

## **Alonzo's sermon at Grace Cathedral on Sunday, January 19th.**

Thank you Dean and thank you everyone at Grace who have been so warm and so inviting, it has been a wonderful time that LINES has been here and it's not over. We are thrilled to be here.

I would like to start with an affirmation by Yogananda. I'm going to say it and if you could repeat after me.

*"I relax, and cast aside all mental burdens*

*Allowing God to express through me his perfect peace, love, and wisdom."*

This time of year, we're still in January; it is a boon in the way it is structured, because we come out of the joy of Christmas and the celebration of Christ, and we step into the new year with support and cheering assistance so that we can renew ourselves. We look at ourselves, and this is where resolutions arise, and we say we too want to renew in the new year, and usually that means some cleaning. It's always easy to look at someone else and see what needs to be repaired, but when it comes to ourselves, it's not so easy. And so that introspective look of impersonal analysis that examines our habits, and sees where we are going, what we're becoming - it's a great opportunity to look at that and say, do I like what I'm becoming and where I'm going. That introspection, buoyed by this new year, can help us to change; and we human beings, individuals changing ourselves, are helping the entire world - that is how we assist.

There is a story that is common in India where they talk about going to the Ganges. And that if you bathe in the Ganges that your sins are washed away. The joke is that when you step toward the Ganges all your negative habits and negative ways of thinking, they leave because they don't want to get into those holy waters. So when you step into the holy waters you are refreshed and you feel new and you feel rebirthed and clean. And when you get out of the water, those habits are waiting. And as soon as you get out, they jump right back on you. They call them the monkeys. The monkeys that are waiting in the trees after you get out of the refreshing dip in the Ganges. And so, too, that is like us - we begin with this firm conviction, we go forward with zeal, and inevitability, the monkeys come and jump on our back again.

I watched the Martin Luther King, Jr. speech that he gave at Grace, last night. It was incredibly powerfully moving and I wanted to read some words from it: *Dr. King said that "Man must seek to develop his inner powers in a brilliant manner, no matter how small it may be according to the world's standards. He must see that it has cosmic significance if it is for the upbuilding of humanity. He must come to see that whatever he is called to do is significant, if it is for the making of a better world. So, if you can't be a pine on the top of the hill, be a scrub in the valley - but be the best little scrub on the side of the rill. Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be the sun, be a star. For it isn't by size that you win or you fail, be the best of whatever you are. And this determined push to the end of self realization, this inward drive to develop one's inner powers is the length of a human being's life."*

It's beautiful. And in its deeper meaning, it's pointing to the fact that we are souls. And that when we human beings who have our essence disguised in these bodies, and we identify with these bodies, when we delve into the senses like food, you identify with the body, you're locked in, but in reality Christ has told us who we are and what we are. His words in John, "Ye are gods." - "Know ye not that ye are gods and that the kingdom of Heaven resides within you." Not outside somewhere to run to, but within you. Very deep, profound statement.

Many physicists have said that this cosmos looks more like a grand mind, than just a working machine. The brilliance of an unimaginable, Omnipotent mind. In our struggle to claim our real identification, we have mentally separated ourselves from that mind. That Omnipotent mind is just beneath the surface of our minds. Just behind the darkness of our closed eyes. Yogananda, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* says, "We are waves on the vast ocean of that omnipotent mind." But we are like bottles of ocean that are corked and we have to uncork that bottle and dissolve back into that Magnificent Ocean. We can tap into that ocean because thoughts are universal. We think, individually, that we're thinking about our own little thoughts in our own little world - no, we plug into that limitless realm of thought. Whether it's negative or positive, God was the creator. Good or bad, He created all of creation. And so, we have the ability, as waves, to find the way where we can relax, and let go. Find that identity - and how is that found? It's akin to the way salmon have to go back to their spawning grounds - swimming upstream against the current, a rushing roaring, impossibly difficult, current. We have to travel against that stream to return back to bliss.

Dr. King said, "While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change. Gandhi referred to his form of nonviolence as *satyagraha* meaning truth-force or love-force." Each of these great mighty men were using love as the transformative force to help mankind. Gandhi, in his literature on nonviolence, says that it's not just about saying I'm nonviolent, but it's actually to begin to love that person and realize that that person is merely playing a role. And I read recently that he said, "Even if a vegetarian admonishes a meat eater for eating meat, that is violence." Dr. King goes on to say, "I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence, was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom." And the question arises, *who is not oppressed on planet earth?* There is the schisms, there's the war, religious sectarianism, the greed, materialism, the boomerang of evil, but they both talk about how that can be transformed through love. The application is that everyone of us has some form of oppression inside of us - again those monkeys - that we too, through our behavior and the way that we think, want to eradicate. Because it helps the world, it helps mankind, or humanity, I should say.

Dr. King and Gandhi were looking to remove oppression from the world and how to rid the world of evil by helping their brothers and sisters. The Gita says that a lot of the struggle is actually karmic. There is personal karma, there's karma in families, there is karma in cities, countries and there's world karma. Karma is really the law of retribution, what you put out, returns to you. The old testament, when they are talking about karma, they say "God is an angry god and he seeks revenge." It's impossible for God to be angry. It doesn't make sense, it's an aberration.

God is love. God is unconditional love. No matter what mistakes we make, no matter what bad habits we have - God is unconditional love. But the old testament was referring to the law of cause and effect. The law that was created by God and God is above the law. Yoganada says, "Since God is not bound by his cosmic law, devotion is also necessary to summon his attention. Devotional demand is greater than law, than the law of cause and effect, because it touches the heart of God and makes him answer his naughty and good children alike. Law is based on mathematical precision - justice weighted according to the law of cause and effect. Devotion is based upon claiming God as your own true love. Law is exacting in it's demand, but love presupposes God's mercy and thereby attracts his response whether or not the full measure of the law has been met." That's tremendous - that love is above the law.

Dr. King says, "If you can understand and feel, even in the midst of those critical and often physically painful moments, that your attacker is as much a victim as you are, that he or she is a victim of the forces that have shaped and fed his anger - then you are well on your way to the nonviolent life." Seeing roles - every person has to play their role. This is teaching us how to see people. When people identify as this age, race, sex, religion, we must respect that. But we have to see people no matter how they appear or behave, as souls. Souls with roles - we all have our roles to play. And this brings the Shakespearean statement, "All of life is a stage" into a true reality. Some play huge roles on earth, others small personal roles. But, all souls are equal. So whether it's on the big stage of the planet with the entire world watching, or in a little village, the soul shines. All souls are equal.

*A few definitions of the soul. This self, soul, is never born, nor does it ever perish, nor having come into existence, will it again cease to be. It is birthless, eternal, changeless, ever the same, unaffected by the usual processes associated with time. It is not slain, when the body is killed.*

*The universal everything is made of the singular consciousness of God. When a spark of that consciousness is individualized by God, it becomes a soul, capable of ultimately expressing the God image in which it is made. In essence, the soul is perfect and complete. An exact reflection of God's ever existing, ever conscious, ever new bliss.*

A land, a country, a nation, is conserved through it's masterpieces of humanity. And so, again, our work is to realize that we're not weak, whining mortals, we are immortals. A difficult task. Often people say, "I feel I have a great purpose to accomplish in life" and that is true, that purpose is to find out who and what we really are. And Christ tells us who we are when He says, "Know ye not that ye are gods."

I'd like to close with what is known as the quality that God cherishes most, humility. By Andrew Murray, "Humility is Perpetual quietness of heart. It is to have no trouble. It is never to be fretted or vexed, irritable or sore; to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and above is trouble."

I would close with one last affirmation by Paramahansa Yogananda, if you could repeat after me.

*I am submerged in eternal light.*

*That light permeates every particle of my being.*

*I live in that light.*

*The divine spirit fills me, within and without.*

*I am submerged in eternal light.*

*That light permeates every particle of my being.*

*I live in that light.*

*The divine spirit fills me, within and without.*