



*an interview with*

VERNON HOWARD

MAURICE MORGAN INTERVIEWS VERNON HOWARD

MM: There are very few people in Las Vegas or in Clark County who are free from agony and pain, who aren't trying to find some better way of living with themselves, and perhaps many of us are taking the wrong road to find the answer.

I am fortunate today to be able to have a conversation with a man who has been doing a lot of thinking, writing and teaching about making use of the inner life that God has given us in order to help us break away from our bad thinking and overcome our pain and agony. We're going to come back and talk about that, but first I would like to introduce Mr. Vernon Howard, who is an author and teacher. He lives in Boulder City. We think you will find his words and advice helpful.

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MM: Vernon, in your book you talk about the Mystic Path, and when we use the word "mystic" sometimes people think we're talking about something which is unusual and it really is not. Would you mind explaining what you mean by "mystic" and "mysticism?"

VH: We don't want to get too mysterious about a word, especially the word "mysticism," which simply means, in connection with what we're doing, to examine human nature, to examine spiritual principles, with a very practical aim in mind, which is to find ourselves as we really are, and when doing that, to free ourselves from unnecessary negativity, sorrow, loneliness, and so on. So the word "mystic" is simply used as a general guideline toward a specific aim: using spiritual principles in order to set ourselves free. It has no odd meaning at all. Just a good, ordinary word that we use to apply to our teachings. It's been a well-known word for a long, long time.

MM: Oh, I know it has. But, this mysticism is in a very real sense based on a connection between myself and a power above and beyond me, isn't it?

VH: Most certainly. A power that's above all our petty and puny ordinary thoughts. What we really want to do is get ourselves out of the way, get all our conditioning, all our raging desires out of the way, just so we can make contact with something that has a lot more sense than we have. It is very obvious that we're not thinking very clearly,

very logically, when we have wars, when we have crime and when we have all the heartache that goes on inside the average American or worldwide home. Go into any home when the doors are closed. An awful lot of pain goes on in there. And we're saying that there is a way out of this problem for anyone who will work hard enough at it...the principal work being to get rid of all of our delusions about who we are and what we have to be.

MM: Yes, but how do you do that?

VH: Hard work. Starting with what you and I discussed briefly before the program which is to very intensely and yet quietly, watch everything that is going on inside me at the moment it's going on. For example, if I see someone with more money or a bigger car than I have, who is younger or more popular than I am, I can be aware of that thought going through my mind at the time it goes through.

After a long time of watching it, I can cease to identify with it. That simply means that I no longer call the thought my own. While it is my own presently, because I am trapped by jealousy or loneliness or whatever, the time will come when I can, by ceasing to identify, ceasing to attach myself to this thought or feeling, see that it is something quite foreign to me. Something that has taken possession of me. But with right spiritual principles and with this higher power that we discussed, I can break it off so that I see I don't have to be tied to it at all. This is very hard to believe at the start.

MM: Well, you know I told you before we started our discussion that I have had a somewhat disturbed 3 or 4 weeks, since I've been reading your book.

VH: Yes.

MM: So much so, that I find myself in this whole area of what you call self-observation. I've been re-examining my total life.

VH: Yes.

MM: And getting all mixed up between bad motivations and all that sort of thing. How do you overcome that struggle? Or do you have to live through it?

VH: We have to see that almost all our thoughts, all our motives, all our aims are slanted toward trying to prove ourselves. We discussed that briefly, too. What if we discovered that there was no central core self at all inside that has to prove itself. Wouldn't that at once make me free of wanting to be richer than you, or younger than you? Wouldn't that immediately break down all my pain in trying to prove myself? As a matter of fact, and this is one thing that we teach in our classes: You don't have to be who you think you do. You can destroy all false images, ideas about yourself. Which doesn't mean putting an end to yourself. In fact, this is what many religious teachings are getting at when they say you must put away the old nature, put away the old conditioned thoughts. When the cupboard is empty, then something more valuable can be put in it. But not until the junk is gone. And that's the hard work. Because of all these habits we've had, even of wanting to suffer. People have the habit of suffering to the point where it's impossible to get them to give it up! If you

could give a pink pill and say, here, take this pill and your suffering will be gone. They won't take it. It's too valuable to them! It gives them something to do with themselves. We're saying that theirs is an empty life rather than a rich one.

MM: Is this based upon the fact that God has made each of us different from one another?

VH: Well, we're different certainly physically, and in some of our makeups. But we're the same in the fact that we're lost from reality. If there is real individuality, that would be when we come to see that we can have individuality within this higher state that we're talking about. Certainly all the great religious and philosophical teachers of the ages lived different kinds of lives.

MM: Did you ever read "THE HOUND OF HEAVEN?"

VH: Thompson's poem. Yes, many years ago.

MM: You know we have run and run and run, looking for an answer...

VH: Correct.

MM: His poem says it beautifully: Turn around and the hound from heaven will catch up to you. The Christian heritage says God has been chasing people since the beginning of time.

VH: And we're running away.

MM: And we don't turn around and say, "Here I am."

VH: No, we try to find our own conditioned values that society says are necessary.

MM: Chesterton said that we don't know whether Christianity works or not, because no one has tried it.

VH: Quite right. There's "churchianity" but not the teachings of Christ.

MM: Yes. There's a remark you make---and we talked about it a little bit---that mystical truth, in other words the truth that God gives us, is in us, and if we find it, it can make us free and happy. Why is it that we as a pragmatic people who concentrate on doing things that work do not arrive at Truth?

VH: Because we're so involved in trying to prove ourselves. As we said before, trying to find something that's going to fulfill us. But the odd part is: no matter how much money we get, no matter how much fame, how much family, how many friends, how many boats we have out on the lake, it's very curious that we never look inside and see how lonely we are at night, when the party is over...after the ball is over. We never come to the conclusion that our happiness is simply an exterior thing and we're depending on that boat or upon that wife or husband. There is something in us that tells us that you just can't depend on temporary things like this to give you eternity. But we're afraid to face the fact because we don't want to go into the work of seeing that we're going to have to do a lot of work on ourselves to find the alternative.

VH: (Con't) The alternative is union with something higher than a boat. We're afraid to do work. I'm afraid we're pretty lazy mentally.

MM: Well, it's more than a mental process. It's also an emotional experience.

VH: Quite true.

MM: As well as, ah..."awareness" is in my head and "realization". But it's not just an intellectual practice.

VH: Oh, no. All our intellect, all our thinking, all our thoughts, all our plannings has only kept us in the squirrel cage going in the same circle all the time. And all the time, trying to convince ourselves that if I get this or do that or don't do that, then the pain is going to come to an end. It should be pretty clear to us at a certain point in our lives that thinking is not the way out. But this frightens us, because we say, well, if I can't think my way out then how can I get out of the mess?

MM: Well, I think it's even more dangerous than that. We've passed through the thinking stage, and are now living in the age of feeling. I will do something if it makes me feel good to do it. And that doesn't give me happiness either.

VH: No. No, because the opposite feeling will take over. If I am elated over getting a raise and you didn't, maybe you'll get the raise the next time and I'm going to be depressed. So I work in opposites, elation-depression. Roller-coaster, up and down.

MM: Yes, but as Hershell said in one of his writings, "anyone who lives according to his feelings, is destroying his own free will."

VH: Oh, according to negative feelings, certainly. It destroys the opportunity to find something that's above them.

MM: Yes.

VH: Oh, yes. Most of us I'm afraid live pretty much in loving to be gloomy. Walk down any street, and look at people's faces and you see their sadness. Even if they're doing happy things exteriorly. Whatever they are doing. You can look at their eyes very carefully, look at their manner. You can see that they are in a pretty lonely state.

MM: Do you think that people find it difficult to understand what you're driving at?

VH: Very much at the start, because it goes so much against all their old habit thinking. All their religious thought for that matter, all their philosophies. It is not easy for a person to be told: now look, you face yourself as you are...not as you imagine you are!

VH: (Cont) Don't call yourself loving, now, because it may just be a word in your mind and you may not be loving at all. All of a sudden they get very frightened because they have gone all their lives saying, I must be a loving person...I've helped other people do this or that. So it frightens them to face the fact that maybe they have a lot of negatives in them that aren't loving at all. So they say, I don't think I want to go any further with this.

MM: That's one of the things that has bothered me for the last three weeks. I have a reputation among several people whom I know, of being a quiet, patient man, who tries very hard. I am basically right now, a very angry man.

VH: Yes. Do you understand why?

MM: I'm trying to understand why.

VH: Oh.

MM: It's because, I think, I'm doing things that I really don't want to do.

VH: Correct. False duties.

MM: False duties or trying to prove myself to other people.

VH: Yes.

MM: Or, trying to show everybody what a nice guy I am.

VH: It doesn't work, does it.

MM: No, because in the back of my head, every once in a while, I think very nasty thoughts.

VH: This is the one thing that people begin to learn at an early stage. That they're involved in all sorts of activities which they don't have to do. And the relief is enormous. It's like dropping a load of bricks off their back. Which does not mean that you're unkind to people. It means that you're kind for the first time. Because if I have secret hatred toward anyone, I have that hatred in me, don't I?

MM: Yes.

VH: Outwardly, I smile, and I'm pleasant and all that. But if I'm burning, I'm jealous of other people, that hatred is in me, and unconsciously it's going to spread out there. So I'm harming both myself and that other person with my unconscious hatred. We say: Bring it up! Let's look at it. And once you look at it, through processes we talk about in the classes, it will dissolve. It will dissolve, and you'll set yourself free from self-torment.

MM: I think there is a connection between that and a sense that you think that you're constantly failing at what you're doing, according to your own standards, and yet it seems to satisfy everyone else. Or apparently it does. That becomes also a source of irritation, frustration and anger.

VH: Why should we live up to the false standards of society anyway? What does society demand of us? Why should we live up to what they say we must be? The idea of being successful, for example. So I have a million dollars...what does it do??

MM: Well, I think it goes deeper than that. The whole process for instance of job-finding. Or growing up to become certified, so that you'll be typed to do this kind of work. What you're saying is, in reality, that those certifications are not really that important.

VH: Look, suppose I'm out of work. I need money. Of course, I need money to buy bread and have a roof. I go down to the employment agency or to the factory, whatever, and I go in and say I want to go to work for you, to fill out an application. How does it bother me if they either accept me or reject me? If my ego is not involved, I say, Okay, you don't want to hire me, I'll go somewhere else. I'm working to earn bread and a roof, not to try to be the boss of the factory. Look, I've set myself free, say. I know that the physical body requires food and a roof. I go out and do something to get it. But I'm not going to wreck anybody or be competitive with anybody, because I don't care if you're the boss and I'm the employee. I don't care. All I want is enough to feed the physical body. The rest of me is in this world but not of it. What a relief!!

MM: I can appreciate that. I can also appreciate the difficulty that we face when we begin to think this way. When we have grown up in a culture which is becoming more certification orientated now than it ever was.

VH: Yes, that's true.

MM: More specialized. Whenever people ask me what my education is, I never tell them. I refuse. If I introduce people to speak to a group, I never give their biography of what schools they went to. I want to know what they're going to talk about. That's all. But, this is not satisfying the general notion of certification.

VH: The individual is going to have to make up his mind to start to go against society. Not rebelliously, not angrily. But begin to see that he as an individual is what is important to him, and not sell his soul to society's false demands. This is what every religion teaches. This is what all great philosophers taught...that very thing. But most people are afraid to step out. They are afraid to be criticized. And so they play it safe inside their little dark house...staying afraid.

MM: How can I begin to learn to feel great...every minute of the day?

VH: The first step is to see what is causing the pain, in which you're not feeling great. We covered some of them, loneliness, jealousy, a competitive spirit, depending on someone else for my happiness. How's that for a good start? I look inside myself, and I see that if you don't phone me or if this doesn't happen, the letter doesn't come, whatever, then I feel lonely. Why don't I find out that I'm depending on something outside myself to make me feel good? If I can do just that much I've made a good start on it. Then I can see, well, there's nothing wrong with you phoning me, nothing wrong with the letter coming,

VH: (Con't) nothing wrong with the good news, whatever it might be. Nothing wrong with that. But I am not going to have my spirit attached to it, so that I have to have them in order to feel right.

MM: Don't panic waiting for the telephone to ring?

VH: Something like that, yes.

MM: I was thinking of that a couple of weeks ago. You're not sure what the other guy is going to do. And so you're waiting for him to call and tell you what he is going to do. If you were free, you would let him go do whatever he wants to do.

VH: Oh, yes. See the real morality in this sort of an inner life. You are not putting demands on anyone. You are not saying you'd better behave the way I want you to, or else. There are no threats in it at all.

MM: You know, if we're going to get somewhere with this thought of removing ourselves from the pain and agony of living up to standards outside of ourselves, where can I get the help that I personally might need? For instance, in developing some way to open my soul to God and to get rid of these things?

VH: We have a number of very simple, practical exercises to begin to make us aware of ourselves...as we are...so that we can begin to change ourselves as we are. One of them, and you'll see how practical this is, is to simply slow down your life, slow down your mind, slow down your reactions, even slow down the way you walk across the room sometimes. Simply to see that for the first time in your life, you realized that you were rushing through life. Physically slow down. If you walk at a certain pace across the room, slow down to half the pace. This should produce a little bit of awareness in you, because you never see the usual. You only see the unusual. So by deliberately going at half the pace, you suddenly become aware of yourself, which you never were before. That puts a little bit of a jolt in you that makes you see that you are different than what you thought you were. This begins the whole process of self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-understanding. Just like an automobile. If the motor breaks down, you can't fix it without understanding the carburetor, the spark plugs, and so on. By understanding, self-knowledge, you can begin to put the parts back together correctly...repaired. Or rather, Truth will, God will.

MM: Well, I have a little problem in this because we have grown out of an age of rationalism into an age of feeling. And now we're going to sort of open ourselves to the power that God has placed within us and the power that God is willing to share with us, knowingly. How do I determine whether or not I am really beginning to share in that mysterious power of God?

VH: Shall I tell you?

MM: Yes.

VH: Become fed up with your life as it is now. FED UP!! Now, I did not say get angry at the world, or be bitter against the world for what they might have done to you. The world has done it to every one of us, to you, to me to all of us.

MM: I thought I did it to myself?

VH: Well, no. We do it to ourselves, but the world does it too. We've all been brought up in this kind of a world. When you begin to see that it's this kind of a world, and that you don't want any more to do with it, because you don't want to suffer that way yourself any more, that is certainly a very special kind of prayer. And we'll talk about God. This is a very special kind of prayer that God recognizes. Now, here is a human being, the prodigal son, the prodigal daughter, who is away from home, who is tired of wandering out in the wilderness. Tired of living as he has been. Tired of pretending that he is happy, tired of pretending that he is going to go somewhere in life and be happy all the time. The perception of the beginning of pretense is a prayer. Not all the people in the world pray this kind of prayer. But seeing this honesty, this cutting self-honesty, God recognizes that, and says, now here is a person who is ready to begin to understand that he doesn't have to suffer unless he so chooses. This is the beginning of the answer to his prayer to something that is higher than human pain. Unless a person gets very, very tired, but at the same time turns not toward the bottle, not toward excitement, not toward the new boat, but turns toward something inward---the Kingdom of Heaven is within, right?---turns toward something inward, then he will see something different happening to him. Something he can feel authentically. And it will be very individualistic.

MM: You know, we've only begun to scratch the surface of this topic and we're going to have to continue it next week, but I think it might be useful for us to mention, for this week, that it is possible for people to get help from you as a teacher.

VH: Yes. We have classes four times a week in Boulder City, and I'm in the phone book: Vernon Howard.

MM: I think what Vernon and I have talked about is terribly important. And I hope while you're thinking over what we have talked about, you will begin to look into yourself and try to discover whether or not you suffer unnecessarily pain and agony that you don't need. And that you need to begin to look for inner peace without copping out with some kind of extraneous substance or covering up with anger or false joy.

Thank you, Mr. Howard.

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