

VISIONING

An Interview with Rev. Dr. Michael Beckwith

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This interview originally appeared in the December 1996 issue of *Science of Mind®* magazine.

Each of us has the greatest gift imaginable—life—but all too often we can't imagine what to do with it. We feel adrift and lost, yet long desperately for meaning. We want to make our life count and to express the gifts of Spirit we know we are here to bring forth. But we search in vain to discover just what these unique gifts of ours are and how we might express them. We search in vain because we look outside ourselves. Perhaps we follow someone's well-intended suggestion or a popular trend of the times. However, that kind of reactive approach to seeking the right and best way to use the gift of life itself leaves us feeling frustrated, confused, and more lost than ever. The Science of Mind philosophy teaches that the way to our true path and to the successful expression of who we are is through the use of our own spiritual sight, or inner vision. Dr. Ernest Holmes writes in *The Science of Mind* that “as we bring ourselves to a greater vision, we induce a greater concept and thereby demonstrate more in our experience. In this way there is a continuous growth and unfoldment taking place.” Dr. Michael Beckwith teaches Holmes' ideas, offering practical guidance and specific techniques. When deep meditation and affirmative prayer combine in an attitude of receptivity and surrender, says Dr. Beckwith, the result is a high state of consciousness in which we become instruments of God. This approach to spiritual living that he calls visioning has been used with tremendous success in the rapid growth of Agape Church of Religious Science and Center of Truth, which Dr. Beckwith founded 10 years ago in Santa Monica, Calif. The dynamic power of visioning as a way of discovering direction and clarity regarding life goals or a current project comes from its reliance upon the inner knower, the deep self within each of us, always available and ever responsive when we call upon it.

Science of Mind: You have used visioning at Agape Church with the result that your membership has grown to 4000 in only 10 years, and many wonderful programs and activities are being offered there. The results you have achieved using this approach are truly astonishing. What exactly is visioning and how did you come to begin using it?

Beckwith: Visioning is a process by which we train ourselves to be able to hear, feel, see, and catch God's plan for our life or for any particular project we're working on. An organic process that has evolved for me as I grow spiritually, it is based on the idea that we're not here to tell God what to do or to ask God for things but to absolutely be available for what God is already doing, to open ourselves up to catch what's already happening. My initial discoveries more than 20 years ago on my spiritual path allowed me to see that there is a bigger pattern of life, a level of reality beyond the mere human experiential life. These awarenesses shifted my perception tremendously and the visioning process developed as a way of applying that new insight.

How does a life based on visioning differ from one that is not?

A passage in Proverbs says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” People who have no vision for their life are sleepwalking without a hint as to why they are here or what their purpose is. They are drifting along on the currents of the culture's beliefs of the day, whether those beliefs be good or bad. Actuarial tables tell us that so many people will die at a certain age or that a certain number of accidents will occur. People who don't have a vision and are not open to their purpose in life become these statistics. They are the average men and women who live out the collective beliefs of society and seem to be at the whim of forces outside themselves. But as spiritual beings made in the image and likeness of pure Spirit, we are so much more than that. Each of us is a composite spiritual idea containing every idea that infinite Mind has ever thought. When we begin to understand our purpose for being here, which is to be a revealer of love, then we can start to open ourselves up to God's vision for us and to discover our own unique way to deliver that love, our individual mechanism by which we can express that love.

What is the difference between our purpose in life and our vision?

Our purpose for being on the planet simply is to be an emanation or an expression of love. Anyone who has made a breakthrough into fourth-dimensional living or has had a near-death experience or a mystical realization will know this. We're here to love—to perfect, amplify, and express the unconditional divine love of God. That's our purpose. God's vision for our life is the means or manner by which we bring forth that love. It's our heart's desire, our own unique way of expressing the love. I like to call it our delivery system. Whether that vision involves being a doctor or a teacher or whatever, it is the way we fulfill our purpose of expressing love. We're multidimensional, multifaceted beings, and there are many ways in which we express love, but each of us has a primary vision to catch or open up to, and that is the particular delivery system, which enables us to serve our purpose of revealing love.

What happens to us as we open to the vision God has for our life and begin to live it?

We become less and less influenced by the popular or entrenched beliefs of a particular society or culture, and we become much more available to Spirit. We become inspired by the ideas held in the mind of God, and they begin to live and express through us. We begin to be able to articulate them and to live and embody and reveal them. The feeling we have is that we have come home. We are fulfilling our heart's desire, which is the same thing, I believe, as God's will for us. God's will is for the greater expression of life, of beauty, of everything that God is. Our heart's desire is generally about expressing ourselves, allowing our latent talents, gifts, and abilities to become actualized. When we express God's vision for our life, we feel fulfilled.

What is the difference between visioning and the technique of visualization?

Visualization is a beginning phase in metaphysics in which we mentally conceive of something we want. We imagine doing it or having it and we generate the feelings that would accompany the experience. Visualization involves having an idea of what we want to accomplish or how we want to live our life, then imaging that goal as already achieved and establishing the necessary mental and emotional vibrations to bring it forth and manifest it. Visualization is a beautiful and wonderful stage in our evolution, and it's very important. When we do visioning, on the other hand, we align in consciousness with our divine purpose, which is to love and to express a greater degree of life. Then we open ourselves to catch a sense of how that expression is supposed to occur through us.

What are the stages we go through in the visioning process?

Visioning always begins with a deep sense that we're surrounded by unconditional love. We enter into the conscious awareness that we live, move, and have our being in this unconditional love, and we open ourselves up to what that love feels like. I don't mean just emotionally, though. The feeling tone we develop is of a spiritual nature, and this feeling is the whole foundation of visioning. We then declare what it is we are doing the visioning about. For example, we may ask, "How does God see Itself as my life?" We then wait to inwardly hear, see, and catch what comes to us, what it looks like, what it feels and sounds like, and we pay close attention to any symbols or metaphors that appear. All of this is done without judgment. We are throwing ourselves open to whatever comes up and we notice what begins to flow through so we can articulate it, write it down, express it, dialogue about it, and be aware of how it feels, not just emotionally but spiritually. In this way we can begin to articulate God's vision for our life.

You seem to be saying that willingness to make the necessary changes is an important factor in the success of the visioning process.

Absolutely. Once we begin to be able to get God's vision for our life, and are feeling and sensing it, we ask the question: "What is it that I have to embody or become in order for this vision to manifest?" As we listen inwardly in a meditative state, we begin to hear from the deep levels of our being what we have to know, what we have to become, what we have to embody and change. Then we write it down and dialogue about it. We know metaphysically that we cannot have anything we are not willing to become. It's an impossibility for us to have something in our life that is not aligned with our consciousness. So we begin to get a picture of how we need to develop and grow and unfold, of how we must change. Then we are ready to go on to the next stage, which is affirmative prayer. We pray affirmatively not about how to accomplish the vision but rather about the ways in which we need to grow. What qualities do we need to embody, what things do we need to know, what do we need to change in our life, and how do we need to unfold spiritually in order to bring forth the vision?

Why aren't the prayers directed toward bringing forth the vision itself?

The vision is already accomplished in the mind of God. It's already a complete idea in Spirit, so we don't need to pray for its accomplishment. What we do need to pray for is to be a willing and able vehicle or delivery system for the vision. Here's an example from my own experience. When I first called everyone together who had said they wanted to be involved in creating a church, we began doing the visioning process for Agape Church. I instructed everyone to throw away all preconceived ideas of what church is and to disregard their past experience of being in church, whether it was good or bad. We started the visioning with a clean slate. We anchored in unconditional love and we threw ourselves open to God's idea of Itself as the Agape Church. People began describing it in a number of ways: It's unconditional love, it's multicultural, it's community. We began to articulate the vision that was coming through to us. Then I asked what we each have to become, know, or embody. What is the role each of us is to play? We all had prayer partners and we prayed that each would embody the qualities that were needed. We didn't even talk about the vision—that was unnecessary, because it was already held in the Mind of God. But we do have to become willing and able to carry the vision, to express it. At one point the church was growing, we were doing a visioning process, and some people were a little nervous about the growth. Previously they had a little private church for themselves, but now others were starting to come, just as we had visioned, and this was making some members of the initial group uncomfortable. When I asked what we have to know or become in order for the vision to manifest, many people said they had to become more loving, more accepting, more responsive, and more willing to meet new people. They realized they had to stop hanging out in their cliques and expand their circle of friends. But throughout this process we didn't pray for the growth of the church—we prayed for everyone to have open hearts, to be flexible and loving. So using the vision process is always self-examination. It's never, “God, I want this. Make this happen.” It's always, “What do I have to become to live the vision, to manifest it, to reveal it?” The visioning process, then, is a process of transformation of the individual or of the group.

What other factors besides willingness are important?

First of all, let me emphasize that the person being prayed for must be willing to change and grow. Whoever is doing affirmative prayer for that person must know and believe that he or she is a divine emanation of God, and that God is divine Love revealing Itself as whatever spiritual qualities are needed. The person's willingness to change and to evolve spiritually, together with the prayer partner's affirmative prayer, create the synergy that allows for outer manifestation to take place. The realized vision is simply an outpicturing or a by-product of the spiritual growth and development of the people who are involved. As a divine idea, Agape Church is a state of consciousness in which all of us are growing, unfolding, and manifesting the vision—and it keeps changing. The visioning process becomes more and more refined, and as we get greater clarity, we have an easier time articulating what we have felt and sensed. We develop a deeper trust to hang out in the vision, to let go rather than trying to make something happen.

So no matter what the visioning process focuses on, spiritual transformation of the individual using it is the ultimate result?

Absolutely. Visioning is always for self-transformation. It's always to shift our perception of reality. And this process goes on forever. We never reach a place where the process is complete, because God's idea is infinite and it's always expressing. We just become bigger and bigger places for it to express through. The prayer work that is part of visioning allows for the invisible spiritual idea to be made visible through and as the individuals involved. They literally become it, give it clothes, make it visible. And this process goes on and on, because people keep becoming willing to be bigger, so there's no stagnation. New ideas proliferate, and change is always going on. It's an organic growth and transformation. For example, at Agape we're doing things now that we didn't do four or five years ago, and the only thing we retain as a tradition is the visioning process itself. We don't insist that something has to be done a certain way because that's how it was done before. The visioning process keeps us all flexible and ready for change. We watch the outer changes take place, while at the same time, we're always touching that Something within us that doesn't change—the presence of God.

Does the practice of visioning help, then, to foster a mystical sense of Oneness?

Yes. When we do visioning, we become more aware that we are spiritual beings, made in the likeness of God and not separate from God, and that all the divine ideas God has are within us already. We learn consciously to shift our perceptions and lift our vibrations so these ideas can express through us. Since visioning starts with the awareness that we are unified with God already, this process encourages a mystical awareness, that absolute sense of the undissolvable union with the presence of God. We develop a willingness to become big enough for the expression of God, and enter into a mystical state of being.

What is happening when we seem to lose touch with our vision and to feel that we are just drifting along?

This does happen, for several reasons. Sometimes it happens as part of the refinement process, part of the transformational walk. As we shed our false concepts and ideas about life and our false identities, then there is a feeling of being separate and adrift, because the deeper dimension of our being has not yet emerged or we are not yet conscious of it. So it feels as if we are out in the wilderness, in no-man's-land, and there's a sense of barrenness and emptiness. But in the transformational process, that's good. We're shedding, we're releasing, we're being purified. All promised lands are barren, all promised lands have nothing there—because if they were clothed with something already, they wouldn't be the promised land. That sense of barrenness or darkness just means undeveloped capacity, something that has not yet been developed but is in the process of developing so a deeper dimension of our being can emerge. As we do our spiritual work, we go through these periods of darkness, of barrenness, of wilderness, which is all part of refining and eliminating the false concepts and false identities.

Sometimes, though, we experience a sense of wilderness because we've gotten off the path. We've been inundated by the limited beliefs of the world and have become receptive to false ideas of reality that capture us and keep us in bondage. Thoreau said that most people live lives of quiet desperation. These are people who are not in touch with themselves. They don't know who they are spiritually, so they carry the quiet desperation and existential dread of the average person, feeling out of touch and fearful. To them the world seems unfriendly and nothing ever seems to go right. They clutch at moments of happiness. That's the average person's experience, which goes up and down, at random. People who live like this seek desperately to control the external world in order to make themselves happy. But that's different from the sense of wilderness that a person who is walking the spiritual path goes through. In this case a clear purging or elimination of something is occurring so the deeper self can emerge. All spiritual growth, 100 percent of it, is about releasing or eliminating rather than attaining something, because we're already there spiritually. We're in the process of releasing inhibitions, limitation, false concepts, and all the other baggage that prevents our greater yet-to-be self from expressing. So it's always a good sign on the path when we start to hit bottom. Something's being dissolved, transformed, redeemed.

Is someone who has lost touch with the deeper self, who is experiencing quiet desperation, ready in consciousness to begin doing the visioning process, or is there some necessary preparation?

I believe that everyone's ready to do visioning, but it's helpful to start with a basic understanding of Science of Mind or New Thought principles, in order to be able to trust the process. If we've been involved with a spiritual tradition which teaches that there is only one Power, then it's easier for us not to try to manipulate conditions or to make something happen, because we have an inner awareness that there is already order in the universe. We don't have to create some kind of order but can simply trust the order we know already exists. People who have been on the path for a while tend to develop an inner awareness that there is order. They realize they don't have to create it, and when they release limiting beliefs or old ideas, they know they're not releasing them to greater chaos but rather to a greater sense of order. People who don't have that spiritual viewpoint, however, are usually feeling more comfortable trying to make something happen than just letting themselves to open to God's will. So someone who still has the false belief that God's will is other than magnificent and beautiful may need to build a greater sense of trust before doing the visioning process.

For such a person, would the approach of visualization and manifestation be a good way to start?

Yes. This is a very appropriate and effective way to begin. Basic Science of Mind teachings are right there at whatever level we start on, as we embark on the spiritual path and continue to develop ever higher levels of faith and trust. The visioning process, which requires a high degree of trust, is the logical evolution or deepening of the Science

of Mind teaching. In Religious Science we've done an excellent job of teaching spiritual principles, such as the Law of Cause and Effect and how visualization works—so much so that the entire world knows these basic principles. Schoolchildren know them. Businesspeople visualize the attainment of their goals, which is all to the good. But what Science of Mind is now being called to do and to become as a teaching is to provide a pathway for accessing the deeper dimensions of our being—not purely for manipulation, not purely to make things happen to get things in our life, but as a greater expression of our divinity. In formulating the Science of Mind teaching, Dr. Ernest Holmes correlated mystical teachings from around the world, but in his day he had to focus primarily on teaching the Law, because if he had started off talking about divine love and the omnipresence of God, his philosophy would not have sounded any different from the religious teachings prevalent at the time. His great gift has been to awaken us to the idea that we are made in God's image, that God does not change, and that God is no respecter of persons.

Are you saying that an understanding of the Law forms a foundation for a more mystical approach to spirituality?

Yes. By emphasizing the Law in the beginning, the Science of Mind teaching has helped us to realize that we can stop trying to use the Law and now start allowing the Presence to use us. Dr. Holmes said that if he could do it all over again, he would emphasize love more, but I believe he did what was right at the time he lived. He compiled the mystical teachings, yet emphasized Law because that was the emphasis needed at that time. He did his job so well, and we as metaphysicians have done our job so well, that everyone knows about using the Law of Attraction and the Law of Cause and Effect. They know about visualizing and treasure mapping. These techniques are used all over the place, not only in churches. Years ago it was all secretive and occult, but now kids do it in school. Pat Riley used it with the Lakers when he played a film of their highlights for them over and over again so they could establish in their minds a sense of doing great things on the basketball court. Visioning, however, is for a higher purpose. Visioning lets the presence of God use us, which is what all the great mystics who have walked the planet have done. They haven't walked around telling God what to do or what they wanted. They came here to glorify God. It's the difference between saying, "There's a power for good in the universe, and I can use it," and saying, "There's a power that can use me." The latter statement suggests allowing ourselves to be available to the deeper levels of this Spirit that is everywhere and that is always expressing through and as each of us. We know we can't be destroyed, we know God's will is for good, and we know a greater order, better than we can imagine, is going to emerge, so we let God.

Do you believe the use of visioning as a spiritual practice can make a difference in the world?

Absolutely. When even one individual is true to his or her vision, it assists in liberating everyone. When even one individual neutralizes or requalifies the thought forms of

separation and lack and limitation that run rampant in human experience, he or she creates a spiritual vortex that allows others to be pulled into that same vibration. Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I draw all men unto me." Because he attained and embodied a high level of consciousness, then it became possible for other people to have the same realizations that he had. Whoever touches that spiritual realm has a tendency to lift everyone else up. Whoever has the ability and the willingness to become very still and catch a vision will create an opening for others. When Jesus said, "Greater things than these shall you do," he was telling us this. Ernest Holmes said, "If we could stand aside and let this one perfect Life flow through us, we could not help healing people! This is the highest form of healing. We have gone through many abstract processes of reasoning and found out what the Law is and how it works. Now we can forget all about the Law and know there is nothing but the word—the Law will be working automatically. We must forget everything else and let our word be spoken with a deep inner realization of love, beauty, peace, poise, power, and of the great presence of Life at the point of our own consciousness." Whoever uses the visioning process in this way lifts us all, because it is a technique that allows us to realize we're at one with God, at one with the love that is everywhere. There are only divine ideas in the universe, whole, perfect, complete ideas. All we have to do is be receptive to these ideas, and then to expand our willingness to be at one with them, releasing anything within us that prevents them from expressing through us. When we align ourselves with divine ideas of joy, harmony, love, and wisdom, they uniquely express through us. The visioning process allows God to reveal Himself through us in infinite ways. We become a living embodiment of God's ideas if we let God work through us. It's our reason for being here. In periods of meditation we catch the spirit of the living God, which is everywhere in its wholeness. Each of us represents the totality of God and has the capacity to know that. With every greater increase in our awareness, we have more freedom and more creativity, because we know who we are.