

SDSU Archives Oral History

Event: Friends of the Library Luncheon
Guest Speaker: Allan Anderson
Subject: Krishnamurti
Date: January 14, 1995

[The following is a transcription of Allan Anderson on Krishnamurti when he was guest speaker during a Friends of the Library Luncheon on January 14, 1995.] ~~This transcription is part of the SDSU Oral History project and has been made possible by the John and Jane Adams Minigrant.~~

Bob Wallace:

✓ Allan Sparks is going to introduce our speaker today. He is the Chair of the Religious Studies Department. We're very happy to have him introduce our speaker.

Allan Sparks:

Thank you very much. It's such a pleasure to see so many people I know from different contexts and different times throughout the history of this University. I've been here since 1974 and meet somebody I know almost every place I end up. As the representative for my Department and, in that context, I bring greetings from the faculty and from the students. There are 18 majors in Religious Studies. There are approximately 900 students each semester who take courses in Religious Studies and in the course of their work are all friendly with one of the teachers of Indian thought which is reflected in the writings of Krishnamurti, namely the non-dual perspective which baffles them the first time around and causes a few of them to become serious

about life as a result of that.

One of my colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies faculty, Howard Gilbert, is present today and I'm glad to see him. I acknowledge your presence, Howard.

For many years, San Diego State University has guarded its well-kept secret of the Religious Studies Department. The first time we gained any notoriety was the year after President Thomas Day arrived and a list of Departments that might be considered expendable was designed so that, should the University have to reduce its budget seriously, we would know which Departments could be jettisoned. Our Department was on that list. Following the meetings that we had with President Day and our students (as some of you know because you were present on that occasion) our president was deeply moved by the importance of Religious Studies as part of the curriculum of the Humanities in the University. So, two years ago we were stunned when we found we were on the list again. The good thing about this, of course, is that people who never knew we had a Department of Religious Studies found out that we did have one.

This reminds me of the event at Long Beach State in the late 1960's when campuses were turbulent with student unrest and demonstrations. There was an enormous demonstration in front of the president's office because students did not want to see the teaching of Sanskrit given up and they had marvelous demonstrations. Speeches were given, and threats were made (as was the case in those days), and then someone made the announcement that they'd never taught Sanskrit. Universities are

places where we try to learn something new every day.

It is a privilege and an honor to be a colleague of our guest speaker today. Dr. Allan W. Anderson has been an important resource ^{at} in this University ever since he came here in 1962 from his Doctoral studies at Columbia University. He has enriched the lives of countless students, numerous colleagues, and a much broader circle of the community as the result of his sustained and deliberate attention to life issues concerning what is known in these reflective circles as self transformation. It is not his only metier of scholarship and he has ranged broadly over the fields of Confucius studies, reflection on the Bhagavad Gita -- the great classics of the spiritual traditions in India and in China.

It was one of those happy congruences of time and place that last summer, Andreas Brown would give to this University an important collection of materials related to the great thinker of the 20th century, Krishnamurti. Because of the many ways in which Professor Allan Anderson has become known widely, his engagement in the thought of Krishnamurti is one of these jewels. Some of you may know, as many, many others know around the world, of the serious conversations video taped for the rest of us between Krishnamurti and Professor Anderson. Those conversations, if you have seen them, are themselves a treasure and a challenge. They objectify an important matter for all universities and places of learning that it is in the quality and the care with which we present our questions that our thought is guided and that our own lives are formed. Whenever a student asks me about the importance

of questions, I adduce as the evidence for the answer to that Professor Anderson's questions which formed those conversations with Krishnamurti in, I believe, 1975. If you have not had the opportunity to view some or all of those video tapes, I encourage you to do so. I think your appetite for that will be whetted by this opportunity that we have to spend, albeit a brief time, with Professor Anderson today. So in introducing him to you, I bear witness to the way in which he is regarded with love and esteem by his colleagues in the University and by our regret that his retirement has meant that we see him only on very special occasions like this. He needs to hear, as perhaps you might know, that we surmise that every time our paths cross it is a special occasion. It is my honor to present to you my colleague Professor Allan W. Anderson.

✓ Thank you very much, Allan. It is a great honor for me to be here at all. I have never met with the Friends of the Library before. I would have thought that every one was a friend of the library but to be invited into the inner sanctum is, of course, an extraordinary honor. I am very, very grateful for it. I wish to thank Bob Wallace, the president of the Friends, and especially I should like to thank Walter Makao who prevailed upon me to appear. And I'd like to thank Lyn Olsson for handing the material over and helping me arrive here step by step.

It's been nearly a decade since I opened my mouth in these halls of learning. I stand here and I look over those among us that I've seen before and some I've known for many years. I see

faces loved long since, although left a while, and on return I am deeply nourished by colleague concern and by your care. I have a case here, and I'd like to take out a few materials if you'll bear with me.

In speaking of friends, I'm reminded of that institution that we call the University. It is properly a place where friends go. If it were not for that fact we should never enjoy authentic dialogue. Dialogue does not take place between enemies. I am reminded of the verse from the Bhagavad Gita, the 72nd hymn of the 10th book of the Bhagavad Gita, which had this to say -- that the Goddess of Speech appears only among friends. The inference from that is far richer. It suggests, does it not, that where she is not present, only babbling can take place. So, to be among friends and await what I await with great enthusiasm is a period for questions and to stand with one another as those who share.

Unfortunately, education has become increasingly impersonal and, therefore, the Socratic method of engaging teacher and student becomes less and less remembered let alone practiced. I bring this forward simply because I think that it is quite critical for our time. Krishnamurti had a passion for what he called sharing. What he meant by sharing was that the relation between teacher and student ought never to degenerate into one in which the authority is over here and the one over there who needs to shape up to the authority must, under whatever duress, shape up. He abhorred that script and he said, "Both teacher and student begin at the same place and they never leave it." So, in our own discussion together today, I look forward to our sharing in the

genuine dialogue some of these issues, some of these enduring questions which were so very close to his heart.

A book will be coming out this year to celebrate the centenary -- he was born in 1895 -- and in this book there are a number of essays, persons who wrote [] on the strength of their personal relation to Krishnamurti. I was honored to be invited to submit one and I want to read two paragraphs from it because what I have written here in these paragraphs is a description of my own impression of Krishnamurti and it might, in that sense, bring us into a closer human relationship with the man himself.

I am referring here to the 18 dialogues that Krishnamurti and I had together in 1974 and the impression I received has never left me. From the moment we began our conversations I was struck by his quality of attention. There was nothing contrived about him nor was it based on a muscular effort of the will to attend. It might be likened on a different level to the dynamic of balance as when one rides a bicycle or drives a car or simply walks. Unless there is a disturbance either in the air or another impediment, normal walking is unselfconscious yet not unconscious. Beyond the strength and skill it entails knack. Knack is a gift. Since most of us walk there doesn't seem to be much of anything that's a gift about it. Yet without knack our walking would be unspontaneous, graceless, sheer mechanical and wooden, puppetlike. Krishnamurti's listening was natural. It had the simplicity and openness of a child with the alertness of a []. It combined the harmlessness of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent.

This way of being, taught me much about education and teaching. It brought home to me why so many different students are lost to higher education -- their chief complaint being that it all seems unreal, there being no relation shown between picking ones life and living it. I know no other way of meeting this objection unless you're inviting the student to look at his or her concrete emotions through a pure act of attention. Not as a positive effort but as a negative one. I quote Krishnamurti here: In attention there is no exclusion, no resistance, and no effort and, therefore, no frontier, no limit." Negative again, in that a pure act of attention does not open out upon a positive understanding. Rather, it discovers the astonishing sufficiency in just not misunderstanding. Suddenly the distance between the striver and the goal no longer obtains for no time elapses between the act of attention and the healing already taking place. Here, timeliness is exact. This negation is not undertaken in order to retain something better. Krishnamurti puts it precisely (and I'm quoting him again, now): "Negation is to deny or is false, not knowing what is true. It is to seek a false in the false and see the truth in the false. And it is the truth that denies the false. You see what is false and the very seeing of what is false is truth."

That statement has extraordinary implications and ramifications. It upsets our notions of how we come to truth. Our notions of how we come to truth precede from a very different posture. We precede from what we call knowledge to begin with. But a pure act of attention does not presuppose any knowledge.

In 1929 Krishnamurti undertook a remarkable and, for thousands and thousands of people, a rather world shaking event. He had been made head of the order of the Star in the East in 1911. On August 2, 1929, when he would have been about 34, he dissolved it. I should like to read just a little of what he had to say when he stood up and dissolved this order before 3,000 people. "We're going to discuss, this morning, the dissolution of the Order of the Star. Many people will be delighted and others will be rather sad. It's a question neither for rejoicing nor for sadness because it is inevitable as I am going to explain. You're going to hear the story of how the devil and a friend of his were walking down the street when they saw ahead of them a man stoop down and pick up something from the ground, look at it, and put it away in his pocket. The friend said to the devil, 'What did that man pick up?' 'He picked up a piece of truth,' said the devil. 'Well, that's very bad business for you,' his friend said. 'Oh, no. Not at all,' the devil replied. 'Not if I can let him organize it.'" And, then he goes on. "I maintain that truth is a pathless life and you can not approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point, too, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth being limitless, unconditional, unapproachable by any path whatsoever can not be organized. No more should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path. Truth can not be brought down. Rather the individual must make the effort to ascend to it."

Truth is a pathless life. It doesn't take much imagination

subversive?

to see how submersive that statement is. On the other hand, if one wished to discover its content, not just the form of its utterance but its radical content, one must absolutely embark upon self-inquiry.

On my way here I was thinking, "I wonder if someone should ask me today, 'Could you really say in one sentence what the gist of Krishnamurti's teaching would amount to?' and immediately the words of the Buddha came to my mind, that he pronounced on dying to his special disciples: "Be a light unto yourself." He didn't say, "Become a light unto yourself." He said, "Be a light unto yourself." -- the implication being that there is no historical trip to that light in oneself. As you might put it in present day language, "There are no field trips to reality for reality is neither an event nor an experience." Krishnamurti's teachings never veered from that perspective and in the title of the topic for today when I called him "prophet" I meant that in a classical sense not in the sense of a prognosticator but rather in the sense of a seer. To speak of self-awakening means to speak of awakening to that light within ones self that never had a beginning and opens out upon no end. Our culture has in Socrates moved farther and farther away from genuine self-inquiry. When Socrates said, shortly before his execution, "An unexamined life is not worth living" he had reference to self-inquiry. And self-inquiry proceeds by questions not by answers. To ask one's self the timely question is to put one's self at that time in check-mate which is not the most comfortable position for any chess player. But I am most serious when I say "to put one's self in

checkmate" by which I mean crisis for if it is not undergone as a crisis, one has not made it, one has not understood the question or has perhaps asked the wrong question. But to stand before that question, hold to it, unwaveringly, with no expectation of a reply, no fantasy of what one would like to hear, but simply abiding, then the activity of genuine self-inquiry begins. It touches on a region that I have called primal intuition. Not intuition as one of Jung's four functions which is not clearly differentiated from insight. We are not talking about insight. Insight has content. Primal intuition has no content. It simply tells one what not to do, not what to do. If one is sincere, serious, and emptying of fantasia, one's question will bring one to precisely that crisis. It is within that crisis that the light within one's self will return. But it will not return outside of my placing myself at risk. The greatest risk of all

(side two)

...we rely upon as an ultimate judgement. But there is a resource within that is clear and free from any contamination whatsoever. We still have available to us the life of original innocence. This is something that Krishnamurti brought forward again and again. I have just put it in my own language.

I came to this concern, for what I called final intuition, because after many, many years of concentrating on his teaching I felt that one needed to find some term that would, for our time, help us engage the deep trust of his concern. What is one waiting on at the point of that [] question that one directs to his own original nature? What is it to wait on it -- which is a very

different thing from waiting for something. To wait on is not to wait for. To wait for is contaminated with expectation. Waiting for is a matter of endurance which is always painful. Waiting on is a matter of patience and patience has no agenda. Practicing that waiting on opens one to what Krishnamurti was continually inviting us to undertake -- a most genuine self-inquiry.

My concern in bringing this matter forward is that genuine self-inquiry is very rare. It is not to be confused with introspection. It is not to be confused with meanderings among the denizens of the unconscious. It is concerned to wait on, to wait (as we also say in English) upon what we can neither foresee or expect and that that answer comes to us. A profound change occurs and we are no longer the same person.

Today we hear a great deal about process and, particularly, in new age terms, process is referred to again and again. Steps talk about something, somewhere awaiting us as a reward for our []. The created relation to the light within one's self is not a process. As you recall I said a little while ago that the light within us has no beginning and no end. The way of getting to it, then, is based on change or not at all. It is in no sense a matter of time. Process is always a matter of time. Process has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But what's self-inquiry? There is a practical equivalent to self-inquiry and that is timeliness which is not a matter of timelessness or time. It is a gathering in between timelessness and time. In that gathering between, action that is timely occurs through no contrivance whatsoever of ones own. And the amazing thing about timely action is that it is

not only exact but it is inevitable. And if one could live ones life inevitably what occasion would there be for anxious worry?

I just touched upon several themes, each one of which is worth a life time of inquiry. The question of one's radical change such that one is no longer [after] changing the same person for indeed as the beautiful biblical phrase has it: "The former things are passed away." Someone might ask, "Oh, dear. What can a changed one person do to affect the course of the world?" Krishnamurti's answer to that question is simple and clear. "Change has seen matter."

Question from the floor: Allan, I have one question. I was very impressed but my mental faculties got myself lost quite often. What appeared to me is that you hear people being "born again" today and I was wondering if this is a result of conversing with your inner light or the light within. Somehow, in that conversation, would it appear that there was a new beginning for them?

Allan Anderson (AA): The question itself is on a very visible matter and, unless I'm mistaken, the phenomenon called "born again" is usually associated with an organization -- a group. Therefore my first response to that would be on the positive side without prejudice to whatever was claimed. I should have to wait and see. But within the context out of which that claim arises I don't see any relation between that and what I was saying.

Floor: I think that "born again" was just a Greek [] but in translation it has changed. Perhaps there is a relationship with

[] change and reborn or born again.

AA: Yes, but if you look at the Greek word it means "change of mind." It doesn't mean change of opinion. Radical change of mind requires an emptying of the contents of ones consciousness. That entails not, first of all, a rebirth but a psychological death. And, that psychological death is, of course, the ultimate threat because it is with what we have died to that we measure ourselves as existing. That's why we bolt from it. So, a change of mind as [] is the deepest change. The mind is not to be confused with its content. The mind is essentially empty. It expresses itself content-wise through force and worry. But unless that psychological death is undergone, the fundamental emptiness and purity of the mind is never discovered. One never awakens to what it is to live with choice []. In relation to the first question, it would be better to precede the issue of rebirth with a once and for all death, and wait and see.

Floor: In your last statement about what can we do to change the world, you said that we should change ourselves. I believe that was what you said?

AA: That was the indication of it, yes.

Floor: I also have another question which is not too profound. I have often wondered if Krishnamurti said that the answer is not in relationships, not in knowledge, not in poverty -- did he himself ever have a relationship with a woman or man. I've often wondered this. It's not a profound question but I'd like to have an answer if you have the answer for it. If what can we do to change the world is change ourselves, he also said that we are

the world -- or maybe Robert [Hall] said that. Can you expound on the phrase, "You are the world?"

AA: He said, in a particular context, "I am the world and the world is me." I think that's the phrase you are referring to, isn't it? What is that context? Well, that context is precisely that the content of my consciousness and the ongoingness of the world are essentially the same. But unless I wake up to it then I am not that content with respect to the distinction that I made between the mind and the contents of consciousness. Of course, I shall always remain one with the world. We are in the world but not on that account ought we to remain of it -- which is not a counsel to a rejection of the world but rather it is the counsel toward self inquiry so that we could see the difference between being in the world rather than being of it.
