

The Yoga of Jesus

Class 3 - "One Way" Exclusively or Universality?

I. OVERVIEW

- A. Tonight, we turn our attention to the core question of whether the teachings of Jesus the Christ were originally intended to define a unique route to attaining reunion with the divine or whether they are extensions to, and built upon, Eastern mystical tradition and its accompanying universality.
- B. Will do this by taking a look at three teachings that are often cited by mainstream Christians as evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus' teachings. These are often "proof texts" to convince nonbelievers that Christianity is the only way to heaven.
- C. We will begin by looking at Jesus' teachings on the notion of rebirth.
- D. Then will look at a portion of the story about Nicodemus, often used as a proof text that only by proper baptism can one enter the realm of God. Finally, will conclude with an examination of the question of whether belief in "the only begotten son of God" is required or even sufficient to attain enlightenment.

II. SECOND BIRTH

A. Revisiting Parables

1. For the first two parts of this evening's study, we will be revisiting the story of Nicodemus.
2. But we must begin with a re--examination of the need for Jesus to teach all except his disciples using the form of presentation called parables.
3. A parable, you'll recall from earlier studies, is a succinct, didactic story (IOW, designed to teach), in prose or verse, which illustrates one or more

instructive lessons or principles.

4. Parables were in common use throughout Israel at the time Jesus lived. They were teaching a vehicle frequently used by many of the itinerant rabbis who made up the informal fabric of teaching to the lower classes.
5. Jesus is reported to have told his disciples that the reason he taught in parables when addressing the masses of people trying to follow him, was (PAGE 80 THE COMPLETE GOSPELS)
6. Furthermore, Jesus tells us in the next verse, this behavior was a fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah which reads, (PAGE 81 THE COMPLETE GOSPELS)
7. Interestingly, this interaction with the disciples appears to support the main contention of the Gnostic approach to Christianity which suggests that there are a great many hidden truths which are not suitable for presentation to those without a proper grounding and education.
8. This can seem elitist when it comes to spiritual truth, which most people assume should be readily accessible to anyone. But in reality it's more like any other topic on which one wishes to become educated: there are often pre-requisites.
9. As Yogananda puts it, "The ultimate truths of heaven and the kingdom of God...can only be grasped by intuition -- awakening the intuitive knowing, the pure comprehension, of the soul."
10. And, as he teaches throughout his many writings and speeches, we awaken our intuition through only one path: meditation.
11. So let's look at the story of Nicodemus, which may or may not be a parable, and see what we can learn from a deeper reading of the material.

B. Story of Nicodemus

1. Introduction

- a) READ P. 204 IN COMPLETE GOSPELS)
- b) Yogananda describes the 21 verses of this story, which we will look at in this in the next section this evening, “present... Jesus’ comprehensive esoteric teachings relating to the practical attainment of the infinite kingdom of blissful divine consciousness.”
- c) Nicodemus is described as a “Judean leader”, which probably means he was a Pharisee and quite likely part of the Judaic ruling body, the Sanhedrin.
- d) He comes to Jesus by night because of the social harm he might well incur if his interactions with the rebel rabbi were known.
- e) But he introduces his dialog with a very familiar ploy used by Judaic leaders in all three synoptic Gospels. He flatters Jesus.
- f) On every other occasion when this language is used, Jesus is immediately asked whether the Jewish people are obligated to pay the Roman tax, a practice many Jews found idolatrous because the Roman coins had the Emperor’s face on them.
- g) So from this introduction, we can’t tell if Nicodemus is sincere or not. But at least he asks Jesus a question that doesn’t appear to be designed as a trap.
- h) But Yogananda, in his revelatory commentary, *The Second Coming of Christ* depicts Nicodemus as a spiritual person who “reverently affirmed his conviction that only a master who had actual God-communion could work the superlaws that govern the

inner life of all beings and all things.”

- i) Yogananda also points out that the use of the word miracles in verse two has another level of meaning.
- j) He declares that the greatest miracle comes in the healing of what he calls “the root cause of every form of suffering: the elusive ignorance that obscures the unity of man’s soul and God.” The teachings of A Course in Miracles are very much in keeping with this perspective.
- k) Yogananda goes on to say that, “All bona fide revealed religions of the world are based on intuitive knowledge.”
- l) He says all religions have two aspects: the exoteric or public perspective which is for the many, and the esoteric aspect which focuses on actual communion of the soul with God.
- m) From this perspective, the “second birth” is the means by which we are enabled to enter the land of intuitional perception of truth.

2. Rebirth a Requisite to Experience God’s Realm

- a) Since Nicodemus hasn’t asked a question, Jesus’ “answer” in verse 3 is strangely out of context. He says that before anyone can experience God’s imperial rule (aka Kingdom of God), he or she must first be “reborn from above.”
- b) This sparks a confused response from Nicodemus, who asks, logically enough if you take Jesus literally, how in the world this could happen? “Can you re-enter your mother’s womb and be born a second time?” he asks.

- c) By now, Jesus is getting a little exasperated with Nicodemus. He uses the phrase, “As God is my witness,” here and in a subsequent verse. This could be translated into today’s vernacular as something “ like, “Are you serious?” Or perhaps even “oy vey”.
- d) He clarifies his point. “No one can enter God’s domain without being born of water and spirit. What is born of the human realm is human, b but what is born of the spiritual realm is spirit.”
- e) Returning to his original statement, Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he said it was necessary to be “reborn from above” in order to attain salvation or enlightenment as we might call it.
- f) It’s probably worth noting here that when Jesus mandated that being “born again” was a prerequisite to enlightenment, that very choice of words could be seen as a reference, at least, to his familiarity with the doctrine of reincarnation.

3. Birth by Water and Spirit

- a) When Jesus says to Nicodemus that a person must be born of water, he does not mean baptism. At least according to Yogananda he doesn’t.
- b) Water, Yogananda says, means protoplasm and refers to the physical birth of men and women.
- c) Jesus’ teaching here, in that context, means that physical birth is not sufficient for us to be allowed to see or enter into the realm of God.
- d) Of course, modern Christianity has taken this same verse to mean baptism is prerequisite

to salvation.

e) This, in turn, has led to all sorts of mischief including:

(1) The running battle over whether baptism can be successfully employed to bring uncomprehending infants and children into the kingdom;

(2) The related argument that led to the creation in the fourth century CE of the doctrine of Original Sin, from which only baptism could save us;

(3) Conflicts between Christian denominations too numerous to go into here.

f) Taking Yogananda is inspired interpretation of this text to be accurate, however, we can reach a higher meaning.

g) Perhaps what Jesus intended us to understand here is that, given the limitations of our physical senses and even of our rational minds, without a spiritual rebirth, we can never realize the Divine within us.

h) Thus a physical birth through the medium of water, which comprises 97% of our bodies, falls far short of the ability to understand and integrate spiritual concepts that we actually attain only through spiritual intuition.

i) And this spiritual intuition can only be attained through the practice of meditation.

4. Going Deeper

a) Attaining this spiritual intuition through meditation also places a requirement on us humans to engage in our conscious evolution.

b) As you recall from last week's lesson, there

are five stages or aspects to consciousness embodied in the evolutionary process from a physical perspective.

- c) Beginning with the unconscious response in minerals, we gradually evolve our power of knowing through the feeling present and plant life, the instinctive sentiment knowledge in animals, intellect and undeveloped introspective intuition and man, and pure intuition in the Superman.
- d) Through the power of meditation, we are able to transfer our consciousness from the body to the soul where it can become one with the Divine.
- e) Before departing from this topic, we should take a brief look at the question of **how** one learns to practice meditation in such a way that one can attain reunion with God.
- f) Yogananda, in the grand Hindu tradition, says it is essential for us to find and follow a guru, a spiritually enlightened person who is able to resonate with us spiritually. He says that, "A true guru is one who can change the disciples brain cells by the spiritual current flowing from God through his enlightened consciousness."
- g) This transformation, according to Yogananda, must take place during this incarnation. He says, "At death, wherever one leaves off in his progress, he will have to start in again in new incarnation.
- h) After giving the subject much thought and meditative attention, and consulting with others on similar paths, I've concluded that, while a guru is necessary, it is not necessary

that the guru be living. If the person you wish to follow as a guru is fully realized, then learning the proper path and techniques through his or her books, lectures and other means is a perfectly legitimate way to find a guru.

III. THE PATH TO DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS IS WITHIN

A. Jesus' Exasperation With Nicodemus

1. Picking up where we left the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, Jesus is getting more than a little exasperated with Nicodemus but by now.
2. READ P. 205 IN THE COMPLETE GOSPELS
3. Jesus begins this part of the dialogue by issuing a bit of a rebuke to Nicodemus.
4. After pointing out that the mere fact that Nicodemus holds a position of authority in Israel does not guarantee he will understand the mysteries of life, Jesus reiterates his earlier teaching (that we studied at the beginning of this lesson) that most people cannot understand the deep spirituality behind his teachings.
5. He asks Nicodemus, "If I tell you about what's mundane and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about what's heavenly?"
6. Despite his frustration, Jesus goes on to try to explain to Nicodemus, and relatively simple terms given the context, how this process of spiritual awakening works for all who wish to engage it.

B. Lifting Up the Son of Man

1. This passage, which takes up versus 13 and 14, begins with the word "and". This indicates that it is a continuation of the preceding thought, so we must figure out first what that connection is.
2. Jesus has just been talking about how to describe spiritual matters to the uninitiated and unprepared

mind.

3. Since he has been talking about birth and rebirth, he makes a transition from talking about the subject generally to discussing it in the specific case of the “Son of Man” which he says is in heaven.
4. So he tells Nicodemus that nobody gets to heaven unless he first comes down from heaven. In other words, in the context of the present teaching, he is reiterating his point: being physically born is not enough; we must be reborn from above, i.e. spiritually or from heaven.
5. That’s fairly clear.
6. But what’s with this Moses and the serpent stuff?
7. This first refers back to Numbers 21:9 where Moses created a bronze sculpture of a snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever anyone in Israel was bitten by a snake, they could look at the bronze serpent and be healed.
8. The reason the people of Israel needed this servant was because they had previously offended God, who, by way of retribution, had unleashed a large number of snakes who were biting and killing people. When they repented it to Moses and Moses went to God does ask what should be done, God told Moses to make this image of a snake as a healing mechanism.
9. That is clearly one of the strangest stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. It seems so unlikely that a God who had recently told Israel that it could not worship “graven images” and that it was to have “no other God before me”, would prescribe gazing at a graven image as a way of healing a plague which he himself imposed on Israel for their misbehavior.

10. But that's not the point here. The point is that Jesus is comparing himself for this limited purpose to that serpent. He is saying that, just as the serpent became an instrument of healing on the physical plane, so Jesus should become an instrument of healing on the spiritual plane.
11. Nicodemus, as a leader in the Judaic community, would have readily understood the analogy here. It therefore serve the same role as a full-blown parable.
12. But we can understand this passage metaphysically and gain another level of insight.
13. According to Yogananda, the word "serpent" here refers to man's consciousness and life force as they are subtly coiled in a passageway at the base of the spine. This life force is the embodiment and vehicle by which our physical bodies are made manifest.
14. As this essence ascends -- i.e., evolves through stages toward attaining enlightenment as superman -- it becomes successively lighter and increases its energy level. That's the meaning of "lifting up" the servant.
15. So even though this text has been used by Christians to suggest that just as the uplifted serpent on a tree in the wilderness saved Israel from the wrath of God, so Jesus' raising on the tree of the cross and his subsequent ascension will save humanity from God's wrath, it clearly has much deeper implications for spirituality.
16. That is particularly true when we view this teaching in the context of Jesus' Eastern mystical understanding and influence.

C. What He Attained, All May Attain

1. Recall from our last lesson that when Jesus used

the phrase “Son of man” he was referring to his physical body and, by implication, to all who have physical bodies.

2. So in verse 14 when he says the Son of Man must be lifted up, he means all of us who have been born into the physical plane.
3. In an elevated or exalted state, we become part of the Divine, re-united with God. The statement that, “everyone who believes in him (the exalted Son of Man) can have real life.”
4. To believe that, we must engage God in silence and meditation so that our infinite intuition is awakened sufficiently to receive that truth.
5. Furthermore, we must re-ascend from body consciousness into God consciousness to the same path by which it had descended.
6. (Yogananda gets into some pretty heavy chakra stuff here, which I’m not going to go into. If you’re interested, you might want to pick up the book we were using in this class.)
7. You might find interesting, though, to know that this metaphor of the life force as a coiled passage in the lowest chakra is also known in Sanskrit and Hindu teachings as the kundalini, or serpent force, until it is activated and re-ascends, is referred to as the sleeping kundalini.
8. Yogananda tells us that awakening this kundalini force is exceedingly difficult and cannot be done accidentally or without great contention. It requires years of meditation under the guidance of a competent guru, but the rewards are great. He says, “One who is able to awaken the kundalini fast approaches the state of Christ hood.”
9. For Yogananda, the bottom line is that Jesus explains that whoever “believes in the doctrine of

lifting the bodily consciousness (Son of Man) from the physical to the astral by reversing the life force through the coiled passage at the base of the spine, will not perish... But will gradually acquire the immutable state — Christ consciousness, the son of God.

IV. TRUE MEANING OF “BELIEVING ON HIS NAME”

A. “Son of Man” vs “Only begotten Son of God”

1. READ JOHN 3:16-21, P. 205 IN THE COMPLETE GOSPELS)
2. It's probably safe to say that no other misunderstanding of Jesus' teachings has caused more bigotry or difficulty than that of the notion that Jesus proclaimed himself as the “only begotten son of God”.
3. At its most basic, following the usual interpretation, leads to the conclusion that Jesus was not in any sense a man born in a mortal body that evolved his consciousness to become one with God. But that is the reality of Jesus' life and ministry.
4. Only by denying that humanity could one reached the conclusion that Jesus was in any sense the “only” anything.
5. From our metaphysical perspective — which is shared by Yogananda and of course millions of others — we can be certain that it is not the body of Jesus but the Christ consciousness within it that was the only begotten. There is only one of us here, and there is only one Christ consciousness. We all participate in it and we are all embodying it. It expresses in, through, and as us.
6. Nowhere in the gospel accounts does Jesus ever say that his “Son of Man” consciousness, or his body, is the only Savior throughout all time. In fact, it's clear from the Judaic tradition in which he was

raised that Moses, Abraham, and many others were saved even before Jesus was born.

7. It is, as Yogananda says, “the Christ intelligence that is the universal Redeemer.”
8. Furthermore, each of us can free our consciousnesses from the case of flesh in which they find themselves and join it with the vast omnipresence of God by tuning in with Christ consciousness.
9. But what could Jesus mean when he talks about those who do not believe in this Christ consciousness “perishing”? It seems to me that he means that those people find themselves in a place where their form is never transformed, where the delusion of materiality continues to dominate our lives, and from which they are inevitably going to face another incarnation in limited bodies, falling well short of the goal of reunion with the Divine.
10. I found this description of Yogananda is particularly interesting in view of Vicky’s fondness for the metaphor of our lives be like a movie. “God sent the Christ Intelligence to produce not a torture chamber but a colossal cosmic motion picture, whose scenes and actors would entertain for a time and ultimately return to the Bliss of spirit.”
11. It never seemed to me to be believable that God would condemn non-believers when he himself dwells in all beings! Isn’t that self-defeating? Rather, I think this condemnation and punishment originate within ourselves in the form of guilt, unhappiness, and a sense of aimlessness that characterize so many lives today.
12. But how are we to begin to recognize the true presence of God and Christ consciousness within

ourselves? We can begin simply by following the process of expansion that is inherent in the fundamental nature of the universe as evolution. Beginning with our selves and our families, we can expand to a point where loving all of humanity becomes a part of our daily spiritual walk.

13. As Yogananda says, “One who disconnects himself from the happiness and welfare of others has already condemned himself by isolation from the spirit that pervades all souls.”

14. People who don't recognize the presence of the Absolute in the relative world tend to become either skeptics or dogmatists.

B. How the True Meaning of “Only Begotten Son” Got Lost

1. READ FROM P.65 OF “YOGA OF JESUS”

C. The Power of Belief

1. In this passage, Jesus refers to belief several times. But what exactly does belief mean?

2. There are two dictionary definitions for the word. The first is, “an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists.” and the second is, “trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something.”

3. Both can apply equally here. Believing in your inner Christ Consciousness says both that you agree it exists and you have trust or faith in it.

4. Belief is a release date in the path of spiritual progress. It's necessary in order to receive the concept of God. But to be of real value in seeking the ultimate goal of reunion with the divine, that belief must be turned into a conviction.

5. Belief is a powerful force if it leads you ultimately to desire — and even to become doggedly determined — to experience the true Christ. Yogananda says this is what Jesus meant when he urged people to believe in the name of the only

begotten son of God.

D. The Consequences of Disbelief

1. Those who disbelieve, according to the passage were reading, are condemned. Fortunately, the same passage explains very clearly what it means to receive that condemnation. There are no images of hell or brimstone here.
2. Rather, those who don't believe will not see or understand the light, by which is meant the all pervading light of God. This light lives within each of us as an ever present guide through discriminated intelligence and intuition. When we don't believe in the Inner Consciousness of Christ, we lose sight of that light. And losing sight of the light is the cause of what Christianity refers to as "sin" in which we define as "error thought".
3. Going beyond that, Yogananda says, "The origin of sin... Lies in the fact that the souls divine intelligence and discrimination are suppressed by man's misuse of his God-given free choice."

E. The Insufficiency of Belief

1. But belief, at least what is so often "blind belief" is not sufficient to achieve the ultimate goal of reunion with God. Jesus' teachings went well beyond mere belief.
2. To hold a conviction, one must have some personal experience or realization of the truth. Merely reading about it, studying it, discussing it, even teaching it, is never going to be enough to break through to the deep truth of Inner Christ Consciousness that lies deep within us.
3. As Yogananda says, "One can assert incessantly and intellectual belief in Jesus Christ; but if you never actually experiences the Cosmic Christ, as both omnipresent and incarnate in Jesus, the

spiritual practicality of his belief is insufficient to save him.”

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Next week we conclude this four-week mini-class by looking at the last three chapters of the book, “Yoga of Jesus”, Chapters 7, 8, and 9. The subject will be Jesus’ unique and signature teaching of Divine Love.
- B. We’ll close that conversation with another, deeper look at the Realm of God within each of us.
- C. Namaste