

Interview with Yancey Gates

Yancey Gates is here today. He is employed at the San Francisco Planning Department, and is on the Governor's World's Fair planning committee.

INTERVIEWER: Yancey, it is good to talk with you today.

YANCEY: Thank you sir, it is good to be here.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give a history of how you became a member of the Governor's World's Fair committee?

YANCEY: Yes. It began when I was given the assignment of planning a new MUNI transit terminal out in the bay on Treasure Island.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the San Francisco Municipal transit system.

YANCEY: Yes, the MUNI. Ms. Brown, my boss, sent me to Sacramento to pick up some documents for the project, and there I was introduced to the Governor. We hit it off well together, because we were both on the spiritual path, and, you know, the new Fair has a spiritual theme.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about this spiritual path, and the whys of how you got there?

YANCEY: Sure, of course. It was quite some years ago, my life wasn't going well, and I began wondering about my whole purpose for living, you know, why do I exist, where did I come from, where am I going; all that. I landed a job in Planning but I wasn't happy. Frankly I was quite miserable. See, I don't fit into this world, I really had no social life and the job was not going well.

INTERVIEWER: And so you began your spiritual quest?

YANCEY: Yes, exactly. There was only one book that gave even a hint that there must be some future world better than what we have here. After all, we live and we die, that's it! Does that make any sense?

INTERVIEWER: And this book, was it religion?

YANCEY: Yes. I picked up a small copy of the Bible, the New Testament. It didn't answer my questions, but I became more curious. I moved to Berkeley. It's where revolutions start, where the standard fare is challenged. I found the kinds of answers I wanted at metaphysical bookstores in Berkeley. It became clear that the mind creates the world, not the other way around. The other way makes absolutely no sense, there is no possibility that the self that we know and experience emerges out of dead matter. In fact, what is dead matter? We only know what we see in front of our faces. What is "the physical world"? It's a term describing what we see in front of our faces. But we cannot be objective observers because we too are "the physical world". We really don't know anything else.

INTERVIEWER: You're saying Science has it wrong?

YANCEY: Newton and Darwin's science, yes. But the newer science, Quantum Physics, is coming around to the Buddhist way.

INTERVIEWER: Buddhist way? You said you read the Bible.

YANCEY: I started with it. Buddhism and the other Eastern religions make presumption that mind is all that exists, and that mind creates the world in our imaginations, like when we dream.

INTERVIEWER: Let's consider your original focus for a moment; the Bible. Is that okay?

YANCEY: Sure. Of course.

INTERVIEWER: The Bible is our answer, the West's answer, to those questions that you said were so important to you. More than two billion people throughout the world are Christians. This is their path to eternal life, is that not true?

YANCEY: This is a subject I generally avoid. I believe that the Master, that would be Jesus, taught the same essential things that Buddha taught, but the message was twisted when Church authorities who were closest to Rome founded their church in the Master's name.

INTERVIEWER: In my Sunday School classes, that was some time back, but I distinctly remember the early Christians being at odds with Rome. They were thrown to the lions just for amusement. And their Master was crucified.

YANCEY: I believe the message later became twisted. The original message does not lend itself to organized religion, to a structured body. What Jesus taught, and what all the Masters generally teach, is something of a private matter. We don't need others to intercede and bring us salvation. Beliefs cannot save us, only wisdom and spiritual knowledge really can.

INTERVIEWER: You don't believe you're saved by the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ?

YANCEY: Do you?

INTERVIEWER: If you don't accept the Cross then what do you believe?

YANCEY: The Cross, salvation through the Cross, is a belief. It's essentially a story. We cannot be saved by a storyline no matter what that storyline is. But we can be fooled into thinking so.

INTERVIEWER: The Church is fooling its members?

YANCEY: I wouldn't say that. Rather, the Church itself is fooled by an historical story of salvation.

INTERVIEWER: I don't want to dwell on this too long because I want to talk about the World's Fair committee that you're on, but really, without Christ as our salvation, do we have anything remaining but Darwin's evolution?

YANCEY: Darwin's evolution is pure doom. With that scenario there is no purpose for living, we're just doing dumb things for a while and attempting to be not too miserable, so that we can wait it out and then die and be gone. It makes no sense.

INTERVIEWER: So what then is the answer?

YANCEY: Christians can find it in the Gnostic gospels, a few of them, that give a clearer picture of the Jesus message. Like the Gospel of Thomas. It is probably the best gospel we have.

INTERVIEWER: I've never heard of that gospel. It is not in the Bible.

YANCEY: Yes, exactly. It's not because the early Church leaders didn't understand it. But this gospel tells how to find everlasting life by way of knowledge, not beliefs.

INTERVIEWER: Knowledge, not beliefs? What is the difference? What is knowledge?

YANCEY: Truthfully, knowledge, real knowledge, is the understanding that beliefs are not ultimately true. No belief is true, because beliefs are creations of the imagination.

INTERVIEWER: But the Crucifixion is not a belief, it is an historical fact.

YANCEY: Whether it actually happened or didn't happen is beside the point. It really doesn't matter. You see, people imagine things; they imagine events and they imagine stories. Maybe they'll put the story in a novel or maybe they will pursue their imagination and it will come to pass in this world. Either way, it's an imagined event. So what if it happened? Would that make any difference? Whether it happened or didn't happen wouldn't really matter in the greater scheme of things. No story can save anyone.

INTERVIEWER: So, what is real knowledge?

YANCEY: Real knowledge is, well, it's a recognition that beliefs are not true, and are yet necessary to our existence. It's both of these things; not true yet necessary. Beliefs are the clothes we wear, the flowers in the meadow; they are the lifeblood of the world. At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that the wine he was pouring at the feast was his blood. He meant that the body is more than our flesh, it goes beyond the flesh, it is all of what surrounds us, and what surrounds us is entirely our beliefs.

INTERVIEWER: I'm not sure that I understand you. Let's move on. You said that the Governor is a spiritual man. I've never heard him speak of his religion. How would you know this?

YANCEY: As I said, I met him at his office for the MUNI Treasure Island project, which, I didn't know at the time, was connected to the World's Fair that was in planning then.

INTERVIEWER: Did he tell you he was a spiritual man?

YANCEY: No, not at all. I just knew that he was, and he could see that I too was on the path. He saw it instantly, I could tell.

INTERVIEWER: How?

YANCEY: It's a higher plane of thought. I don't know. You can see light in a person, you see energy, and you know right away they are at a higher level. You can say that we connected. It is why he wanted me on the project and is why he appointed me to the World's Fair committee,

INTERVIEWER: Okay, uh, the World's Fair; you're on the World's Fair planning committee, and you have no visible position at the Planning Department where you work. How did you accomplish this?

YANCEY: Yes. At the time, when I was in Planning, the project wasn't going that well, we were having some problems with some of the peripheral players. The Governor wanted to end legalized gambling on the Indian reservations that were to become a part of the World's Fair. This is a little difficult to explain. An influential tribal chieftain was organizing demonstrations in Sacramento to counter a federal bill that would end Indian gambling. This was a disruption. And I, well, was helping to iron this out.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you do this?

YANCEY: I couldn't do much at the Planning Department, because, as you said, I had no authority to do much of anything.

INTERVIEWER: There have been rumors of your run-ins with your supervisors in Planning. Is this what you're getting at?

YANCEY: Uh, well, I would rather not get into that here, but, uh, yes, there were some issues. The Governor appointed me to the State World's Fair committee, and in that capacity I managed to work with the tribal chief. I worked between him and the Governor. It was essentially a spiritual solution, that was our common ground.

INTERVIEWER: Spiritual solution? What do you mean?

YANCEY: If your focus is a spiritual one then your interest is with the general welfare, not so much your own material advancement. We were not seeking to enhance our reputations or secure any kind of reward. We wanted the Fair to be successful; all of us.

INTERVIEWER: You mean you and the Governor and the tribal chief Ground Hog?

YANCEY: Yes. An accumulating of material goods, or fame, or recognition is futile. Nothing can touch the real issue which is old age, sickness, and our bodies turning to dust at death. There is nothing in the world more important than that. Well, Ground Hog was at odds with the

Governor, and that was a problem, but when I looked at it I saw that we all wanted the same thing. Ground Hog didn't want the gambling money, he wanted to return his people to their spiritual heritage, but he thought the money from the Indian casinos would give him the means to that. The Governor had other plans, but envisioned a same result. Once that was clear there was no longer an issue. Just about anything can be easily resolved when the intention of the players becomes clear. But when there is a selfish motivation, that is, when someone wants more wealth, or more fame and recognition than he wants others to have, then there is no resolution. This is why wars are fought.

INTERVIEWER: Wars are fought because some people are greedy, you're saying.

YANCEY: Yes. But also because of misunderstandings. I think those are the only two reasons why we have wars. But if people were not greedy there would be no misunderstandings. The misunderstanding happen because people believe their adversary is being greedy, that's all.

INTERVIEWER: We've about run out of time, This experience has been enlightening. Thank you, Yancey, and good luck with the World's Fair project.

YANCEY: Thank you.