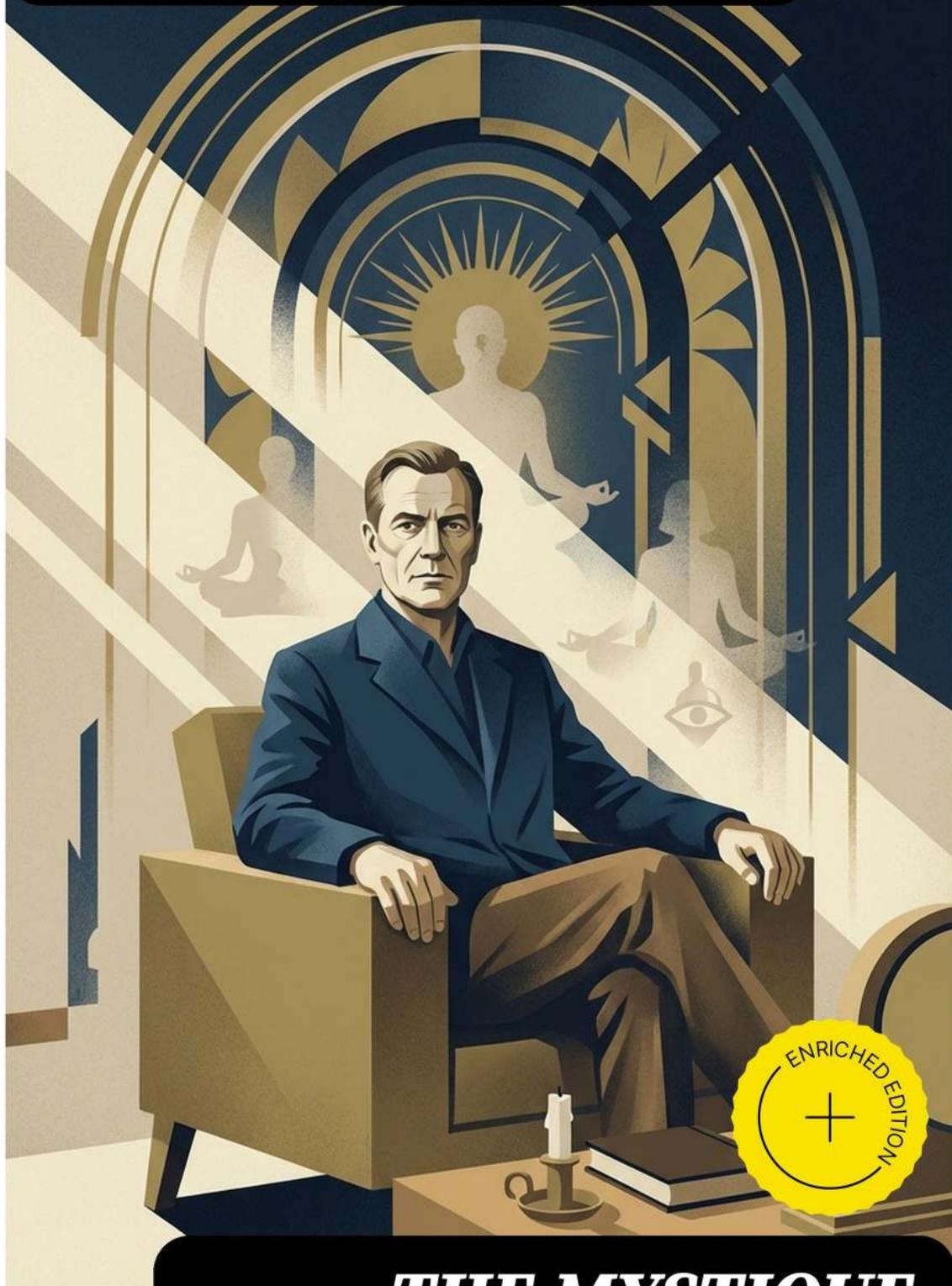


U. G. KRISHNAMURTI



**THE MYSTIQUE
OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

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THE MYSTICAL

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OF ENLIGHTENMENT***

U. G. Krishnamurti

The Mystique of Enlightenment

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Kendall Pierce

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Introduction

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The *Mystique of Enlightenment* by U. G. Krishnamurti stakes everything on a stark wager: that enlightenment, the lodestar of spiritual aspiration and cultural mythology, is not a prize to be sought or a state to be achieved, but a mirage generated by language, tradition, and the seeker's own craving, so that the more one pursues it the more one is captured by mechanisms that perpetuate dissatisfaction, authority, and self-deception, and the only honest encounter with freedom may begin when the search itself—along with its consolations, methods, and promises—collapses without replacement, at which point what remains is not a perfected ideal but an actuality that refuses validation, instruction, or spectacle.

As spiritual-philosophical nonfiction assembled from conversations, *The Mystique of Enlightenment* presents U. G. Krishnamurti in dialogue rather than expounding a system. Composed from exchanges in informal settings, it belongs to the late twentieth-century moment when interest in Eastern wisdom, skepticism toward institutions, and experimental publishing converged. The book's setting is spare: a room, a question, a voice cutting across expectations. The absence of doctrinal scaffolding situates it closer to an oral record than a manual. Readers encounter an Indian-born iconoclast whose reputation as an anti-guru frames the text, yet the work resists movement labels, preferring the immediacy of unscripted challenge.

Rather than leading the reader through stages, the book subjects assumptions to relentless cross-examination, often looping back to bare slogans, hopes, and metaphysical comfort down to their operative motives. The voice is

brusque, unsentimental, and spare; the style moves between terse answers, sudden monologues, and a rhythm that repeats to reveal how thought entrenches itself. Without stories engineered for uplift, the tone stays austere and subversive, yet unexpectedly conversational. The experience is disorienting in a clarifying way: one hears a mind refusing to trade in reassurances, pushing readers to notice not what to practice next, but how seeking manufactures authority.

The book's central themes unfold as a critique of spiritual authority, a dismantling of the ideal of enlightenment as an attainable endpoint, and a close look at how language organizes experience while quietly dictating what seems achievable. It pursues the ways conditioning sediments in habits of explanation, moral aspiration, and self-improvement, then asks whether the body's sensitivities operate outside those narratives. It suggests that time-bound effort may reinforce the very continuity it promises to liberate. Rather than offering countermystique, it clears away theatricality, examining the hunger for certainty and the market for teachers that hunger sustains, leaving questions starkly uncluttered.

Yet the book is not a blanket rejection of curiosity or thought; it is a pressure test for secondhand answers. By refusing practices, it forces attention onto the mechanics of wanting transformation—how the image of a future self shadows present perception. The argument engages ethics obliquely, implying that genuinely responsive living cannot be engineered by ideals without becoming another performance. It also interrogates the authority of experience as a proof, noticing how the mind turns events into confirmation. The result is a philosophy delivered in street clothes: plain speech that places responsibility for clarity not in methods, but in seeing motives.

For contemporary readers navigating wellness industries, optimization cultures, and the algorithmic amplification of

charismatic certainty, the book matters as a solvent. Its critique exposes how the promise of ultimate fulfillment can be packaged, measured, and sold, while leaving the underlying restlessness intact. It offers value to skeptics of spiritual branding and to practitioners seeking a corrective against dependency on experts. In an era of self-curation and relentless advice, its refusal to prescribe becomes a form of intellectual hygiene, reminding us that critical inquiry is not cynicism, and that relief from compulsive seeking may begin where improvement loses its glamour.

Approached as an invitation rather than a doctrine, *The Mystique of Enlightenment* rewards patient, open reading. Its provocations are not puzzles to be decoded into a new method; they are deliberate blockages against the reflex to turn insight into a program. Without revealing outcomes, it can be said that the book delivers clarity about the machinery of spiritual ambition and the social contracts that sustain it. What remains for the reader is a cleaner field of attention, skeptical of borrowed promises and alert to the uses of language. In that stripped clarity lies the book's enduring relevance and unsettling grace.

Synopsis

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The *Mystique of Enlightenment* by U. G. Krishnamurti presents a stark, contrarian inquiry into the spiritual enterprise through a series of conversations and statements. Eschewing the role of teacher, Krishnamurti refuses to offer doctrines, systems, or practices, and positions himself outside the familiar guru-disciple framework. The work unfolds in a dialogic cadence, with persistent questioners meeting terse, uncompromising replies. From the outset, he dismantles expectations of progress, realization, or inner transformation, insisting that the very demand for change may be the source of disturbance. This opening movement establishes the book's tone: rigorous, disenchanted, and focused on exposing the assumptions that sustain spiritual ambition.

Central to the book is a relentless critique of the idea of enlightenment itself. Krishnamurti treats enlightenment not as a goal to be approached but as a cultural construct that fuels hope, effort, and dependency. He challenges the authority of tradition, scripture, and exemplary lives, arguing that their narratives are shaped by memory, imitation, and social conditioning. The dialogues repeatedly return to language, noting how terms like consciousness and freedom create problems they cannot resolve. Rather than proposing an alternative vocabulary, he favors stripping away metaphysical promises, contending that the search magnifies conflict and that idealized ends keep psychological struggle in motion.

A recurrent biographical thread concerns what he calls a dramatic, nonvolitional shift that left him outside conventional seeking. He describes its features only to deny

their exemplary value, asserting that making a model of his experience reactivates the very quest he criticizes. The work portrays this episode as a fact for him rather than as a prescription for others, and the conversations probe its implications without turning it into a doctrine. Krishnamurti maintains that he cannot transmit anything, that there is no method to reproduce what occurred, and that explanations inevitably turn mystery into another pursuit.

The book's middle sections confront the broad spectrum of spiritual techniques, from meditation routines to ascetic disciplines. Krishnamurti argues that such practices refine the self's strategies rather than end them, reinforcing comparison, achievement, and continuity. Interlocutors press for practical guidance, but his responses frequently dismantle the premise of guidance itself, suggesting that any technique presupposes a controller who seeks security in repetition. This perspective extends to institutional religion and charismatic figures, whom he regards as perpetuating hope and dependence. The cumulative effect is iconoclastic, yet the exchanges resist bitterness, aiming instead to expose the subtle incentives that keep effort alive.

Another persistent concern is the relation between thought and the body. Krishnamurti treats thought as an instrument built from memory that excels at practical tasks but generates conflict when it ventures into psychological control. He points to the body's own regulatory intelligence, suggesting that sensations and emotions are physiological events not needing metaphysical embellishment. Discussions of love, compassion, and morality receive this same scrutiny: when turned into ideals, he argues, they breed imitation and guilt. The book does not deny ordinary functioning; it questions the movement to improve the self through images, claiming that imagery creates division and chronic dissatisfaction.

In considering everyday life, the conversations address family ties, work pressures, and social responsibilities without proposing a counterculture. Krishnamurti resists offering techniques for better living, contending that the demand for outcomes sets internal measurement in motion. He emphasizes the immediacy of perception unmediated by ideals, while acknowledging that descriptions cannot produce such immediacy. Readers encounter a stance that neither withdraws from society nor endorses reformist agendas; it simply declines the premise that psychological time can be managed into freedom. The result is a portrait of living that is ordinary, unspectacular, and free of metaphysical narrative, though stripped of familiar consolations.

As a document, *The Mystique of Enlightenment* endures for its unsparing examination of spiritual motives and its refusal to promise fulfillment. It functions less as a guidebook than as an X-ray of the quest itself, challenging readers to inspect the motives behind their questions and the authority they assign to teachers and traditions. Without resolving the enduring riddles of consciousness or offering a definitive account of freedom, the book's impact lies in the clarity of its negations. It remains significant as a provocation to think freshly about aspiration, dependency, and authenticity, while leaving conclusions open to the reader's own scrutiny.

Historical Context

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Uppaluri Gopala Krishnamurti (1918-2007) came of age in late colonial India, where transnational spiritual currents intersected with anticolonial politics. Madras (now Chennai) was a hub, hosting the Theosophical Society's international headquarters at Adyar since 1882. There, debates over mysticism, reason, and modernity flourished. Jiddu Krishnamurti, once advanced as a "World Teacher" by the Order of the Star, famously dissolved that organization in 1929, repudiating institutional authority. Against this backdrop, *The Mystique of Enlightenment* later emerged as a set of iconoclastic conversations, rooted in environments where large claims about spiritual realization were continually made—and just as often challenged—by influential figures and institutions.

After independence in 1947, India's leaders promoted a secular, rational public culture while sustaining space for religious pluralism. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru advocated a "scientific temper," later reflected in the Fundamental Duties introduced by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976). Meanwhile, public intellectuals such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a philosopher who served as India's President (1962-1967), popularized Advaita Vedanta in global academic circles. This juxtaposition—state-endorsed rationalism alongside renewed interest in classical metaphysics—set a stage in which claims to transcendence remained prominent. *The Mystique of Enlightenment* situates itself amid these tensions, voicing suspicion toward systems that promise transformation within either devotional or secular frameworks.

Jiddu Krishnamurti's post-1929 independence from organizations influenced the intellectual climate of seekers in India and abroad. By the 1960s, his annual talks in Saanen, Switzerland (held from 1961 to 1985), drew international audiences exploring inward freedom outside traditional religious structures. U. G. Krishnamurti moved among these European and Indian circuits, encountering a milieu that mixed rigorous questioning with enduring metaphysical aspirations. *The Mystique of Enlightenment* reflects that environment: it privileges unscripted conversation over doctrine and interrogates the very premise of "enlightenment" as a definable goal, responding to the era's demand for authenticity while resisting new forms of authority that often replaced older ones.

The 1960s and 1970s saw Western counterculture turn decisively toward Asia for insight. High-profile episodes—such as the Beatles' 1968 visit to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh—popularized meditation and spiritual experimentation. Movements like Transcendental Meditation expanded globally; yoga entered mainstream wellness; and publishing houses and lecture circuits amplified guru figures. In India, organizations around teachers such as Rajneesh (Osho) developed large institutional footprints. This surge created a marketplace of methods, promises, and charismatic leadership. *The Mystique of Enlightenment* arrives squarely within that boom, scrutinizing the assumptions—psychological, commercial, and cultural—on which the period's "seek and you shall find" ethos largely rested.

U. G. Krishnamurti described a decisive personal event in 1967, which he called the "calamity," while in Europe; it became a contextual marker for his later dialogues. Rather than forming an organization, he engaged small groups across Switzerland and India, including major cities like Bombay (Mumbai) and Bangalore (Bengaluru). *The Mystique of Enlightenment*, first circulated in the early 1980s,

compiled such conversations and made them accessible beyond immediate listeners. Its publishing trajectory mirrored many alternative spiritual texts of the period: limited printings, word-of-mouth distribution, and steady reprints, reaching readers who had grown wary of grand narratives yet remained drawn to unvarnished, firsthand accounts.

The media technologies of the time shaped how unorthodox ideas traveled. Cassette tapes, cheaply duplicated from the 1970s onward, enabled informal circulation of talks and interviews across India, Europe, and North America. Small presses and independent booksellers nurtured niche readerships alongside mainstream publishers catering to the spiritual self-help boom. *The Mystique of Enlightenment* belongs to this cassette-and-staplebound ecosystem, privileging dialogue over treatise and resisting programmatic presentation. Its plain-spoken exchanges positioned it apart from systematic manuals, aligning with contemporaneous audiences who favored recorded conversations, transcripts, and Q&A formats as more faithful to the immediacy of a speaker's stance.

Concurrently, psychology and biomedicine were testing spiritual claims. Studies on meditation and stress reduction gained visibility in the 1970s, exemplified by Herbert Benson's *Relaxation Response* (1975) and early research on Transcendental Meditation. The human potential movement blended therapy, encounter groups, and altered states, seeking measurable change. *The Mystique of Enlightenment* enters that evidence-seeking climate by contesting the premise that techniques reliably deliver liberation or that "enlightenment" can be standardized, quantified, or taught. Its skepticism addresses both religious orthodoxy and therapeutic optimism, questioning whether institutional knowledge—sacred or scientific—can capture the phenomena it purports to master.

Political events deepened distrust of authority in India and the West. India's Emergency (1975-1977) centralized power and curtailed civil liberties, leaving durable public skepticism toward institutions. In the United States, Watergate (1972-1974) eroded confidence in official narratives. Such episodes formed a global backdrop for challenges to hierarchy, expertise, and ideology. The *Mystique of Enlightenment* resonates with that post-1970s mood: it dismantles the aura around sanctified teachers and marketable paths, refusing consolations offered by organized religion or psychological technique. As a document of its time, it both reflects and sharpens late twentieth-century scrutiny of the "enlightenment industry."

The Mystique of Enlightenment

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Part One

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U.G.

(Compiled from conversations in India and Switzerland, 1973 to 1976)

People call me an 'enlightened man' — I detest that term — they can't find any other word to describe the way I am functioning. At the same time, I point out that there is no such thing as enlightenment at all. I say that because all my life I've searched and wanted to be an enlightened man, and I discovered that there is no such thing as enlightenment at all, and so the question whether a particular person is enlightened or not doesn't arise. I don't give a hoot for a sixth-century-BC Buddha[1], let alone all the other claimants we have in our midst. They are a bunch of exploiters, thriving on the gullibility of the people. There is no power outside of man[1q]. Man has created God out of fear[2q]. So the problem is fear and not God.

I discovered for myself and by myself that there is no self to realize — that's the realization I am talking about. It comes as a shattering blow. It hits you like a

thunderbolt[3q]. You have invested everything in one basket, self-realization, and, in the end, suddenly you discover that there is no self to discover, no self to realize — and you say to yourself "What the hell have I been doing all my life?!" That blasts you.

All kinds of things happened to me — I went through that, you see. The physical pain was unbearable — that is why I say you really don't want this. I wish I could give you a glimpse of it, a touch of it — then you wouldn't want to touch this at all. What you are pursuing doesn't exist; it is a myth[4q]. You wouldn't want anything to do with this.

UG: You see, I maintain that — I don't know, whatever you call this; I don't like to use the words 'enlightenment,' 'freedom,' '*moksha*' or 'liberation'; all these words are loaded words, they have a connotation of their own — this cannot be brought about through any effort of yours; it just happens[5q]. And why it happens to one individual and not another, I don't know.

Questioner: So, it happened to you?

UG: It happened to me.

Q: When, Sir?

UG: In my forty-ninth year.

But whatever you do in the direction of whatever you are after — the pursuit or search for truth or reality — takes you away from your own very natural state, in which you *always* are. It's not something you can acquire, attain or accomplish as a result of your effort — that is why I use the word 'acausal'. It has no cause, but somehow the search come to an end.

Q: You think, Sir, that it is not the result of the search? I ask because I have heard that you studied philosophy, that you were associated with religious people ...

UG: You see, the search takes you away from yourself — it is in the opposite direction — it has absolutely no relation.

Q: In spite of it, it has happened, not because of it?

UG: *In spite* of it — yes, that's the word. All that you do makes it impossible for what already is there to express itself. That is why I call this 'your natural state'. You're always in that state. What prevents what is there from expressing itself in its own way is the search. The search is *always* in the wrong direction, so *all* that you consider very profound, *all* that you consider sacred, is a contamination in that consciousness. You may not (Laughs) like the word 'contamination', but all that you consider *sacred, holy* and *profound* is a contamination.

So, there's nothing that you can do. It's not in your hands. I don't like to use the word 'grace', because if you use the word 'grace', the grace of whom? You are not a specially chosen individual; you deserve this, I don't know why.

If it were possible for me, I would be able to help *somebody*. This is something which I *can't give*, because you *have* it.

Why should I give it to you? It is ridiculous to ask for a thing which you already have.

Q: But I don't feel it, and you do.

UG: *No*, it is not a question of feeling it, it is not a question of knowing it; you will never *know*. You have no way of knowing that at all for yourself; it begins to express itself. There is no conscious.... You see, I don't know how to put it. Never does the thought that I am different from anybody come into my consciousness.

Q: Has it been so from the beginning, ever since you became conscious of yourself?

UG: No, I can't say that. I was after something — like anybody else brought up in the religious atmosphere — searching for something, pursuing something. So, to answer that question is not easy, because I'll have to go into the whole background. Maybe it comes, I don't know. (Laughs)

Q: Just out of curiosity, like Nachiketa, I am very interested in knowing how these things have happened to you personally, to the extent you are aware of.

UG: You see, that's a long story; it's not so simple.

Q: We would like to hear it.

UG: No, you see, I will have to tell you about my whole life — it will take me a long time. My life story goes up to a point, and then it stops — there is no more biography after that.

The two biographers who are interested in writing my biography have two different approaches. One says that what I did — the *sadhana* (spiritual exercises), education, the whole background — put me there. I say it was in spite of all that. (Laughter) The other biographer isn't much interested in my statement 'in spite of', because there isn't much material for him to write a big volume. (Laughter) They are more interest in that. The publishers too are interested in that kind of thing. That is very natural because you are operating in a field where the cause and effect relationship always operates — that is why you are interested in finding out the cause, how this kind of a thing happened. So, we are back where we started, square number one: we are still concerned with 'how'.

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

Q: I don't seek a model to give to the rest of the world — I'm not asking from that angle. We see a star, we see the sun, we see the moon — it is like that; not that I would like to imitate you. It may be relevant, who knows? That is why I said I am Nachiketa here: I don't want to leave without knowing the truth from you.

UG: You need a Yama Dharmaraja to answer your questions.

Q: If you don't mind, you be Yama Dharmaraja.

UG: I don't mind. Help me. You see, I'm helpless, I don't know where to begin. Where to end, I know. (Laughter) I

think I will have to tell the whole story of my life.

Q: We don't mind listening.

UG: It doesn't come.

Q: You need to be inspired.

UG: I am not inspired, and I am the last person to inspire anybody. I will have to tell you, to satisfy your curiosity, the other side, the shoddy side of my life.

(He was born 9 July 1918 in South India into an upper-middle-class Brahmin family. The family name being Uppaluri, he was given the name Uppaluri Gopala Krishnamurti. His mother died soon after his birth, and he was brought up by his maternal grandparents in the small town of Gudivada near Masulipatam.)

I was brought up in a very religious atmosphere. My grandfather was a very cultured man. He knew Blavatsky (the founder of the Theosophical Society[9]) and Olcott, and then, later on, the second and third generation of Theosophists. They all visited our house. He was a great lawyer, a very rich man, a very cultured man and, very strangely, a very orthodox man. He was a sort of mixed-up kid: orthodoxy, tradition on one side, and then the opposite, Theosophy and the whole thing, on the other side. He failed to establish a balance. That was the beginning of my problem.

(UG was often told that his mother had said, just before she died, that he "was born to a destiny immeasurably high." His grandfather took this very seriously and gave up his law practice to devote himself to UG's upbringing and education. His grandparents and their friends were

convinced that he was a *yoga bhrashta*[\[2\]](#), one who had come within inches of enlightenment in his past life.)

He had learned men on his pay-roll, and he dedicated himself, for some reason — I don't want to go into the whole business — to create a profound atmosphere for me and to educate me in the right way, inspired by the Theosophists and the whole lot. And so, every morning those fellows would come and read the Upanishads, *Panchadasi*[\[3\]](#), *Nyshkarmya Siddhi*[\[4\]](#), the commentaries, the commentaries on commentaries, the whole lot, from four o'clock to six o'clock, and this little boy of five, six or seven years — I don't know — had to listen to all that crap. So much so that by the time I reached my seventh year I could repeat most of those things, the passages from the Panchadasi, Nyshkarmya Siddhi and this, that and the other. So many holy men visited my house — the Ramakrishna Order and the others; you name it, and those fellows had somehow visited that house — that was an open house for every holy man. So, one thing I discovered when I was quite young was that they were all hypocrites: they said something, they believed something, and their lives were shallow, *nothing*. That was the beginning of my search.

My grandfather used to meditate. (He is dead, and I don't want to say anything bad about him.) He used to meditate for one or two hours in a separate meditation room. One day a little baby, one and a half or two years old, started crying for some reason. That chap came down and started beating the child, and the child almost turned blue — and this man, you see, meditating two hours every day. "Look! What is this he has done?" That posed a sort of (I don't want to use the psychological term, but there is no escape from it) a traumatic experience — "There must be something funny about the whole business of meditation. Their lives are