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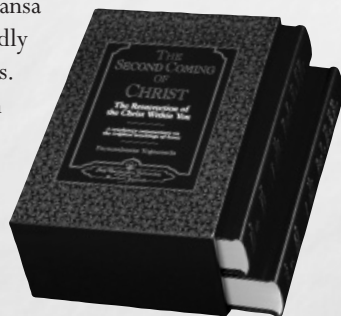
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CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS HERE AND NOW



Michael Toms in conversation with Brother Chidananda

Renowned journalist Michael Toms is founder of New Dimensions Radio Broadcasting Network. For twenty-five years he has conducted discussions with the world’s leading-edge thinkers, spiritual teachers, artists, and scientists. The “New Dimensions” program is heard on more than three hundred radio stations throughout the U.S. and another six hundred stations worldwide, reaching a total of ten million listeners.

Following are excerpts from the latter part of his hour-long interview with Brother Chidananda about Paramahansa Yogananda’s book, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*.

MICHAEL TOMS: So often, people I’ve talked to say that *Autobiography of a Yogi* is the book that seemingly just fell in their path, dropped into their lap. I know it happened for me that way. Suddenly it was there, and I couldn’t put it down. I think I read it in two nights, because it was one of those books you feel compelled to keep on reading. You have the awareness that it has been written

by someone who is a master. Some of the stories he tells are quite “out there”; and yet at the same time Yogananda was very much a teacher of science and spirit. I think that was an attractive point of view for a lot of people, particularly Americans, who tend to be very rational, and want to have the scientific view.

BROTHER CHIDANANDA: Very much so, yes. He attracted doc-

tors, physicists; all sorts of different people would visit him and spend the evening talking. He was able to relate to them on that scientific level, by telling them that there isn't anything occult or mysterious about yoga if you have the vocabulary, which, wonderfully, modern science is continuously providing. Nowadays, even more than in Yoga-

“...A transference of spiritual energy—a projection of the master’s life force and consciousness and awareness; his divine blessing, divine grace, into the consciousness and body and mind of the disciple. Truly speaking, that is what baptism was always intended to be.”

nanda’s lifetime, we see this interface, you might say, of science with spirituality.

MT: So let’s transition now to the book, *The Second Coming of Christ*. There are lots of books and lots of interpretations of Jesus out there, probably thousands. What makes this one different or unique or original?

BC: Great question. And I think I would answer it by going back to what you said a minute ago about *Autobiography of a Yogi*: that what makes that book unique is that it’s a book about yoga by somebody who had demonstrated and exper-

rienced the totality, the depths and the heights, of the yoga experience and its divine states of consciousness. So I would say the same about this book. Paramahansa Yogananda says in his introduction to *The Second Coming* that if anyone is trying to interpret the sayings and the teachings of Jesus, unless they have experienced the

state of consciousness from which he was talking, then it is inevitable that they are going to put those sayings into their own cognitive framework, their intellectual “box”; and knowingly or unknowingly their interpretation is going to be confined by that. What makes this book unique is that Paramahansa Yogananda was one who contacted that infinite Divine Consciousness which he said Jesus embodied. And from that state, from that point of view, he was able to unfold these very condensed and sometimes cryptic sayings that are recorded in the

Gospels, to bring out their full spiritual significance.

MT: Let’s talk about some of the elements that are in the book. He talked about Christ Consciousness; how did he define Christ Consciousness?

BC: He spoke of it as the infinite consciousness of God or Spirit that pervades all creation. The Christ Consciousness is what he was referring to in the very title of the book, *The Second Coming of Christ*. He didn’t call it *The Second Coming of Jesus*. He said that the real significance of the “Second Coming” is that the infinite love of God—the infinite Joy and Divine Consciousness that were embodied in Jesus—can come back a second time in you and in me and in anyone who makes the effort to expand his consciousness to receive it. This, he said, is the real second coming of the Christ Consciousness.

MT: Great idea! Also, what about the Holy Ghost?

BC: One of the things I find very exciting about this book is that, having grown up in a Christian tradition, there are all of these terminologies and concepts that we were taught since childhood. And Holy Ghost is one of them. It is a

term that many of us grew up with, not really understanding it. But the way Paramahansa Yogananda unfolds it, it becomes such an incredible, beautiful concept. He defines it as the experience of the life-force of the universe. It is the holy, sacred Cosmic Vibration, which in the yogic tradition is called the *Om* or *Pranava*; it is the source of life in the body, the source of all manifested creation. And we can become one with that—actually experience it—through yoga meditation.

MT: That is a great image, for sure. Continuing along with some of the things that were brought out in the book: Baptism? Being baptized?

BC: In everything Yogananda brings out from the teaching of Jesus and the stories of his life, he is



Brother Chidananda has been a monk in the Self-Realization Fellowship Order for over twenty-five years.

showing Jesus as a great yogi. This is part of what makes the book not only unique, but makes it so valuable on an experiential level. And baptism is one of those experiences. Baptism corresponds to the concept in yoga called initiation, or in Sanskrit, *diksha*. At the time a spiritual master accepts a disciple, he gives him initiation, which is lit-

“Holy Ghost...is a term that many of us grew up with, not really understanding it. But the way Paramahansa Yogananda unfolds it, it becomes such an incredible, beautiful concept.”

erally a transference of spiritual energy—a projection of the master’s life force and consciousness and awareness; his divine blessing, divine grace, into the consciousness and body and mind of the disciple. Truly speaking, that is what baptism was always intended to be.

MT: So when Jesus went to John the Baptist, he was doing it as a human being, to be baptized, to be initiated; and John the Baptist recognized that.

BC: Absolutely, and Paramahansa Yogananda explains why that happened. It was because Jesus, in a past incarnation, was the disciple of John the Baptist, when John the Baptist was the great Hebrew prophet Elijah, and Jesus in that

incarnation was Elisha. There is that story in the Old Testament, in the Book of Kings, when Elijah is leaving; it says he is taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot, which of course is a metaphorical description of him dissolving his physical body into that radiant spiritual fire, spiritual energy, and ascending into the higher spheres. And at that

time, Elisha said, “When you leave, let a double portion of your blessing fall upon me”; and Elijah did. In their later lives they were John the Baptist, who was the forerunner, preparer of the way, preparer of the setting, you might say, for his beloved disciple, Jesus—who was coming back with a world mission to play.

In the description of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, there you see the true baptism, which isn’t about just dunking somebody in the water! I don’t mean that in a disrespectful way; but only to point out that many of these rituals and ceremonies over the years have become divorced from the real spiritual power that

was there in the beginning. When John the Baptist conferred that spiritual baptism on Jesus, it is recounted, he “saw the heavens open and the Spirit of God descending on him in the form of a dove.” This is a description of baptism by the Holy Ghost, baptism in the spiritual consciousness, and opening of the tricolored spiritual eye at the point between the eyebrows, which is a very well-documented and well-explained aspect of initiation and deep meditation in yoga. It is opening the doorway, the portal, through which the disciple can go from body consciousness into the higher states of divine consciousness.

MT: Brother Chidananda, in these times we hear a lot about being “born again.” What about “born again” from Yogananda’s point of view? What did that really mean from his perspective?

BC: “Born again” is another of those deep meditative experiences that comes as the consciousness expands through meditation, through the practice of yoga, through contacting that divine, hidden essence within yourself.

“Born again” in the Gospel refers to the time when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, who was one of the Pharisees but who was

actually very receptive to him. They had a discussion about being “born again,” and Nicodemus said: “What does this mean? Does a person have to go back into his mother and come out again a second time?” And Jesus explained, “No, that isn’t it.” He said, “Unless a man is born of the water”—meaning the flesh—“and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” So what is that second birth? The first birth is when we incarnate in these fleshly forms, these physical bodies with all of their cognitive and sensory apparatus—the brain and intelligence and different faculties that come with the body. But then the second birth is the awakening of the higher faculties: the faculties of soul intuition.

Intuition means to perceive that dimension of creation which the five senses cannot perceive: beyond matter, beyond physical energy. When by practicing meditation you begin to awaken that quality of soul intuition, then you begin to see yourself in a totally different way: “I’m not this body! And when it dies, who cares? It doesn’t mean anything to me. It’s a cloak; it’s a set of clothes.” When I know myself in my real essence as a being of light, a being of con-

sciousness, a being of joy, a being of perfection—that is the second birth.

MT: Though we are focusing on the New Testament and the Old Testament of the Bible, Yogananda and his teachings are really very ecumenical. He has made the point that Jesus is like many other teachers.

BC: Yes. In fact, when describing what Jesus' role on earth was, he explains it by quoting from the Bhagavad Gita! There is that beautiful passage where Lord Krishna is saying to his disciple Arjuna: "From age to age, when virtue declines and vice predominates, I incarnate as an avatar." Krishna was speaking from that universal consciousness; saying that he was one of those avatars. And Jesus was in the same tradition of those fully liberated masters who have attained their complete freedom, complete liberation from limitations and mortal karma and mortal consciousness, and yet, out of their great love and compassion, choose to come back to help others. Jesus and Buddha and many others in the traditions of India, going back thousands and thousands of years, using the Western vocabulary we would say that all of these are Christs. Jesus was a Christ; we call him Jesus the Christ.

Christ wasn't his last name; "Christ" is a word for his spiritual stature, his state of consciousness. And that identical state of consciousness has been in other great prophets, other great masters, down through the ages.

MT: And the point that Yogananda made so often was that Christ Consciousness is available to you and me and all of us.

BC: That's right. If it weren't, then of what relevance is it? This is the entire message of the book, from page one to page seventeen hundred: that if you look at Jesus or any of the other great masters as just an ideal—or you put their beautiful scriptures up on your bookshelf and pay respects to them—of what value is that, if their message doesn't become something that transforms us and we can find a way of accessing and uncovering that divine consciousness within ourselves?

MT: Did Yogananda have anything to say about Jesus as a social activist?

BC: He dwelt very much on Jesus as a spiritual teacher, someone who was coming to bring—as Jesus himself said—"the kingdom of heaven," which was not a social utopia, but a state of conscious-

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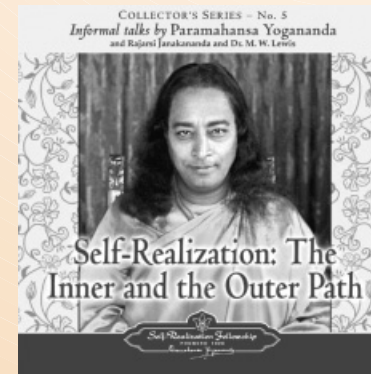
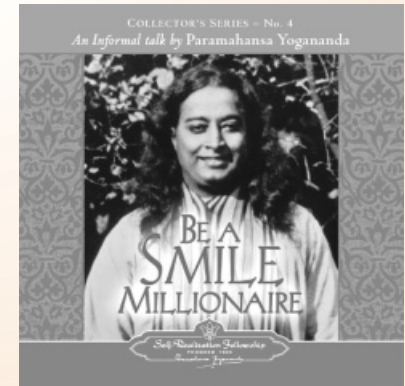
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ness. Of course, the social utopia very much follows from that. As you can imagine, the more people get in contact with, get in harmony with and bring out in their own lives, those inner states of peace and divine love that they find through meditation, then of course utopia naturally follows.

MT: Well, that famous story of Jesus in the temple, throwing out the moneylenders and also attacking the Pharisees and so forth—that

“Intuition means to perceive that dimension of creation which the five senses cannot perceive: beyond matter, beyond physical energy.... When I know myself in my real essence as a being of light, a being of consciousness, a being of joy, a being of perfection—that is the second birth.”

has to do basically with resistance to authority and the old way; in other words, reformation.

BC: Yes, from that point of view, certainly you can say that he was a reformer. Paramahansa Yogananda dwells more on his role as a spiritual reformer. There were those old, misunderstood, misinterpreted religious doctrines which were holding people back, preventing them from understanding how to unfold their spirituality; and Jesus came to undo that.

MT: And from Yogananda’s perspective, who is the devil?

BC: That is a big question! In the simplest way, “the devil” is a creative intelligence, a part of the intelligence and energy that came out of Spirit to create this physical world of matter, of dual forces. We live in a world of duality. Even in the most basic subatomic particles, you have that duality of positive and negative electrical charges; and from there it unfolds so we see

duality all around us: darkness and light, heat and cold, joy and sorrow, life and death.

MT: But don’t we have to get beyond that? We have to get beyond that dualistic thinking.

BC: That’s what yoga does for us. The purpose of the devil or Satan is to perpetuate that force of duality, that force which in the yoga tradition we would call *maya* or *avidya*, delusion or ignorance. It means the opposite of realization,

of truth. It is spiritual ignorance that makes us think that we are just these mortal beings. The purpose of yoga is to reverse that.

MT: *Maya*, the great illusion, like television!

BC: Television does a good job of imitating it, using a lot of the same principles.

MT: The technological version of *maya*, which we’re sending out all over the world!

BC: At the same time, Paramahansa Yogananda would say that the devil isn’t just a cosmic principle—*maya* or duality—but a very real conscious force that actually works in the lives of anyone who is trying to escape *maya*. In other words, anyone who is trying to lift his or her consciousness away from this prison of body-consciousness or mortal limitations, especially those that are really getting advanced, becomes aware of that Satan-force or the devil-force trying to pull them back and prevent them from reaching liberation.

MT: So, just what is “enlightenment?”

BC: English is a very impoverished language when it comes to describing these high states of consciousness. So I’m going to jump to a Sanskrit word, and then tell you

how that translates in English. But the first thing to admit is that it is completely beyond words. The yogis, the masters, say: “He who knows, he knows; no one else knows.” You cannot describe it; you have to experience it. But the word that they give to it which comes closest is *sat-chit-ananda*. Translated loosely, that means “ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new joy or bliss.” *Ananda* means bliss, and enlightenment means oneness with that *sat-chit-ananda*: infinite bliss, immortal bliss, all-knowing, omniscient, omnipresent Bliss. That is what we really are.

MT: So it’s more than happiness.

BC: Happiness is the tiniest little window on that state, which we can see through our senses and our mortal intelligence. It is enough that we realize, “This is something I want to go after.” But that little happiness, even the greatest joy that can be found in human consciousness, Paramahansa Yogananda said, “if you multiply that a million times, you still wouldn’t have the joy that you find in contact with God.” To give us that contact is what meditation is all about.

MT: So here we are over fifty years removed from Yogananda’s death. In today’s world with all of the

challenges that everyone faces, how do people find that meditative space in the midst of a rapid-fire society?

BC: They have to make the effort—and it is not as hard as it might sound. We are not talking

“As the ‘franticness’ increases, it impels people to find time to meditate. They realize that now it is an issue of basic survival, of maintaining even a basic level of sanity and human decency.”

about running away to a hermitage or spending your life in seclusion. But it does take the willingness and the determination to ask yourself, “What do I really want? What’s important in life?” And when you wonder, “How do they find time amidst such franticness and busyness and all of the competing demands on one’s attention in modern life?” it is somewhat paradoxical—because I would say that the other side of that coin is that as the “franticness” increases, it *impels* people to find time to meditate. They realize that now it is an issue of basic survival, of maintaining even a basic level of sanity and human decency.

MT: That’s a good idea!

BC: And again, it doesn’t have to

be a huge investment of time. We see in the lives not only of people who follow the path of Self-Realization Fellowship, but thousands and millions of people who follow other forms of meditation or devotional communion, that they do

make time for it. And they find that, far from being an imposition on their time, it enriches their life and makes it what they want it to be in terms of their highest goals.

MT: Brother Chidananda, thanks for taking the time to be with us.

BC: It’s been a pleasure, Michael.

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