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## **Thought, the Natural State and the Body**

### **Deconstruction of Spirituality in UG Krishnamurti**

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UG Krishnamurti (known to his friends as ‘UG’) has been teaching across world for some 40 years ever since he had undergone what he called ‘calamity’ in 1967, in which his life processes ceased for about 45 minutes (he was brought back to life by a phone call from a friend) and he was cleansed of all his past experiences. The continuity of his person had been broken into pieces; gone was any central coordinator or a reference point. Since then, to quote Terry Newland in his Introduction to Mind is a Myth, “What is there is a calm, smoothly functioning, highly intelligent and responsive biological machine, nothing more. One looks in vain for evidence of a self, psyche or ego; there is only the simple functioning of a sensitive organism.” (p. 12)

UG passed away on March 22nd of this year (2007). He left an indelible impression and had a deep personal impact on many of the people who met him with his radical approach to philosophical questions and issues of living.

After having known UG for over 25 years, it is now time for me to put together my thoughts on his teaching. In the following, I will not only summarize his views on thought, the natural state and the body, but will also present, in the last two sections, my reflections on his teachings and make some conjectures based on my own personal life. The last two sections are somewhat tentative. Because this paper is mainly exploratory, it should be viewed as ‘work in progress’.

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UG was not a systematic philosopher in any technical or academic sense. As a matter of fact, he abhorred technical jargon, especially psychological jargon. He did not leave behind any theory or body of teaching. It is doubtful that one could extract any consistent and coherent system of ideas from his teachings. One could aptly describe him as a ‘teacher without a teaching.’ What he taught came in short discourses, dialogues and one-liners, most of which have been published in several books and in a biography of him by Mahesh Bhatt. In the following, I have organized UG’s teaching into a number of topics.

The uniqueness in UG's teaching lies in his demystification of spirituality. While discounting all spiritual experiences, he provides a rather naturalistic explanation of spirituality in terms of what he calls the 'natural state.' He maintains the impossibility of attaining the 'natural state' through search, effort, seeking or any other strategy employed by our thought process.

Spiritual experiences are, he says, like any other experiences, only more glorified. They do not solve the problems of duality or suffering. There is no such thing for UG as a non-dual experience: it is a contradiction in terms. In order for you to know non-duality as an experience, you must somehow be there. That means the experience is not truly non-dual.

None of the means which tradition has handed down to us to attain such a liberated state of non-duality delivers the goods. Meditation, renunciation, prayer and worship are all done with an ulterior motive and can never free you from duality. You are always there measuring your progress. As long as 'you' are there, you can never be free.

Thought: The 'you' is thought-generated. Thought is memory, your cultural and individual past, operating on the present situation. Each thought splits itself, as it were, into two: the object thought about and a fictitious, non-existent subject. It creates the illusion of the subject, the thinker. Since there is no thinker as such, we can never know the thinker. The thought is the thinker. There is no other thinker.

Thought cannot understand reality. Reality and life are constantly changing. Thought, being dead and static, can never understand them or know them. We know or understand anything only through experiences molded out of our past. If thought cannot understand reality, nothing else can, either. You can never know anything directly, without the mediation of thought or knowledge. If we could, then there would be no need to understand anything.

For UG, thought is only useful for communication. The structures that thought produces, its theories and hypotheses are only useful in producing technological tools and gadgets. The theories and hypotheses are mere fictions created by thought.

Thought superimposes itself upon the biological organism, creating a parallel world, the world of thought, which consists of all the things we strive for, our pleasures and pains, our knowledge and values.

The Cultural Input: UG says that all typically human problems arise out of the values that the society or culture around us has imposed upon us, what he calls the 'cultural input'. Our desires

and goals are all passed on to us by the culture around us. This culture wants us to become the 'perfect man'. It induces us to emulate the models which history has produced, models like Jesus and the Buddha, or to strive for utopias such as the Kingdom of God or Nirvana that those models have presented. The cultural input gives us the notion that by living this way we will gain permanent happiness.

Thought is the mechanism which enables the experience of the past to repeat itself through images and words by creating a future, which is only a modified past, and prompting us to strive for it. Ideals thus projected into the future falsify our present condition, making us feel as if there were something wrong with it. We are in constant conflict between what we think we are and what we want to become. We feel restless, inadequate and unfulfilled, and we constantly search for a meaning in life to fulfill us.

Thought presents us with various goals and prompts us to strive for them to gain permanent happiness without a moment of pain. But permanent happiness is an illusion; it does not exist. In our attempts to realize our goals<sup>[1]</sup>, including spiritual goals, we begin to transform ourselves. Furthermore, the process of seeking self-fulfillment is endless, resulting in suffering for the individual and destruction in society. Our seeking leads us to a search for security, power, wealth, sex, love, spiritual liberation and so on. As we strive to attain our goals, we have conflicts, fears, jealousies, exploitation and wars. These are generated by what UG calls the self-protectiveness of thought.

Instead of a peaceful living organism, we now have an individual torn by conflict, stressed out, competing, conflicting with other individuals and groups, causing suffering for himself and for the society. As long as we are driven by thought and its goals and structures, our problems are inevitable. The problem is that we take our thoughts and goals to be too real. They are all fictitious and generated by the society around us. Since the goals conflict with each other, we are constantly in conflict. "We want all this and heaven too," to quote UG.

Then we ask how we can become free from all these goals. The 'how' is a mischievous question; it implies another goal, this time one of 'thoughtlessness' or absence of goals. All our effort is utilized to strive for goals.

To become free from the 'stranglehold of thought,' to use UG's expression, all effort must cease. A clinical 'death' must occur. But you cannot bring it about. If and when it happens, the organism

will function smoothly without the interference of thought and its artificial goals. Thought then falls into its place as an instrument of communication and problem-solving.

**The Body:** For UG, the human organism is unique. No other organism is like it. It is unparalleled in nature. UG maintains that the body is a tremendously intelligent organism capable of living in the world without any help. It does not need any of our knowledge, education, goals, pleasures and happiness. It does not care to achieve anything or to improve itself. The only needs of the body are survival and reproduction. The body has no need for transformation or liberation. “There is nothing there to be transformed,” UG says.

The body is always in a state of peace. This is not a dead peace concocted by thought, but a living and dynamic peace. Through our conditioning we constantly seek pleasures. But the body is not interested in them. Pleasures take it away from its peaceful harmonious state. Pleasures are indeed pains, in that sense. For that reason, the body constantly tries to get rid of them.

According to UG, the body has the needed intelligence to take care of any problems, such as ill-health, that it might confront. It has the needed resources and the power to recuperate and renew itself, given a chance. When all else fails, it will die gracefully. Medical science only prolongs the agony of pain; it does not cure it. In a sense, the body is immortal, because at the time of ‘death,’ its atoms may be reshuffled and recycled, but the body is always there in some form or other.

UG calls the mind the ‘interloper’ or ‘squatter’. He says that through its pleasure-seeking movement, it constantly interferes with the functioning of the body and disturbs the peace and peak functioning that are already there.

UG holds out as a possibility that when one becomes free from the stranglehold of thought through some ‘calamity,’ which might happen not because of any of our effort but in spite of it, the body falls into its natural rhythm; then thought functions harmoniously without creating a surrogate life. Such a body is in the ‘natural state’. According to UG, when one falls into this state, the body and the senses will resume their full function and sensitivity.

**Means:** UG does not supply any specific method to become free from the stranglehold of thought. Instead, he wants us to see the futility of striving for all our goals for self-fulfillment. He asks us to find out what we really want. If we are free from all those fictitious goals and realize that there is no such thing as permanent happiness and no meaning in life, our lives become simple and easy. Otherwise, we are wasting our life and talents in futile pursuits. As UG says,

*You are not ready to accept the fact that you have to give up. A complete and total surrender.*

*It is a state of hopelessness which says that there is no way out... Any movement in any direction, on any dimension, at any level, is taking you away from yourself...*

*It hits you like a ton of bricks. (ME, p. 21)*

With UG, there is no talk of mysticism or mystical experiences, oneness, nonduality or such. Rather, he speaks of returning to the natural state where there is no conflict.

Teaching Process: UG was a teacher who constantly operated from a state of nonduality: his actions were not born out of calculation or premeditation; they were spontaneous. His dealings with people were directed constantly toward drawing them into the vortex of nonduality where there are no distinctions between bondage and liberation, or indeed, even between life and death. UG did not distinguish himself from others. He was not trying to achieve any results, nor was he trying to change anyone. Yet, his dealings had that effect on people, viz., they were constantly prodded to question their belief structures. His only aim seemed to be to destroy the mental structures people had so carefully and assiduously built within themselves, without attempting to replace them with any of his own. He would say, "You can walk, you don't need any crutches."

Reflections (A): Ground Zero: 1. Does UG's teaching not leave us dry and empty, without any hope? Doesn't it seem to advocate that we have to give up all our goals? If so, why live? If there is nothing we can do to achieve the 'natural state,' then why even talk about it? UG may have deconstructed spirituality, but hasn't he deconstructed life itself, leaving it dry and empty?

Is UG asking us to revert to the state of the animal, to start at the beginning, as it were? To be sure, he says there is no going back. In fact, his own life after 'calamity' was much more than survival (albeit without reproduction).

He says that whatever you are, you have to live in this world. Living in this world requires that you develop your talents, that you make a living of some sort, and that you live with some sort of arrangement with your society. You have to compete with others, make money, work at a job or whatever else you have to do. But UG never tells us, of course, what to do. You cannot derive any 'directive' from what he says.

Then what is he saying? Why did he keep talking to people until the end of his life? What did he hope to accomplish?

I don't think he intended to achieve anything. The nature of his being was such that he always talked; he always commented on whatever was happening around him. Of course, his talking might have had the effect of disillusioning some people about the goals they had been pursuing, making their lives less 'burdened', but that was a consequence that just happened. He didn't plan anything.

2) So, what role do thought and thinking play in daily life? I have to use thought to solve problems for sure, to plan ahead and to organize my life – in short, to lead a successful life in this complex civilization. If I don't, I would be reduced to an animal state. Then, in precisely what sense do I have to become free from the 'stranglehold' of thought? Only in terms of being free from the religious or spiritual goals (or other goals for self-fulfillment) – that I have to have this, or that I have to become that, or that I have to seek this pleasure or avoid that pain.

But if I have pain, and I want to solve the problem of pain, would I not be using thought to solve it? Wouldn't that be the same as avoiding pain? UG never made this very clear – on the one hand, he encouraged people to go see a doctor ("You can give your ailing body a helping hand."); on the other hand, he said he himself would never see a doctor and encouraged people not to take any medicine or see a doctor for their troubles. I don't think he was very consistent on the matter. However, one must admit that he was mostly consistent with himself about his own life, in the sense that he never saw doctors. He said pain is a great healer. You have the problem of pain, he said, only when you link two sensations (of pain) through memory and then say, "I have pain."

3) Even toward the end of his life, UG seemed to believe in the 'basic' status of the body. He would say something to the effect, "The body doesn't let me go," or "The body is not ready to go." If the body and its solidity are put together by thought, it's not clear, how he would take the body as basic or real. Of course, he could say that these statements too are just interpretation. Or, more appropriately, UG's statements could be taken to mean nothing more than preventing you from believing anything as real; his statements are just teaching tools to demolish our mental structures.

4) To act outside the self-centered framework is to act outside the framework of thought. But we don't know if such action is possible except when we act impulsively, habitually or reflexively or in situations of emergency. UG, on his part, said his actions were not based on thoughts or ideas. He never told us how they arose or how they were possible. He said none of his actions were initiated by himself. They were always prompted by something 'outside', some person or circumstance or

thought. It is as though he was simply drawn into action by a situation. What he says reminds us of *wu-wei* in Taoism.

5) Somewhere, we must find peace and fulfillment without having to seek any goals. Of course, I can't solve any social or political problems or problems of the world. Then what good am I without contributing anything to the world? A counter question here would be, I didn't create all those problems, why should I bother to solve them? Who asked me to? (As UG would say, "Who gave me the mandate?") On his own part, he said that he was perfectly at peace with the world. Given the way we are, the world "couldn't be any the different."

All this discussion is based on the question of how to live in this world or what policies of living we should have. The answer is that there is no answer to that question. We don't need to know how to live in this world. We are actually living.

6) The virtue of UG's teaching is that through the process of his questioning he unburdens us not just from our cherished beliefs and prejudices, but primarily from our goals. Whether or not we are completely free from them is up to us. When we are, we can live in peace.

Reflections (B): One Blind Man's Elephant: 1) UG hints at a life which doesn't involve symbols, meaning and interpretation. This living is in contrast to one of striving for our goals and fulfilling ourselves through them. If we let all our goals (for self-fulfillment) go, then perhaps we could view everything, including ourselves, as a unitary energy – that we are the energy aware of itself in a non-dual fashion.<sup>[2]</sup>

2) Let us say that I am disillusioned<sup>[3]</sup> about all these goals that I seek to fulfill myself. And when I am free from the goals, I am also free from my attachment to things and therefore from my fears as well and the consequent self-protectiveness. Thus when I can let go of everything, including life itself, I can land in that state of total peace (Energy). Then hopefully I would not be causing the problems which are generated by my striving for self-fulfillment.

Of course, theoretically I may still be a problem-maker in the world, but that is something for the world to judge and respond to. Also, perhaps, in the heat of the moment, I could be acting rashly or emotionally; but I would have no grasping nature nor would I accumulate property beyond my needs or protect it with all my might.

3) When you let go of everything, you are the Energy. This letting go of all concerns may occur through various means which have been known to tradition: passive awareness, contrary (or

opposite) thinking, looking at the situation more objectively, reversing roles, going behind or stepping out of feelings and experiences, and so on. Yet no seeking is necessary and nothing needs to be changed. There is this state of just being an awareness or an organism, an awareness or being whose energy may last only a moment. And the energy released thus vitalizes the body. It may not affect the individual organs in any specific manner (like in acupuncture); but it certainly refreshes the body.

4) Suppose we let go of everything: then, as I said before, we will recede into the body or, rather, into an energy field where there are no distinctions or divisions. But that too, as I was suggestive above, is only a temporary state. At least, just out of the sheer necessity to respond to the needs of the body and the world, we have to engage in thought and then again we get caught in a state of duality.

So becoming free from the stranglehold of thought must just amount to becoming free from the goals that thought generates for self-fulfillment. This does not preclude us from using thought in solving problems of day-to-day living.

As UG would say, life would then become simple and easy. One is not involved in anything except for the moment. Goals and meanings (including the meaning of the world, things and people in it, as well as values and points of view) are only temporary and tentative. When you are not in the world of meaning, then, as UG often said, thoughts are mere noises in the head and time ceases to be.

5) Now we can see how when a person is in this Energy or awareness, he (or she) could be passively watching things, persons and events in the world as a passing show; or, he could be merely aware of his memories or images come and go. And for one split second, he could become one of those images or memories. Then, the world of meaning and all that is associated with it would again exist for the person. Yet, he could once again withdraw from that world and recede back into the field of energy. It's interesting to note here that when we are in the world of meaning, we often confuse our mental realities, which are mere symbols with meaning attributed to them, with actual realities, and respond to them as if they were real.

6) This being 'in-and-out' of energy is occurs in full awareness; there is only periodic disengagement. When the present context is finished, when the 'me' is no longer needed, then there is disengagement and the 'me' is gone. The ending of the context happens in many ways, as for example, when a person visiting leaves or when a task is accomplished. Then one is back at ground

‘zero’. There is no awareness that one is even living. Nothing matters. When a need occurs, such as having to mail a letter, or being hungry, or having to go to the bathroom, then the particular thoughts and images come into play, and the self is temporarily involved again. But, since there is no desire to continue, there is no conflict in either ‘being in’ or ‘being out’; there is no duality here.

7) But there is a fundamental difference between the disappearance of the ego temporarily and one becoming an automatically-run organism where the will simply has withered away permanently. But such a thing is not in our hands. There is nothing we can do to make it happen. We can’t even ‘wait’ for it. All the strategies, even to passively wait for it to happen, are thought-generated and willed. Yet, that’s what true liberation is: to be totally and permanently freed from the ego. Unfortunately, there is no protocol for it, no program and there is nothing anyone can do to achieve it. Yet, from what I can see from my time with UG, it seems to be a possibility.

### *References*

- 1) *Mystique of Enlightenment*. Edited by Rodney Arms, Sahasranama Prakashana, Banagalore, India. 2001.
- 2) *The Mind is a Myth*, Dinesh Vaghela, Goa, India, 1988.
- 3) Mahesh Bhatt, *UG Krishnamurti, a Life*, Penguin Books India, 2001.

<sup>[1]</sup> In the following, by ‘goals’ I do not mean the goals necessary for day-to-day living, but goals for self-improvement and self-fulfillment – goals which involve the ‘self’ in some fashion or other. While the former set of goals will have no relevance and cease to be once they are achieved, the latter persist in our consciousness and create endless striving. Indeed, the continuity of the ‘self’ is perpetuated by the contemplation and striving for these goals.

<sup>[2]</sup> I discussed the issue of how we know this in my unpublished paper, “Science and Spirituality,” (pp. 17-18) available on this website.

<sup>[3]</sup> Disillusionment can not only be unsettling but also traumatic and can happen in stages.