

Mary's and Krishnaji's relationship

From *Krishnamurti: Preparing to Leave*

Mary and Krishnaji's relationship was unusual yet seemed so completely right. It was, in many ways, an epitome, so a whole volume could and should be written about how they were together. This worthy task will not be attempted here, but some things must be said to give a fuller impression of the last nine months of Krishnaji's life.

In Mary's memoirs, we see the clearest picture of their relationship, and it is a love story—not an ordinary love, but a love that was dedication; a relationship that centered on giving, not receiving; a mutual selfless care; and a love that was part of each fulfilling their individual purpose. Seeing their relationship on a daily and personal basis, I was struck that it did not have the negative hallmarks of tremendous familiarity: the occasional hardly seeing of the other person, the taking the other for granted, the falling into mechanical patterns, the feeling that the relationship is “old.” I know all of these personally, and they did not exist in their relationship.

Krishnaji said that Mary was the closest person to him since his brother died in 1925. Mary assisted Krishnaji in everything personal and professional. She was the only person who was a member of all the Foundations, leaving the Indian Foundation after many years only because she felt she didn't visit often enough to correctly fulfill her responsibilities. She was involved in all the publication work, decisions on the travel, and the scheduling of his public talks and seminars. In Europe and America, she arranged Krishnaji's interviews. Mary also took care of Krishnaji's living arrangements. She had so completely melded her life into his that even for the twenty-two years she lived after his death, there did not seem to be a

separation between them. Krishnaji was physically not there, but he remained present in her presence. Before Krishnaji's death, when they were physically separated, as they were most winters when Krishnaji was in India and Mary was in California, they wrote to each other every day, sometimes just a few paragraphs, but they were on each other's minds.

Mary's upbringing among the rich and famous, her time as a top model, and her experiences in the upper echelons of Hollywood meant that she was never "star struck" by the famous people who often came to see Krishnaji. This made her the perfect hostess for Krishnaji, who was similarly only impressed by people's (in his terms) "flowering in goodness" and "awakening of intelligence." This amounted to an atmosphere between them that was the opposite and an antidote to the fame fawning of our current age, and was a lesson to me about valuing people.

I had never seen or even heard of anyone being so impeccably looked after as Krishnaji was looked after by Mary, yet there was a lightness of touch that Mary had in her care. It was natural that Mary's tastes and preferences would be visible in places where Krishnaji lived and that she had decorated, but there was an obvious intention on Mary's part not to impose on the "flavor," "color," or "feel" of Krishnaji's presence. This lack of imposition did not exist in some of the other places made for Krishnaji.

Also, completely unique in their relationship was the extent to which Mary welcomed anyone with whom Krishnaji wanted to spend time. As a consequence, she was very much the hostess and not the gatekeeper that existed in other places. Krishnaji's and Mary's inclusiveness astonished me, and though I was of the wrong generation, the wrong class, and the wrong culture, they included

me in their being together as though I fit perfectly. It seemed that what made this possible was the openness and inclusiveness of how they were with each other. Mary's listening to Krishnaji seemed to be at the base of her openness and inclusion around Krishnaji and was needed, as he was often "listening to/perceiving" things.

If one is in a city like New York and enters the home of first-generation immigrants from a foreign but not unrelated culture, like Italian—perhaps all their furniture and decorations are old-fashioned Italian, everyone speaks Italian, and the smells in the house are from Italian cooking—one would feel they have entered a friendly and agreeable but different world. Keeping with that analogy, I was not kept in the parlor of Krishnaji and Mary's relationship, where formal encounters occurred, but rather I was let into the family rooms and the kitchen, where the full and unfettered relationships of that social unit were expressed. I often felt I needed to check that I was not intruding in a domain as it was so personal that perhaps I shouldn't be there, but I was never given to feel that.

Of course, what also surrounded them was an elegance, beauty, and refinement without pretension that they shared, and which Mary's money allowed. This included a refinement of manners. Old-fashioned courtesy was a hallmark of their behavior, and to see the way their closeness and affection incorporated that old-school comity, without formality or stiffness, was a lesson, and it made me want to act with more courtesy.

There seemed to be a public persona for their relationship, in which he was prominent and she was almost invisible. But the private personae were entirely different: There was a dance of consideration and caring for each other, a contentedness in each other's company, a never taking the other for granted, and easy laughter.

It made no difference that other people knew Krishnaji longer than Mary had; it was clear that she was his best friend. No psychological burdens existed, and mine always dimmed and seemingly vanished in their presence. Of course, that could only make me very skeptical of the burdens I carried into their presence and contributed to the self-understanding I was developing.

Mary grew up in an extremely affluent family (her father was the youngest-ever president of the New York Stock Exchange) that automatically placed her partly in a previous age (as long-established money often does), and Krishnaji (after very humble beginnings in India) grew up in an affluent Edwardian world. This strangely made them contemporaries. Yet neither took their circumstances as entitlements; instead, they carried the sense that their situations compelled responsibilities rather than conferred rights. Their mutually helping each other meet these responsibilities also saturated the atmosphere of their relationship, and permeated my own sense of meeting my deepest responsibilities that I knew I didn't understand, but which I felt deeply.

The elegance, beauty, luxury, and seeming privilege that Mary carried was accentuated by what I came to learn of her: She was in constant pain and had been since the age of twelve. She had suffered what was diagnosed as bone cancer and had undergone one of the first radiation therapies, which had burned her left thigh so badly that a large part of her leg muscle was physically burned and atrophied. I remember her telling me that she had been startled awake the evening before because, for a moment, she did not have pain. Why this constant suffering did not embitter and harden her, as I believe it would have me, is beyond anything I can make sense of; and yet she never looked to be in pain or pained. She once walked around for several days on a broken leg without

consulting her bone specialist because an Indian doctor (who was a terrible diagnostician) told her he didn't think it was broken. It is mind-boggling to think that someone as favored by life as Mary could simultaneously be as un-favored by life; and she shared this paradox with Krishnaji.

From 1922 until his death, Krishnaji experienced what he called "the process," which usually involved terrible pain, sometimes knocking him unconscious. Since his adulthood, he was given the possibility to do anything he wanted or nothing, yet he felt obliged to meet the continual demands that were made of him. Everything material had been offered to him, but his only possessions were his two pocket watches and his clothes. He was world famous for most of his life, yet he was more shy and humble than anyone else I have known. These dualities were normalized in Krishnaji and Mary's world, and the deeper I swam in that ambience, the more everything in my life was called into question.

Krishnaji always wanted Mary to have more help (housekeeping and secretarial) as he was *very* conscious of the constant work she did on his behalf. Mary did have some help, but not very much—I think partly because her taking detailed care of Krishnaji and his work had become part of their relationship. She knew everything that could be known about him and his work, and he was absolutely comfortable with her being so intertwined in his life. There was also a communication between them, often unspoken, that always surprised me and seemed to spring from mutual appreciation, affection, and an understanding in which misunderstanding wasn't possible.

In our era of "rugged individualism" and "independence," it is difficult to imagine being totally at service without being servile, of being completely in sync with someone without being dominated,

of being totally dedicated without deference—but this is what I saw. Mary was never submissive or subservient, and would object or state an opposing view easily and quickly, which, for Krishnaji, always seemed to make her views valuable, even if he didn't follow them. Krishnaji talked several times about listening to and watching instructors of yoga and flute so completely that he was doing what was being instructed as it was being instructed. There was this kind of watching and listening between them.

In the summer of 1985, Krishnaji spoke of “trust” in very special ways in both public talks and in private discussions with the Brockwood staff. After one of the Brockwood public talks, when I was sitting with him upstairs in the West Wing kitchen, I wanted to pursue what he had been saying about “trust,” so I asked him who he trusted. He said, “Maria” (his name for Mary Zimbalist—there were so many other Marys in his life). I then asked if he trusted Mary Cadogan, Pupul, and Erna (the heads of the three Foundations), and to each he said, “No.” Then I asked him if he were worried that these three people would run off with the money and/or land they had in their charge as had Rajagopal, to which he quickly replied, “No.” When I pressed further with this, (and here I can only paraphrase), I asked him if he would trust Mary to fly him in an airplane, and to this he said obviously not, she did not know how to do that. He went on to say that he knew Mary would make mistakes. So, I asked him exactly what he meant by “trust,” and he replied, “To keep the teachings clean and take care of the land.” He elaborated by discussing that what made Mary trustworthy had also to do with the basis of her decisions and judgements; that Mary would, to the best of her ability, not operate from her ego or her conditioning, but would try to look at things as they were. I believe this was a correct assessment on Krishnaji's part, and the trust of their relationship was perceptible to all who came into their orbit. What this meant to an onlooker like me is that a trust between

people that I had never known was possible, a trust not built on a contract or a conditioning or any kind of agreement or confidence, but on knowing that the basis for the other person's actions and decisions was objectively worthy of trust. Their mutual trustworthiness pervaded the space that surrounded them with an integrity that seemed as solid as a mountain. Perhaps this was part of the foundation of mutual care they had for each other, which looked and felt entirely different from the care that comes from mutual gratification or mutual dependence.

There was also extraordinary joy in their relationship that was a lesson. No matter what was going on, they made the best of it and tried to have fun. Unless there was something that made them worry about the other, they were lighthearted and happy, delighting in doing small things together and going on small outings, even when it involved going to the dentist. It seemed they effortlessly sought fun and found it in the smallest things. Consequently, being with them was playful, despite their leading serious lives, and it was fun and, very often, funny.

I learned from both what it meant to take care of each, which became important at the end of both of their lives. Somehow, the care I came to take of Krishnaji became a large part of my life and it created a bond with Mary, which brought me more and more into the unit that Krishnaji and Mary were.