

## **An Instance of Dependent Origination: Are Krishnamurti's Teachings *Buddhadharma*?**

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THE CLOSE CONJUNCTION between Krishnamurti's thought and the teachings of Buddhism raises some provocative questions. My hope is to initiate discussion on the implications of these similarities, which appear to blur the lines between what is conventionally called Buddhism, and studied as such, and what may more broadly be regarded as *buddhadharma*, or *buddhavacana*.<sup>1</sup>

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born into a brahmin family in 1895 in South India.<sup>2</sup> His father worked for the Theosophical Society, and so the young Krishnamurti was often seen in or around the beautiful 260-acre estate of the society's headquarters at Adyar, near Chennai (Madras). Theosophy ("divine wisdom"), which the Theosophical Society promoted and still promotes, is based on a tolerant, non-sectarian approach to religious truth.<sup>3</sup> Among their esoteric teachings is the notion that humanity is evolving towards a state of "Universal Brotherhood," marked by a sequential evolution of seven Root-Races. This evolution is furthered along by the efforts of great Masters who periodically appear on earth to promulgate teachings and imbue humankind with spiritual energy. Through a series of graded initiations, members of the esoteric section of the Theosophical Society became part of the Great White Brotherhood, a harbinger of the Universal Brotherhood to come. Periodically, at the beginning of a large spiritual evolutionary cycle, a great master, known as the World Teacher or *jagadguru*, was believed to appear. In the late 1800s, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a co-founder of the Theosophical Society, predicted that the beginning of such a cycle, namely the Sixth Root-Race, was close at hand, and would emerge in southern California.

During Krishnamurti's boyhood, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, a former priest of the Church of England, headed the Theosophical Society. It was Leadbeater who spotted the fourteen-year-old Krishnamurti on the beach, outside the headquarter's compound, and psychically discerned that his aura was "without a stitch of selfishness." The boy was soon adopted by the society and systematically groomed to be the physical vehicle for the next *jagadguru*, or World Teacher. This training included yoga and other forms of psycho-physical exercise, but also astral travel to meet with disembodied Masters of Theosophy, such as Master Kuthumi. Krishnamurti was subsequently taken to England, studied briefly at the Sorbonne, and eventually settled in the Ojai Valley in southern California. A remarkable event occurred in 1929, twenty years after his discovery, when he disbanded the Order of the Star, a subset organization of the Theosophical Society, and then left the society in order to offer his own teachings. Krishnamurti traveled extensively, speaking an average of 175 times a year to crowds ranging from as few as fifty to several thousand people at a time, until his death in 1986 at the age of ninety-one.<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars find close resonance between Krishnamurti's teachings and other philosophical systems, such as Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta.<sup>5</sup> However, in both Krishnamurti's life and his teachings, the greatest similarities are with Buddhism. This parallel is not incidental, but intentional, and although there are important differences between Krishnamurti's teachings and Buddhism, the conjunctions are certainly compelling. Some of the more salient of these similarities are discussed below.

Both of the founders of the Theosophical Society were strongly aligned with and well disposed towards Buddhism. The Russian-born psychic Madame Blavatsky claimed to have traveled to Tibet between 1868 and 1870, during which time she received esoteric teachings from various Masters. There are numerous strands of Buddhist doctrines in her writings. Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, the other founder of the Theosophical Society, is well known for his efforts in the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. He wrote a Buddhist catechism, still in use in Sri Lanka today, and is remembered for founding dozens of Buddhists schools in the country. The strong Buddhist flavor in Theosophy carried from Blavatsky and Olcott to Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, the society's subsequent leaders. In fact, the *jagadguru*, whose presence was eagerly awaited by the Theosophists, and whose arrival they hoped to

inaugurate through the person of Krishnamurti, was none other than the Lord Maitreya, the next teaching Buddha, as foretold by Buddha Śākyamuni. It is he who would introduce the teachings that would usher the spiritual evolutionary development of the Sixth Root-Race.

Just as the *jātakas* recount tales of the Buddha's previous lives, Charles Leadbeater, through his psychic journeys, began to investigate the past lives of Krishnamurti, and to publish these in Theosophical journals. Over a period of years, forty-eight past lives were uncovered spanning a period from 70,000 BCE to 694 CE. The past lives were remarkably consistent, demonstrating the career of a bodhisattva with unflinching commitment.<sup>6</sup> The Theosophical Society, by this time, was not a fringe religious organization in a geographical backwater. Annie Besant's report in 1907 counted 677 Lodges worldwide, and the membership subsequently swelled to some 45,000 with the promise offered by the young Krishnamurti.<sup>7</sup> Membership included some of the most powerful and wealthy members of both Eastern and Western societies, and so during his tutelage with the Theosophical Society, Krishnamurti enjoyed such company as that of the immensely rich American heiress, Miss Mary Dodge, and the Countess De La Warr. He was virtually adopted by Lady Emily Lutyens, daughter of the First Earl of Lytton, a former viceroy of India. Lady Emily was the husband of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect of New Delhi.<sup>8</sup> So Krishnamurti's life was very much that of a young British aristocrat. He exercised at Sandow's gymnasium, visited art galleries, the ballet, the races, and the opera, played golf, and drove fast cars. Baron Philip van Pallandt donated the Castle Eerde in Switzerland, along with its five thousand surrounding acres, to Krishnamurti for his use. In his bondage to a materialistic royal lifestyle, we note a parallel between the life of Krishnamurti and that of the young Siddhārtha Gautama.

Krishnamurti commented in his letters to Lady Emily that he was moved by the tales of the Buddha's life as recounted in such writings as Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and in Paul Carus's *The Gospel of the Buddha*. Krishnamurti moved to California in 1922 with his brother Nitya, who was suffering from tuberculosis, where it was hoped that the dry climate would help Nitya's condition. There Krishnamurti began to feel the weight of his responsibilities as the World Teacher and plunged into his meditations with intensity. He underwent a series of powerful and sometimes painful experiences, which he called "the process," which culminated in a profound transforming insight while

he sat in meditation under a large pepper tree. His brother Nitya later wrote that Krishnamurti's experience reminded him of the "Tathāgata under the Bo tree."<sup>9</sup> Of this experience, Krishnamurti wrote, "I was supremely happy, for I have seen. Nothing could ever be the same. . . . I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering; it is not for myself but for the world."<sup>10</sup>

Krishnamurti initially took on the role that had been created for him. He began to speak as if the presence of the Buddha Maitreya had entered into him, and among the large crowds that he attracted were many who regarded him as nothing less than divine. However, in 1925, when his brother Nitya died, a major change grew apparent in Krishnamurti's words and actions. He began to distance himself progressively from Theosophy and the Theosophical agenda. In a speech given in 1927 he said:

When I was a small boy, I used to see Sri Krishna, with the flute, as he is pictured by the Hindus, because my mother was a devotee of Krishna. When I grew older and met with Bishop Leadbeater and the T. S. [Theosophical Society], I began to see the Master K. H. [Kuthumi], again in the form put before me, the reality from their point of view. . . . Later on, as I grew, I began to see the Lord Maitreya. That was two years ago, and I saw him constantly in the form put before me. Now lately, it has been the Buddha whom I have been seeing, and it is my glory to be with Him. I have been asked what I mean by "the Beloved." I will give a meaning, an explanation which you will interpret as you please. To me it is all—it is Sri Krishna, it is the Master K. H., it is the Lord Maitreya, it is the Buddha, and yet it is beyond all these forms. . . . What you are troubling about is whether there is such a person as the World Teacher who has manifested Himself in the body of a certain person, Krishnamurti. . . . My purpose is not to create discussions on authority, on the manifestations of the personality of Krishnamurti, but to give you the waters that shall wash away your sorrows, your petty tyrannies, your limitations, so that you will be free, so that you will eventually join that ocean where there is no limitation.<sup>11</sup>

. . . I hold that there is an eternal Life, which is the Source and the Goal, the beginning and the end, and yet it is without end or beginning. In that Life alone is there fulfilment. And anyone who fulfils that Life has the key to Truth without limitation. That Life is for all. Into that Life, the Buddha, the Christ have entered. From my point of view, I have attained, I have entered into that Life. That Life has no form, no limitation. And to that Life everyone must return.<sup>12</sup>

This speech is quoted in some detail because these are some of the few instances in which Krishnamurti discusses “himself.” In most of his later discourses, and it is through these that most people know of his teachings, he would rarely refer to himself, his past, or his realizations, focusing almost completely on his message. So the vast majority of people who have read Krishnamurti are quite unaware of his early life with the Theosophists. Krishnamurti’s process of distancing himself from Theosophy culminated in his famous address to the Order of the Star in 1929, in Switzerland at Castle Eerde, which he subsequently returned to Baron van Pallandt. He said:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view and I adhere to it absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path. . . . [Y]ou will probably form other Orders; you will continue to belong to other organizations searching for Truth. . . . If an organization be created for this purpose, it becomes a crutch, a weakness, a bondage, and must cripple the individual, and prevent him from growing, from establishing his uniqueness, which lies in the discovery for himself of that absolute, unconditioned Truth. . . . Because I am free, unconditioned, whole, not the part, not the relative, but the whole Truth that is eternal, I desire those, who seek to understand me, to be free, not to follow me, not to make out of me a cage which will become a religion, a sect. . . . I have now decided to disband the Order, as I happen to be its Head. You can form other organizations and expect someone else. With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages, new decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free.

This speech highlights both a parallel with the historical Buddha’s life, and a dramatic difference from it. Krishnamurti’s actions during this period reflect a renunciation that some have compared with Siddhārtha Gautama’s renunciation when he left Kapilavastu and his princely inheritance. Krishnamurti, who had gone from relative poverty and obscurity, to fame, wealth, and social prestige, was at that time also being virtually worshipped by many as an embodiment of the Buddha Maitreya. His renunciation of all that wealth and adulation was certainly noteworthy. In contrast to the Buddha, however, Krishnamurti did not form a *saṃgha*, but disbanded one instead. He

already had a worldwide organization at his disposal, manned in every region by very influential persons who were eager to carry out his instructions. It was certainly equivalent to two sections of the four-fold assembly, namely the *upāsaka* and *upāsikā saṃgha*. If Krishnamurti was ambitious to form a religious organization committed to him and his teachings, he certainly could not have hoped for a better foundation. Yet, he renounced it. Quite tellingly, however, Krishnamurti did not renounce his material, social, and spiritual status to escape into a simple, secular life, but to live more honestly a life that was consistent with his “realization” of Truth. Like the Buddha, he spent the rest of his life giving discourses, meeting visitors, and answering questions. He wrote a few books, but most of his publications are transcripts of his oral discourses.<sup>13</sup> In the course of his life he eventually reconciled with the Theosophical Society, which has never quite recovered from the blow delivered by his departure. He had significant influences on such notables as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India (as well as Indira and Rajiv Gandhi), and the theoretical physicist, David Bohm.<sup>14</sup>

Thus Krishnamurti’s life does not incidentally parallel that of the historical Buddha, but was actually shaped and manipulated to resemble it in some ways. One might suggest that by renouncing his power and privilege he paralleled the life of Siddhārtha Gautama even more than his Theosophical Society mentors had imagined, but by disbanding the Order that they had begun to develop for him and denouncing the value of any religious organization he diverged from the historical Buddha, also in a way unimagined by his mentors.

The essence of Krishnamurti’s teachings on insight shows remarkable parallels with the crux of Buddhist teachings. Krishnamurti talked about many things in his long career, and his work has ramifications in such fields as psychology, education, and philosophy. However, almost all of his teachings converge on the urgent necessity for the individual to undergo a profound psychological transformation that frees consciousness from a conditioned state into one that is liberated or unconditioned. Furthermore, this pivotal transformation, or insight, cannot be brought about through any purposeful action undertaken by the self, such as contrived meditative practices of any kind, since all such actions reinforce the self. Practice intrinsically accepts the illusion of time and of progress, and thus offers the conditioned self (i.e., the ego) a sustained existence as it seeks to improve spiritually, to develop

greater clarity, to grow in goodness, and so on. All these images of development and progress fundamentally divide what Krishnamurti calls “what-is” from an imaginary “what will be,” and this division or dualism generates the matrix for psychological conflict and suffering. Insight, however, frees the conditioned mind from its propensities to escape from “what-is,” liberating it into the unconditioned, inconceivable movement of “what-is.”

This is, of course, a terse summary of Krishnamurti’s teachings, which were never delivered as a simple intellectual scheme to be learned and followed. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of Krishnamurti’s teachings does appear to render clear the importance of pivotal or total insight in the transformation of consciousness. This is particularly evident in published conversations that Krishnamurti had with David Bohm in the last years of both of their lives.<sup>15</sup> Bohm was a renowned theoretical physicist whose conception of the “implicate order,” influenced by his readings and conversations with Krishnamurti, has been gaining some notoriety in the last few decades. Bohm’s lines of questioning were systematic and provide the reader with a clearer sense of the continuities and consistency in Krishnamurti’s teachings. In those conversations with David Bohm, Krishnamurti used concepts such as Mind, “with a big M,” to speak of the unconditioned state, although all such terms are only concepts and thus fundamentally part of the conditioned or relative truth concerning reality.

As difficult as it is to make a case for having extracted the kernel of Krishnamurti’s thought, it is far more difficult to do so for Buddhism, particularly since we do not have the full unadulterated corpus of the teachings of one man, but a 2,500-year history of Buddhisms. To simplify matters, rather than compare the teachings of one man with a global religious tradition with a long history of sophisticated philosophical notions, widely diverse social configurations, and so on, I use a simple seminal text to serve as a basis for comparison.

Krishnamurti’s use of terms such as “Mind” and “Insight” led me via Vijñānavāda and Yogācāra to *tathāgatagarbha* writings within the Cittamātra school, and ultimately to *The Awakening of Faith*, the Chinese work attributed to Aśvaghōṣa.<sup>16</sup> *The Awakening of Faith* is a classic and succinct exposition of central ideas in Mahayana, and thus serves as an ideal text for comparison. The parallels are remarkable. For instance, *The Awakening of Faith* states that those

Who have fulfilled the expedient mean will experience the oneness in an instant; they will become aware of how the inceptions of mind arise, and will be free from the rise of any thought. Since they are far way from even subtle thoughts, they are able to have an insight into the original nature of Mind.<sup>17</sup>

There are many other similarities between Krishnamurti's teachings (when analyzed and systematized) and the kind of succinct presentation of Mahayana doctrine as found in *The Awakening of Faith*.<sup>18</sup> The thrust of this paper, however, is not to present an argument about these similarities, but to inquire into some of their implications.

When we consider the close parallels between Krishnamurti's life and the Buddha's, and if we concede that despite certain important differences, such as the value of a path or a religious community, there are also equally dramatic similarities in their teachings; one may certainly ask what the relationship is between the two. A simple answer might be: There is no real relationship between the two, because Krishnamurti is not a Buddhist and therefore is not teaching Buddhism. While this would be a convenient fence for a scholar to erect around his or her field of study, the matter is not resolved that easily. For instance, Krishnamurti's teachings have attracted Buddhists and have on occasions influenced their thought.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the similarities between Buddhism and Krishnamurti have sometimes provoked strong negative reactions. For instance, P. M. Rao, in an article in *MahaBodhi*, criticized some statements made by the Venerable Shanti Bhadra Thera, who in a previous paper published in *MahaBodhi* had said:

To control the mind according to a certain pattern or mould is simply to imprison it; there is no freedom in such devices. It is by passive and alert observation of the ways of the mind without condemnation or justification that the mind could experience a stillness and freedom not bound by time.<sup>20</sup>

These, according to Rao, were not the Buddha's teachings, but a terminological syncretism that smacked of Krishnamurti's language. While some, such as Rao, are concerned that Krishnamurti's teachings are creeping into Buddhism and distorting the understanding of the Buddha's teachings, others have suggested that certain forms of Buddhism may enable one to better understand Krishnamurti's thought.<sup>21</sup>

Another significant exemplar of the effect of Krishnamurti on some Buddhist teachers is Samdong Rimpoche, former director of the



Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, in Sarnath. As young man, he and a friend would regularly visit Rajghat (one of the Krishnamurti Centres in India, located near Sarnath) to hear Krishnamurti talk. They thought of Krishnamurti as a sort of Nāgārjuna in the flesh. Krishnamurti's teachings in vernacular English were somehow more accessible than the language of the Buddhist texts that he was studying. Krishnamurti's teachings enabled them to understand Nāgārjuna better.<sup>22</sup> Samdong Rimpoche is and has for sometime been a trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation of India. He also confided to me that he was philosophically against the tradition of recurrent recognized incarnations of lamas that exists in many branches of Tibetan Buddhism. He himself is the fifth or sixth incarnation of the Samdong Rimpoches. Although there are political rationales for his perspective on reincarnating lamas, one wonders to what extent these ideas have been influenced by Krishnamurti, whose renunciation of his role as a vehicle for Lord Maitreya was somewhat akin to a recognized incarnate lama doing the same thing.

The second notable example is that of Toni Packer, who began studying Zen with Roshi Philip Kapleau at the Rochester Zen Centre. Viewed by many as Kapleau's clear successor, Toni Packer, who was even co-leader of the Rochester Center with Kapleau, left the center after encountering Krishnamurti's teachings. She now teaches at the Springwater Center in New York, where she no longer calls herself a teacher and makes no special claims to authority. I offer these examples only to point to the entanglement between Buddhism and Krishnamurti at certain margins of the tradition. Perhaps entanglement is a poor choice of words, and interpenetration might be more appropriate. In keeping with Buddhist terminology, one might suggest that Krishnamurti's life and teachings are an intriguing instance of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent origination). And perhaps the margins are not quite so marginal. Samdong Rimpoche currently is Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister) of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Second to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Samdong Rimpoche is arguably the most recognized Tibetan lama, among Tibetans. And since Philip Kapleau is one of the major contributors to the Zen tradition in North America, his heir-apparent Toni Packer's departure from Zen Buddhism indicates a noteworthy influence by Krishnamurti at the heart of the North American Zen tradition. Thus, if the teachings of Krishnamurti and some forms of Mahayana Buddhism resonate closely enough to

harmonize (or at least interact) with each other, one is led to address other derivative questions.

To what extent might Krishnamurti's teachings be regarded as *buddhadharma* or *buddhavacana*? Again, the easy answer is to dismiss the question on the grounds that only the Buddha's teachings may be regarded as dharma, and only his words may be regarded as *buddhavacana*. There is certainly evidence in Buddhist scriptures to identify Śākyamuni Buddha alone with the promulgation of dharma. However, there are also instances of persons other than the Buddha speaking dharma (and by extension sutra). By using the terms *buddhadharma* or *buddhavacana*, I am trying to distinguish between those who actually present new teachings on the dharma versus those who are merely purveyors of the historical Buddha's teachings. MacQueen identifies three types of certification granted to non-Buddha dharma speakers in the early literature: approval after the event, approval before the event, and authorization of persons. In the first type, the hearer of a discourse repeats it verbatim to the Buddha, who gives his approval, saying that he would have said the same thing under those circumstances. In the second type, the Buddha invites someone to give a discourse on his behalf, a kind of "*buddhavacana* by permission." And in the third type, although no authorization is given, the Buddha has previously spoken about this great disciple's wisdom so that their words carry a pre-certified sense of authority.<sup>23</sup> Resonating with these acceptable categories, the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* states:

By 'dharma' is meant that which the Buddha has spoken and that which the Buddha has certified. By 'that which the Buddha has spoken' is meant that which the Buddha has personally and with his own mouth spoken; by 'that which the Buddha has certified' is meant that which the Buddha's disciples or others have spoken and which has been certified by the Buddha.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, the first two types of certification were only possible while the Buddha was alive, and the third type would end after the passing of the Great Disciples, effectively placing a seal on sutra production. There are, however, examples found in the *Sūtra-piṭaka* of a weakening of this closure through the concepts of "inspired speech" (*pratibhāna*). In *pratibhāna*, a disciple may be inspired to speak dharma based on high states of consciousness, or on their innate creative faculties. There is also, of course, the dramatic and fairly well known statement found in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which opens the door to what may be considered

as *buddhavacana*. There, in a conversation with Upāli, the Buddha says,

“The Doctrines of which you may know: These doctrines lead one to complete weariness, ending, calm, knowledge, the awakening, the cool [i.e., *nibbāna*],’—regard them unreservedly as Dhamma, the discipline, the word of the Teacher.”<sup>25</sup>

As MacQueen points out, this opens the door to “a purely functional understanding of *buddhavacana*.”<sup>26</sup>

Certainly Mahayana Buddhism draws upon such statements to legitimize its own corpus of sutras. In the eighth century CE, the Buddhist monk Śāntideva quotes a sutra that expands the concept of *pratibhāna* (“inspired utterance”) to actually be “the word of the Buddhas” if they comply with four factors: “(i) [the utterance] is connected with truth, not untruth; (ii) it is connected with the Dharma, not that which is not the Dharma; (iii) it brings about the renunciation of moral taints [*kleśa*] not their increase; and (iv) it shows the laudable qualities of *nirvāṇa*, not those of the cycle of rebirth [*saṃsāra*].”<sup>27</sup> Paul Williams notes the thrust of such Mahayana attitudes succinctly by saying, “The Mahāyāna took the Buddha’s assertion that the Dharma should guide his followers after his death, and stressed that the Lord has described the Dharma as whatever leads to enlightenment, that is, whatever is spiritually helpful. What is spiritually helpful will vary considerably, depending on person, time, and place.”<sup>28</sup> This line of argument would very likely qualify Krishnamurti’s teachings as dharma.

In another avenue for the origins of dharma discourse delivered by someone other than the Buddha, Paul Williams draws our attention to the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra*. That sutra enjoins the meditator to recollect a buddha (in this sutra’s case it is the Buddha Amitāyus), visualizing him in his pure land surrounded by bodhisattvas and preaching the doctrine. The practitioner concentrates day and night for some seven days.<sup>29</sup> Charles Willemsen has noted that this is a meditative visualization wing of early nenbutsu practice, whose other wing, which focuses on the invocation of the name of the Buddha, later becomes central in such sects as Jōdo Shinshū.<sup>30</sup>

But returning to our sutra, after this intense seven-day meditation, meditators may see the Buddha Amitāyus in a vision or dream and actually hear the dharma. They are even able to question the Buddha while in this absorption, and are capable of receiving undeclared words of the dharma. After emerging from that *samādhi* (contemplative absorption),

they are able to expound “widely to others those Dharmas as [they have] heard, retained, and mastered.”<sup>31</sup> Remember Krishnamurti’s statements made in those early years after his awakening: “Later on, as I grew, I began to see the Lord Maitreya. That was two years ago, and I saw him constantly in the form put before me. Now lately, it has been the Buddha who I have been seeing, and it is my glory to be with Him.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, from the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra*’s perspective as well, Krishnamurti indirectly evoked identification between his words and the dharma.

My excursus into these areas has drawn attention to some of the many levels upon which Krishnamurti’s teachings may be regarded as *buddhavacana* or *buddhadharma*. Krishnamurti, as the Theosophical Society originally configured him, was molded on a conception of the Buddha Maitreya, as envisioned by his Theosophical mentors. Even in the posture he assumed when delivering his discourses (outside of India), seated on a simple straight-backed chair, he evoked the traditional representations of Maitreya. However, Krishnamurti offers yet another unusual, if not unique, twist in the efforts to categorize him. Of course, this problem of categorization is a scholarly one, and one that Krishnamurti himself dismissed. After his break with the Theosophical Society, Krishnamurti no longer used or legitimated the vocabulary of Theosophy or even Buddhism. Although he mentioned the Buddha on occasion in conversation, he did not refer to himself as Maitreya, or his teachings as dharma. In other words, he did not portray himself (and it is his post-Theosophical persona that is best known to the world) as in any way related to the Theosophical agenda of being the vehicle for the Buddha Maitreya. In fact, he dismissed any attempts to compare his teachings with those of the Buddha and Buddhism, stating that such comparisons were not particularly conducive to the realization of Truth. Poignant encounters on these issues are evident in his conversations with Buddhists and Buddhist scholars, such as Walpola Rahula, who frequently pointed out these similarities as they arose. What is clear from those discussions, however, is Krishnamurti’s insistence that even a deep intellectual understanding of a Buddhist teaching on Truth is not the same as “insight” into the essence of Truth.<sup>33</sup>

Recapping some of the previous material, it would seem that Krishnamurti’s teachings do have enough resonance with the Buddha’s teachings to be regarded as dharma. Scholarly analysis of the essence of his teachings certainly uncovers unequivocal parallels between the two teachings. Furthermore, his teachings have influenced influential

practitioners and purveyors of Buddhism. His teachings are close enough to Buddhism to help some people understand the teachings of Buddhism through Krishnamurti, or vice versa; and they are even close enough to be accused of being the same thing. Furthermore, Krishnamurti's early life was directly shaped by the Theosophists to conform to a Buddhistically inspired vision of the next teacher of the Way, the Buddha Maitreya.

What makes Krishnamurti distinct from other would-be Maitreyas, of which there has been no shortage in the history of Buddhism, is that he did not continue to teach Buddhism, but instead taught what might arguably be called dharma, writ large.<sup>34</sup> However, Krishnamurti felt that certain essential elements in the Tathāgata's message were distorted, misinterpreted, or misappropriated over time. This is consistent with a Buddhist notion that the dharma will degenerate over time. The well known Maitreya candidates, who arose in the centuries after Śākyamuni's departure, were often great monks or bodhisattvings who attempted to revive the dharma, but from well within the Buddhist mold. In other words, they promoted Buddhism, lineages, the order, scriptures, and a fairly full corpus of the tradition of Buddhism. In Krishnamurti, however, we see a figure who attempted to revive dharma, but not Buddhism. One wonders if there were other such figures through the history of Buddhism, whose life and teachings were on the margins, and thus marginalized by the Buddhist tradition (because they were not Buddhists), or are even currently on the margins and marginalized by scholars of religion studying Buddhism.

Or is Krishnamurti unique, both in his realization and his teaching and its effects on Buddhism? Although there are innate problems in trying to ascertain the validity and nature of someone's realization, there is a downside to considering Krishnamurti's realization unique, because he can also thus be effectively marginalized. For instance, some notable voices, such as P. D. Ouspensky (the disciple of the Russian mystic George Gurdjieff) and Father Bede Griffiths (the Christian monk who was drawn to Advaita Vedānta), held that Krishnamurti's realization was a unique and singular event. In other words, they imply that Krishnamurti had something unique happen to him and thus his urgent call for people to undergo such a profound (but virtually impossible) transformation, without offering them any method or institutional support for its attainment, is unreasonable and self-serving.<sup>35</sup> However, Krishnamurti's teachings do not appear to be self-

promotional. Nor do they highlight his personal realization as something unique. His message is pointedly about the active exploration of the very real possibility of one's own transformation through insight, apart from the constraints of following any previously trammled religious path. Krishnamurti equated this insight with that attained by the Buddha, and which thus is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists.

If one tries to apply some traditional Buddhist categories to Krishnamurti, his message is definitely not a call to follow the *śravakayāna*, the "way of the listeners." Nor is it a call to the *bodhisattvayāna*, because his teachings dismiss all notions of the progressive development or levels of attainment that we often associate with that approach. It is a call to all persons to awaken, through insight, to a state akin to supreme buddhahood without following the Buddha, Buddhism, or even Krishnamurti. In some ways it resembles a call to the *pratyekabuddhayāna*, the "way of the solitary buddha."

For religious studies scholars engaged in anthropological studies of "seekers" of the "enlightenment" experience, Krishnamurti's teachings offer an interesting case. There are many persons worldwide who have been influenced by his teachings. These persons are keenly interested in the "nirvanic" transformation to which he points, but do not claim allegiance to any teacher or organization, not even to Krishnamurti. Are they closet Buddhists? Probably not, because technically one must take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the *saṃgha* to be a Buddhist, none of which they would agree to constitute part of their approach. And yet, in fundamental ways they are seekers of a similar goal, nirvana. And they have definitely been shaping, although indirectly, the nature of Buddhist discourse along the way. One wonders if there were other such movements of "shadow Buddhists" in the course of Buddhist history.

This essay thus concludes with a series of questions. Have there been, in the history of Buddhism, figures who presented teachings with uncanny similarities to Buddhism, but whose teachings have not been classified as Buddhist?<sup>36</sup> Various Zen Buddhist masters come to mind, because their teachings are centered on the enlightenment experience. However, their affiliations to particular transmissions, lineages, techniques, and so on, grant them a clear place within the Buddhist tradition. But have there been peripheral Buddhisms, shadow Buddhisms, shadow dharmas, parallel dharmas, and so on, in the course of its history, and what do we know about these "liminal dharmas"? We know

that philosophical differences, or issues of discipline, did lead to breaks within the *saṃgha*, but did differences ever lead certain groups completely out of the Buddhist fold? What do we know about such groups and their ideas?<sup>37</sup>

The modern situation offers some intriguing examples of teachers who might fit this bill, although their messages and orientations need to be examined closely and are fraught with controversy. Bracketing assertions about the validity of the actual attainments of any of these teachers, or even the validity of their teachings, it is nevertheless worthwhile to speculate on the *buddhavacana* propensities within their teachings. We have noted the case of Toni Packer, whose teachings are virtually completely aligned with Zen Buddhism, but with the Krishnamurti-like abrogation of authority and system.<sup>38</sup> Another such teacher is Charlotte Joko Beck, although she is arguably more conventionally within the Zen Buddhist tradition. Some, however, would disagree, considering her teachings to be Zen divorced from Buddhism, which the critics hold is “nothing.” Another candidate is Vimala Thakar, an Indian teacher originally influenced by Krishnamurti. However, her current status is clearly as an authoritative “guru” who prescribes traditional yogic *sādhana*. And there seem to be similar resonances in the teachings of U. G. Krishnamurti (no relationship to J. Krishnamurti). If the modern period has been producing so many parallel purveyors of potential *buddhavacana*, might there not have been many others through the course of Buddhist history? Or is this a uniquely modern phenomenon? But if not, how well studied are these pseudo or liminal Buddhisms through the course of the last two and a half millennia? What might they tell us about processes of dissent within a religious tradition, of disengagement from a tradition, of possible reappropriations by a tradition, and other attendant processes? Ruminating on these questions is, of course, simply inquiring into the story of Mahayana Buddhism, but particularly at its configurations at the margins. This paper is also a form of wondering aloud, through the agency of Krishnamurti, about where we as scholars should cast the perimeter around our subject matter, about what is properly Buddhism, and what constitutes dharma, and what should or should not be regarded as *buddhavacana*.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

1. This paper derives from more than a passing interest in the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, the Indian-born religious teacher. I have published work based on a close analysis of his ideas on religion, religious mind, and insight. And I am also engaged in an anthropologically oriented study of seekers of the sort of pivotal psychological transformation promoted by him and other religious teachers. See, for example, Hillary Rodrigues, *Insight and Religious Mind* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990) and "Movement in Emptiness: Assessing Jiddu Krishnamurti's Life and His Teachings on Religion," in *Religious Studies and Theology* 15, nos. 2-3 (1996): 45-60.
2. Biographical material may be found in Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (London: John Murray, 1975); and Pupul Jayakar, *Krishnamurti: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986). A comprehensive timeline of his life with Web links is found at <http://www.robotwisdom.com/jorn/krishnamurti.html>.
3. On Theosophy, see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
4. Information supplied by the Krishnamurti Foundation of America (KFA), Ojai, California.
5. See Renée Weber, *Dialogues with Sages and Scientists: The Search for Unity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).
6. See Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *The Lives of Alcyone*, 2 vols. (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1924).
7. Lutyens, *Krishnamurti*, 254-271.
8. Lady Emily's account of her relationship with Krishnamurti is found in her book *Candles in the Sun* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957).
9. Lutyens, *Krishnamurti*, 156.
10. *Ibid.*, 159-160.
11. *Ibid.*, 250.
12. *Ibid.*, 261.
13. According to a letter (dated Dec. 20, 1993) soliciting funds for the KFA Archives, its holdings include "5000 pages of letters and handwritten manuscripts, an estimated 120,000 pages of typed manuscripts, roughly 7000 photographs, 2500 audio programs, 550 video tapes and 20 films."
14. Krishnamurti's influence on Nehru has been mostly undocumented. See Francis Watson, *The Trial of Mr. Gandhi* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1969), 190.



15. See J. Krishnamurti and David Bohm, *The Ending of Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); and *The Future of Humanity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).
16. Reconstructed Skt. title, *Śraddhotpada-sāstra*, Jpn. *Daijokishinron*.
17. See Yoshito S. Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Aśvaghosha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). Properly titled the *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun*, it is part of the *Taishō* edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka.
18. An intriguing speculation is that Krishnamurti was himself familiar with this book and its teaching. Aldous Huxley, a close friend of Krishnamurti, wrote the foreword to Timothy Richard's 1910 translation of *The Awakening of Faith* (*The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine: The New Buddhism* [Shanghai: Christian Literature Society / Methodist Publishing House]).
19. BuddhaNet, an influential Web site on Buddhism, includes an article in its online magazine discussing connections between Krishnamurti and Buddhism. See "The Krishnamurti Connection and Buddhism," <http://www.buddhanet.net/khrisna.htm>.
20. P. M. Rao, "Escapism and Escape," *MahaBodhi Journal* (June 1963): 117–122.
21. For example, Roch Bouchard, "Krishnamurti Zen," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 54 (October–December 1984): 91–100; and Robert Powell, "Zen and Liberation according to Krishnamurti," in *The Mind of J. Krishnamurti*, ed. Luis S. R. Vas (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1971).
22. Based on personal conversations held in 1999.
23. See Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism I," *Religion* 11, no. 4 (1981): 303–319.
24. *Taishō* 1415, vol. 22, 336, a21–23. MacQueen's translation, "Inspired Speech," 309.
25. *Aṅguttara-nikāya* IV, 143; translated by Edward M. Hare, *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, vol. 4 (London: Luzac, 1935), 96–97.
26. MacQueen, "Inspired Speech," 315.
27. Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Dharbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961), 12.
28. Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 32.
29. See Williams, *Mahāyāna*, 30.
30. Charles Willemsen, "Early Forms of Nembutsu" (lecture, Honpa Buddhist Church of Lethbridge, March 27, 2004).
31. P. M. Harrison, "Buddhānusr̥ti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1978): 35–57; 49.

32. Lutyens, *Krishnamurti*, 250.

33. See J. Krishnamurti and Dr. Walpola Rahula, *Discussion on Truth* (England, audiotape discussion, 1979), and *Discussion on Death* (England, audiotape discussion, 1979). An excerpt from another discussion is found on <http://www.jiddukrishnamurti.info/kandbuddha.htm>.

34. Zürcher mentions nine messianic movements between the fifth and early sixth century in China alone inspired by the notion of Maitreya, in which the movements' leaders sometimes claimed to be incarnations of Maitreya. See E. Zürcher, "Beyond the Jade Gate': Buddhism in China, Vietnam and Korea," in *The World of Buddhism*, ed. H. Bechert and R. Gombrich (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 202.

35. See Weber, *Dialogues with Sages*, 167; and Lutyens, *Krishnamurti*, 153.

36. Śaṅkara's Vedānta jumps to mind, of course, because his notion of Nirguṇa Brahman has resonance with some Vijñānavāda ideas. Like the Buddha, he is credited with the formation of a monastic organization for Hindu renunciators. But Śaṅkara was an *āstika* philosopher, reading and interpreting the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmā-sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. So Śaṅkara is not an example of this type because he may easily be categorized as "non-Buddhist."

37. An interesting series of essays on transformations and developments in contemporary Buddhism at the margins (but within the accepted boundaries of what is conventionally called Buddhism) is found in Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish, eds., *Buddhism in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

38. See <http://www.worldtrans.org/CyberSangha/zenw95.htm> for a vitriolic attack on her by Zenshin Roshi of the Zen Institute of San Diego.

39. A simple Web search through Google produced a number of intriguing articles connecting Krishnamurti and Buddhism. See, for instance, <http://www.buddhanet.net/khrisna.htm>, [http://www.buddhanet.net/bvk\\_study/bvk001a.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/bvk_study/bvk001a.htm), <http://www.gnosis-usa.com/Lectures/krishnamurti.html>, [http://www.uni-giessen.de/~gk1415/preface\\_to\\_the\\_buddha\\_krsihnamurti\\_study.pdf](http://www.uni-giessen.de/~gk1415/preface_to_the_buddha_krsihnamurti_study.pdf), <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/enc/stories/s746134.htm>, <http://www.teosofia.com/book8.html>, and <http://www.teosofia.com/book9.html>.