

## Chapter One

# THE TWO BROTHERS

**I**t was the illness of his younger brother, Nityananda, that brought Krishnamurti to American shores. The year was 1922, and the symptoms of Nitya's tuberculosis had been following an erratic course for fourteen months. The brothers were en route to Switzerland from Australia, but they decided to travel east in order to stop at a valley in California known for the healing properties of its climate. At the time of their visit, they had no way of knowing that the valley would become, not a stepping stone, but their home.

Krishnamurti was twenty-seven years old, and Nitya was twenty-four. They arrived at the port of San Francisco and spent a day in Berkeley at the University of California. Krishnamurti's impressions of the students were favorable. "There was not that aloofness that exists between the godly Englishman and the humble Indian," he wrote; and he added, "One breathed the air of freedom."

The brothers proceeded by train to the Ojai (OH-hi) valley, some four hundred miles south and fifteen miles inland from the sea. A few weeks after they arrived, Nitya described Ojai in a letter to a friend. "In a long and narrow valley of apricot orchards and orange groves is our house, and the hot sun shines down day after day," he said, "but of an evening the cool air comes from the range of hills on either side."

Far beyond the lower end of the valley runs the long, perfect road from Seattle in Washington down to San Diego in

Southern California, some two thousand miles, with a ceaseless flow of turbulent traffic, yet our valley lies happily, unknown and forgotten, for a road wanders in but knows no way out. The American Indians called our valley the Ojai or the nest, and for centuries they must have sought it as a refuge.

At the time the two brothers arrived in Ojai, they had been steeped for thirteen years in the esoteric philosophy of Theosophy. The Theosophical Society (TS), formed in New York in 1875, was the brainchild of Helena Blavatsky, the Russian émigré and author of *The Secret Doctrine*. Her controversial book was an encyclopedic compilation of mystical and occult literature drawn from an indiscriminate mixture of religious traditions. The TS owed much of its success to the guidance and influence of a single convert, Annie Besant. She was a woman renowned for her speaking skills, energy, and formidable advocacy on behalf of working women, the independence of India, and other progressive causes far in advance of her time. As president of the TS, Besant declared that its foremost mission was to identify and nurture the next manifestation of what she called the World Teacher. Such an individual would speak to all of humanity in a time of global darkness and elevate the consciousness of the world.

In 1909, two years after her ascension to the presidency of the TS, Besant determined that fourteen-year-old Krishnamurti was destined to fulfill the role of World Teacher. He and his brother Nitya were living with their father in primitive quarters adjacent to the theosophical compound at Adyar, on the southeastern coast of India. The two brothers were inseparable, in part because their mother had died a few years earlier. Besant effectively adopted them both and removed them to England, where they were raised in the homes of wealthy theosophists and educated by private tutors.

Krishnamurti later maintained that he was never deeply influenced by theosophical doctrines, but in his youth he acquiesced

to the role into which he had been cast. He absorbed the language and appeared to accept the outlook of the TS as his own. By his early or mid-twenties, however, he had begun to exhibit a restless dissatisfaction with his life and the course that had been charted for him by others. When he and Nitya arrived in Ojai, it was his first opportunity in many years to escape the presence and pressure of the network of people, the atmosphere, and the somewhat oppressive milieu of the Theosophical Society. The time was ripe for something more authentic to emerge from within. His inward sense of dissatisfaction, the spirit of freedom he sensed at Berkeley, and the beauty and isolation of the Ojai Valley, combined to create a potent opportunity for something radically new to occur.



Much of what we know about the young brothers was conveyed by the mother and daughter, Emily and Mary Lutyens. Emily was the daughter of the Earl of Lytton, who served for four years as the chief administrator of India on behalf of Great Britain. As a member of the nobility, the Earl's daughter was endowed with the title Lady. Born in 1874, Lady Emily married Edwin Lutyens when she was twenty-three and he was twenty-eight. Considered the most outstanding English architect during his lifetime, Lutyens was largely responsible for designing New Delhi, the capital of India. Upon its completion, the city was commonly called Lutyens' Delhi.

Emily and Edwin Lutyens had five children during the first eleven years of their marriage. The youngest of these was Mary, born in 1908. She grew up to become a prolific novelist and the biographer of her father and of the art critic John Ruskin. Later she served as the only authorized biographer of Krishnamurti.

Lady Emily composed the first detailed memoir of Krishnamurti, *Candles in the Sun*, published in 1957 and dedicated to

Mary. In the first paragraphs, she describes her conversion to Theosophy at the age of thirty-six:

I had then been married to Edwin Lutyens for thirteen years, and the youngest of my five children was two. When I married I was still an orthodox Christian, a member of the Church of England. I read the Bible daily and attended church regularly, and I had hoped that my husband would join me in these observances, but he was not an orthodox believer.

At first this lack of religious sympathy between us distressed me very much, but gradually I came to realize that I, with my orthodox religion, was a much more intolerant and narrow-minded person than he without it, and this realization had the effect of gradually modifying my views and giving me a wider outlook on religious ideas which paved the way for Theosophy.

When Annie Besant brought “the boys,” as they were called, to England in 1910, Emily was among those waiting on the dock to greet them. And so began her deep and sustained devotion to Krishnamurti, a relationship of almost equal significance to him. She opened the doors of her home and her heart without reservation or qualification, and her observations represent one of our primary sources for understanding the nature and qualities of the brothers in their youth.

While Emily’s devotion to Krishna, as he was known, was maternal and religious in nature, Mary was in love with Nitya in a more romantic way. Her memoir of her early years with the brothers, *To Be Young*, revolves largely around her infatuation with Nitya from the age of six to seventeen. The two memoirs together provide an intimate and revealing set of observations.

In spite of the disparity in the ages of mother and daughter, and in the objects of their affection, they paint a remarkably similar portrait of the brothers. The boys exhibited an infectious sense of spontaneity

and good cheer, devoid of affectation or consciousness of Krishna's exalted mission. They liked to play with and tease the children with an affectionate spirit, and their company was appreciated for its own sake, not for their reputation or what they represented. Of the two brothers, Nitya was demonstrably sharper and more intellectually astute. He excelled in his academic work and was much admired by his tutors, while Krishna was likely to be bored by his studies and lacking in focus or concentration. Their differences, however, were less pronounced than their common qualities of impeccable grooming, good taste in clothes, sensitivity in manners, and easy acquiescence to the highly unusual and potentially burdensome expectations placed upon them.

While Krishna carried the primary responsibility of gradually moving into the role of World Teacher, Nitya's participation was considered indispensable. Among their several siblings, the bond of these brothers was the strongest, and no one else was remotely as important to Krishna as Nitya. It was understood from the beginning that he would never have agreed to participate in any theosophical activities if Nitya were not an integral part of the proceedings, and Nitya was amenable to do so. He fully embraced his role as ally and acolyte to his older brother.

The central conceit of Theosophy, as described by Emily, lay in the idea of spiritual progress along a prescribed path. This notion was held to correspond with the secret or occult beliefs of many religions, so Theosophy deemed itself to be a kind of hub or nexus of the collective wisdom of all religious traditions. As a practical matter, what distinguished Theosophy was the claim of its leading figures to have access to clairvoyant powers that enabled them to assess the spiritual progress of any individual. A crucial element in this ongoing drama was the participation of a handful of otherworldly men who had perfected themselves spiritually and transcended normal earthly constraints of time and place. These Masters of Wisdom could be

consulted by those with clairvoyant powers in a nonmaterial domain called the astral plane, usually at night, in a state of mind otherwise known as dreaming.

A strange and significant series of events occurred just a few weeks after the brothers arrived in Ojai. What happened has been enmeshed from the beginning in descriptions laden with theosophical images and interpretations, and it is important to disentangle the facts from the speculative network of ideas in which it has been viewed. To do so is essential in order to understand not only what occurred at the time, but also what it signified in terms of the life of Krishnamurti and the meaning of his work.

The primary account we have of what took place was composed by Nitya in a long letter addressed to Annie Besant. Fortunately, much of what he wrote was objective in nature, and his theosophical interpolations are not too difficult to distinguish from the facts. In any case, the overall effect of the sequence of events was profound, "leaving us all so changed," he wrote, "that now our compass has found its lodestar."

The unusual episode began, according to Nitya, on a Thursday evening and came to a conclusion shortly after sundown on Sunday. The first sign of trouble was a painful swelling or lump, as if of a contracted muscle, in the back of Krishna's neck. This served as prelude to the events that began in earnest the next morning.

What happened for the next three days consisted of an odd combination of physical and psychological symptoms without any discernible cause or source. Krishna's body ached and he suffered from erratic alterations in his subjective sense of temperature, ranging from intense shivering to burning heat. He tried to stay in bed, but sometimes impulsively got up, only to fall to the floor. His symptoms curiously subsided at mealtimes, but if he had anything to eat, he could not keep it down. This syndrome fluctuated in intensity, enabling him to sleep at night, but it gradually increased over the course of the three days.

Coupled with the physical symptoms was an equally strange set of changes in his state of mind. He often seemed not unconscious but psychologically absent in the normal sense. A distinctly childlike persona emerged instead, confused about where he was or calling out for his mother.

By the end of the third day, some of the behavioral changes became even more pronounced. Although his room and his bed were kept very clean, he “began to complain bitterly of the dirt, the dirt of the bed, the intolerable dirt of the house, the dirt of everyone around, and in a voice full of pain said that he longed to go to the woods.” He sat sobbing in a corner of his room and would not let anyone come near him. “Suddenly he announced his intention of going for a walk alone, but from this we managed to dissuade him, for we did not think that he was in any fit condition for nocturnal ambulations.”

At dusk on Sunday, Krishna, Nitya, and two friends were sitting on the porch of the cottage. “The sun had set an hour ago and we sat facing the far-off hills, purple against the pale sky in the darkening twilight.” Nitya had the feeling that the three-day episode was approaching “an impending climax.... In front of the house a few yards away stands a young pepper tree, with delicate leaves of a tender green, now heavy with scented blossoms.” One of the friends suggested to Krishna that he go and sit under the tree, and, after an initial hesitation, he did so.

Now we were in a starlit darkness and Krishna sat under a roof of delicate leaves black against the sky. He was still murmuring unconsciously, but presently there came a sigh of relief and he called out to us, “Oh, why didn’t you send me out here before?”

Nitya’s observations of what followed that evening are steeped in theosophical imagery and accordingly are not too meaningful to anyone who does not subscribe to that philosophy. He sensed the

arrival of a “Great Presence,” and he believed he heard “divine music softly played” emanating from a distant source. He claimed that the face of one of his friends lit up in rapture; but then she fell into a “swoon,” and when she awoke she could no longer remember what she had observed.

Krishnamurti also wrote an extended account of what he had experienced. His subjective recollections form a curious counterpoint to Nitya’s observations, dovetailing with and alternately departing from them. Most poignant among his memories was the metaphor of “a man mending the road,” a rather humble but apt adumbration of the whole of his subsequent career. The parable of the man mending the road surely deserves a place of honor within the spiritual literature of the world.

On the first day while I was in that state and more conscious of the things around me, I had the first most extraordinary experience. There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I almost could feel and think like the roadmender, and I could feel the wind passing through the tree, and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The birds, the dust, and the very noise were a part of me.

Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine, and the tires; as the car went further away from me, I was going away from myself. I was in everything, or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm, and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition.

This experience is not easy to reconcile with the outward symptoms described by Nitya, but the conclusions of the two accounts correspond with one another rather well:

I began to come to myself under the pepper tree which is near the house. There I sat cross-legged in the meditation posture.... There was such profound calmness both in the air and within myself, the calmness of the bottom of a deep unfathomable lake. Like the lake, I felt my physical body, with its mind and emotions, could be ruffled on the surface but nothing, nay nothing, could disturb the calmness of my soul.

Even shorn of its theosophical associations, the outcome of the three-day episode was clearly transcendental in its depth and dimensions:

I have drunk at the clear and pure waters at the source of the fountain of life and my thirst was appeased. Nevermore could I be thirsty, never more could I be in utter darkness. I have seen the Light. I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering; it is not for myself, but for the world.

One of the friends present to witness the events was Mr. Warrington, an officer of the TS in America. He told Nitya that “some process” was going on in Krishna’s body, “as a result of influences directed from planes other than physical.” Whether or not its source was in planes other than physical, the term “process” has remained attached ever since to descriptions of whatever was taking place. Over the years, the term has acquired an added significance due to the fact that the process continued in an attenuated and somewhat muted form. A few weeks after the three-day event, the process resumed for an hour or two most evenings for a period of several months, and it recurred in a similar fashion at intervals for the next two or three years. And although it continued to abate somewhat in duration and intensity, the process remained an intermittent occurrence for the rest of Krishnamurti’s life. Its nature and meaning also remain mysterious and unresolved.