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W. J. WEATHERBY, in New York, finds Krishnamurti, at 89, still inspiring his followers

With the faithful in the pathless land

THE legendary Indian mystic spiritual teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti, made one of his rare public appearances in New York this weekend. On Saturday and yesterday he gave what he calls "a talk," which to his admirers is like calling the Sermon on the Mount a chat.

The scene was Madison Square Garden, usually the home of rock stars, professional basketball games and similar mass market entertainments. Krishnamurti's first gathering followed hard on the heels of a professional boxing programme and had the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus as a nearby neighbour. But Krishnamurti stressed from the start he wasn't offering a competing "entertainment" but a serious get-together for shared thinking.

His message hasn't changed much in more than 50 years. At 89 he talked like the young man who in 1929 caused an international sensation by refusing to act as Guru for the Theosophists and his other many followers. "Truth is a pathless land," he said then, rejecting any religious or political "path," and he said much the same at the Garden this weekend when several thousand devoted followers came

through heavy spring rains to hear him.

His style also hasn't changed. A short slim bird-like man, neatly dressed in dark suit and tie and polished shoes, he appeared without any introduction, sat upright on a hard backed chair, waited until late comers had found their seats, and then talked quietly into a microphone, never raising his voice and seldom even gesturing. Newcomers who hadn't experienced his "talks" before were startled by his low-key style and lack of drama. But gradually his serenity began to have an hypnotic effect and he held his large audience during his long 90 minute talk, breaking the spell only when he took up a watch to announce it was time to stop. When his admirers began to applaud him, he said in the same quiet precise tones, "May I respectfully suggest you don't clap. If you are clapping for yourself, it is a different matter."

He was still rejecting the role of guru or leader, claiming only to stage a scene "where we might think together."

If his message hadn't changed since the Theosophists tried to make him into their world leader and even a new Messiah — another role he rejected — the timing of his latest "talks" seemed

carefully calculated. It seemed no coincidence that he chose to preach of the "pathless land of truth" in the middle of the American presidential elections. New York is still recovering from being wooed along the paths of Reagan, Mondale, Hart, and Jackson in the primary election earlier this month and so Krishnamurti's message suddenly seemed refreshingly topical.

He rejected the Democratic and Republican "Paths" and every other way through any organisation, creed, dogma, priest, ritual, philosophy or psychological technique. Nationalism and patriotism were mere tribal nationalistic glorifications whether upheld by the Americans, English or Russians. We had to see the world we had created first as human beings to be able to "think together."

"Our world was increasingly divided and dangerous, he warned. "Starvation, you know nothing about in America. Even those who are poor have a certain social security, but go to the East and there's no security of any kind. A great many leaders have told us what to do. We have had them by the thousands, yet we remain unchanged. We are not persuaded by Demigods, people who promise us heaven and all that business. There have been a thousand

Gurus which is the silliest form of leadership. People now sit by the hour watching television and being offered by the hourly thing. We are becoming slaves of specialists for in this country there are specialists for everything — headaches, sex problems — and so we are losing the real quality of freedom."

It was a familiar catalogue of complaints heard from many religious leaders, but Krishnamurti in his low key conversational style seemed to keep referring it all back to the meaning of the presidential election. In discussing the difference between love and desire, he mentioned "The desire to be president or some such success" and the fact that America was becoming a model for the rest of the world. "They want to be like Americans — rich, prosperous, with cars and money."

"It is a desire for status and wealth, a desire that drives our lives, an extraordinary energy like the bomb that will destroy the whole of humanity."

Again and again he stressed "we are not trying to convince you of anything. Please believe me. But if we could actually think together, it would be a marvellous thing." He wasn't offering "instruction" as in a conventional sermon or lecture but clearly in his opinion there was a

mystical sharing and attainment of deeper vision. In his more mystical flights, even though he continued to express himself in the same low-key matter of fact way, he seemed to lose even some of his dedicated followers who were still seeking a "path" to Truth through him and hadn't quite understood his message or his role as non-Guru.

Even his dedicated biographer, Mary Lutyens, once remarked after one of his "talks" that while she seemed to understand what he was saying while he was actually talking, "I could not afterwards have given any coherent idea of it to someone who had never heard him." So it was with many in the large audience at the Garden this weekend. He departed as quietly, as unobtrusively, as he had appeared, leaving behind a sense of serenity rather than any coherent philosophical key, an image of a man at 89 spectacularly alive, fearless and independent in his vision, modestly aware that no leader, Guru or even a plain old mystic like himself can know all the answers. It was a much needed point to make so eloquently in a presidential election year.

Krishnamurti: if we could think together it could be marvellous

