

CONNECTION BALANCE MYSTICISM PILGRIMAGE APPRECIATION

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE \$4.50



unity[®] Magazine

Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith: Awakening to Our Connection



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Listening in With ...



Photo by Mikki Harris.

Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith

GO for the GLOW

Michael Bernard

Beckwith is hardly your average minister. Sure, he tends to his congregation (Agape International Spiritual Center in Los Angeles, California), serves the community, and delivers rousing oratory—but he also walks his talk globally. He's addressed the United Nations, cofounded an international peacekeeping organization, and presented an award to the late Nelson Mandela. He's received fan letters from Coretta Scott King and worked alongside both the Dalai Lama and Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi. Hearing him speak makes it nearly impossible to ever again doubt our individual luminosity. Below, he talks with *Unity Magazine* editor **Katy Koontz** about connectedness, thinking outside the box, and making the impossible possible.

Katy Koontz: You've said each person's spiritual awakening affects the whole planet because we're all connected, so can focusing on feeling that connectedness enhance our spiritual awakening?

Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith:

Absolutely. In the process of awakening through our spiritual practices, we cleanse our filters of perception so we can consciously connect with that which is real with a capital "R"—the ineffable presence of God, the presence of beauty, the presence of love within ourselves, and within all beings. Because focusing on that sense of interconnection speeds up our ability to see that which is real, it amplifies our spiritual awakening.

KK: How do we overcome the challenges to feeling more connected?

MBB: The first thing we have to understand is we're not here to live a challenge-free life. Challenges come to activate latent capacities longing to emerge in, through, and as us. So when we're facing a challenge, it's beneficial to ask ourselves, *What gift of growth is this challenge offering me?* It's difficult, because society conditions us to believe success means retiring on a yacht somewhere, whereas authentic

success is the evolution of our soul. So when we embrace challenge as an evolutionary accelerator, we realize it's like a grain of sand in an oyster—we can expect a pearl to follow shortly.

KK: So seeing an opportunity instead of a problem opens the door to getting through the situation?

MBB: Absolutely. We're surrounded by opportunities, possibilities, and potentialities. The word *problem* is related to the word *emblem*. A problem is emblematic of our particular perceptions and beliefs—the sources of which are most often hidden. This is why individuals on the New Thought path are referred to as "truth students." We don't run from challenges, try to hide them under the carpet, or bypass them. We say, *This is my opportunity to grow, so I may become more, and never less, than my true self.*

KK: So much of your work is about being positive, feeling gratitude, and focusing on light instead of shadow. But negative emotions can become addictive. What's the most effective way to get back on track?

MBB: First, become mindful of the emotions and mindsets that hook you, that trigger you. Ask yourself, *Am I caught in*

a societal point of view such as fear, worry, lack, doubt, or limitation? Then, instead of denying that negative emotion, observe it and try to embrace it. By being mindful that you are in a state of fear and embracing rather than adopting it, you can examine its underpinnings. For example, you can ask yourself, *Am I being hooked by society's fear-mongering about a major event that just made the headlines?* Or, *Am I triggered by a habitual fear pattern handed down through my family conditioning?* Then you can begin to recalibrate your vibration to a higher frequency by choosing another thought—maybe a level of gratitude or thanksgiving.

Second, you can use the vibratory energy of a negative emotion to embrace its opposite. Let's say you're angry about something that just happened at work and realize that underneath your reaction is the fear of losing your job and not having enough money to live on. I highly recommend going to a private place and yelling, as passionately as you can, "I don't understand why I *always* have more money than I need! *Why* is everything always working together for my good? *Why* is it that I'm always loved and supported by a friendly universe? *Why* is my life always working?" Emotion has power, and now you have directed the energy of that power to affirm what is true about you and your life. The energy of anger then begins to diffuse.

KK: I love the idea that all emotions are just different degrees of the same quality.

MBB: Isn't that a tremendous relief? In our teaching we say there is only one God, one power, and one presence, which manifests as love, peace, joy, wisdom, compassion, intelligence, abundance, and creativity. These are qualities of Spirit that are our birthright, which we can cultivate within ourselves through our spiritual practices. In other words, love and hate aren't opposites; hate is simply a lower vibratory energy of love; greed is a lower vibratory energy of generosity; worry is a lower vibratory energy of trust.

KK: You've also said we're all here for a reason, but it may take a while to realize what that reason is. How can we best use that incubation time we spend in the gap?

MBB: We all have the same life purpose—to reflect and reveal the face of God in a way that has never happened before through our unique gifts, talents, and capacities. Because the universe will answer any empowering question we place before it, the first thing to ask is, *What is God's idea of itself as my life? What expression of God is seeking to express in, as, and through me?* Then we begin to catch glimpses, insights, and signs in response. Now, if we ask disempowering questions such as, *Why me? What's wrong? Who's to blame?* we end up getting answers from the database of the human collective unconscious that reflects humanity's sense of disconnection from Source.

We can also ask, *If this situation were to last forever, what quality must I cultivate that would give me peace of mind?* Then a quality will emerge—maybe compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, patience, or love. Then, as we begin to focus

more on the inner quality rather than the outer circumstances, that quality starts to pervade our awareness and transformation is quickened, while resistance to the circumstances is simultaneously released.

KK: That would make us much more ready to receive the quality when it comes.



Michael Bernard Beckwith in action. (Photo by Barry Selby.)

MBB: Absolutely. You won't waste your time in wishful thinking, saying, *I wish I would have, could have, should have. If only I had done this ... I shouldn't have done that.* Those are futile statements. They don't strengthen the inner filament that allows you to carry more energetic light.

KK: You advocate discerning what we must *become* instead of what we must *accomplish*. How can we live in this world and reference ourselves more as human beings than human doings?

MBB: The more we regularly stick to our spiritual practices, the more we are investing in "being" rather than "doing." You can't "do" love, you *are* loving. You don't "do" compassion, you *are* compassionate.

You can't be anything you're not willing to become in consciousness. It's impossible. Unless you earn something by right of consciousness, you'll lose it. You'll fritter it away. That's why many lottery winners end up in their original situation five years later—because they didn't own their winnings by right of consciousness.

I always go back to what Jesus said: "Be not afraid for I have overcome the world." So we're not trying to walk in lockstep with this world. We're rising above it, meaning we're in this world but we're actually living in a different world—the world God sees. The headlines are someone's perception of an experience happening in the world. That's not the world I live in. As the scripture says, "Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

KK: That certainly makes it easier to watch the evening news!

MBB: You're right! I watch the news at least once a week so I can see what my assignment is for that week—to lift my awareness, see the truth, see the possibilities, and hold that space in my prayers. And I tell Agape's congregants that the news headlines inform them where their prayers for the world can be directed. If individuals who are waking up aren't doing that, who will?

KK: I've read you keep an impossibility journal where you write down six impossible thoughts before breakfast (a nod to the White Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*). Do you still do that?

MBB: I do. I don't necessarily write six every day. Sometimes I write more, sometimes I write one thing that seems to be just crazy-impossible. What's interesting is that what I called impossible years ago has now happened—speaking at the United Nations; hosting His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Association for Global New Thought Synthesis Dialogue conferences; giving Nelson Mandela the Season for Nonviolence award; developing Agape's diverse spiritual community and touching all corners of the world through live-streaming our services. I've now added the seeming impossible possibility of humanity creating the radical kind of world peace we envision and pray for—including all beings on the planet having their basic needs met and living in dignity. Even if

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you were to journal the same thing every day, maintaining an impossibility journal is very valuable because it takes you beyond your current paradigm.

Prayer is another example of a potential paradigm shift. Most people's prayers are kind of anemic. They contain manipulative factors, meaning they connive or negotiate what they want and when. However, authentic prayer initiates a shift in consciousness where seeming miracles happen outside your present paradigm. That's where the answers are. That's where the juice is.

KK: When the things you journal begin to manifest, that confirmation must enable you to reach even farther.

MBB: Yes! Most people live in what I call "small-box consciousness" and require a "small-box vaccine" so that the epidemic of "small-box living" can be eradicated on the planet. This is how to become open and receptive to thinking outside of our present boxes and discovering that the universal laws governing the universe don't require manipulation to work. The impossibility journal is a way of making welcome that which is already a possibility in the mind of God.

KK: So the possibility already exists energetically, and you're giving it a fertile place to land, right?

MBB: Exactly.

KK: Your work draws not only from eastern and western mysticism but also from indigenous cultures. Which do you find the most fascinating?

MBB: I love and combine them all because each one has its unique gifts. In the western

psyche, there is a separation between us and the ocean, between us and the trees, between us and the animals. That sense of psychic separation is the genesis of a lot of anxiety and abuse of Mother Nature. In indigenous cultures this separation doesn't exist. They see a tree as an extension of God, not an inanimate, soulless piece of matter. I've had many experiences in Africa of conversing with the energetic spirit of trees. The very ground upon which I now stand feels so alive, so electric.

We all have access to communing with nature in this way, but we've forgotten how. Everyone can wake up, take their shoes off, and put their feet on Mother Earth and feel their deep-rooted connectedness to her.

I have a massive tree in my backyard and I often do my breathing exercises while facing it and my meditations sitting under it. I embrace the wisdom-energy circulating in that noble tree. I invite all that the tree-spirit knows to be transmitted to me. I do the same with the blades of grass under my feet and with Mother Earth until I become aware of the life force flowing in the tree, in the grass, and under the ground. Many of my indigenous brothers and sisters were brought up this way, but most of the rest of us have to relearn it.

KK: I love that feeling of receiving wisdom from the Earth. I think nature talks to us all the time.

MBB: Absolutely. Go meditate in the forest, and after a while the city vibration dissolves, you begin to hear the song of Mother Nature's language. You feel that precious sense of connection. Eventually, you'll be able to hold that awareness even in the roar of city. But you'll find yourself emanating that connection, not looking to get it from the world. Trying to get something sets up a degree of separation because you're saying, "I don't have it," but when you begin to say, "I'm here to radiate it," then the universe finds a way to place it in your hands so you can give it. So instead of getting, you end up letting.

KK: What a powerful concept!

MBB: It becomes even more powerful when we practice it.

KK: One of Agape's spiritual practices is participating in spiritual community to enhance spiritual growth. On the flip side, do we each have a responsibility to our communities to grow spiritually?

MBB: Absolutely. In the Agape community, each person is invited to commit to their individual growth in such a way that it benefits the local community and beyond. For example, we have a Sacred Service ministry to increase each person's compassion, tithing to create a collective awareness of the law of circulation, classes offering spiritual practices for expanding consciousness, prayer circles to uplift and unify the community, and fellowshiping to share the joy of being a community. We take these practices into the larger community, extending the reach of loving-kindness to other drivers on the freeways, individuals in grocery stores and restaurants—anywhere and everywhere.

After a while, you realize you're always in spiritual community, in spiritual fellowship, even if the people around you are not aware of it. You become a conscious *bodhisattva*, a Christ, praying silently for all, anchoring heaven on earth.

KK: Sounds like a big job!

MBB: Yes, and a permanent one with great benefits! Remember, our genesis was not in our mother's womb. Each of us, as a spiritual being having a human incarnation, has never been separated from Source—the central flame of all existence. By remembering this, we can return to the interconnectedness we talked about at the beginning of this conversation.

So don't have anemic prayers. Instead, consciously connect with the presence, to remember that inseparability and to become available to wisdom, to spontaneous goodness, to pure creativity—and I'm telling you your life will glow. Glowing is a very high form of prayer. You glow for God. You glow for peace. You glow for beauty. You glow for abundance. You are the light of the world. *Glow!* 🌍



Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith and his wife, Rickie Byars Beckwith. (Photo by Mikki Willis.)