

THE SAGE AND THE HOUSEWIFE

By Shanta Kelker

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Shanta Kelker notes down her conversations with U.G. in a diary. This book is a collection of some of the incidents from her diary pages. The book also contains the article, "Pulling Yourself Up by Your Bootstraps: An Introduction to U.G. and His Teachings," by J.S.R.L.Narayana Moorthy.

THE SAGE AND THE HOUSEWIFE

Stories of U.G. in Bangalore

--by Shanta Kelker

CHAPTER 1

I hope my memory stands by me like a faithful companion as I relive before you, the reader, some of my more memorable moments in the company of that enigmatic philosopher, U. G. Krishnamurti. I met this man in the course of my long, arduous adventure on the so-called spiritual path, in an attempt to thrash out the burning questions in my mind. I listened to every sort of lecture given by every sort of holy man. I attended talks by saffron-robed messiahs, bearded *sannyasins*, and wise *acharyas*. But I succeeded only in intensifying my frustration. I was exhausted and confused. My tears replaced my prayers, and all my supplications to the Omniscient and Omnipotent God to please show himself were to no avail.

Finally, I came across the book *I am That*, a volume of translated interviews with Nisargadatta Maharaj. With my adoption of this teaching I felt sure I had at last reached the end of my spiritual search, that really there was nothing left to do. I thought I had gone far beyond any mere knowledge, that for me just 'being' was enough. It took U.G. to show me that the so-called 'being' was nothing *but* knowledge.

Mid-March, 1980: My first interview with U.G.

The handsome, smiling, humbly-clad man they called U.G. sat relaxed and friendly before me. Intent upon using my visit to get straight answers, I hurled at him my first question:

"Are there any boots to walk on thorns."

His reply came back crisp and direct, "There are no thorns."

Unsatisfied, I pursued, "The thorns are very much there for me!"

With quiet patience he answered, "Stop looking for roses and there will be no thorns."

NOW THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING! He had no boots for sale, nothing to offer.

Suddenly the man in the white *kurta-pajamas* sitting before me became a *very* interesting

personality indeed! I kept on throwing questions at him for some time, and like a golden bell the answers came back clean, precise, and convincing.

Pushing on, I asked him about the mysteries of the mind, and if it was not possible to control the thought process.

"All that kind of thing is bogus. I found out for myself that there is no mind, nothing there to control," he said.

It looked like a hopeless case. I was not getting the answers I wanted, but had no intention of giving up: "Can reading, study, and trying to understand help me?"

"No, these things cannot help you in any way because they are only forms of entertainment for you," he said.

Getting down to brass tacks, I told him that my biggest problem was my unreasonable fear of physical pain. The thought of sitting in a dentist's chair was terrifying for me. Try as I might, I was unable to overcome this fear.

He suggested in all seriousness that I should take some pain shots before having my teeth worked on, as if I did not know that! But I persisted, saying that what I meant was whether there was any way of detaching myself from the pain.

"For heaven's sake," he exclaimed, "don't try all those things. They just don't work. Please take the injection before having your tooth extracted!"

"But," I replied, "Ramana Maharshi had an operation done without any anesthesia."

"Ramana or anybody for that matter undergoes the same physical suffering," U.G. answered.

"No one escapes the natural laws."

Thus ended my first encounter with U.G. I left his apartment with a sense of relief and exhilaration. Despite a few chinks and kinks in the armor which I knew would need some straightening out, I was happy and knew that I would be returning to see him again and again.

Trying my hand at the culinary art:

One day, just after a picnic with my family, I went to visit U.G. at his place at Poornakuti. I caught him descending the stairs with some wires and things in his hands, looking somewhat bedraggled. I ventured to ask him the cause of his disarray, as it was so unlike his usual impeccableness.

"I have the flu. Aches, pains, fever, you name it, I have it," he said, grinning. He was unconvincing as a patient, lacking as he does even the slightest hint of self-pity. Insisting that I should "stick around," having come all that way, he was soon putting me to work in his "sweat shop" making him some *rasam*. I was thrilled at the prospect of doing something, no matter how small, for a man who was rigorously independent, who denounced with vigor those around who practice "aggressive kindness."

Soon I was in U.G.'s kitchen trying my hand at the culinary art. But my efforts met with failure: the moong dahl refused to cook properly. But soon a very thankful sounding U.G. was gobbling it all up, praising it to the skies!

We spent the rest of that evening quietly watching TV. He was more polite and friendly than usual. But later, on my way home, happy as a lark with the overall success and amiability of the visit, it occurred to me that, knowing U.G.'s unpredictability, the fair weather could turn foul at the slightest gust.

The very next day, fortified with more knowledge on the correct method of cooking *rasam*, I returned to U.G. and his sweat shop. But cooking *rasam* for U.G. is no snap. You are forbidden the use of most of the usual ingredients like *rasam* powder or tamarind. The only vegetable

worth calling a vegetable is, according to U.G., the tomato, and none other is allowed in his kitchen. Running up the stairs, bowl in hand, I offered him a taste of my creation.

"Why on earth have you used so many tomatoes and curry leaves? Now I am forced to filter your soup before I can even drink it. Anyway, Narsamma (the housemaid) is very happy, dancing with joy in fact, since I told her that your soup was just horrible. So it is not a complete loss."

Livid, I was ready to bolt for the door. I could not trust myself. I was ready to grab the heaviest movable object within reach and hit him with it. Imagine having to take insults just to make some servant woman giggle! It was too much.

I asked him if he enjoyed making one person happy at the cost of another person's unhappiness. His reply was unrepentant. "It is always that way with everyone," he said. "If you feel very hurt just because I didn't like your *rasam*, he went on, "then you and your precious *rasam* can just get out. I don't want people around me who get upset and hurt over such idiotic trivialities."

This is in keeping with his unvarying willingness to scuttle any and all things which become unnecessary or tiresome. As he is fond of saying, we must be ready at a moment's notice to throw out "the bath water, the bathtub, *and* the baby." Once, looking intently at the chair I was occupying, he remarked, "Both the chair *and* its occupant must be thrown out together." If I or anyone else protested against such shocking statements, he would merely reply that if we didn't like to hear such things we could get out also. No one, he reminded us, is indispensable. He would sometimes end with the acerbic statement, "You can really do without *anybody* in this world. Even Valentine can survive without me."

After the picnic he was looking dull....

The following week, on November 14th, I thought that my daughter, Mittu, deserved a long day with U.G. We went to Poornakuti but found that, as often happens, U.G. had gone out for a walk. We paid a visit to a nearby restaurant and when we returned to U.G.'s we found him in a very quiet and subdued mood. This is by no means uncommon: during full moon days U.G. often gets very withdrawn and dull. Those of us who hang around him on a regular basis often joke that we need not watch for the phases of the moon, as U.G.'s physical state is always a sure indicator of that cycle.

He seemed to arouse himself just long enough to listen to all the gossip and my personal news, then slumped back into his chair in serene silence. I left the room for a short respite in the kitchen, and he proceeded upstairs to his room for one of his frequent catnaps. Soon the nap was over, and I heard him descending the stairs announcing to me that the maid needed some leftover curds for her lunch. Around U.G. one soon learns that small things are not necessarily trivial or unimportant. Oh, the irony of it all! Here was this genuine sage concerning himself with a maid's lunch while the so-called saints ride in Mercedeses demanding devotion and service from the thousands who attend to their every whim.

Then he abruptly marched off to the kitchen to make coffee for us all. I must add that his coffee is less bitter than some of his words. Then he noticed an old aluminum kettle which, because it had turned black with use, he wanted to be rid of. "Here," he said, "is something for sale. I'll sell you this kettle which I bought for 17 rupees, and I will throw in this pot as a bonus." I protested that I had plenty of useless junk at home and had no intention of adding that to my collection. Later the same day an elderly Ayurvedic doctor was supposed to arrive with a *brahmi* plant which he was sure would help revive Valentine's failing memory. (According to Ayurveda, the leaves of this plant, when consumed, revived failing memory.) U.G., with his usual cynicism, was sure it would instead relieve her of what little memory she had left.

The enthusiastic doctor duly arrived, the plant in hand. U.G. followed him, exuding interest and sincerity, into the garden, where the little plant was given its own place amongst the greenery. The doctor, eager to perform his task properly, asked if he thought the pit he had dug was deep enough. U.G., smiling pleasantly, nodded his approval as he said under his breath to me, "You can bury yourself in that pit for all I care." I shook uncontrollably with laughter, threatening to include the incident in my diary. "It was you I was referring to," he said. Once again I was doubled up with laughter. U.G. was evidently quite pleased with the effect his cutting remarks were having on me. But I could not help wondering what impression this giggling lady must have made on the venerable old healer.

(The plant was sadly forgotten, after this incident. U.G. was away for a few months, my visits to Poornakuti dwindled, and the little plant withered in the corner.)

It was time to leave, but I was reluctant to say "good-bye" to U.G. As usual he was already planning to leave Bangalore, and he was already counting the hours till he would fly off to his next temporary nest. Taking my leave, I stopped into the waiting car, and, looking back for one last glimpse, I saw his serious face, motionless, as he waved a cultured good-bye.

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CHAPTER 2

I had heard that U.G. was once again in Bangalore, and, happy as a lark, I jumped into the first taxi I could find to rush to his place in Poornakuti. With Chandrasekhar home on leave, Nagaraj on his way, and some Germans and an American visiting there, I was sure it would be a merry get together. Half expecting him to be out playing tour guide to his Western friends, I was delighted to find him and the others at home. Chandrasekhar was taping his poetry and singing with all his might. I drifted upstairs and found U.G. trying to coax Valentine into something warm to fight the evening chill. He remarked that she was becoming slightly violent, not a very good sign.

The next day I arrived with my kids, Prashant and Mittu, at Poornakuti. U.G. was to leave the next day for Bombay. We found U.G. upstairs in the big room, which was converted into what he called his "office," talking with one of his visitors. We brought him some pepper *papads*, which he insisted on tasting at once. He soon turned red in the face and complained that they were too hot and spicy. My son ran for U.G.'s thermos containing warm water, and my daughter flew to the kitchen for a glass of cool water. U.G. wasted no time in invading the refrigerator for some cooling Italian cheese to ease his burning throat. But before we could sort things out, he had, to our great surprise, wolfed down the rest of the hot *papad*, leaving us spectators confused and helpless.

He sticks to the subject least wanted....

About a week later some wealthy friends of U.G. dropped by to visit. U.G. has a habit of sticking to the subject least wanted by his audience, making them squirm uncomfortably in their seats. That day the topic was to be money. As his uncomfortable guests listened, he went on, "If I had a son who wanted to be admitted to college, I would beg, borrow, or steal to raise the necessary money for him. What are you, the so-called rich, doing, Sirs? You are doing nothing, just sitting and talking. Instead of sitting and talking of capitation fees (the donation demanded by certain educational institutions for granting admission to aspiring candidates) you could start schools and colleges. You are all rich enough to do it. I am not impressed with the rich who sit and talk, doing nothing, sorry." They never brought up the topic of capitation fees, or anything else relating to money, again.

Later that day Suguna and I were discussing the possibility of visiting an astrologer. In the middle of our plan-making U.G. jumped in with, "Why do you want to waste your money? What is it that you want to know?" I said that we wanted our charts done, but this only excited him more. "I don't need your charts," he said, "I only need to glance at your face to know your future. Anyway, you have no future."

Nobody is dear to me....

A very wealthy friend of U.G.'s, Rochaldas, dropped in to see U.G. one day. "I am very happy to see your face, even if but for a few moments," he said. "Why my face? There are a million faces out there," replied U.G.

U.G. never tires of trying to find out how rich Rochaldas really is, and why, in spite of having five cars, he still travels by bus or taxi. "There is no use hoarding it, you know. Money is there to spend, and if you don't, somebody else will. Spend it before someone else blows it all. You know, I am the only one who is really happy to see your pockets overflowing."

U.G. was planning to leave for Bombay the next morning. R. asked if he might arrange for a car to meet him there. In his best form U.G. replied, "There are already cars lined up to take me, and, anyhow, I can't bear the pain you would feel in parting with your money."

"But," protested R., "it is a distinct pleasure for me to spend my money on you."

"Pleasure is pain, Sir," was U.G.'s instant reply.

R. then asked him an interesting question, "Is anyone especially dear to you?"

"If anyone is especially dear to me," U.G. answered, "then you would lose the chance of being dear to me."

"That means then everyone is dear to you," said R.

"I did not say that," U.G. exclaimed, "When I say that no one is especially dear to me it does not mean that everybody is dear to me."

Not much later Gopinath walked in and took up with U.G. the issue of a young man who was in serious trouble by trying to get into the highest spiritual state. Soon the man himself came in, sat down, and began a strange rocking motion in a sitting posture. This young man had a guru of his own whom he considered as a Super God and told U.G. that he (U.G.) was just a God. U.G. calmly advised him to seek treatment. "Go to your gurus for help, appeal to your Super God, but leave me alone."

How rich are you?

A few weeks later I got a phone call out of the blue: "How rich are you?" the voice said. My heart jumped for joy as I recognized the voice: it was U.G. In a flash the children and I were in a taxi on our way to K.R.Road Our mood was a mixture of helpless excitement and hopelessness

abandon. When I walked into the room I saw U.G. and immediately performed *pranams* with all the devotion at my disposal. He gave us all some Italian chocolate filled with liquid coffee. That had to be the most unique *prasad* ever given by a holy man. Not content to spoil us, he trotted out some wonderful Swiss chocolates, and passed them all around. It was a sweet start for a wonderful day.

Suguna, our ever-smiling hostess, so adept at making us all feel at home, exchanged a few words with us, then marched us all into the kitchen for a cooking demonstration. The dish was a very simple couscous dish which U.G. often eats when he is traveling. It was a very simple fare, but tasted extraordinarily delicious.

After our light meal U.G. saw my son studying for an upcoming exam. My son asked if he could take a break and watch some TV videos. Before I could give my motherly consent U.G. gushed, "Sure, of course, do it. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." That was all the encouragement he needed!

You may frighten the animals....

Not many days later U.G. was discussing his forthcoming trip to the U.S. with Ramaswamy. Rochaldas arrived just as U.G. was announcing plans to visit the Nagarhole jungles near Mysore. When Rochaldas showed some interest in accompanying him there, U.G. said, "Sir, you seem to be doing very well in this human jungle. You don't have to go to the Nagarhole jungle. You may frighten the animals!"

U.G. went on in a philosophical vein, "Man is the most vicious species on earth. No other animal wantonly kills its own kind. Without his weapons man is exceedingly vulnerable: even a deer could finish him off in a few minutes."

The conversation, taking its course, turned to gossip. Soon he noticed the hour: it was dinner time, and time too for the guests to go. Ramaswamy got the message and headed toward the door. U.G. graciously followed close behind, enquiring after the old man's age, health, sight, hearing, etc. Ramaswamy made his way down the stairs and out the door.

Going Dutch....

About a week later Suguna and I were trying to catch a few winks when Henk the Dutchman arrived. U.G. noticed that Henk was looking pale and weak, lacking his usually friendly Dutch charm.

U.G. loves poking fun at the Dutch, especially when Henk is around. Kalyani brought Henk some special foods, hoping to get some money at some future time. U.G. said, "She doesn't know that you are Dutch and that by expecting money from you she is also being Dutch." I was sent to fetch the dictionary: "Dutch," "in Dutch," "going Dutch," "Dutch uncle," and on and on, enough Dutch to last anyone a lifetime!

Suddenly U.G. decided to do some shopping. At these times no one can stop him, no matter the time, even if it is a hot afternoon. So we all marched in a troop to the only shop open at that hour, the Dutchman in tow. U.G. bought something and the Dutchman, completely out of character, offered to pay. "You pay?" asked U.G., "When we hear such offer from you we know that Holland is in big trouble."

Kicking the goddess Lakshmi:

Upon arriving at U.G.'s the next afternoon, I could see that the usual crowd had assembled. There was Nagaraj, Adri, myself, Suguna, and the overpowering presence of Brahmachariji, who was, as often happens, reading U.G.'s palm. He said that even if U.G. were to kick the goddess

Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) she would forgive him and come back as his house maid. That was just too strong a statement, even from a supposed holy man like Brahmachariji. To my ears it sounded like nothing less than blasphemy.

I Never walked, but ran everywhere....

But as the afternoon wore, talk turned to U.G.'s boyhood. When he speaks of his childhood we can get an idea of what an impossible boy he really was. Woe to his grandparents who must have been pushed to their limits! U.G. is fond of saying that if his mother had lived she would have attempted suicide every hour on the hour!

He related how his grandfather was interested in health foods, fat diets, and such things, and would use the little seven-year-old boy as an experimental subject. There were fixed hours for all meals, including lunch, which had to be consumed at the same time daily. U.G. would stealthily go to the clock and turn the hands ahead, informing his busy grandfather that the appointed time for his lunch had arrived. This trick was soon discovered by the long suffering grandfather, and U.G. continued on for years as his grandfather's experimental guinea-pig.

He had a long way to walk for his Hindi lessons, and along the way used to pass an old movie house. U.G. could not resist the temptation to sneak in and watch whatever was playing. When he left he would dim the lantern, bribe the servant boy not to tell, slip into the movie tent, watch the film, and then return home with the servant boy. One day, unfortunately, he looked over to find his grandfather seated next to him. His escapades ended abruptly.

U.G. loves to relate incidents of his naughty childhood. Looking at him now, we can still see some of the mischievous boy in him. I usually take my little daughter with me when I go to visit him, and when I admonish or correct her he is perhaps reminded of his childhood. He says that all he ever heard in his young days was a constant "No, no, no," or "Don't." He could not remember even once when the adults around him had said, "Yes, go right ahead and do it. When my daughter had exams I used to make a fuss about them. U.G. would say he never took exams, often copying down the questions carefully, handing in his paper, and simply walking out. I said that most of us could not afford to gamble with our lives in such a way. I would advise Mittu, my daughter, not to listen to such stories. He would just laugh and relate to us the time he bribed the boy who had the job of printing the examination papers, made copies, and passed them out to grateful cohorts. He was caught in the act and punished, but he remained unrepentant.

When U.G. was in town I usually brought my daughter with me to visit him. One result was that she began missing too many of her classes. My concern about her slipping attendance was brushed aside with statements like, "When I was her age I was successfully bribing the boy in charge of attendance records. Once I forgot to pay him and he let out my secret."

These kinds of activities continued on even into his college years. When I asked him why, he said he was so caught up in the spiritual search he had little time left for formal study. He performed 3,000 Gayatri *Japa* or 5,000 Shiva *panchakshari* every day with great fervor. He showed me how he counted the *mala* beads by using the cross lines on his fingers. All these activities were a direct result of his mother's dying prophesy that her son was destined to be a "great one," and her wish that he should be raised accordingly. His grandfather took this last request seriously indeed, and the little boy was tutored in Sanskrit, the Vedas and the Upanishads from the tender age of five.

U.G. demonstrated how as a little child he would sit with his feet up on the desk, slumped over, and often fall asleep when things got too boring. If his teachers hit him he would hit them back. They would complain to his grandfather, promising never to teach his little brat again.

He related to us that his grandfather was fond of philosophy and spiritual matters and kept a sort of open house to which were invited all sorts of *sannyasins*, pundits, scholars, and holy men. He often held *durbars*, and would reward the best scholars with gold coins, to which the boy U.G. helped himself whenever an opportunity arose. One day a *sannyasin* came who was able to produce miraculously gold coins from out of nowhere. U.G. was asked to prostrate himself before this man, but he refused to unless and until the man produced gold coins embossed with the current year. The embarrassed and mortified elders hustled him away quickly before the startled old *sannyasin* could gather his wits.

U.G. could launch into a childhood story at the strangest places. Once we were riding in a taxi past the Modern Hindu Hotel. As we passed by the venerable landmark U.G. remarked that as a child he had stayed in the hotel, and, while running down the front steps he collided with a waiter carrying a tray full of steel tumblers. One falling tumbler cut a gash on his forehead and eyebrow. He showed me the small scar.

I asked him what it was like for him to remember and retell these childhood incidents. He replied that whenever he narrated these stories they were not invested with sentiment or emotion for him, as our remembrances were when we recalled them. He added that as a boy he never walked anywhere, but always ran. This moving restlessness can be seen in his present activities, flitting around the world at a pace that would exhaust even the most robust. Even as a child he loved to travel, and depended upon his grandparents to plan trips for him. It seems that he used to pray to Anjaneya, the Monkey God, and promised him coconuts if only he would use his powers to influence the grandfather to make some new travel plans. He would be delighted when he found his grandfather packing for a new trip somewhere.

U.G. continued his bribing and bargaining with the Monkey God, but noticed that there was always a gap between his prayers and the desired result. Even then he had philosophical leanings, wondering what the connection was between his desires, his prayers, and the actual getting of whatever he wanted. What was this time gap between his thoughts and the event? Things quickly got out of hand. The debt of coconuts owed to Anjaneya mounted, finally, to a neat but unmanageable 1,000. At last he backed out of the bargain, saying that he would not know what to do with 1,000 coconut-halves, the amount that would be returned to him as *prasadam*. (*Prasadam* is the sacred offering to the deity returned to the devotee after the worship as part of the deity's grace.) He now laughingly says that the Monkey God is belatedly exacting his part of the bargain, making U.G. live near his temple grounds whenever he is in Bangalore. Even when he walks to the market area he always passes through the temple grounds, saying it is a short cut, denying any sentimental or metaphysical meaning.

Why are you turning this into a problem?....

I still retain loyalties to the saints and spiritual teachers who helped me along my way. U.G. sometimes makes fun of the *japa* I do and the fact that I am not completely rid of the guru business. I rang him up one day and told him that, try as I might, I was unable to get religion and orange-robed saints out of my system. "It is not surprising," he said. I asked him to please accept me as I was, religious background and all. "Why only the religious background," he replied, "I have accepted all your backgrounds."

I replaced the receiver and, with a quiet heart, made my trip to K.R.Road, the street of U.G.'s residence. As I neared the Basavannagudi post office I found U.G. walking along the nearby broad footpath. I slowed down and pulled up next to him, offering him a lift. He quietly availed himself of my offer with a polite "Thank you." Immediately he said, "Have I ever told you or anybody else not to go to your gurus or temples? What's the problem? Why are you turning this

into a problem? I said that I was in no mood to discuss anything with him, that I was content to merely sit quietly in the car with him. I did not want to shout at him over the noise of the traffic, and had no desire to discuss my spiritual problems with him. Obviously it didn't matter to him either, as he single-mindedly commandeered the very same taxi to the commercial district to do some shopping.

As we made our way towards the bazaar he related to me the activities of his morning, who had dropped in to see him, and some gossip. We had to shout over the racket the traffic was making. He would read every board, every advertisement, every broadside, every street and traffic sign along the way. I would catch him doing this even in the middle of the most interesting conversations.

He was intent upon buying a small wooden shelf for his apartment, but could not find any that pleased him. Finally he decided that only a custom-made shelf done by his carpenter would suffice, and we stopped our fruitless search. Then on to "Woody's" Restaurant where he bought some of his favourite *idlis*. As he stood in the sweltering sun waiting for the *idlis* to be wrapped, he thumbed through the **Economic Times**, apparently unaware of, or at least unaffected by the horrible heat. He scanned the paper for news of the American dollar exchange rate for that day, saying that his fortunes "rise and fall with the dollar."

U.G. has a strange habit of arranging and rearranging the furniture in his apartment. He says that since he does not think about God, the purpose of life, or how to be happy, all that is left for him to concern himself with are the ordinary things of life like arranging furniture, exchange rates, the price of *idlis*, and spending money. He says it is possible for him to think of money or the spending of it only when the means are there, otherwise he doesn't think of it at all. Over the years I have gotten used to finding the furniture rearranged whenever I visited him in Poornakuti. The sofa goes into the balcony, the stool is moved into the corner, the plant on the balcony suddenly appears in a heretofore vacant corner of the room.

We all gave him credit for such ingenious ideas....

U.G. decided that he would have three homes--in Bangalore, Switzerland, and California--and spared no time in organizing and decorating his flat in Bangalore.

One day he decided that we needed some creepers and ferns on the enclosed balcony, along with some wall posters, to help beautify his apartment. To this end he seemed ready to move both heaven and earth (and everything in between!), so long as it was accomplished by nightfall. Creepers were soon uprooted from the garden and let loose on the huge columns in the corner of the veranda. A taxi was soon hired, and he and Chandrasekhar were off, in the sweltering heat, to Lalbagh for more ferns and pots. Within hours the new potted ferns graced the rooms. Next day we set out in search of some wall posters. An obliging friend of U.G.'s, anxious to help, overfilled the tank with petrol causing the car to stall without warning in the middle of traffic. We all got out and passed the time watching some nearby horses. Soon the car was revived and we continued on our way. The desired posters were soon found at the cost of some 400 rupees, and U.G. would not rest until they were correctly displayed on the veranda walls. Next day all guests, as well as the regulars, were led upstairs personally by him, none failing to give all the credit for such ingenious ideas and creativity. I urged him to set himself up in the interior decoration business, with us as shareholders, of course!

She had three burning questions....

On the very next day my friend Pushpa rang me up and suggested that we pay U.G. a visit that day. As usual I did not require much persuasion. On our way to K.R. Road she said she had three

burning questions that had to be put to U.G. and just could not wait. We reached U.G.'s place to find him waiting for Brahmachariji who was due to arrive soon with a car. The bright prospect of a free ride home suddenly presented itself. When the car arrived U.G. decided to accompany us all, with him and Brahmachariji in the front and Pushpa and I in the rear. It seemed as good a time as any to ask questions, so Pushpa ventured her first question, the one on man's instincts.

"I don't have any instincts," said U.G. With most of his attention absorbed in the movement and noise of the traffic, and the countless signs along the road, he added almost casually, "You use the word 'instinct' to justify your actions, that's all." The traffic seemed blocked at every turn, and the poor frustrated driver, goaded on by the very determined Brahmachariji, worked his way through Malleswaram. Pushpa chose this time to pose her second question to U.G.:

"Why should we not trust a compassionate man," she asked.

"Because," replied U.G., "He is only giving you what is already your due, and making a great big virtue of it. He has no right to possess more than another. It is only his guilt that makes him share his excess with one who is deprived."

After a few more stops and turns Pushpa asked her third and final question. "What is wrong with ambition?"

"Your ambition is always related to your goals, and those who profess to live without ambition just don't have the necessary drive to get what they want, that's all. They have given up, and their attitudes toward ambition is only a matter of 'sour grapes'." Distracted as he was by the flow of noise and traffic, his answers were cryptic and quite satisfying to Pushpa. I recorded the exchange in my computer for later use.

I rushed home, wrote down the day's activities, made Xerox copies, and rushed with them back to Poornakuti, thrusting the copies into U.G.'s hand. My expectations of praise were met, instead, with a, "What do you mean you are finished? If you don't write at least twice that amount before I leave, you can have all these copies back." I was stunned and, moaning, nearly dropped down the flight of stairs I was ascending. I appealed to him that my daughter Mittu had exams coming up and I was obliged to help with her studies. This did not, as I had hoped, have any softening effect upon him. "Keep the night lamps burning," he insisted, "or take some sleepless tablets if you must." I had never heard of a 'sleepless tablet', but came home and started writing with double vigor. I was unable to finish the writing before his departure. He advised me to push on and post them later to him in California.

Talking about Pushpa and her endless questions reminds me of the day when she wanted to ask U.G. why he had made such contradictory statements. He replied, "My first sentence is negated by the second sentence, and the next sentence negates the second. If you want to understand what I am saying you must listen to me in disconnected frames, the same way that I talk. That's the way I am listening to you. Each is a separate, independent frame. Then you don't see any contradictions."

All transformations are ruled out....

Upon U.G.'s return to Bangalore Chandrasekhar was going through some old files from the "archives", and Nagaraj was sitting comfortably on the sofa reading some magazine when U.G., suddenly inspired, said to Chandrasekhar, "I want everyone who is interested in this kind of thing to understand: all kinds of transformation--physical or the so-called psychological--are out. When the desire to become something different is absent, then the body is free to function in its own way, that's all. You, the one who is creating the problem, cannot solve it. You continue to ask, "How, how, how, but that 'how' is the problem, and the *only* problem."

Then he talked about erupting volcanoes. "No volcano," he assured us, "ever asked anyone's permission to erupt with fire and fury. And though we would call such an event a calamity and natural disaster, the volcano doesn't. Despite its merciless destruction it still helps nature's aim by bringing up all the raw materials from the bowels of the earth, throwing it upon the surface, and replenishing the land."

U.G. looked like an erupting volcano himself as the words poured out of him with great force. He went on to say that men enjoy seeing one another suffer. "He takes pleasure in sympathizing and feeling sorry, giving it fancy names like 'compassion'. Why don't you feel happy for someone who goes about in a fancy car and has ten houses? But you only feel jealousy."

"But," I protested, "We know that very often gains are unfairly gotten...."

"Even knowledge is power," he said. "There is *no* knowledge for the sake of knowledge. 'I know and you *don't* know;' so you want to know more."

We all sat silently listening to him, not daring to interrupt the flow of words coming so effortlessly from him.

Thoughts are emotions and emotions are thoughts....

It seemed that we sat in silence for the longest time, when U.G. erupted again, "Why do you all give such importance to your emotions? You impute all this significance to your anger, your love, your passion, and your affections. Why? He was sitting comfortably cross-legged on the carpet with the rest of us. He noticed that I was jotting down the beautiful things he was saying on my note pad, but said nothing. "Your thoughts determine your feelings and emotions. It is thought that gives such importance to emotions, nothing else."

The volcano seemed to be calming a bit, and, pointing to himself, he said, "The body here is so peaceful. It is only interested in pumping blood, secreting pancreatic juices, moving its bowels. It is so blissful in and of itself that it is not *at all* interested in your so-called 'spiritual bliss', your yoga, your divine peace, your *moksha*, etc."

Chandrasekhar asked if the *sthitaprajna* was a stone.

Crimelessness would lead to joblessness....

"This is not a stone," answered U.G., "It definitely responds to everything happening around it. Nowadays science has discovered that a stone, too, is affected by your physical looking."

Just then Prashant, my son, came upstairs where we were sitting and asked me if he might watch the video for a while. Before I could respond U.G. intervened: "Yes, yes, of course. Enjoy the music. There are some good American programs, too!" I said that I was concerned about his eyes, but U.G. insisted that watching TV was not harmful to the eyes in any way because it was in continuous movement, whereas reading forced one to focus on fixed words and letters, a definite detriment to one's health! I was glad Prashant was out of ear range, as I knew he would gladly welcome this kind of advice and make the very most of it, so weary was he of continuous study!

This talk of watching brought us to another interesting point. U.G. continued, "Looking at a rose does not tell you that it is a rose; the things you notice about the rose--its color, shape, fragrance, and beauty--were all created by the looker. These things are not qualities of the thing itself, but our own knowledge about the flower projecting itself, that's all."

He went on to say that man had created God out of his greed. The ultimate greed is God. A man who is at peace with himself and the world (for they form one unit) would not create a God, and would *never* ask himself how to find peace of mind. These kinds of questions are born out of man's false sense of dilemma and not of his natural physical state of being. Soon the mechanical

nature of man, the automatic functioning of the biological organism, will be discovered. He says that we are not ready to accept the fact that we are functioning exactly like computers, with information put into us from the outside. "You are nothing but a memory, but you don't want to accept your automatic, mechanical nature."

He continued along a slightly different line, "If there were no crime in this world, many would be left unemployed. Crime is an industry, like any other, and feeds millions--judges, policemen, jailers, and thieves. If you took away the beliefs of the masses, there would be even more jobless. What would the priests and holy men do? The scientists are no better, as they are a direct threat to the world. They have developed the means to blow up the entire planet. Instead of being alarmed, they spend their time awarding each other Nobel prizes.

In the middle of all this Suguna entered and announced that lunch was ready. One interesting thing about U.G. is that he never feels disturbed when even the most serious discussions are interrupted. Nor does he plan to continue the conversation at a later time. As soon as Suguna walks in he drops what he was saying, tells a small joke, and the whole conversation is completely forgotten. Sometimes his friend Kalyani comes in dancing and singing, upon which U.G. abruptly ends his on-going conversation, no matter how serious, and offers her a ten rupee note if she would sing us all some songs. His more philosophical guests are often annoyed by these actions, implying as they do an undercurrent of indifference to their theories and grave concerns.

The dollar is sinking....

About a week later I was walking with U.G. when I remarked about his weight. As we entered the narrow gates of a park he said, "Weight is not my problem. Right now my problem is walking. What's happening here? There's no center of gravity, no gravity at all. Lighter than the lightest, heavier than the heaviest. That's what they say. Then you end up feeling like this. Who's walking here? It's a very funny situation."

He began to weave and meander around as he walked on, a common sight for his friends. Suddenly he said, "The dollar is sinking, the Franc is rising, the Rupee is floating, and I am gliding." You could tell he was very pleased at his extemporaneous composition. Then he said, "Shanta, do you know why Jesus walked on water? He didn't know how to swim!"

What's so happy or new about the New Year?

It was New Year's day, and the usual gang was hanging around at U.G.'s place at Poornakuti. The poor Dutchman fell into a trap waiting for him when he amiably wished U.G. and the rest of us a Happy New Year.

What's so new or happy about it?" U.G. asked. "You were here yesterday and you are here again today. You have even worn the same clothes." So the new year was greeted not with a bang, but with a hiss.

At that moment the Italians Paolo and Marissa walked in. U.G. poked fun at their belief in astrological readings, and their love of money. Although U.G. always warns against wasting money on astrological readings, his many friends usually make a beeline for the Nadi astrologer in Bangalore.

"I don't have to look at the chart," U.G. said, "I can tell you what you want to know right now. The future is not as far away as you imagine. It is here now. Tell me what you want to know." He seemed very interested in Paolo's chart. He was anxious that he (Paolo) should find a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. He said, "It is good for us if you are going to be rich, Paolo. When the dollar sinks we shall have to depend upon you."

Paolo was angry because the Western horoscope he had made up with the help of a computer was giving wrong information, as it had been fed the wrong data. We all agreed that getting angry at a computer was a useless waste of energy. He, Sivaraman, and U.G. continued on discussing some of the finer points of astrology. We were amazed at U.G.'s substantial knowledge in this field.

Sivaraman remarked that the groups hanging around U.G. were getting larger and larger. U.G. rushed to assure him that no one could ever take his place or outwit him, so he need not fear the growing crowds. He said that in that case he was prepared to be U.G.'s successor. U.G. laughed and said, "Since there is nothing to succeed here, you need not wait for long. You could take over immediately." U.G. watched Sivaraman closely as he spoke. Sivaraman has this habit of opening his mouth wide, and to add to that his ravenous appetite always seemed to frighten U.G. U.G. then interrupted him with, "Sivaraman, I don't see any words when you are talking, only a deep crater. If you don't stop I feel I shall be swallowed up in it." Not another word escaped Sivaraman's tightly closed lips that day.

None of us here have a criminal record....

Not much later Subramanya, a journalist, brought along a rather self-important man who was responsible for the surrender of six hundred dacoits. It was obvious to all that he was expecting some words of praise from U.G. Instead he was blasted: "What about the six hundred dacoits you have put there in the Parliament?" Chagrined, the man rose and said, "I will return when you are in a better mood."

The same afternoon the minister for small scale industries arrived. U.G. as usual was blunt: "Let me make one thing absolutely clear, Sir. I am not in the least interested in small or large scale industry. Nor am I willing to recommend any people to you." That said, he allowed the conversation to roll on uninterrupted.

The Inspector General of Police arrived with a whole army of policemen and security guards. U.G. felt moved to say, "Sir, none of us here have any criminal record!"

When talking with ministers and representatives of the State U.G. assures them that he has no objections to corruption. For him corruption is simply business as usual. He neither condemns nor condones corruption. He says that a man talks about morals only when he lacks the means to corrupt another or be corrupted himself. U.G.'s friends often fear for his well-being when he makes such statements to important members of the government. But in this case the minister was delighted with his honesty and candor, even inviting him to have lunch with a group of ministers to discuss with them his views on life, the State, and corruption. U.G. declined.

Of sleeping men, magicians, and avatars....

Listeners are often surprised to hear U.G. put God-men and magicians on the same level. He mentioned a film made by a Swiss man that looked at the lives of eight gurus from India. He spoke vehemently about God-men and their miracles, adding that the magicians in the U.S. could make jumbo jets and elephants disappear in a wink. One magician was able to fill buckets and buckets with flowers right in front of his audience.

U.G. said that no God-man, especially Sai Baba the Avatar, would ever risk performing their tricks in the U.S.A., because the powerful and sophisticated cameras used there would easily expose them. He went on to say that if the Avatars or so-called God-men really possessed knowledge about any as yet undiscovered laws, it was their solemn duty to inform the world, putting mankind on the right track and thus saving it from its inevitable doom, instead of

producing trinkets and ash, which was, according to him, nothing more than cheap entertainment.

"They are going to survive as great survivors as long as they have believers. You provide the fertile soil for their survival."

Subramanya asked U.G. how a stone could be worshipped as a God. He replied that if a virus could pass itself off as man, then it certainly cannot be difficult for a stone to pass itself off as a God. If man is capable of inventing God, and then worshipping him, he is capable of believing in *anything*.

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CHAPTER 3

Sometimes my pen will not move at all. My pen and my thoughts often experience paralysis together, especially when I have had a run with U.G. What else can you expect when you return day after day for eight continuous years to spend your leisure time with a person who makes it clear that he does not give two hoots about you! It makes me question my noble intentions. It hurts my feelings not just in relation to U.G., but affects all my other relationships as well. I have tried to wean myself away from his company. But it is difficult. Sometimes when I am licking my own wounds and thinking of putting some distance between myself and U.G. my daughter would get sad for not seeing him for a few days. She would not sing and would go around with a long face, not laughing at any of the jokes which usually do not fail to amuse her. I would invariably give in and ring U.G. if only to see a smile return to my child's face. He is more in my thoughts when I am trying to break away than when I just let it take its own course. It is when I am most enjoying his company that he chooses to impress upon me the uselessness and hopelessness of it all. The truth of what he says simply cannot be denied, at least by me, no matter how difficult it is to swallow. I must say there is something about him which sets him apart from others and makes him absolutely unique.

Paralysis, feet kissing, *sthitaprajna*, and headaches....

Sometimes his actions spoke louder than any words. For example, once Narayan Rao arrived for a visit. He and U.G. ascended the stairs to his 'office' and I remained behind for a few minutes doing some quick chores. After a few minutes I decided to join them, and, as I reached the top of the stairs I found them both almost on their knees making funny gestures. I thought that perhaps they were searching for something, but soon realized what was going on. U.G. was doing his best to stop the pious old man from touching his feet. He said, "No, don't do that, Sir. Not only to me but to anyone else either. No one is worth that, believe me. How can I convince you that there is no power outside of you? I never touched anybody's feet, not even my own."

To no avail. Narayan Rao was convinced that U.G. was definitely more evolved, and as he didn't want anything from anybody, he was a legitimate object of worship. They then commenced their mutual praises, and mutual denial of the other's praises. The old man insisted that U.G. was a *sthitaprajna*, but U.G. exclaimed, "A *sthitaprajna*! I am more worldly and practical than anybody else. How can you call me a *sthitaprajna*?"

Narayan Rao then asked, "How is it that you have so much energy?"

"I have more energy because I am not wasting any of my energy trying to become something." Later that day U.G. noticed that his Dutch friend Henk had not been around for a few days. He said he wanted to visit Henk's hotel to see if Henk's corpse might be lying there somewhere unclaimed and unidentified. When he arrived at the hotel he asked for Mr. Shoenville and was told that no such person was staying with them. He tried the name Henk, with the same result. Then he said 'European' and was immediately directed to Room Number Three. All this was narrated to Henk in detail in an attempt to convince him that he was known and popular at the hotel.

Henk said he was suffering from a headache. U.G. said that he need not entertain any ideas that the pain was related to enlightenment or higher states of consciousness, that his headache was most likely related to indigestion or some such problem. Satisfied that Henk was alive and kicking and in no serious danger, U.G. wandered back to Poornakuti looking dazed. When he arrived home and related all this to us, he added that he had also found Henk's room was full of young Indian boys who had assumed that he was a heroin dealer, if not worse. We all chose to take this last bit of information with a very large grain of salt!

The only side....

Late in the afternoon Nagaraj felt quite hungry, and said that we should all eat something to keep body and soul together. U.G. pointed to his heel and said that it was the only 'sole', and that the other soul, if there was one, was fed to the point of indigestion by all those holy men and so-called messiahs.

The independent woman....

It was very early and my fingers dialed U.G.'s number without any help from the eyes. Suguna answered, and, from the sound of her voice I could tell she was suffering from one of her migraine headaches. U.G. came on the line and said, "Madam, your presence is in great demand." I remained unmoved, refusing to feel even the slightest feeling of elation. He is often overly kind with his generous words. He wanted me to hire a car and be at his door by 9:30. I protested that I hardly had time to make that distance. I told him that I sometimes wished that I was a man so I could be more independent and get around in public easier. U.G. responded, "Women are more independent than men, they just don't know how to exercise their independence. Come on, step on it, and make it snappy. You can make it in time. Nothing is impossible."

Happily, I did make it on time. U.G. took the seat next to the driver, and Adri and I ensconced ourselves in the rear seat. We sped along the broad roads of Basavannagudi. There was some mix-up about the address of our destination. U.G. took out a slip of paper with the address written on it. He read it aloud, then tore it up. He added that now that the address was stored in the "computer" it would remain there forever. We found Nagaraj and his brother waiting for us in front of the house and transported them to their newly-constructed house.

His family was quite pleased to receive us, and prepared some delicious *idlis*, *chutney*, and coffee. As Suguna was not well we all agreed that this repast would have to be our meal of the day. We all then marched dutifully from room to room, admiring the new rooms. U.G. was most interested and attentive to all the details of the construction, all the while giving helpful suggestions to Nagaraj about how best to utilize the available space.

Soon we were all back in the car headed to Brahmachariji's place. Brahmachariji had just arrived home in his own car and seemed very surprised and pleased that U.G. had come with such a

large, agreeable crowd. He was more than hospitable, and in quite high spirits, as was usually the case when U.G. was around.

Then Nagaraj said that U.G. seemed to be at his best when riding around in the car. He added that someone was sure to 'get it' from U.G. that day. Surprisingly Brahmachariji added, "Yes, the lucky one will get it." U.G. smiled at him, winked, and said, "Nagaraj, did you hear that?"

On the half hour return trip to Poornakuti U.G. made many humorous and interesting remarks, and I scribbled them down as fast as I could. He said that a friend in Mysore, Dr. Ramakrishna Rao had said that it was surprising that U.G. never used the complex terms of either Eastern or Western philosophy, but certainly possessed a wide and deep knowledge of both. U.G. said that all thought had been thrown out of his system altogether, and that all he really needed to communicate was a simple and limited vocabulary to say what he needed to say.

Thymus glands, pigeon holes, and devoted wives....

He went on to say that he did not want to ever imply that anything was going to happen to anybody. "Like that fellow from Jhansi who was convinced that his thymus gland was being reactivated. I told him to just forget it and catch the first train back to hell, or wherever he came from." Then, as if to punctuate this statement, he said, "They are not going to get *anything* from me, you may be sure." His face turned red as he spoke with great force and certainty.

By then Henk the Dutchman had joined us, and U.G.'s rage was turned upon him: "They say that I always talk of money, but the way the Dutch cling to their pennies and pounds is just disgusting. If they refuse to part with a few pennies, how could they seriously talk of brushing aside their entire past. If they were unable to give up such trifles, how could they ever even think about liberation?"

At some point in the conversation U.G. quipped, "Hope for the best and be prepared for the worst." When Nagaraj excitedly applauded this witticism, U.G. admitted that they were originally the words of Jinnah addressed to the Muslim League during the partition of India. Nagaraj then asked U.G. what he would do if he were staying in a five-star hotel and nobody came to visit him. U.G. almost never answers suppositional questions of any kind, but this time he did: "I am not against people visiting me. I don't call or miss anyone if they don't come. It must happen naturally."

U.G. said that one famous philosopher admitted that he was unable to put him in any pigeon hole, had finally given up, and his parting words were, "We must let this strange bird fly free."

U.G. added that as soon as they succeeded in fitting him into some framework it would be the end of him.

Nagaraj then told U.G. that he was such a difficult person that his wife must have had a terrible time with him. U.G. countered that she never thought so, so how could anybody else hold such an opinion? She was loyal to him till the end, he said, and would get furious if anyone said a word against him. He said that only a filthy country like India which produce Sita, Anasuya, and Damayanti could produce a loyal wife like her.

Then the topic switched to Ramayana. As usual U.G. praised Ravana to the skies and said that by the time Valmiki reached the end of writing his epic poem he must have been of two minds about who was to be the hero.

Moving feet, wonder of wonders....

U.G. and I went to the airport to meet Mahesh Bhatt. His plane was to arrive late by at least an hour and a half, so we decided to take a seat in the bustling airport and wait it out. The books in the store were visible from where we sat, and U.G. would read title after title aloud, an activity

interrupted by the passing movements of people. I watched him intently and smiled to myself. "Every movement there is a movement here. This like an empty screen--now see this man, now this title, now this poster, now this porter, now this woman. That is all. Do you really want this? You talk of bliss and beatitudes, but the movement of that man's foot there is all there is for me. I *am* that, that movement of the foot, and there is no other meaning to that phrase." As he talked his head and eyes moved with every passerby, and when the traffic stopped, he would immediately resume reading and reciting aloud the titles of books. I found the whole thing most interesting, and I watched him intently.

Boredom, U.G.'s problem, getting nothing....

Next he pointed to a lady buying some chocolates in the shop. As she counted her change he watched her every movement. "In that simple activity there is the real wonder of wonders, not your wondrous nature with its trees and all that romantic stuff." He explained that that was why he was never bored: there was always something going there which demanded his complete and total attention. It is only when we feel that there must be something more interesting or meaningful that boredom sets in.

Well, I must admit that I certainly function differently than U.G. As we sat on the bench waiting for Mahesh to arrive I could not refrain from thinking--perhaps worrying is a better word--about my son's upcoming exams. How could he be ready with thirty four lessons the next day? I related my fretful thoughts to U.G. and he said, "How can you sit there and worry about something which you are doing absolutely nothing about? Either you should help him with his lessons or get somebody who would. The last thing you should do is sit there worrying about it."

I did not, as often happens when I am with U.G., notice the passage of time. Soon the plane arrived. Greeting us in his usual dramatic style, Mahesh said, "Look, we are going to build a foundation around you, U.G., whether you like it or not. I will be the video tape man, Shanta the receptionist, and Nagaraj will be the secretary." U.G., ignoring his little joke, asked matter-of-factly, "How much money do you have on you Mahesh? We have to pay for the car, and the one who pays gets to sit in front." Mahesh offered at once to pay, but insisted that U.G. take the front seat. So, with Mahesh making the crowd all the more merry, we made our way to Poornakuti.

They dropped me tired and dazed at my door, promising to meet me the following day.

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CHAPTER 4

January 21, 1988 was different from all other days. Usually we came to see U.G. and talk about our seemingly endless personal problems, but this day we were all assembled to discuss U.G.'s problem. His difficulty was strange: why had we for so many years come to him again and again despite his repeated announcement that he could not help us at all, that he had no wares to sell, that we were wasting our time if we thought we would get *anything*? He said that he could not make himself available to people for this reason. He added that he wanted it made absolutely

clear that what he was saying should *never* be given any spiritual or mystical overtones by us. Whatever he said was to be stripped clean of any and all religious content, period.

I, unfortunately, happened to be sitting right under his nose. So, looking for someone to direct his rage, he said to me, "Why do you come day after day, wasting your money, knowing that you can't get a thing here? Why do you and others come here for years in spite of my rude, blunt cynicism, my insults, and open refusals to offer you any solutions for your problems?"

Suddenly turning to me he said, "Lady, you please give me one reason why you come here." "I like you," I said. "But I don't like you," he responded. It was like a slap in the face. I was quite piqued even after he tried to console me by saying that he jolly well understood our sentiments, but that it was impossible for him to reciprocate anyone's feelings. The great summit meeting went on, everyone offering solutions to the problem, only to have U.G. brush them all aside. The problem remained unsolved. U.G. gave up trying to get any help from us. An idle car on the road led U.G. to suggest that I go home. This was the end, and I, as had happened many times before, vowed never to look at his face again. "Why single out my face? Is it so bad as that?" asked an innocent-looking U.G. The next morning every trace of anger had vanished. I was waiting for a call from U.G. with prayers and expectation.

When, to my undiluted delight, the call came, he told me that Mahesh was in the same mood (the same foul mood and with the same resolution never to see U.G. again as he had the night before), and that I should grab Mittu, my notebook, and make haste to Poornakuti. As I entered the room a heated conversation on enlightenment as ultimate pleasure was well under way. This time the animated questioner was a German, very intent upon convincing U.G. of his seriousness and ardent desire for enlightenment. U.G. did not spare him: "You have chosen a fine form of escape for yourself, but there is nothing superior about it. You should stop fooling yourself if you think you are helping the world in any way. You are only adding to the already existing confusion in the world.

U.G. then broke off his conversation with the German and asked me to read from my notes to the assembled group. Nagaraj went up in arms. Whenever I was asked to read from my notes he would slip out for a smoke, admitting that he was thoroughly bored with my repeated narrations. Anyway, I had no choice in the matter. Mahesh seemed quite pleased with a few points that he had not heard before.

Mahesh then asked U.G. for a quick review of the new book coming out entitled **Mind is a Myth**. "Any fool who buys and reads that book is wasting his time and money." Mahesh repeated this line at least a dozen times until it began to sound like a nursery rhyme.

Lunch was soon over, and the obsession with the idle car arose once again. Plans were laid to take the kids and ladies to the Ashoka Hotel so that we could watch the video cassette in Mahesh's room. Mahesh could not understand the need to put the car to use and said, "I must put my hands to use and strangle somebody." We made it to Mahesh's room and enjoyed some coffee at his expense. As the video blared Brahmachariji, Chandrasekhar, Suguna, and Subramanya all showed up, making conversation nearly impossible. We watched "Moonlighting", a movie about a lady trying to get a black belt in Judo, an accomplishment that could not happen soon enough for U.G. He, however, recommended the next movie, "Moonstruck", as much superior. But once again plans were soon made to return to Poornakuti, as the car was once again sitting idle. Its disuse had become a joke by that time. Upon our return I was once again asked to read from my notes, to the delight of Subramanya and the disgust of Nagaraj who went out for a timely smoke. U.G. suddenly announced that he would take up the challenge of seeing to it that my notes would see the light of day, if not in India then in America.

Mr. Subramanya asked if he could bring in some professors from the Institute of Science of the Bangalore University to meet and talk with U.G. Apparently he did not notice the obvious fatigue on U.G.'s face. U.G. diplomatically deferred the matter to the next day. Nagaraj asked U.G. why, if he was serious about not meeting with people, he continued to make fresh appointments. U.G. said that in spite of the fact that he was not in the least interested in gathering people around him, he was not capable of saying "No." Nagaraj gave up, saying that he did not know what to make of it all. When Nagaraj said he was sorry for pushing the idea U.G. forgave him even before he had asked for forgiveness.

Ram Nam, munching papads, and natal charts....

It's really great fun to have Mahesh around. That day was a special one, and we were all having *chapatis* in his honor. Nobody cared for or paid much attention to U.G.'s "Down with Hindi" refrain and his "nothing from the North" broadsides. Chandrasekhar was busy trying his hand at operating the video camera, which made me very self-conscious while he taped me eating. U.G., oblivious of the camera's prying eye, happily munched his *papads*.

Between bites he told Mahesh that he had given me a new *mantra* which was sure to send me into instant ecstasy. Everyone sat up and listened as U.G. recited it: "*Ram nam bore hai, bhakti mukti jhoot hai.*" Everyone, including U.G., joined in the hearty laughter.

The next day we were discussing the astrological chart made by an Italian astrologer who had never met or even heard of U.G. Nevertheless, the predictions and character analysis was remarkably coinciding with U.G.'s actual life and behavior patterns. We all found it most interesting and fascinating.

A visit from a troubled J.K. fan....

The next morning there were not many people around, and it promised, for a change, to be a quiet, uneventful day. But soon a Mr. Hinduja arrived, and after polite enquiries about each others' health and the like, he finally came out with his question. He was a seasoned and disillusioned J. K. fan, and all the years of attending J. K.'s talks had obviously not helped him at all. So here he was asking U.G. why the mind remained such a problem for us. I was all ears as U.G. began his unprepared response in a very natural way. He said, "The mind is a disease. Any medicine that you try is only going to prolong the suffering. Its only effect is to keep the disease going a little longer. The death of the mind will free you from suffering at once. But you do not want to die. Actually, you seem to enjoy the suffering, and that is why you continue looking for some medicines which will give you relief. Of course, the doctors and medicine makers have to make a living and will take full advantage of your hopeless situation.

I was so happy listening to all this. But after a few moments of silence the man asked another question: "Are you always happy, Sir?" U.G. instantly shot back, "I really do not know what happiness is. So I can be neither happy nor its opposite, unhappy."

Hanging out with the Poornakuti gang....

The next afternoon I was a bit tired from teaching simple interest problems to my daughter who was having her arithmetic tests the following Monday. So, after finishing lunch, I was enjoying a well earned snooze when the phone rang. Rudely awakened, I heard U.G.'s voice on the line. It was worth being disturbed. He said that the conference there was interesting, that Brahmachariji, Adri, Nagaraj, and the rest of the gang were all there and in good form. That was enough for me. The sleepiness and laziness flew out the window, and within the hour I had joined the group.

I entered to find U.G. and Brahmachariji sitting on the cane chairs, Nagaraj relaxing in the corner, Lalubhai sitting calmly in another corner, and Adri sitting on the floor close to U.G.

Of horrible men, palaces, and chanting *slokas*....

There is no end to the jokes and laughter with the lively combination of U.G. and Brahmachariji. U.G. asked Brahmachariji if he, after knowing him for some twenty years, "really, honestly, truthfully and sincerely" thought U.G. was a 'horrible man'. Brahmachariji hesitated momentarily as we eagerly awaited his answer. He hedged around the question and said that courtesy demanded that he kept his opinions private. Then Lalubhai, trying to be very helpful, said, "Do you have any other word to describe U.G. than the word 'horrible'?" We all found that a very witty remark and laughed heartily.

U.G. then enquired Brahmachariji why he kept coming all these years, despite the fact that he did not agree with one simple thing that U.G. had said. Before Brahmachariji could think of an answer Nagaraj asked U.G. why he could not throw Brahmachariji out of his system. The simple answer came: "I just don't want to. It was, after all, he who brought me to Bangalore and made it possible for me and Valentine to establish a home here. I am forever thankful for this."

Nagaraj then asked U.G. why he didn't provide for Brahmachariji's material needs. U.G. held forth thus: "I would turn this house into a palace for him" Brahmachariji inserted a vociferous "But..." at this point, and U.G. continued, "I would provide him with anything he wanted, *but* my gratitude is so overwhelming that nothing which money could buy could ever express it. U.G. doubled up with laughter, so pleased was he with his joke.

U.G. got up, went to the cupboard where the "archives" were kept, and pulled out the poem Brahmachariji had written about him back in 1979. U.G. read aloud some of the verses. He read the part which expressed Brahmachariji's frustration and bewilderment of trying to spell out just exactly what U.G. was, a Madhawa or a Mareecha, a God or a Devil. He also patiently read out U.G.'s astrological predictions penned by Brahmachariji as well.

Suddenly U.G. asked for a pen and a paper. He said that there were circular movements of energy starting from the inner corner of his eye, and another which commenced from his ear, which operated on different levels but never clashed with one another. Both circular movements ended in the forehead region. He asked Brahmachariji if he knew of any sacred verses that referred to this curious movement. Brahmachariji and Shashidhar began chanting some *slokas* that described the various gods which resided in the hands, ears, eyes, etc. U.G. sat quietly with his eyes and said, "All those verses were no doubt written by aspirants who wanted very much to be 'there'. But assuming that someone is there, then all these descriptions are of no value whatsoever to that person. Further, it is very disturbing to his body, because the very act of describing creates an unnatural division there. Once the division takes place it creates a painful tension in the forehead, which the body is obliged to handle in its own way. There is no 'individual' there to handle anything."

Generalizing, he went on to say that these chantings are of no use to this person, or to the person who thinks that through chanting he can attain some wished for spiritual goal. In fact, the very chanting itself becomes the obstacle. It is the same with anger, greed, and other emotions which, when regarded as things to be free from, become their own obstacles.

He turned to Nagaraj and said, "Don't try to be free from the so-called negative emotions--greed, anger, lust, fear, etc.--let them remain, leave them alone. When you are free from anger then you will find yourself freed from property, relatives, children, etc. also. I myself resolved everything into just one burning question: 'Is there really something called enlightenment?' Nothing else mattered. I did not attain *moksha* or enlightenment, which were my goals. The question just

burned itself out. The very demand to know the answer to that question, and to be 'free' from anything was entirely absent, that's all." We all found these flowing, crystal-clear statements most interesting and instructive.

Bhujangas, special treatment, and a devoted friend....

U.G.'s body always went through changes during the full moon. He was telling the assembled gang that the swellings had already started, and showed us the rope-like band of swellings around his neck. He said that on Shivaratri day the swellings took the form of a cobra. He surmised that this was probably the reason why pictures of Shiva showed a coiled cobra around his neck. He insisted that these were purely physiological manifestations, having absolutely nothing to do with mysticism or spirituality, and merely showed that such an 'individual' was open to and affected by everything around him. He didn't have to do a thing.

Nagaraj pursued, "How are we different from you, U.G.?"

U.G. answered, "It is the same for you, Sir. You are in no way different from me. It is only because you have created a thought barrier around your fictitious self that nothing physical takes place there."

We all found this most inspiring and relaxing. To me it was certainly worth missing my afternoon nap, and I felt lucky to be a participant.

Brahmachariji was in a hurry to leave for an appointment with his brother with whom he had promised to spend the weekend. But U.G. kept him there for another hour, showering hospitality upon him. He offered fresh *idlis*, coffee, and charges for his taxi. After Brahmachariji made his belated departure, Nagaraj asked U.G. why Brahmachariji received such special treatment. "I have nothing against him, but I am determined that Suguna not be burdened unnecessarily. I don't want Brahmachariji to feel that he has any *right* to hospitality. I have never failed in anything so miserably as in my attempts to wean Chandrasekhar from him. With many others I have succeeded, but not with him."

Crying for help, bodies washing ashore, and hard-core movies....

The second book of U.G.'s conversations, **Mind is a Myth**, was about to come out, but the whole thing was being delayed, primarily due to the negligence of the publisher. The date for the release of the book had been publicly announced, and the ministers had all been invited to help inaugurate its release. The publisher had fallen behind schedule, so he was getting desperate and crying for help. He was ringing up U.G. every three hours from Goa, seeking his advice and counsel. U.G. was the least involved, saying he was not really in the picture at all. He raged that the first book was a mistake and the second was unnecessary, and that he had nothing to do with the whole business of publishing and printing. True, he had not even read the first book, **The Mystique of Enlightenment**, and depended upon its readers to tell him what it was all about. The only thing he knew was that the size of the audience increased after its release.

Sometimes I would hear U.G. talking to Goa on the phone, "The publisher, the printer, and the distributor can all jump in the river in Goa. But don't try jumping into the sea. The salt water will make your bodies float, and there would always then be the possibility that the stinking bodies might wash ashore!" Woe to the poor man on the other end of the line! After putting down the receiver, U.G. walked calmly upstairs asking me if I knew the name of the large river running through Goa. He made me jot it down for him and spelled it out loudly, "Mandavi."

Jack Nicholson, sex cassettes, and cheap fuel....

The conversation rolled on in a meandering way and somehow J. Krishnamurti's name came up. U.G. quoted American actor Jack Nicholson who said that the difference between the '60s and the '80s is that now the Krishnamurti tapes are played in between the hard-core sex movies. Just then Mr. Ramaswami arrived and discussed his visit to the ophthalmologist in Madras, who informed him that his left eye was almost gone. U.G. gaily asked if the right eye was to follow. They got on to the subject of T.V. programs. Ramaswami expressed surprise that U.G. had never seen even one J. K. tape on the T.V. when he was in the United States. U.G. asked him if he had ever watched hard-core sex movies. R. said that he did not. "There," ejaculated U.G., "How could you have seen J.K.'s tape cassettes when they are always presented between two porno movies? No wonder you missed them." He enjoyed Ramaswami's bewildered look, and, turning towards me, laughed with joy at the hilarity of the moment.

Not satisfied, he went on to tell Ramaswami that the cremating of human bodies was a waste, because some scientists had recently discovered that the bodies could be made to produce a cheap fuel if submerged in an acid. He thought it a fine way to remember your ancestors, because every time you turned on the gas you could say "That's my grandmother" or "That's my great grandfather." It doesn't seem nearly as funny when written down; you had to be there. Ramaswami had had enough for one day, and took his leave. In high spirits we marched down to see what was awaiting us for lunch.

Valentine, Lalubhai, and Jnanadeva....

Mr. Lalubhai had accompanied U.G. from Bombay, and I was curious to see him. As I entered the room I noticed that U.G. had had a hair cut and looked different. I was introduced to the quiet man sitting beside him. They were watching the Republic Day of Switzerland on the TV. Valentine, a Swiss citizen, was enjoying it. But before long she lost patience and left the room. Soon she was busy trying to revive her old socks. U.G. asked me to keep an eye on her. Almost like a little baby she was trying to remove her socks without help from someone. She finally succeeded at the task. U.G. said, "See, that's the intelligence I am talking about."

After some time U.G. asked Valentine to come and sit out on the sofa. With her memory loss and advanced age, she resisted such efforts, but found herself inexplicably seated next to U.G. on the sofa. She looked at him and said that he was "worse than disgusting" for giving her all this trouble. She laughed and appeared to be in a good mood. Then U.G. joked about her age, asking her if she was eighty or fifteen. "Are you eighty? Are you seventy? Are you sixty?....Are you fifteen? Are you fifteen Valentine?" U.G. repeated. Valentine seemed to recognize the joke and laughed. Of course she had no idea, but, as far as I could tell, she seemed to be enjoying the whole thing. Lalubhai joined us for lunch. While we ate he mentioned that he enjoyed reading the classic book **Jnaneshwari** written by Jnanadeva, a Marathi saint, but since meeting U.G. had found himself unable to read it or any similar books. I said that it was not at all surprising.

Dead palmists....

The next day I was preparing once again to visit U.G. at Poornakuti when I met a good friend who was keen on palmistry and astrology. She offered to accompany me to U.G.'s. I warned her that a famous astrologer had died a few days after seeing him and attempting to read his palm. She replied that since she was already very sick and had many complications, it didn't matter to her. So we set off.

She was not invited to read U.G.'s palm, but was content just to meet him. As I had suspected, the moment U.G. learned that she had a working knowledge of palmistry, he eagerly stretched

out his hand for her to see. He was enthusiastic as he held his upturned palms, acting as if his whole future and well-being depended upon her predictions.

U.G. often acts interested in astrology and palmistry, and very convincingly at that. He starts with questions like, "Will I travel? Will I see foreign lands? Will money come pouring in?" She said that there were only two lines indicating travel to foreign lands, that money would never be a problem for him as he would not feel the need for it, and that he had a very strong mind. I asked him if he had a mind at all. He answered that if it was a strong mind, he certainly had it, otherwise he did not have a mind at all. She said that there were signs of there being many breaks in his education. He repeated his favorite line, "I am an illiterate." I had sincerely believed this line when I first met him years before. I had read somewhere that the highest saints and sages had not attended school or read beyond the fourth grade. So I was pleased when U.G. wrote his initials on a piece of paper for me, and was duly impressed at his fine command of English. I had no inkling of his background, and did not know that he was pulling my leg. I said to him, "Geniuses never have time to become literate."

The whole afternoon was spent in the same easy, frivolous way. My friend was thoroughly pleased. I knew she was hooked! As we were leaving U.G. suggested that I come by the next day, and to bring my daughter. I reminded him that the next day was Shivaratri. He said that we would be all the more welcome, as we would be fasting and would not be a burden on our gracious hostess, Suguna.

Throwing it all away....

It was Maha Shivaratri. I left for U.G.'s as early as my mundane duties would permit. I reached K.R. road around 10 O'clock. When I arrived I found Shashidhar and Satyanarayana ready to chant *slokas* and Chandrasekhar preparing the video camera. The crowd was larger than I had hoped and expected. I had my heart set on some *Japa* and getting into my best religious mood for the great day. I wondered what the day would bring, knowing it would be in the company of the unpredictable U.G.

Before long the drone of the chanting commenced. U.G. sat quietly with his eyes closed. Arhat sat cross-legged. Shivaram snoozed, Lalubhai was, as usual, the patient spectator, and Mittu worked on her arithmetic. I allowed myself to be pleasantly lulled by the singsong of the chanting. The Vedas were being chanted, but they found it difficult to synchronize with one another. They pleaded that they were amateurs and should not be measured on the same scale as the professionals.

As the chanting concluded U.G. said that there was some reference in the Vedas which asked one to throw everything away. But it was flawed in that it was part of a suggestion of a path for some aspirant to follow.

Satyanarayana then read out a verse from the Vedas which stated that an enlightened individual functioned in an entirely different way. It went on to say that such a person's every utterance *becomes* the Vedas.

U.G. added that such a person need not quote any authorities, and whatever was there should stand or fall of its own merit without any outside support. Such a person would not write any commentaries on the Gita, or any such text. Therefore, all those teachers, including Shankara, Madhvacharya, and Ramanujacharya, were just intellectual metaphysicians. He remarked how surprising it was that they could interpret the same text in so many different ways.

Then they discussed the various ways of defining Sanskrit words. U.G. told us about the pundits who sit on the banks of the Ganges and have hairsplitting discussions on the real meaning of certain words, or how a particular *acharya* used a certain word.

U.G. then talked about Satya Sai Baba and how painful it must be for him to vomit up so many *lingams*. He went on and on about it. I protested at length saying that it all sounded like blasphemy to me, especially since I was quite devoted to Shirdi Sai Baba since my childhood, and had come from a family of Baba devotees. I refused to write all these nasty things U. G. said about the saints whom I still very much revered. Lalubhai was listening to my heartfelt protestations and interceded with, "*Lingam-vomiting* is not nasty, but is actually a very heroic deed and a thing of great valor."

I told Lalubhai about some of the famous saints and sages I had met in my life. I mentioned Nisargadatta Maharaj. Lalubhai said he had also met him. He had asked the revered sage why he chain-smoked *beedies*. The latter replied that he smoked them only if and when his son brought some, otherwise he did not smoke them. U.G. had chimed, "He could not escape the consequences of smoking."

Nagaraj was genuinely surprised at the large number of saints I had met and asked me to total them up and give him a number. U.G. blasted away saying, "There are as many as there are hairs on her head. I can tell you that getting rid of them will be a very painful process."

Deterioration in human values....

One morning, Dr. Modi, a renowned eye surgeon who had performed many eye operations free by setting up camps all over India, came to see U.G., and I happened to be amongst the fortunate audience. Dr. Modi asked U.G. why there was a certain deterioration in human values. U. G. replied, "Human nature being what it is, what can you expect? Falseness of human values has ended up in the Church, the monarchy, and politics. We have elected and placed men in power, and with the very same power they will destroy everything. It is nothing but the power game. All heritage is born of a diseased mind. Man is corrupt and lays the blame at the feet of the coined word "heritage". The unwillingness to change with the changing times you call tradition."

Dr. Modi asked about love and compassion. U.G. answered, "Love thy neighbor as thyself"--more people have been killed in the name of love than anything else. You can't love your neighbor as yourself and even if by chance you do, your neighbor does not love you. He loves what you have." U.G. continued, "There is nothing but greed in operation. Indians are the most mercenary people, and yet you say you don't touch money with your hands. Anybody who talks of tradition should be shot at sight. The whole of mankind is taking a certain path to doom. You can't reverse it individually. And collectively it would mean war."

"Anyway," added U.G., "I always say that man, when he is alive is useful to the doctors or the holy men, and when dead he is useful to nature. Nature uses the dead bodies to recycle matter."

Dr. Modi listened to all this attentively and finally said, "Sir, I am fully blind. Please help me see." U.G. humbly replied, "I am not competent enough to do the operation. I can only tell you that there is nothing wrong with your eye and no operation is necessary." But the doctor persisted that U.G. should suggest some therapy for his spiritual malady. U.G. said, "The therapy is the disease."

The doctor finally got up and took leave. The conversation of U.G. with the eye doctor enabled the rest of us to "see" things clearly.

Souvenirs of extracted teeth....

It was before U.G. moved to his new residence, when he was still at West Anjaneya Street, that he decided that since his teeth were becoming loose he would have them out and get a set of false teeth made. There was a very devoted group of foreigners who offered their car to take him

to the dentist and another lady eye doctor who insisted on accompanying them. Now what I am relating is just what U.G. had told me, and I don't know how far take him seriously. He said that the foreigners, the eye doctor, and U.G. himself all trooped into the dentist's room, much to the bewilderment of the dentist. As U.G. opened his mouth and surrendered himself to the surprised dentist, the foreigners stood before him and showed him the photo of "Lord Rama," their deity of choice. I really don't know why they did that, because U.G. hardly ever taps on any outside source for his undaunting courage. Neither did the dentist need Rama's help to pull out loosened teeth. At the same time the lady doctor, U.G.'s foremost devotee, almost got herself electrocuted because she stepped on the electric wire connected to the dentist's chair, all in the eagerness to collect U.G.'s extracted teeth as souvenirs, reminding you of the temple in Candy (Sri Lanka) built over the tooth of the Buddha.

Purging U.G. out of the system....

While all this was happening I had one of my angry bouts against U.G., and had managed to stay away for at least a fortnight. On the sixteenth victorious day, I was tempted to see the tiger in his lair especially because the ferocious one had lost all his fangs!

U.G. greeted me with a toothless smile. As I flaunted my 16-day victory of independence, he said, "Tell me truly and honestly, how often were you tempted to use the phone?" Yet I would not openly admit how irresistible his power over me was, teeth or no teeth!

Finally he added, "I just can't get my teeth into anybody now." When I told him that one day (I don't know when that might be), I would finally purge my system of his very name, he said calmly, "You won't succeed; it just isn't possible."

Anyway, these sudden outbursts of anger always drive me to attempt to wipe him out from my memory. But there are times when I have thanked my stars for having met the only man on the planet who has his two feet solidly planted on the *terra firma*.

Speaking about this anger that burned me because of his absolute indifference (from my point of view), I remember one day when Nagaraj, Chandrasekhar, U.G., myself, and Brahmachariji were just having an idle chat after lunch. I asked U.G. if it really did not matter to him if he never saw my face again. This was many years ago, before I knew him well enough and when I still craved for some human emotions from the bottomless pit of the 'walking computer'.

U.G., of course, replied callously that if he never ever saw my face again he would not, in the least, be concerned over it. Then I remember how childish I sprang to my feet and exclaimed, "U.G. Krishnamurti, I am sick and tired of your callous behavior. I'll never ever set my eyes on you." He replied, "If you really mean what you say, you won't wait to give your parting speech." As was expected it was a tremendous struggle to keep away from him. I ended up with a toothache and antibiotic capsules which made me sicker. Finally I acted the prodigal son, not knowing what welcome I would get.

I can recall the embarrassment as I climbed up the stairs, dreading the moment of meeting him face to face and wondering how I would explain my presence after my great proclamation on the previous day. U.G.'s behavior revived my faith in the Bible. He jumped up and said, "Nagaraj, look who's here!" The first thing I said was, "I am on antibiotics and feel weak and hungry."

U.G. went into the kitchen, got me some hot coffee and *upma* (made of couscous) and watched me as I gobbled it all up gratefully.

Talking about teeth, I laughed when U.G. remarked, "I was happy when all my teeth were gone, and thought it saved me the bother of brushing them and taking care of them, but these false teeth need more fuss to be done about them than the natural ones!"

Controlling emotions....

It was a Sunday and Chandrasekhar had his privileged holiday. We were all on the sit-out and basking in the warm sunshine. U.G. as usual remained silent and unaware of what everyone else is doing around him when Chandrasekhar suddenly said something about emotions. U.G. had remarked that same morning that man is nothing but a computer but refuses to accept the fact. So reminding him of the statement he had made Chandrasekhar said, "Unfortunately or fortunately this human computer has emotions and feelings."

U.G. said, "That is the misery of man. That is the neurotic condition. All your religions condemn emotion. There are no good or bad emotions--all emotions are bad. Why do you want to control the emotions? Anyway, you are not dealing with emotions. All you do is sit there and talk about anger or jealousy. Anger as such is something you don't know. You are all the time controlling, suppressing, living with or choicelessly aware--you are all the time doing something with what is not there any more. It is already gone. It is the thinking that results in hitting somebody--your child, for example--and not the anger. You are attributing it to something that is not there any longer. *That* has set in motion this nonsensical movement of thought. So it is not the anger but the frustration that is your problem. You are not dealing with desire. Desire is life. If you destroy desire you are destroying life. It is there--not *must* be there--whether you like it or not. Have you freed yourself from desire? Don't say 'good desires', 'bad desires', 'spiritual desires' and 'material desires'. They are all the same. What you are going to do with the desires is all that you are interested in."

We were a very serious audience to all this, but suddenly Kalyani came in and started dancing around the room clapping her hands. Looking at her U.G. continued, "You are a neurotic and she is a clinical case. I don't see any difference. You too are talking within yourself all the time. She is talking aloud, so you call her a mad woman and put her here in the asylum. There is some consistency in what you are thinking which she does not have. So here there are organized trains, in her head express trains, so you think she is loony. Somebody in the loony bin says, 'I'm Jesus,' and you sit here and say, 'So-ham, I am That.' What's the difference? You are doing exactly the same thing."

Nagaraj who was sitting quietly all this time said, "U.G., what exactly are you trying to put across?" U.G. replied, "Depends on you, not on me. This you don't seem to understand. You are the only medium through which I can express myself. That medium I don't like because that medium is translating this into religious terms. That's not what I am. So try somewhere else or someone else. It is very much my concern not to sit here and waste my time. I don't want you to fit me in a religious framework. Any other framework will do. That's the point I am trying to hammer. So what does it matter whether you are here or there, talk to us or to some ash man or someone else?"

I will meet you again in 1990....

One evening it was quite late when a friend of Chandrasekhar brought along a famous astrologer and with him a strange group consisting of an American lady, a Negress, and an orange-robed *sannyasin*. It took us quite some time to get used to this assortment, but U.G. was quite at ease with his natural smile of welcome. He did not speak a single word till the orange-robed *sannyasin* asked him a few questions to which he replied quite courteously. The Swami then came out with a strange statement. He told U.G. that he was sure that they would meet each other again in April 1990. U.G. asked him how he could be so sure, but the latter insisted that he was certain about his prediction. U.G. joked and said, "I am not sure, I will be there at all, in 1990."

But the Swami exclaimed, "I will meet you wherever you are." That was the end of this strange episode.

Telepathy....

One day my sisters planned an outing to a nearby picnic spot. We arranged for a van, since with all the kids and the rest of the family, the cars were not enough. U.G. was in Bangalore and I very much wished that all of us could see him before we proceeded to Talakadu Lakes. Anyway, I did not dare to declare my wishes because no one else in my family was such an ardent devotee of U.G. except Mittu and myself. The rest of them were just in a great hurry to start on the trip. Much to my surprise, the van took the same road as the one along U.G.'s house, and even more surprising was the fact that I saw U.G. walking along the road. I immediately asked for the van to stop and each of us got off. U.G. shook hands with everyone and wished us an enjoyable picnic day.

This incident reminds me about the time I had asked U.G. if there was anything to telepathy. He asked why I was interested in all that. I had announced that if I had telepathic powers I could contact and converse with him wherever he was. Much to my disappointment he answered that writing letters was much easier. But there are times when I have thought strongly about him he *has* responded in some fashion or other.

At a loss for words....

U.G. related a funny incident about his Italian friend Paolo's brother. U.G. is never usually at a loss for words, but there was a situation when even he could not find the right answers. It seems that once he mentioned that do what you may you could not get into the 'natural state', because whatever you may have happened to do or not do would just be another obstacle in the way, and such a thing, if it happened at all, struck one in a billion. Then Paolo's brother apparently asked him, "U.G., we are four billion here. You are one. Who are the other three?" There was a pin-drop silence before the truth and humor of the statement hit the rest of the audience, and U.G. for the first time in his life was at a complete loss for words.

Your fear is your obstacle....

Arhat, an artist and photographer who was previously in the Rajneesh camp, now having deserted it for good, happened to visit U.G. He has taken beautiful photographs of U.G. and even helped to make the jacket for the new book **Mind is a Myth**. I was there when he had asked U.G. something about his experience of terrible fear during his meditation sessions. He questioned U.G. about this and U.G. replied, "The body has to go through actual physical dying, if you have to come into your own. The fear that you felt prevented the possibility of the experience of death. Every feeling, every experience, everything that everybody felt and experienced before has become a part of your being and has to be completely flushed out. But you can't make this happen through any volition on your part. It is the fear of yourself as you know yourself coming to an end that prevented that from happening. If you had gone through the death experience, then the whole organism would have fallen into its own natural rhythm, which is discontinuous, disconnected, and disjointed. The continuity of thought would have been broken. Sorry Arhat, you missed the bus."

U.G. continued, "That is why I am saying that all those teachers are false and their teaching is phony. I am not saying I am superior to all of them. Not at all. They are false, period, full stop, full period. I am not saying I have a teaching, that I am here to save mankind. It is false as far as you are concerned, but if you say that what I am saying is false because the others are right, then

you are on the same merry-go-round. I have freed myself from the burden, this choking of the entire past of mankind--that's all. I don't use that for any purpose other than communication, functional living; period."

Then Nagaraj asked U.G. how spirituality was considered so superior in India. U.G. replied, "Material achievements or spiritual achievements both are the same. You feel superior because you are mouthing some *mantras*, do your *sandhyavandanam*, take your bath at four o'clock. But Sri Ramakrishna--the mad one--that poor fellow had no money to go to the theatre to see the play of his friends, and Sharada Devei suffered too for lack of money. But now you wallow in wealth. What is the result of it all? You give away the money. How did all those temples, churches and gurus have become rich? They don't work for it. You give it to them. You deny yourself. Why do you walk and make them fly? Don't you see the absurdity of the whole thing?"

Offerings to gods a waste of money....

Chandrasekhar had not yet moved to Poornakuti. The new home had not been set up, and the moving was in the process. On such a day I was in a very relaxed mood, just chatting and gossiping with U.G., my daughter Mittu, an interested audience. I said that my son Prashant was terribly interested in American pop music. Very casually U.G. mentioned that he had a "walkman" which he would like to present to Prashant. I was very embarrassed with U.G.'s generosity. Yet he somehow convinced me that my son deserved that gift because he had given Mittu a wrist watch for her birthday. He said that the walkman was in Chandrasekhar's old house, and as usual he wanted to put the thought into immediate action.

So Mittu and myself found ourselves walking through the beautiful gardens of Basavangudi Park and through the temple precincts of the Anjaneya or U.G.'s childhood Monkey God! It was a beautiful experience to walk with U.G. without much conversation, amongst the cool trees. As I neared the Bull Temple I had a desire to see the huge, almost 20 foot Bull carved in black stone. I asked U.G. falteringly if he could just wait till I made a quick rush inside the temple and back. Surprisingly he agreed and patiently waited outside the temple when I rushed in to offer my prayers and respect to the sacred Bull. As soon as I ran back to where U.G. and Mittu were standing the first question he asked me was, "How much money did you waste in the temple? Did you put anything in the *hundi*?" I answered I had put a five rupee note. He said that he could have put that note to better use.

So we reached Chandrasekhar's house. U.G. tried to convince me what a beautiful set that walkman was as he tried on some music tapes on it. Then he had a naughty gleam in his eyes when he said, "It is so fantastic that I have two minds about parting with it." Anyway, my son jumped with joy when he got his new gift, and is ever grateful to U.G. for his kind and generous gift, to this day.

Getting "soles" fixed....

I remember as we walked back U.G. had trouble with his "sole". So we had to stop near a roadside cobbler's shop to get the sole of his sandals fixed. He made a very endearing picture--a man who spends every summer in expensive Swiss Alps, getting his "sole" fixed under the hot Indian sun. Anyway, he patiently waited for the cobbler to finish the job. But he refused to part with his new two-rupee notes. So he borrowed my old note which he promptly returned when we reached home.

On the way I asked him if he would drink some tender coconut water. He replied that he was not thirsty, and if at all he was, he would rather drink plain water as soon as we returned home.

I made him some coffee with cream. As he took the cup he generously offered to pray for my long life and prosperity!

I asked him where Chandrasekhar was and he said, "He has gone with his sister to Tirupati. After so many years with me he still goes there! He is insulting me." It was getting rather late and I had to unwillingly end another beautiful day with U.G.

Wanting to be free from boredom is the cause of misery....

I have a friend, Usha, who had this problem about boredom. There was a time when this particular aspect of life disturbed her, and it was then that she agreed to accompany me to U.G. As usual U.G. was not very pleased that I had brought one more person with me to discuss the "purpose of life". Anyway, he was quiet and did not seem eager to start any conversation. I knew one of us had to start and set the ball rolling. So I said, "U.G., how can we get rid of boredom?" He looked at me as if he knew the game I was playing. Anyway, he must have condescended to answer for my friend's sake. He said to my great satisfaction, "Whatever you do is boredom. It is part of life. People are all bored. Whatever you do is an escape; and that also bores you. You bore me. Your sitting here bores me. Your talk bores me." (I knew I had asked for it, but I let him continue.) He said, "What do you want me to do? The subject of God or Reality is equally boring. The talk on spirituality or gossip is as ridiculous as anything else to me. Even repeating *Ram-nam* is painful because it doesn't do any good. You have done it for long. Instead you can have a drink of wine or alcohol and forget for a while, or take a cup of coffee or tea. Even if you don't come back it is fine with me. Go to some guru. Don't waste your time here. Go to some doctor and take some palliative or drugs."

He continued, completely ignoring the dazed and shocked expression on our faces, "Wanting to be free from boredom is the cause of your misery. You want to be content always. It is just not possible. Just forget it. Why should you be content always? To me there is no such thing as contentment at all."

Suguna told him that his lunch was ready and waiting. He got up, excused himself and walked away unaware of the storm he had created in our minds.

It was just for a few minutes that we waited for him. He had gobbled up two *idlies*, eaten some yogurt, and that was lunch for him. Yet he spoke endlessly when the demand was there, and looked as if there was energy to spare. I asked him the secret of this inexhaustible source. He replied, "If you are free from goals of every kind, the energy is released for functioning in the world. Here (pointing to himself) the demand to be free from anything is not there. The problem with you is that when there is an experience there is a demand to extend the longevity of that experience which in turn destroys the sensitivity of the body. Every sensation has its own life. Pleasure is pain for the body. I never give any name to any sensation except when the demand is there. The demand always comes from outside. The demand for permanence is not in the nature of the body. The sensory perceptions are from moment to moment."

My friend and myself had a lot to think about as we made our way home, already planning our next trip to U.G. at the earliest convenience.

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CHAPTER 5

I had made it to Basavangudi quite early that morning, and I found Nagaraj and Adri already present there. U.G. looked quite neat in his laundered *kurta-pajamas*.

How each of us met U.G.....

We soon started to discuss how each of us had met U.G. and since how long each one knew him. U.G. calmly watched us as we exchanged notes and testimonials.

Adri, it seems, was a shopkeeper and an ardent follower of J. Krishnamurti. It seems his passion for J.K.'s lectures drove him to trust an utter stranger with his shop, and the unworthy stranger gave everything in the shop to every passer-by on credit. After the enlightening lectures Adri returned to the shop to find two soaps left and an utterly bankrupt Adri faced a bleak future.

I first met Adri at U.G.'s. U.G. shows a special affinity to the old man, generously giving him gifts every time he comes back to India. He also takes him along with him on his tours to Bombay, Mysore or the Nagerhole Forest. Adri, on his part, shows a strange attachment to U.G. which excludes the usual hello's and goodbyes. He just sprints into the room and joins the conversations and sprints out equally fast without wishing anybody goodbye.

Nagaraj worked as the Personal Assistant of the Post Master General in the Bangalore Main Post Office. Nagaraj too was a J.K. freak, read every book published by the Krishnamurti Foundation, practiced "choiceless awareness," sat for hours in front of trees and flowers in the Lalbagh gardens, and accidentally, much to his reluctance, met U.G. U.G.'s discussion of the "red bag" and "door knobs" instead of flowers and sunsets, blew Nagaraj's mind. Every time U.G. came to Bangalore he would apply for a month's leave and sit in a corner to take down notes in shorthand. It was his speed in shorthand and later in transcribing them that was a great help to U.G.'s second book **Mind is a Myth**.

Brahmachariji, a former I.A.S. officer and professor at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, was well adept in Vedanta and *Shastras* of Hindu philosophy. He happened to meet U.G. in Mysore. It was Brahmachariji who urged U.G. to come to Bangalore and introduced Chandrasekhar, Shashidhar, and Satyanarayana (who were learning Sanskrit from him) to U.G. Very soon, after a brief exposure to U.G., Brahmachariji lost almost all his disciples who became staunch regulars in the U.G. camp.

Radhrakrishna came to India from Karachi. He was a refugee after the partition in 1947. He had an adventurous journey in a train and arrived penniless in Bombay. He started from scratch as a balloon peddler to end up a tea merchant. Now his pockets overflow with money. He is always smiling and is nicknamed "Sadananda". He visits U.G. almost every day, and it is he who devotedly brings U.G. his cream for coffee, the **Time** Magazine or any other shopping item.

Rochaldas, the millionaire friend of U.G., introduced Gopinath and Radhakrishnan to U.G. So, in short, these are the regulars whom I meet every year.

Last but not the least, Subramanya, who is called the "sleeping man" by U.G., always goes into a sort of trance whenever U.G. is in the room. All of us are used to seeing him nodding his head in a corner. Narendra is another ardent devotee. He owns a bicycle shop, and whenever U.G. visits Bangalore he is ready to play the chauffeur and drive U.G. around in his car.

I just met a man....

Before I met U.G. I was immersed in the book **I am That**, conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In the course of conversation with U.G., whenever Maharaj's name was mentioned, U.G. would point to me and say, "Your Nisargadatta," and I would feel quite elated. I asked U.G. if he had ever met Maharaj. U.G. replied that Maurice Frydman had somehow arranged a meeting. But Frydman did not know Marathi which was the only language Maharaj spoke. And the other person in the room with Maharaj could not be of much help as an interpreter because he could not understand much English. Anyway, as U.G. returned home someone asked what he thought of Maharaj and U.G. gave a typical answer, "I just met a man."

I told U.G. that his name was mentioned in the **I am That** in Chapter 72, and that Maharaj had commented that "this man", referring to U.G. would soon stop talking altogether. U.G. on hearing this said, "Maybe, I will develop throat cancer or something. It is only the privilege of a saint to die of cancer. I told Mahesh to see that in my death certificate the cause is put down as cancer and not anything else. Otherwise I won't be recognized by the world. Anyway it is only when I stop traveling that I will drop dead."

I had somehow got Maharaj to autograph the book **I am That**, and this made the book all the more precious to me, so precious that I was reluctant to lend it to anyone. And if I did lend it I was quite worried about losing it till it came back to me. U.G. remarked, "If you are that attached to that book, whatever you get from it will be a big zero." This statement surely succeeded in reducing my attachment to a certain extent, but even at this point it has not completely vanished. Just to end this narrative concerning Maharaj, I remember I had told U.G. that when I had first read Maharaj's book I felt as if the chair that I was sitting on was pulled from under me. And U.G. replied, "I will pull the chair, the carpet, and the very ground that you are standing on." I was so hypnotized by his words that even for my own sake I did not have the strength to run away from him.

No difference between the religious man and the politician....

It was just a foursome on a cloudy morning. Not many visitors--just Nagaraj, Chandrasekhar, myself and U.G. sipping hot coffee brought by Suguna. U.G. was just glancing through the **Time** Magazine. Naturally over hot coffee the most delightful subject to discuss is politics, if you have had enough of the weather. U.G. said, "Between the religious man and the politician, I see no difference. The religious man does not want to take the backseat. So he uses the gullibility of man, the belief of man and exploits him. You blame corruption, but you are corrupt. You are electing the corrupt man. Even if you don't someone else will elect him. Two crores of rupees for every candidate. How do they get two crores of rupees? When once in the seat of power what does he do? He wants to maintain the same style afterwards. So he has to make money. So he starts the membership for the party. You are a bound slave for the next five years."

"The religious man condemns corruption from the platform and makes money by condemning corruption. The politician does the same thing. So what's the difference? The politician says, "I am the custodian of the morality of man. I don't want anything for myself, only for my cause. What cause? Cause of that blind cow there?" U.G. continued, "I am not singling out anyone. I am just pointing out. Society wants Mr. Average, just ordinary people. It will destroy Hitler, if he does not commit suicide on his own, and will destroy Gandhi. Society does not tolerate extremes like Hitler or Gandhi, the two extremes of the same spectrum. Sinners and saints both have to go. So what we are left with is wanting to be a saint *one day*. Until then you remain a sinner. That is the problem with us. The emphasis that everybody should be a saint has created this lopsided

civilization, which is not possible." I thought we had enough of politics and politicians for a day. I declared that I had tried my hand at poetry and written the poem "Ganga" on the previous day. I cleared my throat and read it out to what I assumed was an appreciative audience. At the end of it all, when my ears ached to hear, "Bravo! *encore!*, *encore!*," what do you think U.G. said? He sneered, "Where did you pick up that horrible prosody?" It took me quite some time to recover from the shock and regain my confidence in myself and dare to lift my pen again to write poetry.

Wanting *moksha* is part of wanting....

Though U.G. usually rages and roars against saints, teachers and messiahs, there are moments when he appreciates the "real McCoys" as he calls them. One day he said, "Nartaki (one of Chandrasekhar's acquaintances) said something very interesting the other day. It seems that somebody went to Ramana Maharshi and said, "Bhagavan, I don't want anything. I only want *moksha*." It seems Ramana did not say anything but continued to do whatever he was doing. At twelve o'clock everyone got up to go except for that man. Ramana got up too and was about to go. He said to the man, "If you don't want anything that *is moksha*," and went away. Remarkable statement that was. That Ramana was a real McCoy." U.G. continued, "Wanting *moksha* is also part of wanting."

Old habits die hard....

As all this was being said a stranger entered the room. Maybe this was his second visit to U.G. She had brought along some cashew nut biscuits for U.G. who said, "Why all this? You don't have to bring anything." He turned to us and said, "Old habits die hard." The stranger did not stay back to converse but left almost immediately.

Not love but terror will keep us together....

U.G. wanted to get some cream from "Butter Sponge", a bakery which was quite a distance from home. He asked me if I was interested in a walk. I gladly agreed. I could not keep pace with him because he walked real fast considering he was almost one and a half times my age. I asked, "U.G., don't you ever feel tired?" He replied, "No, I live on air, polluted air. With all the preservatives added to the food I eat it should help to preserve the body longer." Coming back home to Poornakuti we found a scientist waiting to have a chat with U.G. He introduced himself and asked U.G. a question. U.G. answered, "Man is a chemical organism with an extraordinary intelligence. You have introduced an 'ideal man' and thus created misery for yourself. It is not 'Love thy neighbor' but terror which will keep us together."

"Man is just a memory. You understand things around you by the help of the knowledge that was put in you. You perhaps need the artist to explain his modern art, but you don't need anybody's help to understand a flower. You can deal with anything, you can do anything if you do not waste your energy trying to achieve imaginary goals."

The scientist then asked U.G. if we could convey any experience. U.G. replied that we could not convey any experience without a reference point. He gave an example of a Dutch girl who had never tasted a mango in her life and could never have the concept of the mango taste till she could taste a mango piece herself.

U.G. was then asked why religion had gained the upper hand in India. He said, "In those days the temple was the center of social activity. Slowly the priests took over the entire field of social activities." Asked about fear, U.G. said, "What you call you is fear. You go to a cricket match, take a drink, or listen to music to escape from the reality of the situation. The body can handle fear. It either faces the situation or runs away from it."

"If you have no fear, only then human relationship is possible. Then man will kill only for survival." U.G. continued, "I am a selfish man. I want only my two meals. The rest can do what they like. It's only because of religion that people are starving. You hoard for your children, your great grand children, and for the whole of evolution. Man is the most vicious of all animals, of all the species on earth."

"As for corruption, it is there in the West on a gigantic scale. Here it exists at every step, on every level, right down to the common man. We are doomed: the writing is on the wall. If you don't see it, you are illiterate and blind."

The scientist got up to leave. He was very polite and thanked U.G. for the very enlightening conversation. But U.G. refused to take any credit. He replied, "This is a drum--the beat, the song, and the lyric are yours. There is no part played by me. But it is a perfectly tuned drum, singularly incapable of producing a single wrong note. All the specialists, scientists, economics, and chemists teach me everything. I am not a well-read man as you might think me to be."

Where there is no fear there is no hurt....

As I entered Poornakuti the next day I heard Suguna saying that U.G. had a fall down the steps once again while he was hurrying toward the waiting car. U.G. said that the broad pajamas had made him trip. So he had decided to narrow their width. I asked him if he was hurt. He said though he had fallen on his elbow, there was no fracture. Since there was no fear, the body fell very lightly almost like a cat falling on its fours. Maybe he did suffer some pain, because he kept rubbing his elbow with Tiger Balm. The funny part was that every time his eyes fell on the balm, he would open the little bottle and rub a little balm on his elbow.

This bang shows me I am here....

The same afternoon, after lunch, as we sat gossiping, I noticed that U.G. kept banging on the wall cupboard with a loud bang. I asked him why he kept on doing that. He said, "Just to see if I am there. I can't feel my body. This bang shows me I am here. It is a very funny situation. Not much difference here between me and Valentine. Her brain is damaged, mine still functions. She is afraid of this situation, I am not." As he was saying all this he happened to see my reflection in the mirror, and suddenly he said, "Who's there? Your reflection there distracted me. The continuity was broken." He continued, "After all that trouble, I never expected to end up this way."

If I had liked a variety of dishes, I would have liked a variety of girls....

One morning U.G. was in a great hurry to go shopping for some material for his *kurtas*. He was particular about the pastel shades and that it should be pure silk. Yet he went for the cheapest variety. The strange thing about U.G. is that he appears as if he is in dire need of your help in choosing matching colors, yet no one is more efficient at the job than him. So you just stand there and watch him choose the nearest and most correct matching shade for his *kurta* or pants. Then he goes to the cash counter. With that blank look on his face he fishes out a huge note from his pocket. He does not bother much about checking the change that the cashier hands out. With the same dazed look he goes out of the shop, collecting his parcel, with the rest of us trying to keep pace with him. Then all of us, U.G., Suguna and myself, go to his favorite tailor and give the newly bought material for stitching.

We came home and had lunch. I share a regular meal with Suguna. But U.G. eats noodles day in and day out with a little yogurt to wash it down. I ask him if he does not get bored with the same

meal day after day. He seriously replies, "If I had liked a variety of dishes, I would have liked a variety of girls."

yajnas and homas....

Brahmachariji walked in and this made the company all the more merry. The topic of conversation glided to *yajnas* and *homas*. As usual U.G. refused to give them much importance and started ridiculing them instead. U.G. said, much to the discomfort of Brahmachariji, "For *yajnas* they sacrifice goat meat. *Yajnas* are usually done by those who get the craving to eat meat. Actually the cannibals do the greatest *yajna* because they sacrifice humans. So they perform the highest *homa*." All this was too much for Brahmachariji. He got up and went to the next room for his afternoon siesta and woke up in time for his afternoon coffee.

I was in one of my religious moods and in spite of U.G.'s sky-high philosophy, I had defiantly carried with me my *japa mala* (rosary) and had persisted in doing my *japa* right under his nose. Of course, he had his share of jokes and taunts at my expense. He looked at the *mala* round my neck and said, "What is that dog collar you are wearing round your neck? Anyway, how is it that you are managing to look very spiritual?"

What's love got to do with it?....

He said that he had brought some taped video hits and we watched the T.V. for a while. I remember we watched the song by Tina Turner "What's love got to do with it." U.G. looked at me, smiled, and said, "You better remember the words of this song. It is more enlightening than your boring repetition of *Ram-Nam*" He also liked the song sung by Boy George (Culture Club) "Karma Karma Karma Chameleon," and the song "Bad, bad" by Michael Jackson.

Those who help themselves do not need God's help....

My daughter was watching TV intently when suddenly U.G. said, "When you want something, you have to work hard for it. God helps those who help themselves. And those who help themselves do not need God's help. God is very much relieved that he does not have to spend his energy on those who do not need his help. His maximum energy is wasted on helping God men!" Now that was a real brain-tickler!

Using doggie sense to find the way....

When all this was being said, Nagaraj walked in and U.G. suggested that all of us should watch the movie "Death Wish, Part II". He seems to have a special affinity for Charles Bronson. I offered to go with U.G. to the video library. We got into an auto and paid the driver his fare. I asked U.G. how we would find the way. U.G. replied he would use his "doggie sense" and he literally sniffed his way to the video library, much to my surprise!

The whole afternoon was spent in watching "Death Wish" which turned the insides of my stomach. It had every conceivable violence in the most grotesque form, and U.G. sat unblinking through the whole movie, as if he was watching "Sound of Music."

I escaped to the kitchen and U.G. followed. I said, "I am hungry, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses...." He did not let me continue. He said, "You'll get the daily bread, but forgiving your trespasses, no!" Anyway, I was quite happy with the daily bread and was not very anxious about getting my trespasses forgiven.

All relationship is mutual exploitation....

It was a sultry afternoon. Pushpa rang up and said that it was the right weather to drop in at U.G. He was taking one of his catnaps and we patiently waited. After half an hour or so he came

down. The coffee woke him up and he was aware of our presence. He said, "Hello, how long have you been waiting? You could have called me. I was just listening to some Telugu music." Anyway, my friend had some more serious topics to discuss. She asked why relationships were so temporary and unsatisfactory. He replied, "There is no relationship which is without friction. In spite of that, for whatever reason, you want the relationship to continue. If you don't get anything from that relationship, it just breaks into hate, resentment, indifference, and the like. That is the means with which you punish the other individual. These are the means you use to maintain the relationship.

"It is the idea of the perfect relationship that you must have, and which you are pursuing as an ideal, that has soured all relationships."

"The contact you have with me, the dog there, or the door there, is the same. Nothing is expected of this relationship. My relationship is not what I get out of that, or what I can give. Both are the same. Both are absent. There is no exploitation. All relationship is mutual exploitation. Why don't you remain by yourself, be and stay happy and die happy?" I felt quite cheerful listening to all this.

Beauty is framing done by thought....

Then Pushpa asked about consciousness. U.G. replied, "You think there is something mysterious about consciousness. It is only an instrument through the help of which you become conscious of things around you. The instrument which you are using to understand, if it is used in the technical area, will be very useful. But you are using it for something to which it is totally unrelated."

Then we discussed the concepts of beauty, fear, and goals. U.G. spoke patiently: "Beauty is just the framing done by thought and it is cultural. Thought is the frame. Beauty is not in the object, neither is beauty in the beholder's eye. It is thought that creates space and frames whatever is there and calls it beauty. To define beauty as the total absence of the self is just pure romantic hogwash."

If the fear goes, you will drop dead....

We asked him about our fears and struggles to achieve goals. He said, "The goal is not out there. *You are* the goal. If the goal goes, you go with it. You can never be rid of fear. You and the fear will go together. If the fear goes, you will drop dead.

"It's the body that lives from moment to moment. The body's malfunctioning we call disease, and the body gracefully accepts what you call death. The body does not *know* it is coming to an end. In a way you can say the body is immortal. Not the permanency as you understand the word, but even after the so-called death, the body disintegrates and becomes one with life. It has its own intelligence."

Sewage water sold in fancy plastic bottles....

It was the day when U.G. had just moved to Brunton Road before he found his present place at Poornakuti. Suguna was down with her migraine, and there was not a drop of water in the house. The taps were dry and I got an S.O.S. from U.G. He called, "Can you cook something and bring here? We are starving." My friend, Asha, a J.K. freak (as U.G. calls them) was with me. She showed some interest in meeting U.G. and agreed to accompany me. So I cooked some noodles and U.G. and the rest ate it up without comments or complaints. After lunch we all sat around on the stone benches under the shady trees. Till then Asha, my friend, was enjoying herself, quietly observing U.G. Out of nowhere, someone mentioned J.K. and U.G. started his usual firing and

grenade-throwing. The poor girl's face became pale. She couldn't bear the line, "Sewage water sold in fancy plastic bottles." As we made our way home, she said, "If U.G. is a God man then he should not speak against other saints." Of course, she was expecting to find a meek, humble, soft-spoken, gentle Jesus, but she found a roaring sage.

I asked U.G. the next day why he spoke against J.K. or anyone else. He replied, "Didn't *he* speak and scream from the platforms against gurus and tradition? All I am doing is to shake a person's attachments to anybody, however great he is proclaimed to be, strip the person of everything, and then he is on his own." That seemed to be a great explanation and satisfied my question. So, I paid no attention to a stranger's opinion about U.G.

U.G.'s Italian friends Paolo and Marissa were in town. It was Marissa's first trip to India. Very soon we became good friends, and she told me many interesting episodes about U.G.'s stay in her home. The same evening U.G. called up to say, "Shanta, bring the whole family. You are all invited to dinner. Marissa is cooking an Italian dish--*gnocchi*." We made our way to Poornakuti to find that Marissa was unaware of the role of the head cook that U.G. had chalked out for her that evening. So we had to start with buying tomatoes from a nearby store and boil some potatoes. I and Mittu helped in whatever way we could. Paolo kept us entertained with his stories till the potatoes and flour were mixed into a soft dough. U.G. shuttled in and out of the kitchen till the *gnocchi* was finally ready. My husband and children were some of the "honored guests" to get the first taste of the strange but tasty dish. U.G. finally gave his solemn speech about how grateful he was to Marissa, and how sorry he was for putting her to such trouble. Any of us could get an idea of how sorry U.G. really was!

Money....

Here are some of U.G.'s favorite slogans on economic theories: "1) Money should never stay idle. 2) Money should earn money. 3) Money is the only God. Then he adds, "Show me one person who is not interested in money. The religious man, the politician, the rich, the poor, the sick, men, women, and children, young and old, babe in arms and even unborn babes are interested in money."

The Demand to be free is the cause of man's misery....

One morning there was an interesting visitor. He was a photographer and he also claimed that the souls of great personalities like Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi spoke through him when he went into a trance. I asked U.G. how valid was any experience, and he said, "Those petty little experiences you want to experience again and again. You can have out of body experiences by increasing your blood pressure. Here is the ending of the demand for experiencing things. The demand to be free is the cause of man's misery."

As all this was being noted down, Suguna brought a plate of hot, roasted groundnuts. I placed the plate in front of U.G. who started mechanically popping the groundnuts one by one in his mouth. After some time he said, "Remove that plate, pass it around. If it's here, I won't stop eating till it's all over." I rescued the groundnuts and the rest of us helped ourselves to them.

The largest rope and the tallest tree....

It was already late, and I was hurriedly getting ready to go to Basavangudi when the phone rang and U.G. said, "You are in great demand here as the official scribe." "But," I said, "I have the problem of catching an auto. I'll get one soon if I am lucky enough." Then U.G. said, "Problems? There is one way to solve them. I can provide you with the largest rope and the tallest tree." I was in no mood for jokes that early in the morning!

I reached Poornakuti to find that Radhakrishna had brought some hot buns from the bakery fresh from the oven. I was in time to get a share and then, of course, some hot coffee to start the morning. U.G. was relaxing on the front door steps. He was in good moods, or so I thought. It was the right moment to declare that I thought he was the only reliable and dependable friend I had in the whole world, and that I trusted him so much that if at that minute he asked me to jump from the window I would obey him blindly. He listened to this and immediately said, "Really? Let's go on the terrace. That's high enough for you to jump from."

End of pleasure-seeking....

Very soon after a middle-aged couple, friends from Mysore, came to meet U.G. He politely led them upstairs and as usual made courteous and kind enquiries about their whereabouts. I noticed that the lady had taken out her pen and notebook. Obviously she was interested in jotting down bits of the conversation. I followed suit. I did not, however, bother to note down the questions asked by the gentleman, although I could catch a few sentences of U.G.'s reply: "Don't talk of love or attachment. You can't easily throw away your *bunian* which already has some holes in it, nor can you part with your favorite fountain pen. I did not get a definite answer to any of my questions. The questions just burned themselves out, because there were no answers to them. I found that I had to use somebody for pleasure, and when this dawned on me the whole pleasure-seeking movement was out of my system."

One young man asked U.G., "But even eating something can be called a pleasure." U.G. replied, "I eat food because I need some energy, at least to walk to the toilet by myself. What is the special charm in living? I have no other way to survive in this human jungle. This is the only way to fall in line. You do things either for pleasure or for power. Money will pour in my hands like rain if I promise them something. I cannot promise them anything. So, I am willing to dig trenches if I must, to make a living."

"Once you are relieved of the burden of culture, any potential will be exposed. What stands in the way is the culture, all the teachers and what they have taught."

"Of course you have to depend on others in some ways. I can't grow my own wheat, milk my own cow, but at least I could solve my own problems without the help of anyone."

"The only interest to give expression to this is to strip it of all the religious content, and not because I have the hope of freeing you from anything or anybody."

When the reference point is gone there is no knowing....

Then came the usual question, "Why do they say that the world is an illusion?" U.G. replied, "The center is created here; the space is created by thought. Measurement starts from a reference point. All measurements are illusory. "Maya" means "measure" and not "illusion". If the reference point goes by any chance, there is no way of knowing anything. Then there is no outside or inside."

Thus U.G. kept on and on vehemently as each of the many in the room fired questions at him, and he in turn fired back: "The machine gun is not interested in killing. But it is designed to trigger and shoot at the slightest movement anywhere, and *this* machine gun just shoots."

The movement of even a leaf affects you....

"You are just a computer. There is no individual there. It is all one movement in the cosmos. The movement of even a leaf affects you."

Puranas are pornography....

Then U.G. added something quite shocking in answer to the question of a religious person who asked about **Puranas** and their significance. U.G. said, "The *Bhagavatam* is nothing but pornography written by sex-starved people. If that goes from you, the whole knowledge goes, no new knowledge accumulates, and then thought comes only for the purpose of helping you to function intelligently and sanely in this society. Of course, I have a memory. If I had no memory, they would put me in a loony bin.

It was lunch time and the crowd dispersed. They brought some soup which was so hot that I asked U.G. to wait till it cooled a little. He insisted on torturing himself, and jokingly added, "The whole culture of this land has its foundation in masochism."

He poured some ghee in his *rasam* and he looked at me and said, "See how the ghee floats on this *rasam*! This reminds me of how your Shirdi Baba performed the miracle of lighting lamps on water. Obviously this is how the layer of oil must have floated in the tin pot." I told U.G. that I would jot this down, and he said, "Enough of *rasam* in your notes. It is already overflowing there. The notes are soaking with it." This reminded me that I had mentioned *rasam* quite a few times in my diary.

Then he was watching some program on the TV which depicted a dance of Krishna, and he said, "How depraved the Indian mind is. Remove Rama and Krishna, and they will be nowhere. All their music, architecture, dance, even pornography centres around those two."

By now it was just Chandrasekhar, Suguna, myself and that couple from Mysore left, and U.G. was in quite a jovial mood. He spoke and joked about a few things here and there. He said, "Now in America or anywhere else it is fashionable to be able to walk on fire. My grandmother picked live coals with her bare hands." I told him that there was a time when I liked to eat egg omelets, and now the very smell of fried eggs created nausea in me. U.G. said, "Every seven years every drop of blood, every cell changes in the body. The body gets used to a certain type of food, and then there is no more demand for a particular food on the part of the system."

You can gobble up your neighbor's baby and yet be spiritual...

He said that once in U.S., the president of a vegetarian society had invited U.G. to speak to its members. This was long before his "calamity". It seems he spoke for some time and then a person from the audience asked U.G. if there was anything to the idea that eating *Sattvic* food is desirable, vegetarian food being more conducive to the spiritual path. It seems U.G. replied without batting an eyelid, "You can gobble up your neighbor's baby and yet be spiritual." The president of the vegetarian club was shocked out of his wits and asked U.G. whether he was being paid a hundred dollars to say such things to the members of the club.

Anyway, U.G. was unperturbed and cheerfully related this incident to us and added, "The vegetarians, the so-called vegetarians who love to eat fish call it the flower of the sea. Some consolation to the fish! Just an excuse to eat fish."

The usual scene: a hilarious welcome to the holy man, Brahmachariji, Chandrasekhar and Suguna enjoying the whole scene, U.G. all poised to make the best of the situation, Nagaraj walking in and falling prostrate at Brahmachariji's feet, much to the joy of U.G., then very soon the palm reading session. U.G. stretching out his palms to Brahmachari and asking him questions like, "Will I go abroad? Will I be rich?" Brahmachariji said, "Money will be pouring in from now," and U.G. said, "We have a shortage of funds. I don't see any windfall." Then Brahmachariji said, "There is a star on the Mount of Jupiter. You'll lead the life of a teacher." U.G. said, "It's arrogance on anyone's part to say that he is the channel for the divine, and that his

teaching is the teaching. The real compassion is to know that you can't do a damn thing to come out of the trap of culture." U.G. then added, "I am getting some evil ideas. I feel like kicking the whole thing and going and living in some jungle." Brahmachariji said that wherever U.G. went, according to the lines of his palm, even if it were the jungle, a five star hotel would sprout near the very tree that U.G. happened to sit under!

As usual, whenever U.G. sees Brahmachariji, he is reminded of the three *acharyas*, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhavacharya. U.G. said he was ever grateful to at least Madhavacharya for having turned out Udupi Brahmin cooks. Their unique contribution was Udupi restaurants which were found in every corner of the world, even in Hong Kong. So U.G. would not miss his *idli sambar* wherever he happened to be.

What I am saying unburdens you....

The book, **Mind is a Myth** had just arrived from Bombay and was being discussed by us all. Chandrasekhar said that the jacket was really attractive and thought it belied the shocking contents of the book. Then U.G. said, "What I am saying unburdens you. You don't get any directives about what one should do. There are no miracles, no room for any spiritual healing. If anyone can perform miracles, it's *you*, because you are as much an expression of life as all those claimants in the market place. No special mandate is given to anybody. No one is sent by anybody to change anything in this world. You mean to say that if there is such a thing called the supramental power, it needs you and me to channel itself? What are you talking? If it is possible for any one person to perform any miracles it is possible for anybody.

What I say destroys the foundations of culture....

"You have created gods and goddesses from your own imagination. You have one wife, your gods have 16,000 wives. You have two arms and one head, your god has three heads. Remove Rama and Krishna from the scene, and everything is finished for this country. What I say is out of the way, not of the run of the mill type. If help is what you are interested in, you are not going to get it. What I say destroys the very foundations and architecture of culture. My teaching, if it can be so called, stands or falls by itself. It is a threat to society. So the best thing would have been to burn all the memories that you have of me along with my body. But that's impossible."

Parting words....

He was silent for some time. It was quite late and I had to leave. U.G. looked a little tired. He sighed and said, "Oh God, if there is a God, what the hell are you doing. Help us, if you can." And then he said, "Nagaraj, let us close the shop. I feel a little tired, talking the whole day." The next day he was leaving for Bombay and then on to his four month trip to Switzerland and San Francisco, California. The crowd had dwindled to almost nil. It was almost eight o'clock, and U.G. gave his parting piece: "I sing my song and go. Enlightenment is one thing I don't want from anybody. Dollars are welcome! That seems to be the situation not only here but wherever I go. They seem to know a lot more than I do on enlightenment.

"Whatever I say, Nagaraj, depends upon you, not me. What I am saying is not my own. I cannot claim originality. It is your insight. That is why it is not working. It won't work because it is your own, it's not mine. Any insight you may have is your own creation which is the product of your thinking. But I want to know what you make out of it, so that I can use some other medium than this religious medium, or the medium of the Krishnamurti freaks, or similar media. I have nothing to say. There is no gist. No essence. This is not the right kind of material. If nothing

happened, it doesn't bother me. Nothing is going to happen anyway. Maybe there is something, somewhere, somebody...."

He continued, "I don't want to be called a guru, a god man, or a religious teacher. It bothers me just as you would be bothered if I called you a thug or a crook. Since I am not that, the film people put a picture of me in their magazine and label me as the 'sexy god man of the film world' which I am not. God man, no! Sexy god man, much less. So I go, leave the film people.

"So, Chandrasekhar, Nagaraj, you have to help me understand and free myself from this business of talking to people day after day. I have no idea at all how to put an end to all this. It's the same thing everywhere. So the only thing I can do is to hang myself along with these bats there, or talk to the trees." So he went into his room to finish packing his small suitcase which held all his belongings.

There was no turning back, though we would see each other only after five months, no tear-jerking farewells, no emotional goodbyes, no promises to keep in touch, not even a look. The door closed, and I made my way back home, as unemotional as the strange man I left behind.

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CHAPTER 6

There indeed *are* white crows....

I could never compete with my daughter as far as her unshakeable faith in U.G. is concerned. I remember, one day, we were just dropping Mahesh Bhatt back at his hotel room. The taxi carried U.G. and my daughter in the front seat, and Mahesh and myself singing and joking in the back seat, as it often happens. I started an argument with U.G., and my daughter Mittu unquestioningly sided with him against me. I exclaimed that if U.G. would point at a crow and call it 'white' Mittu would readily agree with him. It was meant to be a taunt to her childlike devotion to him, but on the other hand what do you think U.G. came up with? He said, "There *are* white crows in Australia."

Thank God we had reached our destination by then, because I could not argue any more after this strange clipping which sounded like something from Ripley's **Believe It or Not**.

If you really want to learn something, school is the last place to go...

Mittu was having a real tough time with her school syllabus, and the chief cause was lack of time. So I decided to move her to a new school, with an easier syllabus and just half-a-day working time, so she could devote more time to her studies. All this was told to U.G. He heard all my explanations patiently and then said, "If you want really to learn something, school is the last place to go."

I then continued saying that it was a change from a convent school to a Hindu school, from "Jesus to Ganesha." He exclaimed, "What a fall!" He was not very happy about Mittu's new school timings which cut down her visits to him. So he said, "Drop school for a week." Of course, I turned a deaf ear to this advice.

U.G. addiction....

During his last visit to the States, U.G. had regularly sent audio tapes by mail to my son Prashant. Every week's mail carried a new tape with music, video hits, and "Yes, Prime Minister" taped on them. Prashant was overjoyed at the arrival of each new tape and the only sane member of the family finally got hooked to the "U.G. addiction."

Prashant was counting hours, minutes, and seconds for U.G.'s arrival in Bangalore, and the very next day we were all happily making our way to Poornakutee.

Prashant entertained himself with "Barnaby Jones," and "Three is Company," and I saw a tired-looking U.G. sitting amongst unpacked bags, the whole carpet littered with pen refills, shaving kits, tooth brushes, torches, photographs, and what not.

After he played Santa Claus for some time, the children (Chandrasekhar's two daughters, and Mittu and Prashant) helped U.G. to clear up the mess and tidied his bed so that he could catch up with his sleep.

The after-effects of the jet-lag and the usual effects of a full moon presented us with a dull U.G. who kept on repeating, "I am sinking."

The next morning Prashant was eager to catch the early bus to Poornakutee, so that he could spend the day with U.G. I could not accompany him, however much I would have loved to. I had to attend to Mittu who was attending her new school.

By the evening I rang up U.G. to ask Prashant to take an auto home and skip the tedious bus ride. U.G. immediately replied, "I have a very rich and prosperous guest who has parked his brand new car here and is generously offering to give your son a lift to Malleswaram." I was just wondering who this honored visitor could be, and U.G. continued, "But he is such a careless driver I told your son not to risk his life." I immediately said, "U.G., my son is very precious to me." U.G. replied, "I know, so I have told him to go on his own." It is only after Prashant returned home that he told me how U.G. had one of his jokes at the expense of poor Brahmachariji who had come to visit U.G. on a bicycle, and had offered a double ride on his back seat to my bewildered son.

Even now I don't know how far to trust U.G. and his sense of humour; for all I know poor Brahmachariji could have brought his moped. Trust U.G. to call it a bicycle!

Willing victims....

Talking about Prashant, I have noticed that U.G. has never failed in his attempt to humour my son, knowing jolly well that he had been dragged unwillingly by an over-enthusiastic mother. I am talking of those days long ago when I had eagerly rushed to spend every spare minute with U.G., and my son who had just entered his teens would be thoroughly bored with all the philosophical discussions held by every visitor who walked in.

U.G. was temporarily staying at Brunton Road, and though it was a lovely place with a sprawling garden, Prashant used to curl up his nose in distaste every time I mentioned a day with U.G. So much so that my kids were soon branded as "willing victims."

I advised Prashant to bring his badminton rackets and play on the lawns with Mittu if he was bored with me, U.G., and Philosophy; and Prashant packed in his racket, a pack of cards and comic books.

When we arrived at Brunton Road U.G. again remarked that "the heartless one had once again dragged the willing victims to spend another boring day."

Much to my surprise, U.G. offered to play badminton with Prashant and pranced about like a teenager himself. To top it all he then settled down for a game of cards and very soon a poker-faced U.G. was trying his skill at the game of "Bluff" and won.

So the day ended with Prashant completely bowled over and victorious with his new friendship with U.G.

Well, then, it soon became a habit. Prashant would carry his game of chess and the like, and squirmed as U.G. seriously played game after game, while people waited to discuss the "purpose of life" with the renowned sage.

Those playful days are over. Now Prashant rejoices whenever U.G.'s name is mentioned. All he can think of is watching Michael Jackson on the video and discussing the latest TV programs with the ever-willing U.G. I am quite happy with the way things go because Mittu too never tires of sitting at the feet of her Master and refuses to bat one eyelid when U.G. speaks for hours. So now neither of them are any longer referred to as "willing victims," and have become a part of the regular regulars.

Thought itself is action....

There is a friend of mine, Vatsala, who spent the last twelve years in Ireland. Afraid that her children would be influenced by the totally materialistic atmosphere of the West, she came back to India. Unfortunately for her, she happened to be my neighbor. After a few days, she found that I could not carry a simple conversation for more than five minutes without mentioning a certain U.G., and thus I had to tell her who he was. She did not have any Guru or background of Philosophy. She told me all that she had ever done since she was a little child was to repeat *Ram-Nam* over and over.

Now she told me that there were a lot of questions which she would love to ask, and I thought she deserved an interview with the ever-available sage, U.G.

So I took Vatsala with me one day, and U.G. started with his usual line, "Why do you bring your friends? What has not helped you is not going to help anyone else." Anyway, we were not so easily discouraged.

Vatsala asked him how to prevent thought or emotion from distorting her actions. U.G. very quickly came out with the simple answer, "Thought itself is action." Then she said that she repeated *Ram-Nam* to overcome her impulsive actions, and U.G. said, "A *mantra* is also a thought. You can repeat your own name or even your friend's name instead of *Ram-Nam*." That sounded ridiculous at first, but sadly true.

You can't own people like you own furniture....

U.G. used to refer to her as the "Irish Lady" though she was very much an Indian. On her next visit she had a few more questions to ask. And this time she asked about "selfless love." Of course, she was not aware of how U.G. detests the very mention of the word 'love,' so that it was enough to remind him of a bottle of mouthwash! But U.G. is gentle with strangers. She said that in her every act of love she sensed some sort of selfishness, and it was not the sort of detached love that everyone talked about. U.G. advised her to stop attempting at the unattainable goal of selfless love, since there is no such thing at all. He said, "You can't own people like you own furniture or a color TV set." That simple sentence seemed to have found its mark, and she was quite satisfied with his answer.

U.G. had once remarked to me that people owned dogs to enjoy a sense of power or possessiveness, since they could not enjoy human relationships. They chose to enjoy a sense of authority by keeping a pet dog.

During his last visit to his son, Mark, in the U.S., it seems that their pet dog tried to jump on U.G.'s lap, and after being pushed away many times the dog finally got the message.

Like master like dog....

Speaking about dogs, U.G. once said that a lady in Switzerland once came with two dogs, and for a full two hours of discussion the dogs sat quietly without the slightest movement. He said that he had not seen even human beings behave so well. Finally he asked the lady about those dogs, and she said that they were sent to a training school. U.G. told me, after relating this incident, that man being neurotic, the poor animals which were kept as pets finally turned neurotic in man's company. So much so that even the plants in a garden have sexual problems.

There is *nothing* to understand....

I remember way back when I first met U.G. I used to visit him almost everyday, not caring for the time, energy or money spent, and my circle of friends back home used to wait for me to return and ask me to relate all that was discussed. I used to come home and jot down the most interesting points of conversation.

One day I happened to tell U.G. how eagerly my friends asked me, "What did U.G. say today?" He immediately shot out, "What *does* U.G. say? Tell *me*!" I was frightened to even attempt to answer, so I put the ball in his court by asking him, "O.K., you tell me what I should answer them." He said, "Tell them that there is *nothing* to understand." As I repeated that to myself just to register it in my memory, he then asked me whether I had understood that "there was really nothing to understand." I answered with a feeble "Yes." And he said, "If it were so, you wouldn't be here." I am so used to being told that if he had really helped me in any way I would not have seen his face again that I have stopped trying to convince U.G. that he has helped me in some way.

Why I don't want to see people who are interested in enlightenment....

U.G. always said that his heart sank at the amount of money I wasted just to visit him, and he missed no chance to remind me of my decreasing bank balance. Ultimately he tried to discourage me by saying, "You know what U.G. says? -- Get up and go, and don't come back. You are wasting your time. I don't have anything to sell."

Those were the days when I felt really hurt when he told me never to come back, but I kept going back because I loved to listen to him, and I could sit for hours when he spoke, just listening to him. U.G. would say, "I am ready to be enlightened by you. The physiological aspect is of no importance at all. The way I express myself is still related to the question of enlightenment. When you say that there is no such thing as enlightenment, what does it matter if you present it as physiological, psychological or any other enlightenment. It is of no importance at all. But still it is just a state of functioning. The stigma of the *guru* is there. All the people who come to see me ask me about enlightenment--so all these answers come out of me. That is the reason why I don't want to see people who are interested in enlightenment. Period, full stop, full period."

No God man....

And so he is labeled as a 'god man.' And there was this little girl of just nine years old who sat watching U.G. who asked her why she was staring. The kid replied that she was told that U.G. was a god man. U.G. asked her if she thought that he looked anything like a god man, and she said, "Mother says so. Then why do they call you a god man?" And U.G. said with a smile, "Either your mother has a very vivid imagination or the birds are singing in her head!"

The roar of the sea is silence....

A lady called Shyama, a friend of mine, equally interested in the God man and enlightenment, accompanied me once to U.G. She asked him about divine bliss, silence, meditation, integration with the Divine, and question of the like. U.G. first looked at me and smiled. He was getting used to my bringing a new friend with me every time I visited him. He taunted that I brought them along either for moral support or to save on the taxi fare, (both of which reasons were false and unfair to me!)

Anyway, then he seriously settled down to answer my friend's question on silence, "What is this silence you are talking about? The silence operates there in the city market. When I am talking, it is the expression of the silence. You think there is no silence, when I am talking? You think there is silence when you close your eyes, sit in one corner and try to stop the flow of thoughts? You are just choked--that is not silence. Go to the forest--that roar is the silence. Go to a sea--that is silence. Go right into the center of the desert--that is silence. A volcano erupting--that is silence. Not the silent mind trying to experience "silence." Silence is energy bursting.

All this certainly silenced my friend's further questioning. When we left we did not speak a word to each other till we reached home. We were both in a daze.

'No' is the only word in my vocabulary....

For all his talkativeness U.G. sometimes refuses to speak at all. Like when a Jehovah Witness bombarded him with many questions like, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in reincarnation, divorce, and the like?" U.G. was patient enough to let him run out of his stock of questions, and in the end he answered, "There is only one word in my vocabulary--the word, 'No.' And you will be really surprised to know in how many different ways I can so 'No.'" Sounds funny now, but I feel sorry for the man who was waiting to hear U.G. voice his opinions on all the topics from "disease to Divinity."

Nature descriptions are tricks to capture readers' interest....

My notes were being read with fervor, of course, with the exception of Nagaraj who rebelled openly. The hope that the notes would finally have the privilege of coming in the form of a book burnt like a small flame in my heart, and yet I really wondered what the final outcome would really be.

Suguna asked me if I had thought of a name for my book. I said that I was so busy waiting and collecting material I had no time even to think of one. Talking of books, notes, and diaries, Nagaraj suddenly asked U.G. why J. Krishnamurti described the natural surroundings and its beauties in his **Commentaries** before he reported his conversations.

U.G. replied that it was a trick to capture the interest of the readers. He also said that when Krishnamurti himself spoke he always gave very commonplace examples like the red bag, a door knob, and the barking of dogs. Such examples in a book would not attract the attention of people much, and the book would collect dust on the shelves.

Thinking Allowed....

U.G.'s recent trip to Delhi was a grand success. He told me that he had the occasion to be avalanched by a hoard of Krishnamurti's "Widows," Rajneesh's "Divorcees," and the "Separatees" of some other Guru. And the most surprising part was that they said that they were ready to "marry" U.G.! His trip to the U.S. was hallmarked by his interview in the program titled "**Thinking Allowed.**" The man who was to interview U.G. came to the place in Mill Valley where U.G. was camping and had a brief talk with him. U.G. normally refused to go to TV

studios for such interviews. But this time he agreed. A few friends were nervous about how the whole thing would go, especially because of U.G.'s frank and blunt ways of putting things across. But U.G. assured them by saying, "Come on, I can handle it all. I was not born yesterday, nor did I come to town on a turnip truck."

God said "Let there be light," and there was a power-out!....

It seems that the lady who made up U.G.'s face for the TV camera remarked that he was very handsome and that soon the place would be flooded with fan mail. As U.G. was relating all these incidents to us suddenly the lights in the room went out, and U.G. came up with "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was a power-out!" We all enjoyed the joke, so he added, "Oh God, if there is a God, what the hell is he doing?"

U.G. continued to say, "In the bygone days, during my lectures I often used the phrase, 'Don't curse the darkness, light a candle.' But now I don't use that phrase anymore because I don't see any darkness." We did have to light the candles anyhow, till the power came back, until which time U.G. kept us quite entertained.

Ram-Nam and stealthy behavior don't go together....

I had this habit of putting aside a few rupee notes from the household account and save them for a rainy day. This secret was told to U.G. who would often tease me about the ever-increasing kitty funds, till it reached the enormous sum of 7,000 rupees. I remember it was a very hot afternoon. I had taken my kids with me, and U.G. suddenly had this idea of making me invest all this in a post office Savings account. I asked him how I could ever face my husband, and what he would say if he came to know all about these secret savings. And U.G. said, "Just put all the savings certificates on his lap as soon as he returns from work, and I guarantee you everything will be fine." He even dictated a letter, still in my possession, which says that *Ram-Nam* and stealthy behavior don't go together.

I remember how U.G. walked with the kids and me in the hot sun of the merciless summer, all the way to the post office, just to see my money safely invested.

When we returned, I made some coffee for the tired U.G. who promised to "pray for my long life and prosperity," much to my surprise. Seeing that he was in a good mood I cajoled him into giving me a much-coveted photo of his which he had refused me before, because he said he looked very saintly in it, and he detested that religious look about him.

The whole episode of the declaration of the immense savings to my husband was uneventful except for the pleasant surprise. I agreed with U.G. when he said, "Your husband must be some God or saint. Save some more money and build a temple for him, and I will be the head priest." My fertile imagination vividly pictured a U.G. in the garb of an Indian priest, and I was tempted to pass the hat around for the collection of funds for such a temple.

Gaudapada did not stumble into that by reading the Upanishads....

One early morning Brahmachariji surprisingly dropped in and U.G. as usual started an animated discussion on Indian culture. The very sight of Brahmachariji, though greatly welcomed, always reminds U.G. of the great heritage and culture of India. He started by saying, "Why do you have to sell Shankara to make a living? What little good or bad he has done is there--the *Maths* are there. So why do you have to sell Shankara? You preach something about Gaudapada. But it doesn't operate in your lives. Gaudapada said, "No *moksha*, no *sadhana*," then what are you selling? That is why I say, one fellow is enough for the whole of India. You don't need any more. Gaudapada, sure he brushed everything aside. So where's the room for Ramakrishna Math? They

translated Gaudapada. How can they justify that? Gaudapada did not stumble into that by reading the Upanishads. So what are you doing?"

All this we listened to in utter silence. Brahmachariji made no attempt to either justify or defend himself. Soon it was lunch time and everyone seemed most interested in the menu prepared for lunch.

What am I doing here? Why am I here?....

U.G. had just returned to Bangalore from one of his world tours. On the very first day, as I sat watching, I noticed that he sat with his eyes closed murmuring something to himself. I asked him what it was and he said audibly, "What am I doing here? Why am I here?"

Strangely I felt quite sorry for him. I asked him if he felt more at home in the foreign lands, and he replied that he did not feel at home anywhere in the world. But there was a time, he said, when he had felt at home everywhere in the world. I let him continue with his catnap and got busy with my notes.

Writing on awareness is the biggest lie....

A reliable acquaintance of mine told me that he had had two or three interviews with J. Krishnamurti, and that he had come to know that there was a time when Krishnamurti smoked cigarettes, that he in fact was a chain smoker. When I related this to U.G., he denied the whole thing and said that he had never heard of such a thing. I told U.G. that this friend could not have possibly lied because he had recently written a book on awareness, and U.G. immediately said that writing on awareness was the biggest lie that the man could have ever told. I have yet to clear this misunderstanding.

"Where have his teachings left you?" "Nowhere." ...

There were days when I had attended every possible lecture of a certain Swamiji of great renown. But a time soon came when I had to tell him that I had no more questions to ask anyone at all, because I had met a man called U.G. Recently when this Swamiji visited Bangalore I occasioned to meet him when he asked me, "Madam, where is your god now?"

I replied honestly, "He is talking to me, this moment." He replied, "So now there is a little humility." (I was never aware that I was proud; proud about what?) The Swamiji said further, "Your thoughts were oriented toward a certain man called U.G. Are you still enamored of his teachings?" I heartily assented. The next question was, "And where have they left you?" I spontaneously answered, "Nowhere!"

And when I related all this to U.G., he agreed that "Nowhere" was the right answer and a fact!

Even to say 'You' you have to retain the 'I'....

That reminded me that during one of my visits to an *ashram* in the South of India, I had a discussion with the saint residing there. I had and still have a great regard for her. Her advice to all who came to her was to subdue the ego by surrendering the 'I' to the universal power calling it 'You' and remembering it in every action of ours. This seemed quite a nice exercise. And when on my next meeting with U.G. I told him this, he said, "At this rate you will be for ever stuck with the 'I' because even to say 'You' you have to retain the 'I'." The minute I am comfortably resting or at least about to lean on a new found crutch, U.G. knocks it off with all glee!

Shoes made from human hide and soup made from new born babies' tongues....

There was this group of foreigners, the oldest of whom was very devoted to U.G. He kept bringing this group to U.G. as often as possible. They would sit very quietly and listen to U.G.,

and bring him many gifts of cheese, cream, and fruits. They had happened to visit all the renowned *ashrams* in India, and had wanted to settle down in India for further *sadhana*. Little did they know that coming to U.G. was the last thing they should have done. There was one member of this group who was on his way to becoming a *Poornavatar*, and this man needed U.G.'s help to become one.

Anyway, this highly sensitive man looked at U.G.'s silk *kurta* and protested saying that he could feel the silk worms crawling whenever he saw silk, and how could U.G., if he was a God man as others declared him to be, ever wear silk? U.G. with his usual sense of humor said that silk was his favorite fabric. Not only so, but he would not hesitate to wear shoes made from human hide, his favorite dish being soup made from new born babies' tongues!

That was really too much. A few more visits to U.G. and they cancelled their plans of settling down in India, and went happily back to their homeland.

U.G.'s favourite line is, "There is no freedom in America, no Communism in Russia, and no spirituality in India."

If you cannot part with a single photo, how can you ever speak of detachment?....

I come from a family of Sai Baba devotees, and they can never explain the fascination I feel for U.G., more so because he ridicules saints, God men, *Moksha*, *Sadhana*, and the like.

Yet when I went home and related to Shobha, my sister, all that U.G. spoke about, she was curious to see him once. I was a little nervous because if U.G. started his usual fun about God men, it would hurt the feelings of my poor sister. But U.G. strangely seemed on his best behavior and sat like a well-behaved schoolboy, so sweet and innocent-looking that my sister was taken in by the oozing charm. She was soon asking for his photograph exactly like the one that he had sent me from California. U.G. asked me to hand over my copy to my sister and said that if I could not part with a single photo how could I ever speak of detachment. Whatever the argument, I clung on to my copy which was my prized possession. Anyway, my sister was least inclined to deprive me of it. So, we returned home. The very next morning, as soon as I entered U.G.'s room, he gave me an exact duplicate of the photo saying, "Here, this is for your sister." When I met Shobha and gave her the photo, she told me that she had prayed and cried to Baba the whole night, saying that if there was anything to her devotion, she should get a photo exactly like mine the next day. Now she is convinced that her Baba and U.G. are in the same "State," which U.G. denies, because, as he put it, that Baba is in "Telugu Desam" and he himself is in the Karnataka State.

At least one member of the family agreed to see something in this enigma called U.G. I had taken my parents once to meet him in Bombay. My mother comes from a thoroughly religious and orthodox background. She is more used to orange robes, incense sticks, and silence in saints' rooms. I felt very responsible for her discomfort when she heard the discussion on investments, rise and fall of the dollar, hilarious jokes and laughter, and to add to it Mahesh Bhatt was rolling at U.G.'s feet on the ground. I did not even attempt to tell my mother that there was a lot beyond and behind this frivolous scene, but it seemed as if it was my father, with his usual broad-mindedness and tolerance, who enjoyed his first visit to U.G.

I can imagine my mother's surprise as we walked in silently to meet the great sage in his Bombay flat. What do you think U.G. said as soon as he saw me? "Ah, there you are, there is some batter in the fridge. We are all waiting for you to make *idlis* and *dosas* for us."

I have yet another sister, Sheela, who is very intelligent, sweet, but supremely sensitive. All my excited talk about U.G. roused her curiosity too, and there was another day of nervousness when

I took her to U.G., as if I took with me some fragile china. I rang up U.G. telling him that I was bringing along my favorite and nicest sister and that he better be on his most pleasant behavior. U.G. was his sweet self, but the sudden appearance of a Mr. Shekawat changed the whole course of the hitherto smooth small talk. U.G. was soon talking about drugs, teenage sex, burning of rupee notes, and forgery, with a few four-letter words thrown in. My poor sister squirmed and said that it was getting really late, and I soon found myself on the way to the heaven of my home. Anyway, the unfailing charm of the unassuming U.G. had not failed to rub off, and even Sheela soon found herself dialing his number just to say hello to U.G., at least over the phone. Now I am the only one in the family who has still stuck around.

Mind is a Myth....

And so the book, **Mind is a Myth** finally made its appearance in Bangalore. U.G. seemed quite excited when the complimentary copies arrived from Bombay. Mahesh rang up and told U.G. that he wanted someone in Bangalore to review the book. Chandrasekhar was on leave, and Brahmachariji had graced the house early in the morning. The journalist Subramanya was an eager participant in the conversations, and I was the silent observer of the day's proceedings. Many names were suggested and I did not dream in the least that U.G. would turn to me and ask me to write the review. I could hardly believe my ears. Of course, my mind was used to U.G.'s strange words and behavior, but this surpassed all the *koans* of his "Zen" treatment. I stammered that I had never seriously read any reviews, let alone write one. But he seemed all the more eager to honor me with the job. He said that since I had not read any reviews, my review would be original in style.

U.G. seemed to have more confidence in my potential than I ever dared to have in myself. My protests were of no avail. After returning home, and a few moments of fervent prayer, I lifted my pen and just let it run across the pages. Within an hour a few pages were written. I sent the whole handiwork to U.G. with my son Prashant. U.G. seemed quite pleased with it. He said that he had no words to express what he was feeling, and that he had least expected such a wonderful piece of literature from such a messy housewife!

I want you to stand on your own two feet, however shaky they may be....

The last week that U.G. was in Bangalore was really eventful. I had a sudden call to fill in a leave vacancy for one of the teachers in my daughter's school. I had never seen U.G. more excited. I reported that I would be teaching. Long ago I had taught in a school, and those two years of experience was all that I had. U.G. had insisted that I do my teacher's training, and the plans to enroll in the university had fizzled out even before they had sparked. U.G. said, "I want you to stand on your own two feet," and added quite audibly, "however shaky they may be." Anyway, untrained as I was, I enjoyed the week's teaching job thoroughly, but very suddenly, maybe due to the breathing in of that chalk dust while writing on the blackboard, I came down with a sore throat and a bad cold. The whole prospect of trekking to school and facing an army of naughty brats did not seem to be very inviting. So I rang up U.G. and said, "U.G., I am down with a sore throat, as you can hear, but, for all the trouble I take, they may not even pay me much. So, shall I drop the idea?"

There was a vehement, "No" from him. He said, "Even if they pay you two rupees you have to go; the experience will do you good." So I trudged along and completed the fifteen-day contract with the school. All this not only reduced my visits to U.G., but also cut down on the leisure which I spent writing down the notes for my book. U.G. consoled me saying, "You must teach permanently, even at the cost of your book," which did not appeal to me in the least.

Prashant's birthday....

18th of June--my son's birthday. Poor boy, I could not join in the yearly eagerness to celebrate, because by 10 a.m. I had to rush to school after managing to finish most of the household chores. Early morning there was a tinkle, and I was pleasantly surprised to hear U.G. who had remembered that it was Prashant's special day and had bothered to call him and wish him a happy birthday. I was very happy U.G. told me that if I had not accomplished anything worthwhile in this world, at least I had brought forth into the world such a wonderful boy. He expressed his admiration for both my children. I was happy and proud that U.G. had so kindly remembered to make my son's birthday even more eventful. He asked me to send Prashant to Poornakutee. There could not be a more ideal way of spending one's birthday. Prashant came home with an expensive gift, a voice-activated tape recorder, which was pocket-size and so convenient to carry that the boy was simply thrilled with the gift.

Thought is matter....

It was one of those days--I suddenly got a call from my friend Shyama, and she said that she would come with me if I was planning to see U.G. She said that the visit would help clear some cobwebs from her mind. So off we went. Thankfully U.G. was very much at home, and I did not mind in the least when he called me names and labeled me as a messy housewife. There were not many guests or visitors, so Shyama asked some question on thoughts, thinking, and desire. And it was just a few moments, enough to let me take my pen and book out of my bag, and U.G. started with that surprisingly natural ease. "Thought is matter. Wanting anything is the beginning of your problem. If you don't want a thing in this world then there is no thinking. The roots are there--it started with religious thinking and ended up with political ideologies, which are no different. Communism is a religion."

Shyama and myself were really surprised to find how easily U.G. linked religion with politics, and we heard him as he proceeded, "What are these people doing here? Your legislators--you elect them and seat them there. They tell you how many acres of land you should have, what is the ceiling, what kind of marriage you should have, whom you should sleep with, whom you should not sleep with--what right have they? On what basis do they condemn corruption? On what basis do they condemn selfishness?"

The spiritual man is the worst egocentric man....

As U.G. spoke, I ventured to ask about the so-called missionaries, and he replied, "The spiritual man is the worst egocentric man--he feels superior to everyone. He thinks that his teaching is going to save mankind, and his teachings should be preserved. The compassionate man Buddha, his Buddhism destroyed millions of people in Japan. Armies were maintained. I don't know why you exonerate these people and put them on a pedestal."

U.G. went on, "Their teachings were at fault, not the following. They fooled themselves, all of them. They thought that their teaching was *the* teaching and all the others were phonies. I am not saying that I am superior to all of them. Not at all. *They are false*, period, full stop, full period. I am not saying I have a teaching to save mankind."

Kalyani....

U.G. got interrupted by the sudden appearance of Kalyani, the mad one. She started shouting, dancing, screaming, saying that U.G. was responsible for the fact that her dead mother had left her no property in her will, and that U.G. should see that her family gives her her share of the inheritance. That was a sudden change for all of us. I knew that the session for the day had to end

like this. We left U.G. to sort out Kalyani's problems. She refused to leave till U.G. gave her, with great reluctance, a two rupee note.

Kalyani came from a very good family, but due to some sad circumstances, she left her teaching job, was totally deserted by her family, and shockingly took to begging in the streets. This was the condition she was in when U.G. first came across her. U.G. intervened and arranged for Chandrasekhar's landlord to give Kalyani a small room and also gave her some cash to prevent her from begging in the streets. Much to U.G.'s distaste, Kalyani would come to his flat and start sweeping and swabbing the floors, making them more messy than clean, and I once viewed an angry U.G. almost throwing Kalyani out, broom, bucket, and all.

Anyway, she was finally banned from coming, or at least sweeping, and nowadays, if she comes at all on the scene, we have a musical interlude. U.G. makes her sing before she receives any money from him.

It seems that she had made quite a few thousands of rupees from the foreign friends who visited U.G. So U.G. calls her the "rich beggar." She would sometimes put rupee notes into some mail box and love to see the surprise on the postman's face when he collected his daily mail.

U.G. is responsible for the miracle; I am just a surrogate....

My experience with Kalyani is a rather mysterious story. I once had a very severe pain in my neck. The doctors feared spondylitis, and this pain was troubling me for at least two continuous months. It did not stop me from making my daily visits to West Anjaneya Street where U.G. lived before he moved to Poornakutee, his present residence.

U.G. had noticed that I was having this pain, and asked me if I was having any treatment for it. He suddenly brought out the album of his recent visit, and as I was looking at the photos Kalyani came in. I still remember the scene: both U.G. and I were comfortably sitting on the carpet with the photos sprawled all over, and Kalyani suddenly came in and touched me at some point below my neck near the right shoulder. I wouldn't have believed it if it had happened to someone else. But the pain suddenly vanished and never came back thereafter. When I told this to Kalyani the next day, she said that U.G. was responsible for the miracle and that she was just a surrogate. I did not analyze the miracle worker for long; it was enough for me that the dogged pain had left me for good.

I remember I gave Kalyani a hundred rupee note which made her dance with joy, and left me grateful to her for the rest of my days.

If thought is not there, you would not hesitate to sleep with your mother, sister or daughter....

One morning I got up, happy with the feeling that U.G. was still in Bangalore and had promised to extend his visit for another week. Suddenly the phone rang, and U.G. at the other end screamed, "Good news, good news. Guess what!" I said I could not tax my imagination before I had my second cup of coffee. So U.G. said, "Nagaraj is warming up for the world championship against Tysen." Then he added that a common friend had decided to separate from her husband. This was very unlike U.G. because rarely does he gossip over the phone. Anyway, I gulped down my second cup of coffee and arrived at Poornakutee to catch up with the remaining headlines of the day's news.

Then late in the morning there were two new visitors, a young couple, both scientists in the Indian Institute of Science. And they had a lot to talk about, which kept U.G. blasting off almost till lunch time.

The girl was very young and vociferous. She asked about the sense of individuality, and U.G. replied that there was nothing marvelous about it. "Even the so-called enlightenment made you put on orange robes and gave you a sense of superiority by being something different from others. It's nothing but the holy business."

Then the young man questioned, "Do you think animals have a sense of individuality?" U.G. frankly said, "Neither of us know. Leave the animals alone. Why do you have to bring in the poor animals in your conversation? Talk about yourselves. Why don't you talk about the elephants who make it once in eight years. Look at the lady spiders who eat up their mates immediately after the sex act. Animals don't think of *Sattvic* diet. They just eat some grass. The sex there is not born of thought. If thought is not there, you would not hesitate to sleep with your mother, sister or daughter. If the idea is not there sex is not possible any more. The build up is no more there. Sex for the human being is more of a build up in his imagination. The body begs for release from the tension. And we turn this release, the orgasm, into the ultimate pleasure for man."

I was taking down notes, but when U.G. said all this my pen paused, and I wondered how all this talk affected the poor honeymooning couple. But they persisted in their arguments.

The sensory activities are registered in frames....

The gentleman asked U.G. if he was free from the sex idea. U.G. replied, "The sensory activities are registered in frames. If I look at a beautiful woman, that is registered. But when her horrible teeth are seen, the whole scene is changed. It is all in frames, no continuity. So it is not possible for the sex idea to take its birth there."

There is noise inside you wherever you go....

U.G. continued saying, "What is the 'silence' that you are after? Do you hear those trucks passing by on the road and the flushing of the toilet? Do you want to escape from all this and go and sit in the caves? There is noise inside you wherever you go."

The girl then asked, "How can you be so certain of everything you say? Why can't we function like you?" U.G. replied, "I am not selling my certainty."

Radhakrishna entered and U.G. immediately got up and gave him his chair. He plunked on the carpet without making a great show of his concern for Radhakrishna's stiff joints. In the meantime the students who were bombarding him with questions for more than an hour left without even a goodbye. But U.G., who was totally absorbed in discussing some political issues

with Radhakrishnan, did not notice the fact that his talkative guests had left.

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CHAPTER 7

Arrived all in one piece....

It is the 12th of November, '88. Bangalore is not going to be the same again at least for a few months. U.G. has touched the soil. It's hardly an hour after his arrival and I dial his number.

Chandrasekhar picks up and almost immediately U.G. is on the line.

The conversation runs somewhat like a piece from a Wodehouse novel.

"Hello, U.G., arrived in one piece?" I ask.

"All in one piece. Your notes will be published in some women's magazine. Mahesh wants a letter signed by you. Anyway, we will discuss that tomorrow."

"Thanks for mailing all that stuff," I break in.

"Are you bringing the kids along?" he asks.

"Sure," I reply.

"Haven't got any gifts for you this time."

"It's okay, Santa Claus!"

See you tomorrow," says he and ends the conversation. There is such joy in this brief meaningless talk, and the kids share the excitement.

Don't worry, be happy!....

Next morning sees us in Poornakutee, quite early. Everyone is watching the new additions to U.G.'s cassette library. U.G. is eager to show us the new tapes. We watch the tape containing the U.S. television interviews with M. Sheela of Rajneesh fame.

Then U.G. gets very excited about a song, "Don't worry, Be happy." Especially Prashant enjoyed it immensely. After the video session, it being a Sunday, Delhi Station was screening the

"Mahabharata" on the morning program. U. G. walked out as usual with his favorite "Down with Hindi" slogan and sat on the stone bench in the garden. I, of course, walked out with him and sat on a nearby chair.

Nagaraj is not gone. He is very much here....

We spoke about the sudden death of poor Nagaraj. The liveliest of the gang had suddenly left the world of us mortals, and U.G. said, "I told him not to stop smoking. He could not withstand the withdrawal symptoms. I even guaranteed that he would not die of lung cancer. He did not listen to me." Now, we all know that when U.G. talks with a smile and a laugh we never know when to take him seriously. I bet poor Nagaraj took U.G.'s warning lightly and paid for it. Anyway, I kept repeating, "U.G., I just can't believe Nagaraj is no more. I half expect him to walk in any minute with his loud hellos." U.G. replied, "What makes you think he is not there. He is very much here now." That jolted me. I turned around to see if I could discern any friendly specter gracing the scene, but to no avail. Trust U.G. to see things which the rest of us can't! U.G. continued, "Even when you thought you were seeing him when he was alive, you were not actually seeing him. Do you think you can "see" *anything* or *anybody*?"

After knowing U.G. for almost a decade, the mind (if it's not a myth!) comes to a point where you just don't want to know answers to questions. So I was blissfully unconcerned with not even the slightest curiosity tickling the brain as to whether I was really "seeing" when I thought I was "seeing." One thing I am certain of. The day I think I can understand what U.G. says will be too explosive for me to handle alone. So I'd rather not understand or even try to understand. I'd rather be happy with my illusions. Reminds me of the "Don't worry, Be happy," song!

When the knowledge is not there, you will drop dead!....

My daughter, Mittu, suddenly showed signs of indigestion and had bouts of nausea and vomiting. I had to attend to the poor kid till she felt better, and she certainly did after Chandrasekhar's father gave her an Avomin tablet. Meanwhile U.G. had some interesting guests. His brother-in-law, a cancer research scientist, was asking him some very interesting questions and U.G. was in real form. Though I was sitting next to Mittu in the bedroom, my ears strained to catch U.G.'s words. He was talking with his natural vehemence out there in the garden just outside the bedroom window.

I missed a lot of the conversation, almost everything, but I just caught a sentence or two, as the breeze mercifully wafted the words my way. He was saying, "When I look at anything, I don't know what I am looking at. You ask me what this color is (pointing at something), and I don't know whether it is green, red or blue. Of course, I know it is blue, but when I look at it, the word 'blue' does not come. What I am trying to say is there is no 'you' there. All that is there is the knowledge. If even for a second, one second of the clock, the 'knowledge' is not there, the you as you know yourself comes to an end. You will drop dead immediately and the doctors will pronounce you clinically dead. If at all it revives, then 'you' no longer will 'know' whether you are alive or dead. Others will see you talking, laughing, eating, and think that you are alive. But you yourself will never know."

I have heard this piece many times, but every time it is delivered it has a fresh impact. You just don't want to know anything more. So I very quietly came to my daughter's bed and sat beside her. I noticed that she was feeling much better. I was consoled. Those few sentences that I had paused to catch near the window had driven out any remnant desire of joining the little group outside.

I may pick the sweet from your plate and finish it. So sit a little further away!....

The scientist's daughter, Gautami, was quite advanced in her career as an actress, and she had brought with her some cassettes of her own films, which all of us watched with open admiration. U.G. too praised her talent, and also mentioned today that she was an electronics engineer. A bright girl! The guests left and we finished lunch. As we continued chatting outside in the garden, Suguna brought me some tasty sweets and as I was about to slurp at the first spoonful I noticed U.G. looking at the sweets with a hypnotized look. This I have always noticed: till the food is brought in front of him he never thinks of food. But once the eyes fall on anything edible, he picks it up and does not stop till the eyes see the last of it down the gullet. This behavior is so baby-like that I never fail to feel amazed at it. I deliberately said, "U.G., stop looking at my plate so greedily." "Of course, I am greedy. I may even pick the sweet from the plate and finish it. So sit a little further away." I acted scared and rescued my plate from him. While this drama was being played Suguna quickly entered with a little bowl of sweets for U.G. which he seemed to heartily enjoy and appreciate.

The end will be far away from the land of birth....

The conversation sagged on its feet--U.G. seemed to be in one of his "sinking" bouts. I just happened to look at Suguna's palm, and, seeing its pinkish tinge, I told her that she was not as anaemic as she thought she was. Well, someone thought I was reading her palm, and that started the fortune-telling session. Then U.G. looked at his own palm and said, "This man has a funny 'lifeline.' He died at the age of 49, and now what is there will continue to live for a *long* time. The end will be far away from the land of birth--somewhere in the foreign lands. See, this line

near the wrist shows that it will be so." Then Adri who was present got equally interested in the "fate and future" of one and all.

Steal, but don't get caught!....

The topic suddenly reverted to the question of how popular the book **Mind is a Myth** was getting to be in the U.S. It was selling in bookstores for eighteen dollars a copy, and it seems that the only two books being shoplifted were the Bible and **Mind is a Myth**. The Bible gives a slogan on stealing which says, "Thou shalt not steal." But U.G. says, "Steal, but don't get caught!"

Paying for a copy of his own book....

The next thing I knew U.G. was seriously asking Adri if he had at least one copy of the **Mystique of Enlightenment** to spare. U.G. said that he would even pay for it. I would not have believed it if I was not witnessing the fact that the *subject* of the book which had hit the market and which was selling like hot cakes was ready to pay for a copy of that book!

The person to whom Kundalini happens will brush aside the very concept....

The time was almost 3 o'clock afternoon, and we all got up to go inside because U.G. had some unpacking to do and had some problems about his wardrobe being renewed--the matching shades, the jackets to be disposed of, the *kurtas* to be stitched, and the pajamas to be bought. As we went in, someone asked U.G., "They are starting a Kundalini research center in America," and U.G. said as he climbed the steps of the house to go in, "Sir, if there is something like the Kundalini *Shakti*, and if at all there is the rising of this *Shakti*, then the person to whom this happens will brush aside the very concept of Kundalini."

Practicing kindness will only bring about cardiac arrests....

We ascended the stairs to find U.G.'s unpacked clothes lying about everywhere that you could set your eyes on. There were bags unopened and some bags unpacked, his room was littered with clothes, and he was looking so tired that he refused even my help to put things in order. He announced that one of those bags was a gift for me. He looked at me like an indulgent parent as I ooh-ed and ah-ed over the precious gift. He told us that there was a sudden increase in his wardrobe because he happened to accompany his Australian friends on a mad shopping spree during his last visit to Sydney. His generous friends bought everything that U.G. happened to touch or even paused to look at. I have gone shopping with U.G. quite a number of times: he has this habit of stopping and pausing at intervals to look at and touch almost everything that is displayed outside each shop. He is so taken up by this preoccupation that he totally ignores those who happen to be with him. It is not that he is interested in buying all those things, but he illustrates the dictionary meaning of window-shopping down to its letter. That this practice of his was misunderstood by his Australian friends was proven by the fact that U.G. ended up with at least six new woolen, cotton, and silk pullovers, two pairs of jeans, some bags, and some other items in an unending list.

U.G. was feeling quite lost as to which matched what, what should be retained and what should be parceled to Switzerland. Especially an orangish jacket had to be gotten rid of because of its "*swami*" color. It was not very surprising to see soon the cook parading in the orange jacket and U.G. thanking him for helping him to get rid of it. A *kurta* was too tight, yet it was brand new. So, it was immediately gifted to Chandrasekhar's father. Everyone was eager to help U.G. get rid of the unnecessary or extra items in his wardrobe. Finally he said to Radhakrishna, "I wish somebody did the thinking for me. Who wants to waste energy in thinking!" Radhakrishna

remarked that the cook seemed readily pleased with his new jacket. U.G. replied that he had not done any act of kindness. He added, "I don't practice kindness. I just had to get rid of these things, and I give them to the first person who happens to be around. The practice of kindness will only bring about cardiac arrests."

Charlie's Angels....

The afternoon coffee lifted up the sinking spirits of U.G. and the rest of us were filled with fresh energy. So we all had another session of video viewing. This time it was "Charlie's Angels." U.G. seemed quite excited and praised this particular serial. But when all of us were actually watching, U.G. sat with his eyes closed. I woke him up and he said, "Oh, it's boring!" Now what can you say about that!

My promises are like lines drawn on water....

I told U.G. that very soon my family would be an excited owner of a new V.C.R. and that he had long ago promised to gift me with a video tape of his to inaugurate the new set. To my dismay he said that his promises were always like lines drawn on water which disappeared as fast as they had appeared. Yet he gave me a copy of the interview "Thinking Allowed" and kept up his word.

Want some energy transmission?....

Soon we were leaving because it was almost evening. Almost the whole day U.G. showed signs and symptoms of jet lag, and he kept "sinking" whenever he was not drawn into conversation. He was mostly in what he calls his "dull and stupid" moods. So just as I left I wanted to see the smile, hear the witty remarks. So, to shake him out of the dullness I stretched my hand and said, "So, U.G., we are leaving. See you tomorrow. Here, shake my hand. Want some energy transmission?" Those were his own words thrown at him in his most vulnerable moments. But he seemed indifferent and looked up at me without even a smile. I had no heart to disturb him any longer. So the kids and I made our way home.

A seventy-year-old baby....

Next day he needed my help at shopping and delivering some material to the tailor. As I have mentioned before, though he says that he just could not do without our help and makes us feel very indispensable, he knows exactly what he wants and we follow around like dummies. But it's just great to go on a shopping spree with him. Suguna, myself, and U.G. walk leisurely along the streets leading to the shopping area, and U.G. says, "It's like I have never left Bangalore--walking the same street, going to the same tailor." I agreed, because it's really strange: every time I see him I feel he's never been away, though I am seeing him after a long gap of four months. I gossip with Suguna as we walk along and U.G. is left many paces behind walking along and engrossed totally in whatever is happening around him. I somehow get the feeling that we should not let the 70 year old baby walk behind. So we shift positions, let him walk in front so we can keep a protective eye on him. You know, there are instances when his body suddenly slants at dangerous angles and he recovers equally fast. But for those of us watching it is enough to jolt us in the pit of our stomach.

Profess the philosophy of Love?....

The material for the pajamas is bought and safely delivered to the tailor, who charges exorbitantly. Yet U.G. pays with mute obedience saying, "What with the rising prices, the poor fellow has to make a living. I have known him for 20 years, now his hair is turning grey." He

makes kind enquiries about the tailor's wife. The tailor is pleased with U.G.'s sympathy, and then we walk back home. Who says U.G.'s heart was meant only for pumping blood in his body? Talking about hearts and love, I was surprised last month when I received U.G.'s parcel of my edited notes with stamps stuck all over the envelope with the word "LOVE" and flowers. I smiled as I received the envelope. When I met U.G. I mentioned it to him. He laughed. He recalled that one of his Australian friends who had some sort of psychic experiences had told him that the whole course of his (U.G.'s) life would change, that he would talk differently and profess the philosophy of love, that the "Love" stamps marked the epochal moment of the dawning era, that he was not taking care of his body, that he was being careless about his health and diet, and that he'd better preserve the body because he was sent here for a great mission....

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CHAPTER 8

I thought I had finished with these notes, but it sure looks like a never-ending job. It has turned out to be an entertainment in itself, and I have ended up enjoying it tremendously.

We are with you through thick and thin....

The lull period was traumatic in its own way. On December 2nd, 1988 my husband had a heart attack, most probably due to over-medication for his asthma. The whole thing was over before my very eyes, and I struggled to keep a brave front before my young children who were quite attached to their father. Life looked bleak, and the future felt as if it had nothing to offer but emptiness. The shock of losing a person who had become so much a part of the last eighteen years of my life was incredible in its immensity. So much so that even the presence of U.G. in Bangalore at that time refused to play a consoling role.

The mind stood still and dazed and as U.G. rang up on the night of December 2, I remember he said, "Shanta, take it easy. We are with you through thick and thin."

Consolation only brought about fresh break-downs of the shield that was carefully built around, and yet something inside me was very quiet and resigned to the situation. All that I had learnt from U.G. over the years gave me courage, so much so that I felt I did not need even *him* to talk to in my hour of need. I told him so.

I did need U.G. after all....

The next day he hired a taxi and came over to my sister's place where I was staying till all those rituals were over.

It was the first time that he had voluntarily visited me. He avoids socializing of any kind, and only a crisis like this could have brought him to my doorsteps. Chandrasekhar and Suguna had also accompanied him.

My sisters and two of my very close friends formed the small group as U.G. entered my sister's home. He took his place on the edge of the sofa much to the concern of my sister. Prashant and Mittu sat on his either side. He held their hands and my eyes gazed on this scene, drawing

immense strength. His first words were, "These things happen. There should be no guilt whatsoever. Now she has to bring up these kids. How is her financial position? Secure?" All this was addressed to my sister, and after hearing my sister's report concerning my financial assets, he seemed quite satisfied. He discussed the possibilities of my taking up a job, and the pension I would get. Finally he got up, shook hands with the children, told me not to care about anyone's opinions or advice, to live my life on my own, and not to let anyone interfere with it. His visit really did something. There was more confidence on the faces of Prashant and Mittu. The fear and insecurity was no more in their eyes when I spoke to them. I owed U.G. a lot for restoring the smiles back to the young faces, my "mother's heart" overflowed with gratitude. I did need U.G. after all!

Being exposed to the harsh realities of life....

My brother had come from Bombay to settle all my financial accounts and thus one more member of my family chanced to meet U.G., at the airport.

My brother's financial expertise and U.G.'s love for the subject of money helped them to strike an intimate conversation together since they happened to be on the same flight to Bombay.

I was hoping my brother would not get too shocked by U.G.'s outrageous-sounding ideas.

Anyway the plane landed safely at the Bombay airport.

By the time U.G. returned to Bangalore I had already received an appointment letter from the firm where my husband had worked for the last twenty years.

U.G. did not seem to welcome the idea with enthusiasm that I expected from him. He said, "Lady, you are going to be exposed to the harsh realities of life. You don't need to work. You have enough money," and the like, but for many other reasons I had ultimately to decide on taking up the job. I tried to tell him of the inflation and the deterioration of the value of the rupee. At last he gave in by saying, "So you are no longer a housewife; you are a working girl."

My joining the office and the routine of a "working girl" have cut down my visits to U.G. Now I can take the children to Basavangudi only on Sundays.

It was initially difficult to fit in with the routine of file work and computer training when for the last ten years you were almost convinced that the mind was a myth.

Experiences are a stain on consciousness....

U.G. has come from Bombay, this time with Lalubhai, a Gujarati gentleman closely associated with U.G. for the last several years.

Lalubhai had many interesting stories to tell me this time. He told me that once when he was on his way to Badrinath, a holy place in the Himalayas, he developed high fever at Uttarkasi. It seemed he sent a fervent prayer to some Divine Grace and he felt a surge of energy enter his body. It seems when after some time he kept the thermometer under his armpit to check his fever he felt the same surge of energy. After he had this experience he met Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj of the **I am That** fame. And Maharaj told Lalubhai, "You are lucky. Everything is finished for you. Now you can come and cross swords with me, or anyone for that matter."

The surprising thing is that when this same experience was related to U.G., Lalubhai got the reply, "This experience itself is a 'stain' on your consciousness. It is still a stumbling block." Lalubhai was so shocked that he refused to see U.G. the next day. He needed at least a day to stomach the shock.

Nisargadatta Maharaj had asked Lalubhai to celebrate the day when he had felt this surge of energy, and U.G. called this same experience a "stain on the consciousness." It was too much for Lalubhai. U.G.'s reply was quick like an arrow, and it found its mark.

The next day when Lalubhai met U.G. again, it seems U.G. said, "This is a *rare* experience, but it is your own. I have *nothing* to do with it. I don't know anything about it. But it must have happened to you after you came in contact with me." I almost jumped after I heard that. To catch U.G. making a remark like that! I wanted to run up and ask U.G. who was upstairs, but Lalubhai said, "No, he has changed his tunes over the years."

The evening wore off as Lalubhai related his life story, about his long acquaintance with U.G., and before that with Vinoba Bhave and Vimala Thakkar.

Figments of a fertile imagination....

Lalubhai also said that his body responded to everything around him in a strange way. If anyone in the family was about to develop a cold or fever or indigestion, Lalubhai's body was the first to register it before it finally manifested in the patient. This was similar to U.G.'s experiences. I can even quote my own case. I had once a severe cold, an irritating flow of coryza, a bad throat, and yet U.G. said, "Come on over, I may not stay in Bangalore for long." So I was soon sitting beside him and I gradually felt all the symptoms of the cold vanishing. This Lalubhai calls the self-correcting mechanism of the body. I have a hunch that it must be accelerated in U.G.'s presence. Of course, U.G. laughs away and brushes aside all these incidents as figments of a fertile imagination. When Brahmachariji one day asked about these so-called miracles, U.G. related his recent recollections of his trip to Delhi.

Every miracle is an accident. But people want to believe. They need to believe....

It seems his host, Mr. Frank Noronha, who is an important Government official, told the following to U.G.: Mr. Noronha was suffering from a slipped disc. Just the night before U.G. arrived in Delhi Frank dreamt that his backache was cured by a tremendous kick that U.G. gave him. The same night Frank's wife dreamt that his car met with an accident and his right ring finger and right knee were injured. His life was saved by someone sitting next to him. Well, for obvious reasons the wife did not disclose her dream to Frank, nor did she stop him when he went the next day to receive U.G. at the Delhi airport. On their way back home, U.G. and Frank were sitting in the back seat of the car. The car was stopped at a check post for collecting parking fees, and all of a sudden a huge truck rammed into the back of the car, smashing it completely. Frank got the needed jolt to the back which cured his pain and he sustained injuries on his right ring finger and right knee. They were delayed till almost 2:30 a.m. A bewildered U.G. found himself on the streets of Delhi, with an injured friend with a cured back, a smashed car, and a disturbed driver. U.G. said, "Why am I here? How do we go back home? What happens to this poor car?" Finally they reached home to confront Frank's frantic wife who had almost choked herself with worry. The first thing she asked Frank was to show his right ring finger which was slightly bleeding, and to her horror she knew that her dream had come true. The savior happened to be U.G. She ended up being so convinced of this fact that she refused to go for the Christmas Mass, saying that Jesus himself came to her as her guest. She also labeled U.G. a baby and wrote an article on him titled "The Seventy-Year-Old Baby." Frank and his wife exchanged notes about their dreams and convinced U.G. that he was a miracle worker after all. U.G. says he knows nothing of this. He says that for all he knows, Frank's backache may return with the slightest jerk of any vehicle. All this U.G. related to me as if he himself wondered at the coincidences. Brahmachariji asked if he could term an accident (this time Frank's) a miracle, and U.G. answered, "Every miracle is an accident." U.G.'s answers came out swift and straight without even a moment's pause, which never fails to surprise his onlookers. U.G. ended the "miracle" session by saying, "People want to believe, they need to believe."

Brahmachariji's presence I always considered as an additional bonus to me for having come all the way from Malleswaram to Basavangudi costing me Rs.20. In Brahmachariji's questioning taunts and U.G.'s immediate and witty repartees there was always a lot to learn.

If *Brahman* and *jnanam* are the same thing, then why use two separate words?....

The question of *Brahmajnana* came up and Brahmachariji, an erudite Sanskrit scholar quoted a few verses to support his arguments, while U.G. just brushed aside the very concept of **Brahmajnana**, and I simply enjoyed his counter-remarks. U.G. said, "There is no such thing as '*Brahmajnana*.' If at all there is '*Jnana*' then '*Brahman*' is out!" The very statement sent me to the seventh heaven of delight. Brahmachariji did not give up easily. He said, "*Brahman* and *Jnanam* are the same thing." And U.G. came out with, "If they are the same, why use two separate words for it?" And there was nothing else to be said on the matter!

Taste of money is sure to change one's nature....

Lunch was served by a smiling Suguna, and as he munched the *papad* U.G. suddenly got on the topic of money, his favorite topic. Maybe the thought crossed his mind that I was soon going to be a working woman. He said that he had his own doubts if I would retain my generosity, because the taste of money was sure to change one's nature. He said he was not sure of my being liberal with money once I earned it through the sweat of my brow (he made the gesture of wiping his brow with his finger).

Be happy that you have seen your dream come true!....

This led him to relate a childhood incident. It seems once when U.G. traveled by first class in a train and alighted at the destination, he saw his grandfather getting off the same train from an intermediate class compartment. The grandchild got a quiet look from the old man. Both sat in the bullock cart which was then the only mode of transportation. After arriving home the old man called the boy to his side and said, "You see, I am working so hard and saving every penny denying myself everything so that your future is comfortable when I am no more there." And U.G. calmly replied, "Be happy that you have seen your dream come true when you are still living." I don't know how much to believe and take U.G.'s word when he relates all these incidents. And he tries his best to convince us that he was a "ruthless butcher" as his grandmother labeled him.

All that money is going to be spent immediately on shopping....

Another incident was when his grandfather lay on his deathbed, he made the young U.G. sit by his side and questioned him, "How are you going to manage all the land and wealth? You are married and you are going to have children. I am really worried about you." U.G. replied to the dying man, "Why don't you go peacefully. All that money is going to be spent immediately on shopping." U.G. loves to paint these horrid pictures of himself and flaunt his ruthlessness, but those who move closely with him know that he deliberately puts on this false front to disenchant people.

I am crying because of the poor Indians who have to live up to this lofty ideal....

Once a friend of U.G., one Mr. Prasada Rao, who was once U.G.'s schoolmate said, "I remember U.G. and Billy going to the film "*Harischandra*," and he was surprised to find tears rolling down U.G.'s cheeks--(this surprised me too)--and being questioned about this it seems that U.G. replied, 'I am crying because of the poor Indians who have to live up to this lofty ideal.'" I asked Mr. Prasada Rao if he could remember U.G. as a boy, and he replied, "I can't remember much

because U.G. hardly attended school. He was always playing truant. He attended school only five times in a month." U.G. who was sitting quietly listening to this conversation supplied the details, "I was too serious when I was a boy--no fun, no games, no entertainment. I never smiled or laughed even later on. My wife used to ask me, "Don't you ever smile or laugh?"

My wife would rise from the grave if she saw me laughing like this!....

The subject of laughter reminds me of one Mr. Narayana Rao who spent one whole week in Bangalore entertaining U.G. with his mimicry. He impersonated all the film stars, the politicians, and even U.G., so much so he had U.G. rolling up in fits of laughter. U.G. said, "My wife would rise from the grave, if she saw me laughing like this. I never laughed so much in my life." Mr. Narayana Rao was really funny. He imitated U.G.'s every word and gesture, and entertained everyone during his stay at Purnakutee. I was lucky for having had the chance to see him at least on the video because Chandrasekhar had the presence of mind to start his own video collection of the Poornakutee Gang.

I really don't know *how* it happened, *why* it happened, *when* it happened, and *did* anything happen at all?....

It being a Sunday Chandrasekhar was enjoying his weekly holiday. Even after all these years of having known U.G., none of us had given up even the semblance of hope which we nurtured carefully in our hearts. Chandrasekhar still felt that U.G.'s so-called *sadhanas*, the countless repetitions of the *Gayatri Mantra* and *Shiva Nama*, his visits to the various sages, especially Ramana Maharshi, *must* have helped him to stumble into whatever state he is supposed to be in and U.G.'s total denial of the fact leaves no room for argument. U.G. said, "All that happened, if at all anything happened, *despite* everything I did. All those things I did are irrelevant. My favorite sentence is `I really don't know *how* it happened, *why* it happened, *when* it happened, and *did* anything happen at all?"

Chandrasekhar ended by saying, "U.G., regardless of your denials we still have the feeling that it may be because of all that *sadhana* that you did. We don't want to even hear about your denial, because that takes away the *only* hope we have."

Remarks vulgar, but true....

Sometimes U.G.'s narratives appear crude, almost vulgar, much to the discomfort of the people who happen to be around him at the time. But though I blush, my ears turn hot, and I hang my head in embarrassment, in my heart of hearts I *know* very well that every word he says is true. (U.G. says, "This you must put in your book!") Once a childless couple came to U.G. asking for his blessings for a child, and U.G. as usual replied, "You don't need *my* blessings. All you need is to go to the doctor, to find which of you needs medical help." This is the last kind of answer any sage or saint would offer to a couple who fall at his feet considering him as a savior. Anyway, after a year the couple did turn up with a baby, and I'd rather not write U.G.'s remarks. I would leave them to the reader's imagination.

Chalk and cheese have something in common....

People usually find it difficult to be on the same wave length with U.G. when they start a conversation with him. It does look like he is talking about something totally different, and the exasperated listener exclaims, "U.G., I am talking of chalk and you are talking of cheese." But U.G. comes out with a cheeky answer, "Maybe, but the common thing to both is their calcium content. Isn't it?"

Today I am neither dull nor drowsy. So, no New Moon today....

It was a special New Moon day and the TV splashed the Kumbh Mela on the screen for the least reason and every opportunity they could chance on. The honored guest Brahmachariji was embarking on a long fast. U.G. seized the opportunity to joke. He told Brahmachariji that fasting was an unnecessary ritual. He said, "Only the do-gooders fast. Keeping yourself deliberately hungry helps you to be 'high'. There is no other spiritual benefit." Brahmachariji just walked out of the room, unable to bear any more of this. U.G. followed saying, "Sir, why don't you join us for lunch. Anyway, it's not a New Moon day. I can assure you: even the astrologers have agreed that my body is very much in tune with the lunar phases, and *today* I am neither dull nor drowsy. So, no New Moon day today. You can eat to your heart's content." Brahmachariji was already on his way home!

Fasting in an extravagant way....

That did not discourage U.G. from continuing with the rest of us, "You know, once I was invited for lunch to a Madhva Brahmin's house. The man apologized that it happened to be '*Ekadasi*,' a fast day, so he could not offer me a full meal. I replied, "It doesn't matter to me, if you agree, I am always ready to go without food." To my surprise he placed twenty two dishes before me, except rice." Now that was really an extravagant way of fasting!

The mark on the forehead blocks the Third Eye!....

Next day Brahmachariji was back on the scene. As soon as he entered U.G. joked, "Good morning, Sir. But why that mark on your forehead? Brahmachariji justified that it was to locate the "Third Eye." And U.G. said, "That mark blocks the Third Eye, if at all there is one." This was an interesting way for the day to begin!

Fragrant faeces....

U.G. casually remarked that before the "Calamity" he was rather surprised to read about the fact that an "enlightened" man's feces did not have the usual decomposed smell. He took this information rather skeptically. But after the "Calamity" he found that whenever he would be in the toilet the feces smelt like mango or raspberry or strawberries. He wondered why. The doctors who examined him for his gullet complaint told him that his stomach lining had lost its sensitivity completely, the acids no longer secreted in his stomach, the food was not acted upon but went straight to the intestines. The stomach acted just like a vent or a pipe for the food to go to the intestines, and this retained its original odor even when it came out as waste. There was less decomposition in the system.

Strange friendship....

All this sounded quite logical to me. But Brahmachariji had a cynical look on his face and turned down U.G.'s tall claims. It's all so funny because he usually decries everything U.G. says, denies, argues and fights, and upholds the great Indian tradition. Without having much in common, he disagrees with every word of U.G.'s. Yet his friendship with U.G. has continued over two decades. He says that U.G.'s life from the time of his birth does not have one redeeming feature to justify the label of a God-man.

With all this he has this strange affection for U.G. He even finds himself rushing to the kitchen to bring U.G. a spoon and a plate at lunch time. A strange relationship! (It doesn't seem so strange when each of us considers what he or she in turn feels for U.G.)

His standard treatment for newcomers is to throw them out....

U.G. has this standard treatment for the newcomers in his "school." He throws them out. They keep coming back and he threatens to call the police. Insults are added as spice to the injuries. Those that remain are the ones who have survived his long and repeated onslaughts. Yet you never get the feeling that you are out of the "baking kiln." It's too hot to be comfortable, or if it *has* cooled down a bit, the glowing embers are still burning under a cover of ash that gives a false sense of security. But the "hardened" ones know exactly where they stand in relation to him. Brahmachariji asked U.G. why his behavior was so "wild." And U.G. answered, "Do you ask nature why it is wild--why the earthquakes, why the destruction?" Brahmachariji said, "That's different." And U.G. quipped, "It's the same. This is worse. Here, there are words to add to the storm."

The only immortality....

The heavy lunch and U.G.'s acid remarks had made Brahmachariji very sleepy, so he got up to catch up with the afternoon nap. U.G. asked him to rest on the swing which was made into a comfortable rocking bed. U.G. added, "You can swing your way through life!" The rest of us watched old video cassettes which featured the regular gang. Seeing Nagaraj in one of them U.G. remarked, "Who can say Nagaraj is no more? There he is, laughing and talking. That is the only *immortality*. There is no other--no cosmic planes, no astral planes, no eternity of any kind."

We all experience a fatal attraction for U.G....

U.G. had some shopping to do, so he left with Suguna, promising to be back soon. Lalubhai and myself were exchanging news when Prasada Rao (U.G.'s childhood schoolmate) walked in. After an exchange of small courtesies, Prasada Rao, watching me jotting down some points in my notebook, inquired what I was doing. I told him I had started writing a sort of book on U.G., and he said, "How very flattering! How the hell can you write something on a subject like U.G.?" And I said that as he was a close associate of U.G. for so many years he could help by adding a few lines to my notes. He obliged. He started saying that all of us experience a fatal attraction toward U.G. (like the spider and fly story); though U.G. was hopelessly predictably unpredictable, we were drawn toward him again and again.

Prasada Rao said it could *not* be because of U.G.'s talk, because he repeated himself to the extent of boring his audience. He was not very knowledgeable, to be frank, but his presence was vital. But how? Because all of us were unique, and there could not be, and will not be another Prasada Rao on this planet. (Long association with U.G. turns people vehement about professing their convictions!) He turned to Lalubhai and said, "There is only *one* Lalubhai," and Lalubhai added under his breath, "Thank God for that, or it would mean trouble for my poor wife!" That broke the seriousness of the tone, but Prasada Rao carried on, "U.G. once told me, 'It's not what I say--even if I read something from the telephone directory, it would affect you.'"

You have to throw God out of your system....

Finishing his piece, Prasada Rao left, and Lalubhai continued with his story. He said, "U.G. told me last year, 'Lalubhai, you have to throw God out of your system.' This year, I think at this point, I feel I *have* managed to throw God out of my system." I listened and paused, and U.G. walked into the room, declaring that his shopping was a great success.

