



Excerpt of:

THE UNCONDITIONED MIND

J. Krishnamurti and the Oak Grove School

By David Edmund Moody

From Chapter Eleven: Mortality

Krishnamurti is regarded by many as a religious figure, but his actual stated philosophy is secular and psychological in nature. His aim is to elucidate the nature and dynamic structure of ordinary consciousness. His perspective is holistic and encompasses dimensions that philosophers call moral, ontological, and epistemological.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Because the transmission of knowledge is a primary function of education, assumptions about its nature must shape the quality of instruction. Krishnamurti's philosophy had a great deal to say about knowledge, and so it became the responsibility of a teacher in his school to consider how his observations should be reflected in the curriculum.

This, in any case, was my outlook at Oak Grove. In the earlier years of the school, problems associated with discipline and administration demanded attention, and so distracted from the more interesting issues of curriculum and instruction. The principal advantage of my appointment as director was the luxury it allowed of focusing my attention as I saw fit, and that meant reflecting on the structure of the curriculum from the ground up.

According to Krishnamurti, knowledge is always limited in nature and in scope. However vast it may seem to us, knowledge is limited because it is the accumulation of the past.

Psychological conditioning can be understood in terms of the received weight of individual and collective memory of the past.

Obviously, it is essential to employ knowledge effectively to function in daily life. Nevertheless, to see something new, we must put aside our accumulated knowledge and look with fresh eyes. This is especially important in human relationship, where memories of the other person tend to color and shape our perceptions, which leads to conflict.

Krishnamurti's perspective on knowledge is fundamentally revolutionary. While others may have put forth one point or another, he is unique in bringing these observations together in a coherent fashion and showing how important they are in the conduct of daily life.

Because his philosophy emphasized the limitations of knowledge, sometimes parents and others wondered whether his schools would effectively educate in the conventional sense. In our concern with ending conditioning, would we neglect to provide a standard course in academic instruction? Krishnamurti took pains to counter this view by emphasizing in the *Intent of the School* that academic excellence is "absolutely necessary." And yet, the concern persisted in many quarters.

As director of the school, I wanted to end that concern completely. My view was this: the insights provided by Krishnamurti's educational philosophy could be harnessed to achieve far *greater* academic gains than are possible through instruction by conventional means. The school should become known not in spite of its academic performance but because of it. Our students' achievement should be exceptional precisely because of our uniquely enlightened approach to classroom instruction. I made it my primary objective to implement this perspective and to build on that foundation to achieve our larger goals.

My first order of business, however, was to restore order to the difficult personnel situation that Terry had left behind. The man with two wives, one legal and one de facto, and their young child were due to move into quarters on the school property in the near future. The man had a long mane of yellow hair and drove a yellow Mercedes. It was bad enough that Terry had installed him

as librarian in the jewel of the school buildings, but to have his unorthodox lifestyle on display twenty-four hours a day would have been intolerable.

There was a brief honeymoon period after I was appointed director, when Erna seemed for once grateful that I was available to help the trustees out of a difficult situation. She even made a little speech to the teachers and staff, urging them to give me their full support. I inwardly marveled at this, since I already had the teachers' support and knew it was hers that I would be needing sooner or later.

That time came even earlier than anticipated when I acted to annul the appointments of the librarian and the history teacher. Erna was dismayed that she would have to pay their salaries for a few months without receiving their services. Her husband Theo, moreover, conservative in all his tastes, had taken an unaccountable liking to the librarian and bitterly resented my action. Even so, I never regretted it to any degree. I sensed that the man and his family would become the virtual image of the school, and to me he represented a caricature of the meaning of unconditioning, not the real thing.

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Krishnamurti's time in Ojai that year (1985) was cut short because of two trips he was scheduled to take to other parts of the country. The first trip was to Washington, D.C., where he gave a pair of public talks, and to New York, where he received an award from a committee of the United Nations. For a few days after he returned, I noticed him holding his hand to his side as he stood quietly at the end of the lunch line. It turned out his stomach had been uneasy while in Washington, and the aftereffects were still with him.

The sight of him in this condition, at age eighty-nine, precipitated thoughts of his mortality. For years, Krishnaji had reminded everyone that his days were numbered. "I am gone!" he admonished on many occasions. Perhaps the element of hyperbole in such expressions allowed us to take the idea with a grain of salt. But the sight of him holding his side in the lunch line gave it all a little greater sense of reality.

The second trip was to New Mexico, where he had been invited to speak to scientists at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Several days before he left, he asked me over lunch what he ought to say to them. I don't think he really expected me to answer; rather, he was sharing what was on his mind and suggesting it was an interesting question to consider. It surprised me to see him in that state of uncertainty; on the other hand, his question indicated that he was weighing his remarks for days in advance.

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As the end of his annual visit came into view, I had to consider what life at Oak Grove would be like without Krishnamurti's participation. If he were gone, Erna's voice would prevail whenever she chose. I finally felt I had no alternative but to convey to him the depth of my misgivings about this prospect.

I met with Krishnaji in his cottage to spell out my concerns. I said that if he were not around, Erna was unlikely to keep me at the school for very long. She did not hold me in high regard and had no confidence in my abilities, I said, and in his absence, she would find a way to dispense with my services. In addition, she was not really serving his interests in her work for the foundation.

Krishnaji listened to all this rather calmly. He replied by describing in some detail how Erna had almost singlehandedly rescued his work from the machinations of Rajagopal. I said I did not question her dedication or her honesty, but all she really cared about was the financial condition of the foundation and its public image. In my view, she had little or no actual interest in the teachings.

Krishnamurti gathered himself and made a kind of pronouncement. "So you are informing me, in your official capacity, that Mrs. Lilliefelt is not supporting you in your work. Is that correct?"

I said that it was. I inferred from the way he phrased it that he would probably tell Erna some or all of what I had said, and he was giving me fair warning in case I wished to ask for confidentiality. But I did not take that path. I wanted him to do with my judgment whatever he felt was right.