

# THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

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# NEVILLE

*The*  
POWER  
*of*  
IMAGINATION



THE NEVILLE GODDARD TREASURY

NEVILLE

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# INTRODUCTION

*Neville: A Portrait*

by Israel Regardie



## NEVILLE: A PORTRAIT\*

*By Israel Regardie*

ear Broadway on 49th Street in New York City is the Old Actor's Church. Should you go there on Wednesday, Friday or Sunday night of any week, either winter or summer, I can promise you more than a pleasant evening. It will be a highly instructive evening. You will hear Neville discourse on Truth. A young man, not more than 36 years of age, he is a dynamic, handsome and most charming personality. He has a winning smile—thoroughly and completely disarming. His presentation of truth is forceful and sincere. Charged with feeling, and reflecting his own integrity and purposefulness, he communicates himself readily from the pulpit.

Four to five hundred men and women flock to the Old Actor's Church on each of these nights that he talks. How much of his evident popularity is due to his charm and how much to his dynamic orations, is not for me to say. Some, however, have hazarded an opinion. Some suspect it is the former. Nevertheless this judgment does not in the least detract from the value and worth of what he is impelled to teach. His method and content of teaching are entirely too good and provocative readily to appeal to so many and to such different varieties of people. However that may be, his readers and the listeners must be the judges. He does get a crowd—and he satisfies most of them.

Neville is not a native American. He comes from the Barbadoes, British West Indies, having been born in a planter's family in the year 1905. Evidently he felt a cane-sugar plantation was no place for him. A wider

sphere of action for imaginative flight and spiritual understanding were necessary to him. His spirit craved other than a small island off the mainland of the U. S. So at the age of 17 he came to this country to study Drama.

“A Man’s Faith Is His Fortune,” he wrote at a much later date—it was the title of a book of his. Evidently he had unbounded faith in himself to have set off youthfully on the unknown possibilities of a career in an unknown land. His confidence has stood him in good stead, since it has brought him through, to a position where he has become a public figure. No doubt there are greater heights of achievement and fame awaiting him in the future.

The year 1925 found him beginning his theatrical career at the Hippodrome, which not so long ago was torn down, removing from New York one of its old landmarks. The destruction of this building was also a milestone to Neville’s life. It coincided with his departure from the world of the theatre. He entered a totally different public life. Yet it was a life which at the same time bore certain resemblances to his old dramatic career—as we shall see.

He has had a wide and varied experience for a young man, this Neville. In 1925 he sailed for England with a dancing partner, and travelled widely in that country. It was there that he became openly interested in the study of the occult and mysticism.

Whilst in England, he met Arthur Begbie who introduced him to the world of psychical research, giving Neville his first taste of the spiritualistic seance. It left him, I should say, a little bit flat, but nonetheless, he knew afterwards, that he was definitely embarked upon a long journey. Of that he was sure, in spite of his dislike of the atmosphere and the procedure of the seance. Shortly after his return to America in 1926, to continue his theatrical career, his interest in mysticism became keener and keener, coinciding with a waning interest in the theatre.

I want to emphasize that Neville was a success in the dramatic world. He did not retire from the stage to metaphysics because he was a flop. Not at all. His salary from the theatre at times ran to \$500 per week—a sum not usually

earned by failures. This is important to know. It will help dispel the popular notion that only failures and “life-dyspeptics” go in for metaphysics.

It was around this time that he became associated with one of the several so-called Rosicrucian bodies. I should like to write at length on this subject of Rosicrucians and Rosicrucian organisations. However, I shall have to leave that for another occasion despite the fact that it is a fascinating subject for research, and a lovely topic for a disquisition on the foibles of human nature. Anyway, he not only became a member of this body and studied with it, but embarked upon a definite spiritual and moral discipline, imposing upon himself a regime of abstemious living, sexual continence, and a vegetarian diet. It was enough surely, to break a stronger person than him. From a husky strapping fellow of 176 pounds, he rapidly fell in weight to about 135 pounds. Not only was his efficiency impaired, but he became subject to fainting fits, and had long spells of weakness and languor. At the same time, probably because of the dietary and this irrational mode of life, and undoubtedly because of the neurological disturbances which would accompany such a procedure, a number of psychic experiences occurred to him, including involuntary astral projection and momentary clairvoyant glimpses.

His was a successful theatrical career. I repeat this and emphasise it. He had featured in six Broadway plays, and had travelled all over the country from one theatre to another, and his income ran into several thousand dollars per year. But because of his mystical predilections, and his declining interest in the theatre, he finally withdrew from the theatrical career that he had so laboriously struggled to build up. It became a closed episode of his life. Yet the experience of the theatre gave him something that enabled him in later years to succeed in his newly-chosen work. His personality and his teaching are both highly dramatic.

We are not to imagine that various events in a man's life are out of relationship with one another. A Barbadoes plantation, dramatic school, theatre, professional dancing, and teaching metaphysics—while these seemingly point to a discrepancy in the continuous line of his life, that

appearance is only due to our lack of insight. It is one of the characteristics of our age that we seek for superficial consistency, failing to realise that there may be deeper levels of reality, hidden from view, where the true line of continuity may be seen. A man's life is in reality a continuum. Regardless of the number of breaks that may appear in the line of his life, a true continuity does exist. We must not imagine for one moment that growth and development persist anywhere in nature in a straight line. The process of growth involves the idea of a spiral, of an apparent occasional backward trend, of appearances and disappearances, of surges and retreats, of endeavors and new endeavors. The Hegelian dialectical concept may well be the true story behind all human endeavor. There is a forward movement succeeded by its utter negation. Hard upon this, however, there is a manifestation of an entirely new order. Such a cycle persists throughout the whole of nature, and man is certainly no exception to the world order. If we bear such a concept in mind, we will be enabled to understand far more readily the intelligent direction of our lives—and in particular, the work and life of Neville.

In this Rosicrucian body, Neville remained for many years as a student and probationer. But his was finer stuff than this. This cult with its narrow pseudo-occult-religious dogmatism, its lack of imagination and real spiritual achievement, left him cold within. For him there was really nothing there. Life initiated him into its mysteries far more successfully than this occult order. Gradually, he drifted away from it, finding his way, in response to an inner need, into the private sphere of an eccentric Ethiopian rabbi named Abdullah. Here he studied the Qabalah, a Jewish form of mysticism, and obtained illuminating insights into the books of the Bible. As he himself says in *Your Faith Is Your Fortune*, "The Bibles are psychological dramas representing the consciousness of man." And again, "If man were less bound by orthodoxy and more intuitively observant, he could not fail to notice in the reading of the Bibles that the awareness of being, is revealed hundreds of times throughout this literature." He developed an utterly new approach to the whole problem of man and his relationship with the pulsating world of

spirit around him. Entirely satisfied for the first time, he became a devoted disciple of this giant Ethiopian rabbi. His imagination became tremendously stimulated, envisioning life in an entirely new way.

No longer was he confined to the sterile formalistic occult philosophy of this moribund Rosicrucian body. Now he conceived of God and man being entirely one. And it altered the whole course of his life. The core of man's being was God—even though man in his blindness and ignorance did not know it. Outside of man there was nothing that man had not himself created. The entire world was a picture world, projected from within. The Ethiopian soon restored balance to his eager groping mind. Overboard went his fanatical vegetarianism, his continence, and his crankiness—and he became that rare anomaly, a human being. And he is very human this Neville, very human indeed. With the development of this phase of his personality, he was able to loosen his hold upon the hem of Abdullah's skirt, to become a teacher in his own right.

It was in February 1938, then, that he commenced his very successful career in New York City. At first he met in a small room in a public building in New York, where dozens of petty little lecturers held their sway, nightly. Merely a handful of people attended his lectures at the beginning. But as his ability grew, and he gained confidence in talking and expounding, so his audiences grew. Now, as I mentioned above, you may go to the Old Actor's Church three nights a week, and find a tremendous and enthusiastic audience. He has not yet achieved nation-wide fame, but no doubt this will come in time.

In his talks on metaphysics, he reveals the Bible as a psychological rather than as a historical document of the law governing the expression of life. He has a genius for interpretation, and unconsciously employs an exegetical technique that would surprise many a psychoanalyst and professional interpreter of dreams. For example, he takes Dumas' novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and interprets it as would a psychoanalyst a dream. His interpretation of the story reveals that Edmond Dantés is really Everyman, adrift on the stormy seas of life, trying to steer himself into some haven of

security, and attempting to find a refuge against the storm. The old priest with his wisdom and understanding, whom Dantés discovers in the prison, really represents man's awareness of being, that ancient unconditioned self, locked up since time began within the bosom of man. And at the end, after Dantés escapes in the sack intended for the body of the old priest—now dead, because Dantés possesses his insight—and finds the buried treasure, he is able fully to express himself, and impose his will upon the world. “Edmond Dantés becomes the Count of Monte Cristo. Man becomes Christ.”

In another place, he analyses the nature and character of the Apostles. He concludes that they represent the twelve qualities of mind which can be controlled and disciplined by man. When discussing the story of the disciples' feet being washed by Jesus, he states that “the foot symbolises the understanding which must be washed of all human belief or conceptions of itself by the Lord.”

The story of Daniel, again, is the story of every man. Those lions that Daniel found in the den are the lions that beset our pathway through life, the problems of money, health, and relationships with other people. These beset all of us. Most of us, in the face of such predicaments, become so preoccupied with the problem, so brow-beaten by poverty, sickness, or marital difficulties, that we are unable to find a solution to them. The problem obsesses us. It fascinates us. Daniel decided to turn his back upon the lions, resorting to prayer. That is, he turned his gaze inwards, to his I AM consciousness, his real self which alone is capable of solving such problems. And so Neville concludes his exegesis by insisting that here too is our way out, and that what worked for Daniel, will work for us too.

I ought to mention at this juncture that during the course of his lecturing career, Neville has written and published a considerable number of pamphlets dealing with specific points of his system. Some of them explain his attitude towards particular themes and problems of the Bible. His applications of this theory extends to every phase of Biblical theme, from that of the world's creation to the Crucifixion of Christ, from the meaning of circumcision to the significance of each one of Jesus' twelve disciples.

Latterly these essays have been gathered together and incorporated into a single volume entitled *Your Faith Is Your Fortune*. It is upon that volume that I have drawn extensively in order to present what I understand Neville to mean.

However, just as sometimes one feels that the psychoanalyst uses more ingenuity than insight in elaborating a meaning from an involved dream, so occasionally one feels that Neville is hard-pressed extracting psychological meaning from certain sections of the Bible. That is the difficulty in using, for the thin end of one's psychological wedge, a book which is so crammed with heterogeneous and diverse stuff that is clearly not psychological. However, he presents in a simple and practical manner the advantage of realising the identity of man's own consciousness with God. As he himself writes, "I AM the eternal Nothingness containing within my formless self the capacity to be all things. I AM that in which all my conceptions of myself live and move and have their being, and apart from which they are not."

Neville's choice of the phrase I AM to imply that underlying god-like essence in man, is dependent upon several reasons. The most obvious is the self-assumed name of God, which was given to Moses before that fateful visit to Pharaoh—I AM that I AM. This phrase is also repeated throughout Scripture in the same abstract sense.

But apart from this, Neville uses it because if we would define ourselves at all, we must use I AM before we can further qualify it in any way. Before I can say what I am, I must first have said I AM. Before I can assert that I am a man of such and such an age, of a certain race, residing in a certain country, of a certain profession and status, I must say I AM. Not that I am this or that, but that simply I AM. I can condition or formulate this limitless expanse of abstraction by enclosing it within the limitations of sex, age, race, country, profession, etc. But it still remains there, unconditioned, unformed and unlimited. So also is the basic self of man. It can express itself through a variety of masks, play an infinite number of parts, adopt a maximum of possible rôles. But it remains nevertheless, unconditioned and unformed—I AM.

In reality Neville is an atheist. It is conceivable that both he and his audiences would be shocked to learn of my conclusion. Yet he himself clearly and definitely states that outside of man, there is no God. "If man would give up his belief in a God apart from himself, recognise his awareness of being to be God, he would transform his world from a barren waste to a fertile one of his own liking."

Here he allies himself in philosophic principle with the old Buddhist reform. Gautama was a rebel against orthodoxy, against Brahmanism, against the Hindu church. And in passing, let me say that there is more than one correspondence too between Neville's formulation of God, and, let us say, Vedanta philosophy. I refer the interested reader to Swami Vivekananda's book *Gnana Yoga* for a first-rate presentation of Vedanta, which will certainly bear comparison with the ideas contained in *Your Faith Is Your Fortune*. In the chapter on Christian Science, I have given a resume of Vedanta philosophy.

The Buddha had realised that so long as man relied upon God and the church with its priests for help of any kind, man leaned upon an already broken reed. In fact upon a reed that had no tangible existence. It was a palpable lie. If help was to be obtained, in order to solve any of the urgent problems that press upon one in the world of everyday life, only one thing could be relied upon—man, and his inner consciousness. That is the ultimate reality. All else may be explained away, may be challenged, may be denied. This alone remains.

By realising this fact, one is enabled to draw upon secret reserves of strength, of inspiration, find a hidden source of salvation which could be demonstrated and applied to every experience in the hard cold world of reality. This fundamentally is Buddhism and the creed of Buddha. God, or the Wisdom of enlightenment, is inherent in the mind of each one of us. It is the "essence of mind which is intrinsically pure." Unfortunately it has become obscured. The problem is to clear away this obscurity, this delusion under which the mind works, to discover the light of true consciousness which exists beneath.

And so with Neville. Atheist that he is like Buddha, in denying validity to some extra-cosmic personal god—an aged senior with beard, capriciously pulling strings in some far-off corner of the universe—he states categorically that in man is an unconditioned consciousness which is uncreated, unmade, unformed, and unbound—God. If one can only find God in oneself by an ecstasy of feeling, in interior states of prayer and meditation, one also becomes free like God. Poverty, sickness, and need fall away. They are only the products of conscious thinking and feeling, the products of the mind that has divorced itself from its divine roots. These things are the results of denial—the denial that man’s consciousness in its deepest levels, in what we call the subconscious level, is God and able to create and destroy man’s world. It can destroy the present world in which we all live, of sickness, sorrow and need of one kind or another. And it can create happiness, health, and fullness and plenty of every conceivable kind, on every plane of existence.

Many people, by accepting and applying the principle that he has disclosed to them, have experienced what they at first thought were miracles. This is no new doctrine that he has taught. It is ages old. Both the doctrine and its implications have been known and taught since time began. But they are new to some people. They have heard it for the first time. And, credit must be given to him, Neville “can put it over” extremely well, with simplicity and with force.

On the other hand, some other people find themselves intellectually in sympathy with his teaching, yet discover that they are unable to “make it work.” They struggle and struggle, and still no results are forthcoming. These fall by the wayside, attacking him and his system—even becoming vindictive. Some of these suggest that when some of Neville’s disciples obtain satisfactory results, they do so only because they have been hypnotised by Neville.

The sort of person who can make this sort of statement, has not in the least understood the fundamental psychological factor in Neville’s teaching, nor the fundamental fact about Neville himself. It is a very simple fact. Neville is a dancer.

I have watched Neville dance. He is superb. He has a magnificent body. I have already remarked that he has charm and is very handsome. When he dances, his muscles move with that lithe suppleness which one associates with the trained athlete. His every movement suggests power in repose, the effortless ease of the cat, with its undisguised sensuality and force of movement. As an artist, he knows the value of alternate relaxation and tension. Above all, he knows the dance. His metaphysics and his system, are a dance,—a dance of words, a dance of mind, a dance of feeling. And unless you can dance with him, his system is likely to be unproductive. His system is in reality strictly personal—an offshoot of his own personality. To make it work as he has done, you too must become like him.

An artist in every fibre of his being, he has the capacity to sink himself whole-heartedly and imaginatively in the task at hand. He is an artist, and has passion and fire on hand at every moment. The artist in him is truer than his desire to expound publicly the system he does expound. He has the ability spontaneously to apply his own teaching. It is quite another story, however, to teach the practical elements of his system to those who are not artists, who have not his imaginative or emotional capacity to engage in this ecstatic dance of the mind which evidently means so much to him.

Possibly, in his audiences, there are individuals here and there having the necessary artistic and mystical temperament—identical, really—not only to absorb the truth as Neville presents it, but make immediate application of it. To “demonstrate” successfully, as the cliché goes. The average person with his commercial prosaic mind, his unimaginative sterile attitude to life, uninspiring employment and home, is incapable of realising that inner-spiritual being, which Neville implies by “I AM.” Such a person cannot evoke that intensity of feeling, that temporary madness that Neville demands of all those who would apply his teaching successfully. A fiery white-hot passion is but a phrase to them. Consequently, in being unable to whip themselves into such an emotional frenzy, which can be focused in certain pre-determined directions, his words fall on barren ground.

Yet, in one sense this is not their fault. Life has dealt hardly with them, I do not blame them in any way. I am full of sympathy for them in their plight. Of all the metaphysical systems with which I am acquainted, Neville's is the most evidently magical. But being the most magical, it requires for that very reason, a systematised training on the part of those who would approach and enter its portals. It requires a dynamic alteration of viewpoint—a revolutionary turning around of the mind. An entirely new and radical attitude to life and living must be developed, not merely intellectually, but emotionally. Above all, it demands that the student must learn the gentle art of relaxation—not by turning the back on body and ignoring its demands, but by learning the simple technique of so doing. Neville knows the art of relaxation instinctively. He is a dancer, and a dancer must, of necessity, relax. Hence I believe he does not fully and consciously realise that the average person in his audience does not know the mechanism of relaxation, does not know how to “let go.” It is true he speaks of relaxing. “Close your eyes and feel yourself to be faceless, formless and without figure. Approach this stillness as though it were the easiest thing in the world to accomplish. This attitude will ensure your success.” But for the average person, this is hardly adequate. A little more detailed scientific instruction is imperative.

Not only so, but the average individual does not know how to evoke powerfully his feelings and emotions. He does not understand the means whereby he can arouse this passionate intensity so necessary to complete identification with or recognition of the Unconditioned faceless, formless consciousness of which Neville speaks.

To some extent it is possible to succeed more easily with women than with men. Women are essentially more emotional than men. The average male is entirely repressed from an emotional point of view. From early boyhood he is taught, either directly or indirectly, that it is “sissyish” to show his feelings. By early adolescence, his feelings are pretty well hidden. So that when he achieves true adulthood, he has no feelings at all. His emotions are totally repressed into the dark hidden depths of his unconscious life, and he is completely and thoroughly inhibited. Even his mind must suffer from such

violence. Never must we forget that the emotional life is the mainspring of every other phase and aspect of our lives. What wonder that we become ill and impotent and needy, both physically and mentally?

This is the problem of the average adult approaching all forms of metaphysics—the problem of the male primarily, but to some extent true of the female too. In the face of such repression, where violence has been done to the emotional life, and all feelings have been inhibited, a serious question arises. What course of practise may be engaged upon that will evoke from out of the depths, the emotions so necessary to the cultivation of this passionate intenseness which conduces to spiritual experience and the ability to “demonstrate”?

Neville, if not totally adequate to this situation, is at least wise. Whether he did this deliberately or intuitively, it is not possible to determine. But his step certainly serves a useful purpose. He knows that the average person approaching his lectures has had a religious training of some kind. This may have been forgotten and strayed from. But invariably it remains in the individual’s unconscious in some form or other. Emotional intensity is of necessity associated with this early infantile training in religion. There were the first prayers that mother taught us all when we prayed in love and reverence with her. Early experiences in Sunday school and the first feelings of awe and wonder and love that arose with them—such memories are retained, never forgotten, and are stored within. Hypnotic experiment reveals the tenacity of even the most trivial events in our minds. Neville therefore casts a magical cloak of religion about his system, advocating the study of the Bible as revealing this psychological drama of which he speaks. In using the Bible, he draws directly upon the level of consciousness which goes far back into time for most of us—to infancy when the emotions were still powerfully active in our small childish worlds. In drawing upon this level, which he does through the use of the Bible, he draws by association upon all the power and energy which are tied up in that stratum of our minds. This he stimulates and whips into dynamic activity, so that it will accomplish the purpose of which his system speaks.