

William Blake's Idea of Imagination and its Influence on the Spiritual Philosophy of Neville Goddard.

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Abstract:

*The purpose of this paper is to focus on the creative abilities of the human imagination and how God dwells within human beings in the form of their wonderful imagination, which is responsible for the creation of their individual realities. Every individual, whether aware of the creative power of imagination or not, is always imagining and shaping his external reality, consciously or subconsciously, knowingly or unknowingly, favourably or unfavourably. The goal, however, is to be more aware of our thoughts and make more conscious imagination in order to create a reality which is favourable to us. This paper seeks to engage with the idea of imagination and God as one and the same thing, through William Blake's visionary understanding of reality as opposed to the sensationalist understanding of the physical world. The paper also briefly discusses Blake's notion of the presence of God reflecting in human qualities through his poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" from **Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience** respectively. Blake's concept of imagination not only influenced the Romantic poets (for instance, Coleridge, who sought to bring into his poetry a "willing suspension of disbelief" by suspending one's critical faculties and to believe in the unbelievable through the power of imagination), but also the spiritual philosophy of the twentieth-century American author Neville Goddard. This paper also brings in Biblical references to state that the Bible can be seen as a parable of human psyche or a book of psychology instead of a book of historical records, as has been mentioned by Neville Goddard in many of his lectures. Towards the end, the paper seeks to understand the way in which the subconscious mind works and how the subconscious takes commands from the conscious mind to program or reprogram a story or a belief in it which, as a result, determines the kind of life or reality an individual creates for himself. The study has been conducted by making use of secondary sources like books, innumerable websites and YouTube videos.*

Keywords: God, Imagination, Reality, Bible, Subconscious Mind.

"Man is all Imagination. God is Man and exists in us and we in Him... The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is, God, Himself."

-William Blake

The English poet, painter and printmaker William Blake (1757-1827) is considered as a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. Although he was largely unrecognised during his lifetime and considered mad by his contemporaries because of his idiosyncratic views, he is highly valued by the later critics for his expressiveness and creativity, and for the philosophical and mystical undercurrents within his work. He has a diverse and symbolically rich repertoire, which focuses on Imagination as

“the body of God” or “human existence itself”. Even though he is considered as a Pre-Romantic, but his writings always reflect the romantic spirit of supernatural and occult, rebellion and revolution, imagination and emotion and of course a return to nature; which is why he can also be called a Romantic poet.

Neville Lancelot Goddard (1905-1972) was a postmodern American author who specifically focused on the Bible, mysticism and self-help. Goddard was highly influenced by the writer and mystic William Blake and believed that God is nothing but our very own human imagination, our consciousness or our awareness. He did not advocate the idea of the existence of an external God but rather believed that we ourselves are Gods creating our own individual realities. Neville’s interpretation of the Bible was in no way religious, instead, he viewed the Bible as a parable of the human psyche. He said that the Bible is a book of psychology rather than history and that it is written purely in the language of symbolism and all its characters are personifications of the laws and functions of mind. In order to understand the significance of its imagery, the reader of the Bible must be imaginatively awake.

Blake’s early idea of imagination served as a precursor to all the Romantic poets, which involved seeing life through romantic, rose-tinted glasses. Blake made a break from the eighteenth-century ideas of Reason and Rationality, which also shows the departure from the rational thoughts to a world of infinite possibilities during the Romantic Age, where imagination ruled the roost. The Romantics rejected Locke’s limitation of perception to physical objects because it deprived the mind of its power to imagine, perceive and create. Blake and Coleridge opposed the sensationalist view of external nature and prepared the way to establish the supremacy of the spirit. The Romantics thoroughly believed that imagination is the most vital activity of the human mind which makes creation possible. It is the very source of divine spiritual energy. Imagination is always likened to God, for it is the creator of our reality. For Blake, any act of creation performed by imagination is divine because imagination is no less than God. Blake’s idea of imagination later also resonates with Coleridge’s definition of Primary Imagination: “Primary Imagination, I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am.” While Coleridge regards Secondary Imagination as the one responsible for creation of poetry, it differs only in degree from Primary Imagination.

Blake intended to awaken the mind from its usual and habitual modes of understanding and perception to a living awareness, a field of infinite potentialities in which life can be lived. Blake believed that the reality that we experience is filtered through us and that life is not given and fixed. Man is not merely a *tabula rasa* on which reality writes itself, instead the contents of one’s imagination is solely responsible for the way one creates and experiences reality. Blake rightly stated: “As a man is, so he sees.”

William Blake was influenced by John Milton’s masterpiece *Paradise Lost* (1667), specifically when Milton used Satan as his mouthpiece to state:

“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

So, when used correctly, the human imagination has the ability to make the world as beautiful as the mystical visions of ecstatic poets like Blake. When we stop experiencing the

things as they are and turn towards our imagination, everything that lives become holy. A true visionary has the creative potential to see the sacred even in daily familiar little things.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* respectively presents how the limitlessness of imaginative abilities during childhood gradually gets suppressed as one experiences the sufferings and miseries of adulthood. In *Songs of Innocence*, Blake sings of the ecstatic joys of childhood and how a child is in complete harmony with God, or his Imagination, free from all discord and irritation. However, in *Songs of Experience*, Blake talks of the fleeting joys of childhood and how man must be tested by the sufferings that life puts them through. Two of Blake's best-known poems, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" illustrates the innocence-experience dichotomy. Blake's poem "The Lamb" belongs to the poetry collection *Songs of Innocence*, where the image of lamb symbolises innocence and purity, with its tender voice and timid nature. G.K. Chesterton, in his book *William Blake* (1910) said: "Blake believed that behind the universe is an eternal image called the Lamb, of which all living lambs, with their eternal innocence, are merely copies," which is to say how the creator of the lamb must be as innocent and timid as the lamb. Blake's poem "The Tyger" which belongs to the poetry collection *Songs of Experience*, shows the tiger as a symbol of the fierce forces in the soul. The tiger seems to be made by some powerful force which uses the hammer, chain, furnace and anvil that will endure through all the trying experiences of life. At the end, Blake merely poses the question: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" but does not attempt to answer it. Thus, the Lamb and the Tiger are mere representations of the states of innocence and of experience in human beings and their transition from childhood to adulthood.

Blake believed in the truth of his visions. He was an inspired seer. He considered a thing to be true because he saw it to be so by his spiritual and intuitive eye. He found the physical reality to be a mere illusion and accepted the imaginative reality as the only reality. He believed in God and in Jesus Christ in the sense that human beings themselves are Gods. In *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, W.M. Rossetti mentions Blake's ideas of God by quoting him: "Jesus Christ is the only God; and so am I, and so are you. I know of no other gospel than the liberty both of mind and body to exercise the divine arts of imagination." Blake found the way to the truth of God in man's imagination and only by complete freedom can man reach his highest powers of imagination. Blake objected to any kind of restraints of orthodoxy in law and religion that could inhibit the imagination. Blake stated that God and Imagination are one and the same and it is the creative and spiritual power in man. God is just a manifestation of the human imagination and apart from man the idea of God has no meaning. Pertaining to his belief that God has no existence apart from man, Blake's *Songs* which describe God's love and care are actually the qualities which human beings themselves display.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, Neville Goddard's ideas on God and Imagination was largely shaped by the ideas of William Blake. Neville Goddard was a firm believer that imagination creates reality and an individual can figure out what he had been imagining by looking at what has been created in his external reality. Neville was a twentieth-century mystic who was very keen on helping people out by delivering lectures for free to enable people to take charge of their own reality and create their life on their own terms through the sheer power of their imagination. Most people are usually unaware of the creative

potential of their imagination and accept life on the basis of the external world. But reality is actually totally malleable in nature and it is only when one unravels this incredible power within oneself that one appreciates the creative force that shapes reality.

Neville's technique of imagination, called SATS or State Akin To Sleep, is a meticulous method of using the powerful imagination to create our reality the way we desire by creating a short and crisp scene, just before going to sleep, in the mind that implies a time where the person already is in possession of his desire. However, Neville says the imaginative act must not be done from the standpoint of wishful thinking. He states that the imagination should be done by thinking 'from the end' and not 'of the end,' meaning that one should not merely think of his desire but instead live in the end goal of already having his desire. The point is to create an unshakeable faith and determination to focus on the crystal-clear desire and refuse to accept any reality other than the one imagined. It is also important to accept but still be indifferent to any unfavourable circumstances in the current reality, knowing that persistence in the assumption of having the desired reality is what it takes to manifest the end goal. Though it is not as simple as it sounds, the imaginal act must be continued until it becomes a natural assumption in the mind. The power lies in holding the desire in mind's eye and persisting in the end result over and over again, which gets impressed on the subconscious mind and as a result has no choice but to be reflected back in the screen of space. This process makes the desire appear so real as if it has already happened that it gets programmed in the subconscious mind which then creates a bridge of incidents to lead us to our desire.

The imagination is either stimulated by the outer world impressions or inner world impressions which then gets externalized in the physical reality. Everything that appears in the physical world finds its source in the imagination, whether the individual does it consciously or subconsciously. The truth is we are always imagining and whatever we imagine, be it consciously or subconsciously, whether internally stimulated or externally stimulated, whether favourable or unfavourable, always finds its replication in the physical realm. Therefore, the goal is to practice conscious use of imagination, ideally before going to sleep to imagine a scene that is in harmony with already having one's heart's desire. In this way, reality shifts and changes to reflect that which had been imagined. This change occurs gradually or even instantaneously, depending upon how natural the imaginal act appears for the imaginator.

Neville Goddard says it is important to take the tones of reality in our imagination and mimic the five senses through sight, sound, touch, smell and taste and find out how it would feel when one already gets their desire. Imagination is often called the unseen reality and one has to trust in the unseen to manifest their desire in the physical reality. There will be moments when doubts creep up from certain beliefs associated with our mind, which is perfectly normal because we have a human mind, but the aim is to release the doubts and resistance in order to enable the power of imagination. These limiting beliefs can be changed through conscious changing of beliefs, through inner voice conversations directed towards the favourable outcome, through positive affirmations and exclusively working with the imagination. It is necessary to create a 'suspension of disbelief,' as the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggested in his *Biographia Literaria*, during the act of imagination in order to exclude the limiting beliefs out of the awareness. This is the reason why all poets of the

Romantic Age have stressed the importance of controlled and vivid imagination which is why poetry takes a completely different turn during this period.

As has already been stated, Neville Goddard used the Bible as a book of psychology instead of merely viewing it as a book of historical records. For instance, in Mark 11:24, we find the statement: “Therefore I say to you, what things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.” In Matthew 8:13, the verse says: “Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” When we choose to analyse these statements from a psychological perspective, Neville’s teachings begin to make sense.

As the Bible says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and since “With God, all things are possible,” and as both Blake and Neville associate the human imagination with God, it is evident that all things are also possible with the imagination. When the Bible is seen from a psychological point of view, it is found that creation happens by means of impregnating the subconscious through the creative and deliberate use of imagination. The subconscious, when penetrated with the image accepts it as an instruction and pushes it out into the realm of space. It constructs a blueprint of the image into our reality. The subconscious mind knows no logic and reasoning unlike the conscious mind which has the faculty of reason and deduction. In his book *Feeling is the Secret*, Neville Goddard talks about the conscious mind as male and the subconscious mind as female. The conscious mind impregnates the subconscious mind with ideas which gives form and expression to them. A major reason why Neville talks about creating the imaginal scene before going to sleep is because the subconscious mind is more active when we are either in a state of being half awake and half asleep or we are totally asleep and dreaming, and the conscious mind is dormant due to which, it is easier for the subconscious mind to accept the impressions from the conscious mind without the limiting beliefs. However, it is also equally important to be aware and observant of our thoughts and inner conversations that goes in our mind throughout the day while we are awake and redirect any opposing thoughts that is not in harmony with our end state.

In his lecture called “Imagining Creates Reality,” delivered in 1967, Neville Goddard brings in William Blake’s concept of how God dwells in man as man’s own wonderful human imagination. Neville says, the how or the means in which the desire comes to fruition is not our concern. Only the end goal should be our concern. The end is where we begin. Blake defined imagination as a spiritual sensation. One has to feel oneself right into the situation of the wish fulfilled and give it all the sensory tones and vividness of reality and then walk as though it were true. As a result, the creative part within us unfurls a chain of events that would lead us to our desire.

Thus, it is clear how Blake had a tremendous impact on Neville Goddard and how Neville’s ideas on the creative use of imagination were largely shaped by the ideas of William Blake. While Blake was a great visionary poet, Neville was a great interpreter of symbols and dreams. Both took cues from the Bible and interpreted it from a visionary and psychological perspective. Back in 1790, when William Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he had to be obscure enough to not be called insane because he was going against religion. He wrapped the truth that he had discovered spiritually into the poetry so he could safely say what he had to say. In case of Neville, his spiritual findings were wrapped in Biblical language

in some ways to make it safer. So, imagination is the only reality. It may seem hard at first to fully accept this but eventually it is understood that everything that one sees or experiences through the five senses in the physical world was knowingly or unknowingly experienced first in one's imagination, which is the creative intelligence within us.

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