Jiddu Krishnamurti: The Life of a Freethinker

The Golden Thread · Part 3

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What happens when the person who is expected to bring the truth says that truth cannot be brought?

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was chosen as a boy to become a "World Teacher". A large organisation was built around him. In 1929, at the age of thirty-four, he dissolved it himself. For the next fifty-seven years he travelled and spoke, and he said the same thing in many forms: truth cannot be reached through a teacher, a method or an organisation. It can only be seen directly.

In The Golden Thread, a freethinker is someone who sees that a shared expectation is failing before others see it, and who gives a new picture of the whole. Krishnamurti is a special case. The expectation that failed was the expectation about himself.

All facts were checked against at least two sources. Where sources disagree, this is said.

The pattern

Krishnamurti's life follows one pattern:

1. An institution offers a path to truth.
2. He is placed at the centre of that path.
3. He sees that the path itself is the problem.
4. He leaves the path, and shows what remains: direct seeing.

He did this with the Theosophical Society in 1929. He did it again with his own audience for the rest of his life: he refused to become a guru, gave no method, and asked people not to follow him.

This is the same pattern described in *The History of Knowing*: direct knowing returns again and again from outside the institutions, and the institutions turn it into an office. Krishnamurti is the rare case of a person who was given the office and gave it back.

The start: a boy on the beach at Adyar (1895–1911)

Krishnamurti was born on 11 May 1895 in Madanapalle, in the south of India. Some sources give 12 May. In January 1909 his father moved with his sons to Adyar, near Madras, where the Theosophical Society had its world headquarters.

The Theosophical Society had been founded in New York on 17 November 1875 by Helena Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, William Quan Judge and others. Blavatsky died in 1891. By 1909 the Society was led by Annie Besant, who had become its president in 1907. Many members expected the coming of a "World Teacher", a new spiritual leader for humanity.

In April 1909 the Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater saw the boy on the beach at Adyar and declared that he would be the vehicle for the World Teacher. Besant took Krishnamurti and his younger brother Nityananda, called Nitya, under her care. In 1911 the Society founded the Order of the Star in the East, with Krishnamurti as its head, to prepare the world for his coming. In 1912 his father went to court to get his sons back, but Besant kept them in her care.

The boys were taken to England to be educated for their role.

Step 1: The split in the movement (1912–1913)

Not everyone in the Theosophical Society accepted the World Teacher. Rudolf Steiner, head of the German section since 1902, rejected the idea that Christ would return in a Hindu boy. His section refused to admit members of the Order of the Star. Annie Besant then withdrew the section's membership. Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society on 28 December 1912 and was formally expelled from the Theosophical Society on 7 March 1913.

Steiner had spent the years 1884 to 1897 editing Goethe's scientific writings. Through this split, the line of Goethe's science of form, carried by Steiner, separated from the line that led to Krishnamurti. The two lines meet again later in this series.

Step 2: The inner turn (1922–1925)

In July 1922 Krishnamurti and Nitya came to Ojai, in California, because the dry climate was thought good for Nitya's tuberculosis. On 17 August 1922 Krishnamurti began to have intense physical and spiritual experiences, which went on for a long time. He and the people around him called it "the process". One of these experiences took place under a pepper tree in Ojai.

On 13 November 1925 Nitya died in Ojai, aged twenty-seven. Less than four years later he dissolved the organisation built around him.

Step 3: "Truth is a pathless land" (1929)

On 3 August 1929, at the Star Camp in Ommen in the Netherlands, Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star, the organisation built for him. 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."

He explained that truth cannot be organised, and that no organisation can lead people to it. He did not want followers. He resigned from the Theosophical Society in 1930. One source gives 1931.

A movement had prepared for twenty years for his arrival. He told it that what it was waiting for did not need it.

Step 4: Seeing without a method (1930–1986)

For the rest of his life Krishnamurti travelled between India, Europe and the United States and gave public talks. He gave no method and no technique. He asked his listeners to observe their own thoughts and feelings directly, without judging and without choosing. He called this "choiceless awareness".

His central point was that thought itself creates the division between the one who thinks and what is thought. In *The First and Last Freedom* (1954) he wrote: "The thinker comes into being through thought." If the thinker is a product of thought, then thought cannot free us from the problems that thought creates. Freedom begins when this is seen.

In 1938 he met the writer Aldous Huxley, who became a close friend. Huxley encouraged him to write and wrote the foreword to *The First and Last Freedom*, published in 1954 by Harper in the United States and Gollancz in Britain.

He founded schools. Rishi Valley School in India was founded in 1928 (one source gives 1929). Brockwood Park School in England followed in 1969 (one source gives 1968). Foundations in India, the United States and England carried his work.

He died on 17 February 1986 in Ojai, aged 90. His ashes were divided between Ojai, India and England, so that no single place would become a shrine.

Step 5: The scientist who listened (1961–1986)

In 1961 the physicist David Bohm read *The First and Last Freedom*. Bohm attended nearly all of Krishnamurti's talks in Europe and California from then on. The two held dialogues for almost twenty years. In 1980 they held thirteen conversations in Ojai and at Brockwood Park, published in 1985 as *The Ending of Time*.

Through Bohm, Krishnamurti's direct seeing entered physics. Bohm's later idea of the "implicate order", in which the visible world unfolds from an undivided whole runs parallel to what Krishnamurti said about thought and fragmentation.

The question behind the pattern

Year	What was offered	What Krishnamurti saw	What remained
1909–1911	A role as World Teacher	(He was a boy and accepted)	—
1922–1925	Guidance by the Theosophical leaders	"The process" in Ojai; Nitya's death	His own experience
1929	An organisation built around him	Truth cannot be organised	"A pathless land"
1930–1986	Followers, a method, a guru	Every method is another path	Choiceless awareness
1961–1986	A dialogue with physics	Thought divides the whole	Bohm's wholeness

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The thread to the other stories

Not every link is a direct influence. The series uses two kinds:

- A **trace** is a documented link: a teacher, a letter, a book that was read.
- An **echo** is a shared idea without proof that one person learned it from the other.

Person	Link to Krishnamurti	Kind
Helena Blavatsky	Co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, the movement that chose him	Trace

Person	Link to Krishnamurti	Kind
Charles Leadbeater	Saw him at Adyar in 1909 and named him the vehicle of the World Teacher	Trace
Annie Besant	President of the Society; his guardian; founded the Order of the Star in 1911	Trace
Rudolf Steiner	Rejected the World Teacher; split from the Society in 1912–13	Trace (by rejection)
Goethe	Steiner edited Goethe's scientific writings; the line of form runs through Steiner	Echo, through Steiner
Aldous Huxley	Friend from 1938; foreword to *The First and Last Freedom*	Trace
David Bohm	Read him in 1961; dialogues for almost twenty years	Trace
Alfred North Whitehead	Through Bohm, who spoke at the Whitehead conference in Bellagio in 1974	Echo, through Bohm
Tony Smith	Through Bohm, whose quantum potential is part of Smith's model	Echo, through Bohm
Spinoza	Freedom through understanding, not through obedience	Echo

The series now has two lines that meet. One is the line of form: Goethe, D'Arcy Thompson, Turing and Rosen. The other is the line of direct knowing, described in *The History of Knowing*, which runs from the oldest traditions to Krishnamurti. Bohm stands where the two lines cross. Krishnamurti brought him the direct seeing; Whitehead's philosophy of organism and his own physics brought him the whole.

The expectations that failed

1. **That a World Teacher would lead humanity to truth.** The Theosophical movement expected it for twenty years. The chosen teacher himself said in 1929 that no teacher can do this.
2. **That truth can be reached through an organisation, a method or a path.** Krishnamurti dissolved the organisation built for him and never gave a method.
3. **That thought can solve the problems that thought creates.** He held that the thinker is made by thought, and that freedom starts when this is seen directly.

The golden thread in Krishnamurti's life is direct seeing: the claim that truth is not handed on through an office, a method or a person, but is seen by each person for himself. He was given the highest office of his movement and gave it back. That is what makes him a freethinker.

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