Michael Bernard Beckwith
by Linda Harmon

Michael Bernard Beckwith has just returned from West Africa after the dedication of a new hospital floor in his honor and being “in tooled” as a chief by a local tribe. Those honors are indicative of his belief in practical accomplishments of good works and his foundation of belief in all aspects of the Spirit. This article includes some of his thoughts about coming to see the whole of life as a spiritual opportunity, and service to community as an integral part of the journey.

As founder of the Agape International Spiritual Center, Beckwith rarely, if ever, calls it a church. Instead, he describes spiritual community and a “soulful gathering.” The Center, celebrating its 24th anniversary, is about affirming the divine within all of us, the soul’s evolution through a positive life path, and meditation in action through compassionate service. His teachings are about “birthing planetary citizens who are on the edge of insight and growth.”

“We’re really living a song Rickie and I co-wrote, ‘The Best of Life,’ said Beckwith, referring to his wife of ten years and Director of the Agape International Choir, Rickie Byars Beckwith. “It’s a dream we’re going into new territory in our own souls... We’re living on the edge of great discovery.”

Beckwith came from a home of social and political activism. He grew up with “an activist background, boycotting and picketing stores with unfair practices for minorities and women.” His parents had the books of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in the house, and his family was steadfastly against the Vietnam War. He came out of high school and went to college ready to politically transform the country, but one day something shifted. He had a new vision for transforming our country, but one day something shifted.

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Beckwith describes this awakening as a death of his old persona, portrayed in a dream of anonymous men chasing and attacking him at knifepoint. After this symbolic death he experienced an all-encompassing love beyond his comprehension. (This vision is described in his book, Spiritual Liberation—Unlocking Your Soul’s Potential.) He named this all-encompassing presence Love-Beauty, an experience of God as an unconditionally loving presence interpenetrating all creation, rather than the Judeo-Christian concept of a Godhead who keeps score and condemns people to heaven or hell.

“When that happened,” said Beckwith, “I could see a through line of my life where this awareness endeavored to awaken me to its reality. Up to that point I had been successful at keeping it at bay, but not this time. I could no longer cling to my small point of view.”

Michael’s inquiry led him to the teachings of the East and West including psychology helping individuals avoid victimhood, and in board rooms tackling challenges from a creative perspective. Beckwith went on to talk about his concept of gratitude “as a placeholder,” meditation, and community involvement.

“It’s a teaching I give because people have vibrational or motivational placeholders based upon their worst fears, or things that have happened in their life that are negative,” said Beckwith. “(It’s a ‘placeholder’ of worry, doubt, and fear)”

Beckwith has found that when individuals come into an inspirational environment they can temporarily set aside those negative feelings or emotions, but tend to return to the same point of worry, lack, limitation, and fear as soon as they leave that environment.

“They will return to those negative feelings as if they had a negative placeholder,” said Beckwith. “I tell them to create a placeholder in the affirmative, something you can be grateful for, a positive placeholder.”

Beckwith practices meditation everyday and sees it as a way to maintain a positive placeholder.

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Links Meditation to Community in Spiritual Evolution

On Awakening and Creativity

“It’s definitely threatening to the ego, because the ego’s job is to keep the present paradigm and point of view safe, and keep the body safe. Anything that would make us expand our awareness, the ego will immediately try to thwart it. And the collective ego of our society is not about awakening, but keeping the majority in lockstep.” Inventors and innovators, artists and poets, are often looked upon as weird or unusual. And yet, without these individuals society would not evolve, Catch-22... Somewhere down the line, they are seen as ‘ahead of their time.’ I say they weren’t ‘ahead of their time,’ just out of time. Insight is coming from the eternal realm and it can be looked upon as a little bit odd until society catches up.”

On the Media

“The media is mainly corporate owned and controlled. It’s not really news. They are reporting from a dying paradigm... basically to sell pharmaceuticals and polluting soaps. People have to be wary. It’s not news it’s old repackaging as ‘news.’ What’s new is not really there in corporate media... At the high end technology can transform life... Think about it, if everyday when you turned on the TV you were given the latest news about how someone had overcome a debilitating disease, how neighbors had come together to support someone who was down and out and helped them rebuild his life, or how some innovative aspect of education was transforming a community of youngsters. If you watched that every single day, then you would grow up thinking everything was possible. Even though technology is neutral, it can hinder or assist our evolving consciousness depending on its context.”

On the Whole Person Calendar

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The Whole Person Calendar / November 2010
life... Holding your place in that, your inspiration or “ah-ha” moment. Let that be your placeholder until that particular field you are holding can be powerful enough to manifest something greater from that space.”

According to Beckwith, having a placeholder in gratitude, inspiration, or joy is a powerful tool for building a consciousness of health and harmony in our lives. But you first have “to understand what meditation is.”

“Mediation is purifying undistractable attention to reality,” said Beckwith, “reality with a capital R, not that which is transitory but that which is eternal. The qualities of love, harmony, compassion, peace, joy, intelligence—these are everywhere present as the imprint of Eternality. There are many techniques of meditation that transport the meditator into the realm of non-dual reality, and it is within those seconds, moments or hours of its duration that one is truly meditating or communing with Reality, revealing to the practitioner his/her Original Face.”

Learning to respond to the highest and best within us is the focus of his two books, Spiritual Liberation - Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential, and The Answer Is You, both of which emphasize the importance of community and community service.

“Community is a place of inspiration and remembrance. When you come together in an inspirational, intentional community you become inspired to live by spiritual principles. You are provided a context for living beyond the “me plan” and come together face to face. You circulate your energy beyond self-involvement. You begin to connect with the community you become inspired to live by and more live in that intention, we don’t deny the suffering within the human experience, but we consciously invite ourselves into the celebratory state to be open to visions that would solve that suffering.”

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Along with Agape’s services in Los Angeles, Beckwith is excited to mention several new opportunities and upcoming events:

Agape’s online community, Agapelive.com, where people watch real time, streaming services and can chat with each other online. It has grown to include a special conference where people come from all over the world, Japan, Australia, Jordan, and come together face to face.

Agape Revelation Conference April 2011, held each year and designed to be a non-broken inspirational workshop and gathering, which includes speakers, exercises, chanting, international choir, and break-out sessions. Esther and Jerry Hicks, Malidoma Some, and others will join the Beckwiths.

Meditation Retreat, December through the New Year, offering guided meditation and chanting with a shaman presiding over a new year’s ritual.

New radio program on KPFK, Fridays at 1:00 p.m., featuring archival Beckwith talks along with new interviews between Beckwith and “evolutionary leaders on the planet,” music by Rickie Byars Beckwith, and audience call-in when possible.

RICKIE BYARS BECKWITH'S MEDITATION RETREAT FOR 2011

For more information on the Meditation Retreat, visit www.agape.org or call 323-644-2772.