reading a dialogue in one of J. Krishnamurti’s books with a physicist named David Bohm, I felt as if someone had reached into my brain and twisted things in a new direction. There was an eerie sensation that someone was watching me which made me freeze in my chair. The world was suddenly irreversibly different in every way, but what that was I had no idea.

*No time. Then what takes place? What is happening? Not to me, not to my brain. What is happening? We have said that when one denies time there is nothing. After this long talk, nothing means everything. Everything is energy. And we have stopped there. But that isn’t the end.*²

Reading the careful dissection of the mechanics of time and thought, the unusual precision and insight of their exchange had a profound effect on me. I’ll never forget the shabby little kitchen table where I sat reading that book. Until that moment, spirituality had been just a theory: suddenly it was frighteningly real. I was gripped by the sensation as if someone I couldn’t see was staring at me from somewhere in the room. I couldn’t explain these feelings, let alone ask someone about them. As a result of that experience I turned a corner and there was no way back; despite myself, I set off down that pathless path Jiddu Krishnamurti was talking about, just as blind as could be.

At the first opportunity I went to see the impeccably dressed elderly Indian man give a talk. He emerged from behind a huge curtain in Madison Square Garden looking slightly lost, took

a seat on a simple folding chair in front of a packed hall and placed his shaking hands neatly under his thighs. Scanning the audience with a slightly stiff neck, he sat quietly for a few minutes until the audience began to applaud at which point he became visibly annoyed:

“Why are you clapping, sirs? This is not an entertainment!”

Then again, closing his eyes and gathering himself, he hesitantly, slowly, began to speak:

“Can we take a journey, like two friends, walking together?”

For the next hour and a half you could have heard a pin drop. In a very proper sounding British accent with a faint Indian lilt to it, he engaged the audience with carefully chosen words, encouraging us to see if they rang true for us. Addressing the troubles of mankind and the search for freedom, happiness, and truth, he urged the listeners to look into these things with him, using great attention as we did. He proceeded word by word urging us to be ‘choicelessly aware’ of our reactions to what he was saying.

Do you know what it means to learn? When you are really learning you are learning throughout your life and there is no one special teacher to learn from. Then everything teaches you—a dead leaf, a bird in flight, a smell, a tear, the rich and the poor, those who are crying, the smile of a woman, the haughtiness of a man. You learn from everything, therefore there is no guide, no philosopher, no guru. Life itself is your teacher, and you are in a state of constant learning.³

“See for yourself, sirs! Don’t take my word for it!”

It was the same message contained in his books, but listening to the man, whose story was by then familiar, had a certain excitement to it. He was a rare individual who had the guts to walk out of a worldwide organization, the Theosophical Society,

just as he was about to take over as the world teacher.

After seeing him in person, I convinced the art professor to come with me to his talks in Ojai. We camped in the mountains nearby. It was my first encounter with the Rocky Mountains. The hills were full of lavender and the road signs were full of bullet holes. At the talks it was disconcerting to enter a huge parking lot and stand in line after paying for the privilege of witnessing the former world teacher speak to his 'friends'.

*If you examine the nature of organized religion you will see that all religions are essentially alike, whether Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Christianity—or communism, which is another form of religion, the very latest. The moment you understand the prison, which is to perceive all the implications of belief, of rituals and priests, you will never again belong to any religion; because only the man who is free of belief can discover that which lies beyond all belief, that which is immeasurable.*⁴

While we were there, rumors were circulating about a rift between J.Krishnamurti, and Rajagopal, his former manager, who still lived on the grounds. What I didn't know at the time was that I was carrying on with an affair in much the same way this non-guru turned out to have carried on with his manager's wife for 28 years. Unbeknownst to me, there were striking similarities between our situations at some point in time, but back then I was in the first flush of an infatuation with a 'godly' man.

As before, he sat on a slightly raised platform, his hands trembling with Parkinson's Disease, occasionally wiping rheumy tears from big soulful eyes with a neatly folded white handkerchief. A slight breeze blew through the oak grove as a packed crowd listened to his every word. He started more or less the same way.

In listening to the speaker, if you merely interpret the words according to your personal like and dislike, without being aware of your own tendencies of interpretation, then the word becomes a prison in which most of us, unfortunately, are caught. But if one is aware of the meaning of the word and of what lies behind the word, then communication becomes possible. Communication implies not only a verbal comprehension, but also going together, examining together, sharing together, creating together.⁵

He was a master performer, commanding attention from the huge crowd, but I was disturbed. The fact is I was bored and distracted.

Now, what has happened to the mind, to the brain, that has listened to all this—not merely heard a few words, but actually listened, shared, communicated, learnt? What has happened to your mind that has listened with tremendous attention to the complexity of the problem, with awareness of its own fears, and has seen how thought breeds and sustains fear as well as pleasure? What has happened to the quality of the mind that has so listened? Is the quality of this mind entirely different from the moment when we began this morning, or is it the same repetitive mind, caught in pleasure and fear?⁶

It was even hard to concentrate while thinking about what I must be missing. The notion that he was beyond all that only made me feel worse. When I left the talks I was depressed at my lack of moral fiber. By this point I'd given up drinking and drugs, but I had the distinct impression that he was a more pure human being than I could ever be. The idea of applying for a position in one of his schools, or leading a celibate life, occurred to me but that would have meant dropping my ambitions as an

artist and leaving the woman who had introduced me to him. The idea of becoming a celibate was a convenient excuse to distance myself from her, but her tears were all it took for me to drop both ideas.

My life went on as usual, but changed. I was young, insecure, poor and unaccomplished. I was lost.

Eventually J.Krishnamurti's books started gathering dust on my bookshelf. I occasionally dipped into them, trying to 'get it', maybe from another angle, maybe after a month, or a year, or two years.

*If you have not given your attention, everything you have, to find out what thinking is, you will never be able to find out if it is possible to observe without the 'me'. If you cannot observe without the 'me' the problems will go on—one problem opposing another.*⁷

No matter how much I tried, in the end it was like playing a game of hide-and-seek with the unknown. Shaking myself loose from the grips of that man once and for all took another twenty years and another Krishnamurti.

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 2. Krishnamurti, J. and Bohm, D. 1985. *Ending of Time*. New York, Harper and Row
 3. Krishnamurti, J. 1989. *Think on These Things*. New York: HarperOne. p 10.
 4. Ibid p 149.
 5. Krishnamurti, J. 1972. *The Impossible Question*. London: Victor Gollancz, p 32
 6. Ibid p 36
 7. Ibid p 29