

Krishnamurti's Spiritual Development from a Theosophical Perspective

Govert Schuller, RS Philosophy, North-Eastern Hills University, Shillong, Meghalaya

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Abstract.

In terms of states-of-consciousness one could differentiate within Krishnamurti's mystical experiences a spirito-logical sequence. In other words, K went through multiple, discernible phases of spiritual awakening with a step-by-step logic going from low to higher realms. The focus of this paper is to interpret these statements within a Theosophical framework. The primary sources to make the point are 1) K's own statements about his extraordinary experiences and 2) Theosophical glossaries.

K started out as a young man with mundane thoughts and desires (*Kama-Manas*), who then was inspired by a higher principle (*Buddhi*) to control his lower inclinations. After the start of the painful *Process*, he would have spiritual visions of meta-empirical realms and beings. The *Process* purified K to the extent he could be overshadowed by a higher being, *Maitreya*. More in private he experiences intense moments of mysticism to which he gave the name *The Beloved (Atman)*. Later he would have even deeper and vaster experiences of "Benediction" (*Sat-chit-ananda*) arguably moving in the realm of *Atman-Brahman*. Then the whole series is crowned with his experience of the source of all energy (*Parabrahm*).

In conclusion I claim to have shown that, first, K's states of consciousness are different enough that they can be expressed in different concepts, and secondly, that K was aware of these differences and was the first one to suggest non-technical concepts. Thirdly, as skilled Theosophists can do, parallels can be found with Theosophical, Sanskrit-based terminology

Introduction.

There exists a tendency to separate K's life into two segments. The first segment is his early life as a Theosophical spokesperson and candidate to become the vehicle for a next *Avatar* or *World Teacher* to manifest itself through. The second segment is as an independent teacher focused on helping people to understand the workings of their mind and doing so free from any Theosophical ideas about occult forces or meta-empirical beings. The break between the two is in 1929, when K in a dramatic speech dissolved the Star in the East, an organization which helped prepare for the coming *World Teacher*; and emphatically disavowed the concept and title. Some would add a transitional period between 1929 and 1933, in which he purged his new vocabulary from Theosophical ideas, had extensive exchanges with his audience regarding Theosophical issues, resigned from the TS, said farewell to his two guardians, AB and CWL who passed away in 1933 and 1934 respectively, and claimed to have lost his memories of the preceding years (Lutyens, 1976: 280).

The Vacant Boy or Phased Development

Nevertheless, there are two possibilities to interpret K's spiritual life as not involving a dramatic break. One is based on remarks from an older K himself and the other is a Theosophical perception worked out in this paper.

In later life, when his younger years would become the subject in private conversations, K brought up the idea of "the boy" (referring to himself) not having been conditioned by Theosophy, because he was from the beginning vacant and absent-minded and not taking Theosophy seriously. In a conversation with Mary Lutyens, she reports that he wondered,

. . . why had he been picked out by Leadbeater from the other boys on the beach? What was the quality of 'the boy's' mind then? Was he a freak? What had protected him all these years? Why was it that 'the boy', subjected to all that adulation and Theosophical indoctrination, had not become corrupted or conditioned? (Lutyens, 1983: 170)

In short, if he never took Theosophy seriously and was never affected by its ideas, there could not have been a break with it. His mind just had been vacant all the time and never went through dramatic changes. The question arises whether K, because he did not remember much from his early years, was merely projecting his later state of enlightenment back into his past. After all, he is on record in his early years as an articulate and passionate Theosophist and believer of his erstwhile calling.

The other interpretation is that K went through multiple, discernible phases of spiritual awakening which can be tracked in the terminology of Theosophical anthropology with its seven principles making up the human being, and Theosophical theology with its differentiation of a few shadings of divinity. In this narrative there is no sharp break either, merely the gradual fading of the Theosophical worldview in favor of a more experiential and non-technical vocabulary, interchangeable though with a more Theosophical terminology. The aim of this paper is to flesh out this case.

The Terminology.

The following is a table of the Sanskrit and English terms, which I have extracted from several Theosophical sources (Blavatsky, 1892; Besant, 1909; Purucker, 1999). I added descriptions in a more phenomenological and experiential language to make a bridge to the level of lived experiences of mystics, especially K.

In this schema the combined *Atmâ-Buddhi-Manas* form the *Monad* or reincarnating trinity of the three highest, immortal principles. Below this trinity are the four lower, mortal principles (*Rupa, Prana, Linga sharira and Kama rupa*) and above the trinity are *Brahma*, the spirit of the universe, and *Parabrahm*, the absolute root of all existence. These are the basic terms which will come into play in interpreting K's spiritual experiences.

<i>Sanskrit Term</i>	English Term	Short Description / Experiential Grounding
<i>Rupa</i>	Physical	A physical thing among other physical things subject to the laws of physical causality
<i>Prana</i>	Vital principle	The integrated complex of our physical-emotional-mental bodies that we experience as vital or sluggish
<i>Linga sharira</i>	Etheric Double	The prototypical double of our physical body experienced in for example phantom limb or out-of-body experience
<i>Kama Rupa</i>	Lower Desire Body	The lower mental-desire body projecting a mental-emotional body image towards its physical object for fulfillment
<i>Manas</i>	Upper Mental Body	The higher mental-desire body projecting mental-emotional body image towards its spiritual object for fulfillment
<i>Budhi</i>	The Spiritual Soul	Initially the pang of conscience announcing itself as a still voice calling us to transcend our mundane situation which might lead to a new intuitive perception of life
<i>Atma</i>	The Divine Self	Experienced when one's whole being is integrally and self-transcendentally involved in a meditative action of intense spiritual significance and graced by consciousness-being-bliss (<i>Satchitananda</i>)
<i>Brahman</i>	Spirit of the Universe	The universal ground of the Divine Self with which it is one (<i>Atma is Brahman</i>) and experienced in a state of <i>Satchitananda</i>
<i>Parabrahm</i>	Rootless Root of All	The source of all manifestation and existence

Fig. 1. Table of Sanskrit and English terms for aspects of human beings and levels of consciousness

The Chronology.

a) In the years leading up to 1922 K was often critical, rebellious, doubtful of his expected role as vehicle for the coming World Teacher, even sometimes depressed. One could say that he was subjected to regular, mundane experiences of *Kama-Manas* (lower thoughts and desires) with sometimes some *Buddhi* (inspirational conscience) poking through (Lutyens, 1976: 111-2 & 138-9).

b) This attitude was radically altered by his re-conversion or re-dedication to his mission inspired by a message received in Sydney in June 1922 from one of the Masters in the Theosophical pantheon, *Mahatma* Kuthumi. With a touch of skepticism K's biographer and long-time friend Mary Lutyens wrote that the message was "'brought through' by Leadbeater", i.e., next to Annie Besant, K's spiritual and allegedly clairvoyant guardian with a line of communication with the *Mahatmas*. The opening sentences of the message read:

Of you, too, we have the highest hopes. Steady & widen yourself, and strive more & more to bring the mind & brain into subservience to the true Self within (Idem: 147).

Inspired by the message K wrote five weeks later that "*I am going to get back my old touch with the Masters & after all that's the only thing that matters in life & nothing else does*" (Idem: 152).

Italics in original). One could say that in a moment of vision and subsequent dedication the *Buddhi* principle was prevailing over his *Kama-Manas*.

[In Heidegger's terminology from *Being and Time* it could be argued that K gathered in this moment of "authentic temporality" all three tenses, i.e. a) his past of inherited possibilities of becoming a vehicle of a higher consciousness; b) his present of a "moment of vision" handing down to himself this past possibility; and c) thereby creating and resolutely committing himself to a futural projection (Heidegger, 1962: 325 / H280).]

c) From then on K engaged in a regular regime of meditation. This could be conceived as the stabilizing of the *Buddhic* in silence by subsuming the lower bodies. Of his intention K wrote that " . . . I had to harmonize all my other bodies with the Buddhic plane . . . To harmonize the various bodies, I had to keep them vibrating at the same rate as the Buddhic . . ." (Idem: 152, 158).

d) Residing in August 1922 in Ojai, California, K experienced the start of the painful and dramatic *Process*. This could be conceived as if the *Mahatmas* were purging K's body through occult means while K himself was mostly absent in a state of out-of-body experience (OBE). K also had experiences of his *Kundalini* rising, i.e. the awakening of his spiritual energies in the *Root Chakra* at the base of the spine and rising towards the *Crown Chakra* at the top of the head (Idem: 166). Occasionally, when K's soul was OBE ("went off"), a child-like sub-personality would express itself about the pain the body was going through. In Theosophy this is called the "physical elemental" and is a part of one's *Kama Rupa* (lower desire body) connected to the physical body (Idem: 165, 175-7, 188).

e) After a year and a half, and back in Ojai again, the *Process* culminates in the opening of both the *Crown* and *Third Eye Chakras*, making it possible for K to have conscious communion with the *Mahatmas* and attain a clear certainty about his mission (Idem: 186). At this moment one could say that the *Buddhic* principle had fully overcome and subdued the *Kama-Manas*.

f) Then K experienced initially a traumatic, but finally a very transformative experience. On his way to India in November 1925 to attend the golden jubilee of the TS, he received news of the death of his brother and life companion Nityananda. In and through the mourning process K seemed to have purged the last vestiges of doubt and attachments. It was a deepened vision born out of suffering. K also expressed that he was unified in spirit with Nityananda (Idem: 220).

g) On December 28, 1925 occurred the first manifestation of Maitreya in Adyar (now Chennai), India at the grounds of the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society during a meeting of the Star in the East. Many claimed, and even watched clairvoyantly, that Maitreya spoke through K, something K himself confirmed afterwards (Lutyens, 1976: 223). The openness and trust involved in being overshadowed were enabled by K's stable *Buddhic* state of awareness, making it possible for a realized *Mahatma* to temporarily 'take over' K's vocal cords at that level.

h) Around 1927 K starts to re-frame his mystical-developmental arc with the intentionally vague term "*my Beloved*". For K his *Beloved* was the ultimate goal to be united with, like attaining a mountain top or entering a flame (Idem: 247). As long as this goal had not yet been attained one could conceive this as the *Buddhic* sighting of *Atman*, i.e. the individualized spiritual soul has the vision of the all-pervasive divine self.

i) K becomes the *Beloved* in moments of intense mysticism. He sees the *Beloved* as everywhere and within everything. For K the *Beloved* was "the open skies, the flower, every human being" including all the *Mahatmas*, even Maitreya and Buddha, "and yet it is beyond all these forms"(Idem: 249). Here it could be argued that some fusion of the *Buddhic* with the *Atman* was

established and he could be named an *Ātma-jñānin*, or knower of *Ātma*. These pronouncements became the stepping stones for K to go beyond Theosophy into his own unique interpretation of his states of mind, though K's statements also became stumbling blocks for the more doctrinaire Theosophists in their evaluation of K, especially surrounding the question whether he was fulfilling the *World Teacher Project* or not.

j) By 1961, and maybe even earlier, K has deep experiences of 'benediction,' 'otherness,' and 'immensity.' He referred to these experiences early on in his *Notebook* as "that fullness of Il L.", i.e. *Il Leccio*, the name of a Tuscan villa belonging to K's friend Vanda Scaravelli (Krishnamurti, 1976: 11-12). This might have been the place where these experiences started when he visited it on a regular basis just after WWII. This experience seems to have been unexpectedly coming and going, though in differing intensities. Again, in more Sanskrit terminology one could say he was experiencing *Sat-chit-ananda*, the combination of Being (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Cit*) and Bliss (*Ananada*), and, maybe best caught in the phenomenologically re-arranged phrase 'blissful consciousness of being'.

k) K's state of high intensity meditation culminates one night in the middle of November 1979 in reaching "the source of all energy", which he perceived as "the ultimate, the beginning and the ending and the absolute" as he stated in a specially dictated account of that momentous event. In Hindu philosophy *Atma* (the soul) is equated with *Brahm* (God). As K was arguably at that level of consciousness already, it could very well be that the 'source' was beyond *Brahm*, i.e. *Parabrahm*, the highest, supreme principle, the root of all that exists. On the other side it has to be mentioned that in the same statement K cautioned his readers that his experience "must in no way be confused with, or even thought of, as god or the highest principle, the Brahman, which are the projections of the human mind out of fear and longing, the unyielding desire for total security" (Lutyens, 1983: 237-8). With this seemingly ultimate experience the sequence comes to an end.

Discussion.

So far, the identifiable steps K took on his spiritual-developmental arc and the possible Sanskrit terms to describe them. Excluded in this enumeration are the states of consciousness relevant to K as a teacher, which had its own developmental stages.

What has been gained with this differentiation? First of all, it has to be noted that, though words fall short in giving complete descriptions, these states of consciousness are different enough that they can be expressed in different concepts. Secondly, that K was aware of these differences and was the first one to suggest the appropriate non-technical concepts. Thirdly, as skilled Theosophists and probably Sankritists can do, parallels can be found with Theosophical and Sanskrit terminology.

The fact that K was aware of these experiences and could describe them afterwards indicates that something like a 'self,' or something 'self-same,' was enduring during these experiences, at least from the experience itself up to the moment of having them written down. For me this also indicates that something implicitly self-aware in the experience became explicitly so in the wording and that memory had some function in this transition. This has to be mentioned because K would often claim that his kind of experiences would leave no trace in memory. In the context of this paper such pondering is not that relevant, though K's mystical experiences are grist for the mill of an existential-phenomenological interpretation to be pursued in other venues.

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Source

This small paper is a reworked section from "Two Theosophical Views on Krishnamurti: One Sympathetic, One Critical". *Alpheus*, 3 Oct 2019. The origin of this account was in several discussions conducted with Theosophists connected to the Theosophical Society in America (TSA), on awareness and its connection to implicit and explicit self-awareness and how such ideas might apply to Krishnamurti. We used a lot of Theosophical concepts to further elucidate K's experiences and states of mind.