

The Yoga of Jesus

Class 4 - Jesus' Yoga of Divine Love: The Crown Jewels of His Teachings

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Welcome to the fourth and final class in this series of studies of the influence of Eastern thought on the teachings of Jesus the Christ.
- B. Tonight, we will be looking at the true essence of Jesus' teachings as we have them recorded in the canonical Gospels and also in other, non-canonical gospels and other books.
- C. Recall that by "yoga", we mean a methodical approach to seeking their reunion with God (or the Divine, or Spirit, or whatever you wish to call it) that is at the core of every known spiritual path and religion.
- D. So when we talk about the "Yoga of Jesus," we mean the lessons he provided his contemporaries — both disciples and ordinary followers — that instructed them how to attain that reunification with God.
- E. As the title of tonight's class suggests, "Divine Love" is the bedrock of Jesus' teachings. All of his other lessons that we've reviewed in the past three weeks find their culmination in tonight's single-pointed teaching on that central topic.
- F. We will begin by looking at one of the most succinct sets of clear, specific teachings of any we have preserved from Jesus, the Beatitudes.
- G. Then we'll turn our attention to the two great Commandments Jesus identified as being the keys to entering the kingdom — or as we prefer to call it these days — the realm of God.
- H. Finally, will come to the ultimate teaching that merges the practical with the spiritual by informing us that this realm lies within us. This, as we'll see, is perhaps Jesus' most unique teaching when compared to his contemporaries in the Jewish culture.

II. THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes are found both in the Gospel bearing Matthew's name and in the one authored in the name of Luke. I'll be reading largely from Matthew 5 this evening. And I'll be using the Open English Bible translation for all of these readings tonight, unless I say differently.

All the Beatitudes begin with the same word, which is traditionally translated as "blessed," and usually pronounced as if it had two syllables.

One of the reasons I chose the OEB over the Scholar's Version, which I generally prefer, is because the translators of the Jesus Seminar translated that word as "congratulations!". That may well be a more accurate translation, but jarring and we have enough distractions and listens to get through this evening without the added noise level.

There are a couple of differences between the account of this "sermon" in Matthew and Luke. Matthew has his presentation take place from a mountainside, while Luke refers to a flat place or plain.

Furthermore, Matthew has Jesus talking to a large crowd of followers and curiosity seekers, while Luke seems to suggest that Jesus addresses these teachings to his disciples only.

So the contexts of the two accounts vary slightly, but their meanings are the same.

It's interesting to note in passing, that not one of these Beatitudes speaks of faith or belief in any way. They are all about behavior, in other words they address the subject of ethics, which is often the first Avenue of access to religion.

Let's begin our study by looking at the meaning of that word, however it's translated.

A. "Blessed"

1. The Greek word used in all of these places is "makarios," which in other Greek literature is often translated "happy"
2. But as one Greek scholar put it, "...[It]s meaning is a little more nuanced than what we get from happy. The idea behind makarios is that something is made "large" or "lengthy." When God "blesses" us, He "extends" His benefits to us. He "enlarges" His mercy to us. He

"lengthens" His charity in our direction."

3. It seems clear that the word "blessing", which of course has the same report, generally implies a giver and a receiver. So in this case, it is God who is giving these gifts to those who fit certain characteristics.

B. Poor (in Spirit)

1. First up is the blessing of those who are "poor in spirit".
2. Yogananda suggests that this concept means one who has divested one's inner being of desire for an attachment to material objects, including earthly possessions, materially minded friends, and selfish human love.
3. Poverty in spirit should not be read to imply that one should be living in poverty. As Yogananda points out, the deprivation that can result from living in poverty can act as a distraction from God.
4. It does mean, however, that one should not settle for material acquisitions in a place of spiritual wealth.
5. Those who meet these criteria, according to Matthew's account, receive the realm of heaven.
6. Or, to put it in Yogananda's words, "You are blessed for your poverty. It will open the gates to the kingdom of all-sufficient God, who will relieve you from material as well as the spiritual want throughout eternity. Blessed are you who are in want and seek him who alone can relieve your deficiencies forever!"
7. In practical terms, we all know people who have mentally renounced desire for orderly objects and found true joy as a consequence.

C. Mourn (the sense of separation from God)

1. The next blessing goes to those who mourn, who are promised they'll be comforted.
2. This is traditionally been interpreted to mean that Jesus was addressing people who had suffered some loss on the physical plane. And that's not necessarily a wrong or bad understanding, but it is more limited than a metaphysical rabbi would probably have intended.
3. Yogananda says the morning at issue here was what he

called “that divine melancholy” that comes when we are conscious of our apparent separation from God.

4. In keeping with many of his other teachings, Yogananda says, “Those who weep for truth and God, refusing to be quieted by any lesser offering, will be forever comforted in the arms of Blissful Divinity.”
5. He then revises the translation in the King James version to read, “Blessed are you who cry for God-realization now, for by that single-minded yearning you shall attain. With the entertainment of ever new joy found in divine communion, you will laugh and rejoice throughout eternity!”

D. Meek (open, receptive)

1. In verse 5, Jesus blesses the gentle (generally translated as “meek”) and promises that they will inherit the earth.
2. Humility makes us receptive to Truth. By transcending our egos, and achieving some measure of humility, we are more able to receive the beneficent help and guidance of God as we seek spiritual well-being.
3. By the phrase “inherit the earth,” Jesus could be understood to mean these people can achieve happiness while on earth in addition to the joy they will experience when they attain a reunion with the Divine.

E. Hunger and thirst after righteousness (desire beyond anything else)

1. In verse 6, Matthew says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.”
2. Luke, on the other hand doesn’t qualify the word “hunger” and doesn’t mention thirst. He also doesn’t supply any specific thing for which these people might be hungering.
3. One of the recurring themes in Yogananda’s teachings is that a true devotee must be driven and even governed by a deep desire to know and reunite with God. The deeper this desire, the more easily can one attain that reunion. So he found this beatitude to apply to what the French philosopher Blaise Pascal described this way: “[mankind possesses an] infinite abyss [that] can be filled only with

an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”

4. (incidentally, Pascal is often credited with saying that there is a God -shaped vacuum in each of us, but he did not say that. The quote I just read you is as close as he comes to that.)
5. In the King James version, the word we have translated in the version were reading as “justice” is translated as “righteousness.” The differences are subtle and probably not important.
6. Yogananda says righteousness means acting rightly in the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of life.
7. Here is his revised version of this verse. “Blessed are you who thirst for wisdom and who is steam virtue and righteousness as the real food to appease your inner hunger, for you shall have that lasting happiness brought only by adhering to divine ideals — unparalleled satisfaction of heart and soul.”

F. Merciful (forgiveness plus help, physical and spiritual)

1. In this particular passage, Matthew suggest there is a sort of circularity about the act of mercy. If you give it, you’ll get more of it.
2. Yogananda says that Mercy can be understood as the kind of heart ache father feels when observing a child who seems lost. “When one looks upon humanity as a loving father looks after his children, and is ready to suffer for them that they might receive a little of the sunshine and power of his spirit, then one becomes Christlike: God in action.”
3. But like compassion, mercy on its own isn’t very useful. Or as Yogananda puts it, true mercy “offers not only forgiveness but actual spiritual help in eliminating the error in individual.”
4. Here is Yogananda’s revised version. “To receive divine mercy, be merciful to yourself by making yourself spiritually qualified, and be merciful also to other delud nowchildren of God. Persons who continuously develop themselves in every way and who mercifully feel and

alleviate the lack of all around the development and others, surely will melt the heart of God and obtain for themselves is unending and matchless helpful mercy.”

G. Pure in Heart (able to comprehend Spiritual Light)

1. Jesus in verse 8 says that those who are pure in heart will see God.
2. This direct perception of God is the consummate religious experience. To see God — whether with the spiritual I or through the sensation of a presence in the silence within — is every devotee’s major focus.
3. Purity of heart, then, leaves one to the ability to contact God on a deep, personal level. In other words, it reveals or endows the power of divine sight.
4. Divine guidance of discriminative wisdom is part and parcel of creating in ourselves a pure heart with which to perceive and experience the Divine within our inner being.
5. Achieving this state allows the devotee to “gain the true perception of God as present in one’s soul and omnipresent in all beings.”

H. Peacemakers (knowing God as Peace)

1. Those who are peacemakers, Jesus says in verse 9, will be called the children of God.
2. On this subject, I find Yogananda’s teachings particularly insightful and delicious.
3. First, he defines the “real peacemakers” as those who “generate peace from their devotional practice of daily meditation. Those who know God as Piece in the inner Temple of silence... Are... His true children.”
4. Second, after pointing out that God has infinite patience with us, he suggests that we must also behave like gods and conquer hearts with the power of love, or, he warns, “humanity as we know it will surely perish.”
5. His next two observations about humanity in the making of peace I find particularly cogent and applicable in today’s world. First, he says “the best deterrent against against the threat of war is brotherhood, the realization that as God’s children we are one family.” (I imagine you

can easily figure out why I would enjoy that one so much.) Next, he says, “Anyone who stirs up strife among brother nations under the guise of patriotism is a traitor to his divine family — a faithless child of God.”

6. Y

- I. Persecuted for Righteousness (torture of unjust criticism)
 1. This and the next verse offer blessings to those who are treated badly because of their association with Jesus and their willingness or desire to follow his teachings.
 2. While most Christian teachings around the blessing in verse 10 see it as intending those who are physically tortured for their faith, and in some cases becoming martyrs, that may not be a good reading of the original intent.
 3. At the time Jesus would have been delivering these Beatitudes, there was almost certainly little or no real persecution of this tiny and largely non-threatening sect Judaism. So if this passage intends to express a blessing for martyrs, it would clearly have to have been added well after the end of Jesus’ life and ministry.
 4. Yogananda suggest, however, that the persecution met here is what he calls “the torture of the unjust criticism of so-called friends, as well as enemies, for doing what is right.” Those who endure such torture with equanimity and engage in morally right behavior despite peer pressure and social custom, he says will attain the realm of heaven.
 5. He also suggests the verse applies to those who are tortured by addiction, bad habits, and sensory temptation.
 6. I found those interpretations to be refreshing and probably more likely accurate than the traditional meanings that have been applied to this verse. Y

- J. Reviled for My sake (not going along with earthly ways)
 1. The next verse applies not to habits or social behaviors, but to teasing and verbal attacks designed to intimidate the believer into abandoning his or her belief in the teachings of Jesus.
 2. No doubt many early followers of what was called The

Way being created by and around Jesus were shunned and ostracized by their fellow Jewish worshipers and practitioners. In all likelihood, this was more common within the family and in tight circles of close friends, where the abandonment of traditional cultural and spiritual patterns would have been seen as a real threat to the established order of the Jewish community.

3. Interestingly, the Bhagavad-Gita has a quite similar teaching. It reads, “He who is tranquil before friend and foe alike and in encountering adoration and insult, and during the experiences of warmth and chill and of pleasure and suffering... That person is dear to me.” The speaker here is Lord Krishna, the rough Hindu equivalent of Jesus.
4. I really like Yogananda’s rephrasing in this passage. “Jesus spoke to his disciples and followers as their God sent guru or Savior and said “Blessed are you when, for following the son of man, you are criticized and belittled for preferring to walk in the light of his God tuned wisdom instead of stumbling with the masses along worldly paths of darkness and ignorance.”
5. In the Gita, Lord Krishna enumerates the characteristics of a sage in a way that summarizes most of what we’ve just read from Jesus’ teachings in these Beatitudes. (READ PAGE 449 IN “SECOND COMING”.) Y

III. DIVINE LOVE: HIGHEST GOAL OF RELIGION AND LIFE

A. The setting and the story

1. This section of tonight’s lesson, based on Chapter 8 in the book, covers one passage which is present in all of the synoptic gospels.
2. I find the stories as told in the earliest Gospel, Mark, and the latest synoptic Gospel, Luke, to be the most interesting.
3. READ PASSAGE FROM MARK, P. 79 OF NEW NEW TESTAMENT
4. READ PASSAGE FROM LUKE, P. 105 OF NEW NEW TESTAMENT

5. These are among the most widely read and cited texts in all of Jesus' teachings. Many of the teachings in mainstream Christian churches today have their foundation in this story.
6. Note that in Mark, the one asking the question is a scholar. This means he was a rabbi or a rabbinical student who devoted full time to studying the Torah and other Hebrew scriptures. (Luke refers to him as a "student of the Law," which is essentially the same thing.)
7. In Mark's retelling of the incident, the scholar asks Jesus what the most important law is and Jesus tells him. Then Jesus tells him the other side of that commandment, which he says is like the first.
8. But in the story in Luke, it is not Jesus but the student of the Law who recites the two commitments in response to Jesus' prompting.
9. While the teaching presented, whether by Jesus or the scholar, is an excellent summary of some of the basic principles of the Judaic law, this exact idea doesn't appear anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.
10. In responding to his questioner in Luke, Jesus ends up praising the level of understanding of the student by telling him that not only did he get the answer right, but if he lives those two Commandments, he will live, by which he means have real, eternal life. In saying this, Jesus was assuring the student that he was getting closer to attaining a high degree of spiritual consciousness.

B. The whole purpose of religion

1. Yogananda says "The whole purpose of religion — indeed of life itself — is encapsulated in the two paramount Commandments cited by Jesus in these verses."
2. Together, they constitute an irreducible imperative then we must embrace as individualized souls in apparent separation from God if we wish to reclaim our oneness with the Divine.
3. Yogananda makes the further point that it's impossible for humanity to live without the love of God, because we are

made in God's image of love.

4. As we seek connection with Spirit to the processing power of inner meditation, we bring ourselves closer to oneness with the Divine as we enable ourselves to escape the bondage of delusion. Since this reunification is everyone's ultimate goal or hope, it follows that by being loving to God and one another, we, like the student of the Law, are getting closer to attaining a high degree of spiritual consciousness.

C. Loving God with all your heart, might, mind and strength

1. What does it mean to love God with "with all your mind"? Perhaps what's intended here is that only by applying focused concentration in meditation can one achieve that goal.
2. There is an interesting circularity in this relationship with God. As Yogananda puts it, "though one must love God in order to know God, it is equally true that one must know God in order to love God." So which comes first? Given that we make conscious contact with God through the process of meditation and only in the inner silence, it seems to me that the first step is to get to know God, at least on some level. This is in large part because to love God is to become his friend his son or daughter and one with him. This would be difficult if not impossible to do without some knowledge of God. Like so many things in spiritual work, as Vicky likes to say, this is not an either or situation, but rather a both and.
3. The Yoga of India is perhaps the only religion in the world of Jesus' time which not only understood this idea, but which actually has a well-defined process or methodology for achieving that single-point concentration that can lead to a fully concentrated mind.
4. According to Yogananda, Jesus taught the entire yoga system. While this does not appear evident from the teachings we have in the canonical Gospels, there is far more evidence of this in a non--canonical Gospels, as well as in the book of Revelation. Yogananda, and of course many others, see the book of Revelation as a

deeply symbolic metaphoric set of teachings that transcend the boundaries of geography and history in ways that are not evident in the more traditional story-telling narratives of the canonical books.

5. It seems clear that these teachings of Jesus about loving God are anticipated in the Bhagavad-Gita. In one particularly relevant passage, Lord Shiva says, “absorb thy mind in me; become not my devotee; reside in all things to me; borrow down to me. In truth I promise thou shalt attain me!”

D. First Commandment leads to observance of the second

1. The second commandment flows naturally and logically from the first, because if we love God, we will see God in everyone.
2. In Luke’s account, the student of the Law follows up his question by asking Jesus how he defines the word “neighbor”. Jesus answered with the famous parable of the good Samaritan, but he never directly answers the question.
3. Yogananda, along with many other biblical scholars, suggested that the “neighborhood” Jesus has in mind here is the entire range of our consciousness. In other words, we are to love not only the humans in our lives and those we encounter, but everything in creation becomes our neighbor. As God’s creation, containing a spark of the divine, they are worthy of our love.
4. If we live just for ourselves and the select few around us, Yogananda tells us that we “choked the expansion of our lives, and from a spiritual standpoint we do not live at all.”
5. The unions of love that typify friendship are what Yogananda calls “the real romance”. Such ties are eternal. And when that love of God fills our beings, it enables us to embrace everyone in a universal consciousness of love, service, and compassion. As the author of the first epistle of John puts it, “ Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God; and everyone who loves has received the new life from God and knows God.”

IV. "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOU"

A. Jesus' clear teaching and the core of his entire Yoga

1. All of this brings us now to the culminating teaching of Jesus, a teaching that is at the core of the Yoga he lived and taught.
2. READ FROM LUKE 17:20-21, PAGE 115 OF A NEW NEW TESTAMENT
3. The two Commandments we've just discussed are the **only essential** rules for us to follow in our efforts to return to union with the Divine. They are, in a word, non-negotiable.
4. This teaching, that the kingdom of God is within us individually, brings everything to a head. This is where the rubber meets the road. In seeking reunion with God, we need to know how and where to find it.

B. Judaic belief

1. This teaching is another of those where Jesus clearly parted with his Jewish community.
2. For most of its history, Judaism had taught and believed that God's realm was located in the Temple. In fact, it was located in the Holy of Holies, a place set apart from the rest of the Temple by only a veil. And only the High Priest was allowed to pierce that veil and enter into the dwelling place of God-consciousness.
3. But in 586 BCE, the tiny (one might say insignificant) state of Judah (the birthplace of Judaism) rebelled against the treaty it had with Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the powerful Babylonian Empire. This was the second time in 11 years that this group had attempted to escape his control and avoid paying his tribute, and he was not pleased.
4. In the ensuing attack on Judah, the Babylonian army reduced the Temple to rubble.
5. This was religiously devastating to the Jews, who believed that the Jerusalem temple was essential to the practice of their religion. Where could God-consciousness now be located?
6. Ultimately, Judaism became a religion centered on sacred writings, with the interpretation of these writings by priests

(and later, rabbis) becoming the place where one could begin to find one's way back to God.

7. This did not change their belief that Yahweh, their God, actually dwelt in these writings. And it was centuries before the leaders of the tribes comprising Israel were able to convince they could find the Law "written in their hearts." Jeremiah, the second most important prophet in Jewish history who lived in the 7th Century BCE, received that prophecy as part of the covenant God renewed with Israel.
8. But the Law, which was for each individual as well as for the community, wasn't the same thing as God-consciousness, which needed a place to be located.
9. So the idea that God was personal and inhabited each of us would have been viewed as strange and probably blasphemous among the Jews of the First Century and beyond.

C. What is the kingdom?

1. Not observable

- a) The important part of this new passage from Luke reads, in the OEB, "the realm of God is among you", but I prefer the word be translated "within" as it has traditionally been. The Greek word used here can be translated in several ways without losing its meaning. The Scholars Version, e.g., uses "right there in your presence." It conveys the sense of extremely close proximity.
- b) In many of the places this teaching occurs, Jesus tells his listeners that people will try to tell them that the realm of God is over there or here or out there or some more specific. But in each case, Jesus this abuses them of the notion that the realm of God can be seen in any sense, anywhere.
- c) In Luke, in the OE B translation, we read that the realm of God does not come in a "way that can be grasped." In some translations, that phrase is rendered "in a way that is observable".
- d) This is obviously the case, since the kingdom is

within us where we can't "see" in the normal meaning of that word.

e) Here is Yogananda's rephrasing of this passage. "The kingdom of God does not come in response to sensory observation; neither can they find it who say, "behold, it is here or there someplace in the clouds." Rather, concentrate within and you'll find this fear of God-consciousness hidden behind your material consciousness." That last sentence refers to the scientific method of meditation taught by many of the great masters of Indian spirituality, including Yogananda.

2. Non-Canonical Passages of Note (All in *The Five Gospels*, p. 365)

- a) Thomas 3:1-3
- b) Thomas 113:2-4
- c) Gospel of Mary 4:5

D. How to gain access?

1. Short answer: by obeying the Two Commandments with the indispensable aid of deep yogic meditation.
2. Another answer, and one that seems and probably is a bit Gnostic, is that to achieve this objective of discovering the kingdom within, we need to know ourselves. And that means we need to know ourselves deeply and profoundly and intimately.
3. Since our "selves" are the same as our Inner Christ Consciousness, it won't surprise you to hear that self-knowledge is ultimately achieved through meditative practice.

E. Raja (Royal) Yoga

1. As you may recall from our first class in this series, there are several different schools of yoga. Most of them are specialized, focused on one particular aspect or approach to achieving alignment with your Christ Consciousness through study, devotion, service and others.
2. The culmination of the various Yoga paths is found in what is called Raja, or Royal Yoga. This particular path is

the foundation for the Kriya Yoga which Yogananda brought to the west after it was reinstated by one of his gurus.

3. According to Patanjali who authored the Yoga Sutra, there are eight steps to be followed for ascension into the kingdom of God within:

- >Moral conduct

- >Purity of body and mind (we talked a little about this earlier)

- >Disciplining the body to sustain long periods of meditation

- >Life force control through breathing exercises

- >Developing the power of complete mental interiorization

- >Master one-pointed concentration on one of God's aspects

- >Reunion with God, aka Samadhi

4. But at the end of it all, Yogananda reminds us, "This isn't even a matter of attaining, but only of lifting the soul-shrouding veil of ignorance. Bliss is the irrevocable divine birthright of every soul."

V. CONCLUSION

A. Looking back

1. NEW HANDOUT

B. Jesus and the East, some closing thoughts

1. I am so grateful for the opportunity of teaching this class. It has enabled me to dive more deeply into the teachings of what I've come to think of as Hindu Christianity, which is clearly my personal path.
2. I have, in the process, adopted Yogananda as my primary Guru alongside Jesus the Christ and I've joined the Self Realization Fellowship as a student devotee.
3. The whole idea of acknowledging the tremendous contributions made by Indian thought to the many world religions -- including Christianity -- have benefited from,

borrowed and built on is empowering of my belief in Interspiritual work.

4. And it was a great reminder that, “There’s only one of us here.”
5. Namaste.