

BREAKING THROUGH THE CEILING

André Pelgrims meets Michael Barnett

Michael Barnett was born in London and after 10 years as a successful businessman, he travelled the world, working as a journalist and teacher to provide for himself. In the late seventies, he started the lay psychotherapeutic movement People Not Psychiatry. He then moved on to leading Encounter & Bodywork Groups in England, Europe & America. He became a disciple of Osho Rajnees, but soon started his own movement. With The Wild Goose Company, he runs personal and cosmic energy seminars and he has founded a large and spiritual community called Energy World. Under the new name OneLife, he shares his gift of a cosmic energy connection, allied to a transcendent view of ordinary human life, with people all over the world.

AP: First let me explain what my purpose is for this interview. I have learned so much from your work, and there were so many things that I was able to integrate into the business world, that I wanted to make your voice heard to the people I meet every day, who might not take the time to find you. So Michael, can you tell me: what is your voice?

MB: Well, that depends. When I give a talk at a seminar, I am simply a spokesman, a mouthpiece, and words are fed to me. I don't interfere with them; in a sense, I just open my mouth and say what has been conveyed to me. In my seminars, I always end with a session of Questions & Answers, and people ask me questions, not only about my work but also about the problems in their lives, for instance in their relationships, and I answer from my experience. I do have a lot of experience, I have done many things and been all over the world, I have had many adventures and have been

through a whole range of relationships with all kinds of people. Therefore, I can draw upon my own experience. I acknowledge what I find there and give it a voice. That then, is my own voice, the voice of my experience.

**“We put the ceiling there,
it is man-made”**

AP: What are people looking for?

MB: When they first come, they are looking for some contribution to their life, an insight or a different view on how they see things themselves. They may hope for a bigger picture, or a more succinct view, or a different angle on a particular

situation. But once they have met with me a few times - as many people have - they start looking for more of what they already have: a sense of another reality beyond the one we all accept as the *only* reality. Most people don't see further than the fact that their life may be an adventure, a project, a drama, problematic, or hard, and that's it. But there is more: this is not as far as it goes; they have imposed these limits upon themselves, and haven't explored beyond them. They think they have reached the ceiling, as it were.

“People cannot acknowledge that life may bring surprises”

AP: That's an interesting concept, the ceiling and that other reality. Is there a different way you can describe this ceiling?

MB: People see their life as something in which they are always waiting for things to happen: 'We're going on holiday soon, I'm meeting my girlfriend soon, my new job is starting soon, we're going to the movies tomorrow night.' Everything is ahead of them, and while they are waiting, they simply go from where they are to the event they were waiting for, and then they move on to the next thing that will happen in the near future. This step-by-step approach creates the ceiling; it makes life linear and not multi-dimensional. People cannot

acknowledge that life may bring surprises, and that great things can happen.

AP: What leads people to live that linear life, or what is blocking them from going into the multi-dimensional?

MB: First of all, that is how they have been taught life is. Also, in my work, I notice that people hate the idea that they might have missed something fantastic, something they may now never experience because it's too late. Therefore, they reject anything that suggests their life has lacked something, that it has been limited and that there is something beyond it. Take a doctor, for example, who has worked for twenty, thirty, forty years. Suddenly he gets the chance to see that medicine is very limited and that there is something beyond that: an even stronger and more powerful way of healing. Maybe one in a thousand doctors would be willing to see that, because it would mean that his whole life has been limited, while he thought that medicine and healing was the whole truth. It is easier to reject the other option. It is easier to think that there is nothing beyond that.

AP: You are trying to help people break through that ceiling. How do you feel about the fact that most people still prefer not to look beyond?

MB: I like to use Buddha's word: I feel compassion. But I also like to feel that people who come to my seminars have an inkling that there is something more, and that is a great



incentive for me. In a short period of time, I can give them *concrete experience* that there is something beyond what they thought was the limit of human life. I have been able to help almost everybody I have ever met realize that life as they live it is limited. I can do that in an hour, or even less, even instantly.

AP: It is clear that many businessmen who want to control things, society, innovation, technology, would reject your ideas because there is no financial gain in it, and the ideas might lead to chaos. Many people would have a dilemma: keeping control or letting go? What do you think of that?

MB: After forty years of doing this work, I realize that what I do is quite elitist. Not because of its nature, but because most people are not interested in it, and even if they'd had a little taste of it, they would not take it any further.

“People feel they have so much to lose, and they don't know yet what they can gain”

But I am not the one who puts the ceiling there, who closes the door and says that only certain people are allowed to come in. Everybody can come to my groups, as you know, they are completely open.

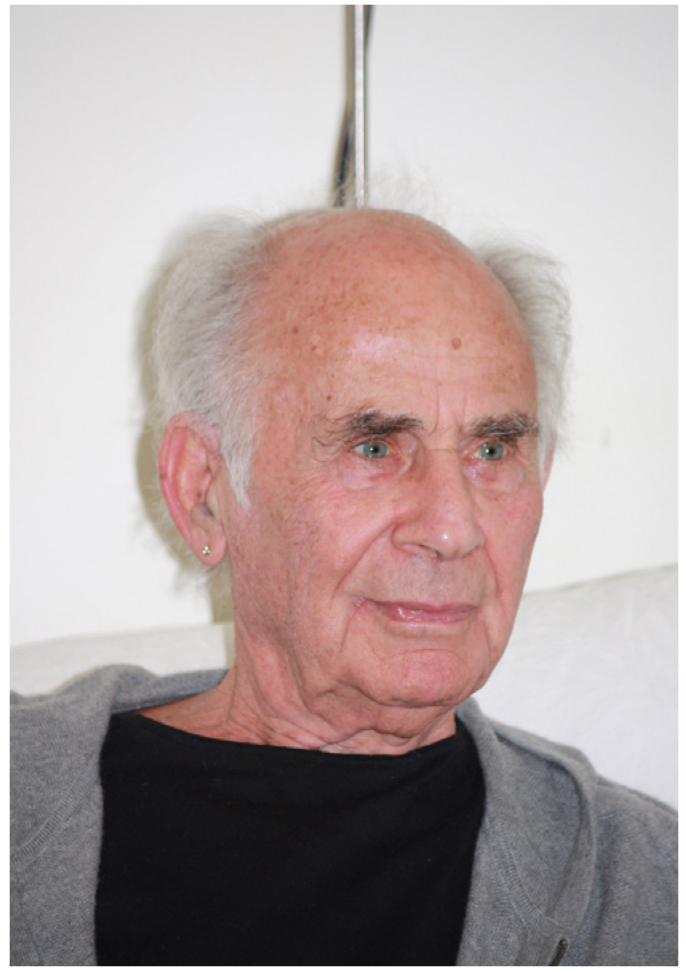
AP: I felt a lot of emotional energy when you said that your work is still elitist. What would life be like if your work was more generally accepted and your ideas were put into practice?

MB: The whole world would be at peace and love would be everywhere, not just between lovers but everywhere. I cannot imagine that anybody who is in that space would be capable of the horrendous things that are happening in the world today, the horrors that make us despair and feel that human life is a disaster.

There are so many people who have no concept of the feeling of connection with others, they just have their own idea of truth and they would kill for it. Or if their conviction is not strong enough to kill for, they will reject different ideas, turn away, scoff, get angry, or attack anybody who seems to live in a different way.

AP: A lot of people are very concerned about the dynamics in society today, the politics and terrorism... Is this part of the bigger picture or does it mean that we are completely lost?

MB: We can go beyond the ceiling if we want, it is not actually concrete, it is not closed off. We put the ceiling there, it is man-made. So many people say to me after they have attended a seminar: 'Michael, it felt like coming home.' How



can that be if they have never been in the place I am talking about? They find it through the work we do together and then they recognize it as home. Something has been awoken in them that had been blocked off and ignored.

AP: Does that mean that this deeper knowledge is present in every one of us because it is part of universal life?

MB: Yes.

“The ego is separation”

AP: I meet people who have come far and who are really willing and longing for that space, but I feel their doubt: 'I will probably lose power, I will lose direction, I will lose...'

MB: People feel they have so much to lose, and they don't know yet what they can gain. You need to have the inner conviction that you will not only gain, but that you will also keep what you thought you had to leave behind. You have to let go, because when you break through the ceiling you are no longer in the room, but when you look down, everything that was contained in the room is still there. You can still go there, and be there.

AP: But what are we so afraid to lose? What is illusion, what is reality?

MB: Spiritual people, travelers who have taken a similar path to mine, often end up saying that all of life is an illusion. It is all just a pantomime, a show, unreal, like drawings on a piece of paper that, in the end, have no real value. They may be right, but if you look at it like that, you separate yourself from the world and I don't want to do that. There is some truth in it; I often have moments when everything seems ridiculous: the way we live and the ideas we base our lives on, the beliefs that lead us to do crazy things, violent things, it is all absurd. I'm not just talking about the crazy individual beliefs of people who can kill completely innocent people and say: 'God is great' afterwards, which is a complete absurdity. But I see the way in which people choose to live their lives as an illusion. I realize that they choose this way because the alternative is to realize that it is all just a play, God's play, and that there is something beyond it, far removed from the things that we consider important.

“Satisfaction is very nice, but it has no comparison with the feeling of love and beauty”

As a famous person once said: all the trouble in the world stems from the fact that people can't just sit quietly at home and enjoy themselves and be at peace with themselves and with everything around them. That may be true, but when you just sit quietly at home, you are no longer involved in life, and if everybody withdraws from the world, the world will stand still. So it may be true, but it doesn't seem realistic.

AP: You have watched many hours of football in your life. If we apply what you are saying, do you have examples of football coaches or trainers where you could see that they have unconsciously transferred their energy?

MB: Sometimes in football and in tennis, you see somebody who is what they call 'in the zone', and that someone has gone beyond the ceiling. They are invested with this energy and then they can't do anything wrong. They are acting from the perfection of what human life can be. As for what I would say to a coach or manager: we all know that teams play best when they are united. They may have their star players, but it is a team game, and after a goal, the players will often say that they had all been working together to achieve it. I would like to work with a team and find ways to make that connection between them even stronger. Players who are open to it, will feel the cosmic connection, as I call it, even stronger. I would say it could create a new level of teamwork.

AP: It is said that in life, people's egos often get in the way. But what exactly is the ego?

MB: The ego is separation, identity, individuality, and people feel that they need the ego in order to feel that they are themselves, not just part of the whole, but an individual with his own identity. But they already have their individual identity. The river is different from the tree, the sail is different from the boat, everything has an individual identity. In Zen philosophy, it is said that the ego or the thought process is like putting a head on top of a head. The mind can only work with the information it contains. But if you believe that you are part of the consciousness and understanding that comes with life, this will work through you, without you having to build a little house of your own and calling it yourself and your views and your ideas. The way this energy, this universal mind, works through people, is different for each individual. So the uniqueness of each of us will still be there. People think they have to establish their own existence, their own views and attitudes, and keep going on about them and argue to make others see their point. They don't understand that theirs is just one of many possible views, and that the others are not all stupid and wrong. People are often convinced that they are the only ones who are right: their ego has created their own view of reality and who they are. All this is unnecessary: it is much better to relax and allow yourself to happen, because you are part of something that is ongoing and continuous.

AP: In politics and in society you often see that things are undermined and destroyed through the ego. I am trying to understand why people feel the need to do that.

MB: They do it because it gives them personal satisfaction. It is very important for people to feel personal satisfaction, with themselves, with their views, their reality, their choices and so on. Satisfaction is very nice, but it has no comparison with the feeling of love and beauty and flow and unity and oneness that you get from breaking through the ceiling and going into what is beyond. Satisfaction is a shallow thing, but people see it as valuable, something they can achieve in this world.

“Politics does not encourage this point of view”

I am not saying that is a bad thing, but it is nothing when compared to the feeling that you are part of a process and you allow your life to be lived, that you just smile and don't make demands, and don't mind if it doesn't work out, you just laugh and carry on with the next thing. But as long as people don't know or explore these possibilities, a feeling of personal satisfaction will be almost as good as it gets.

AP: Are there people in our society, political leaders for example, who feel they want to explore these possibilities?

MB: Politics does not encourage this point of view. To most people, the highest achievement in politics is power. 'Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely,' is a famous statement that I had to write an essay about when I was about twelve years old. It stuck, and I see the truth of it every day: even people who were decent before they got power become corrupt. It happens all over the world. It is the same in so many places: as soon as people get to a place where they *can* be corrupted they become corrupt. In the energy space that I am referring to it is impossible to become corrupt.

AP: When you think of all the teaching you have done, all the people you have met, and you then see on the news what's happening in the world on a daily basis, how do you feel? Do you feel anger?

MB: I read The Times online and then I get The Guardian every day, I also get the weekend editions and I read The Economist and The Spectator every week... But I just have to shrug it off. I am just not interested anymore, because it feels so childish and trivial in so many cases, and even the things that are not childish or trivial, the things that should be significant, are simply not significant to me anymore. I can't explain exactly how this has come about, but I see that I am losing interest in what is going on in the world, while my interest in my work is increasing. I see that there is no way I can stop what I have been doing for so many years, because every time I go into a room and work with a group, it is like the first group, the first time for me.

AP: If people did not take themselves so seriously the world would be a better place. It seems so simple, yet so difficult to achieve.

MB: I once had a person in a group who was quite difficult. At the end of the session he asked: 'Empathy is very important for spiritual teachers, why do you show so little of it?'

“We know the truth and yet we choose to ignore it”

I told him that there is love everywhere in my work, and I said something like: 'Your ego just wants to eat everything up so I'm not going to feed it, and that's the way I show my love.' Then he got this smile on his face, what I call the true smile. And though he realized at that moment that he was playing a game with me and with himself, he wanted to deny it immediately. But you can't stop a true smile.

AP: As if there is something within us that knows and realizes what is true. The smile is a kind of recognition of that realization, something beyond our control.

MB: Yes, it recognizes the truth of everything I say and the truth beyond what I say. We know the truth and yet we choose to ignore it, to take no notice.

AP: It is true. A smile is a little thing that sneaks out.

MB: That's right, a smile sneaks out from the place where love is.

Feedback, questions or a request: andre@takingwing.net



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