

# FEEDING EVERYONE

## Interview with Dennis weaver

---

**MM:** We're very interested in the Life Project. Could you tell our readers what it is and what its short and long term goals are?

**DW:** "LIFE" is an acronym for "Love Is Feeding Everyone." It's a feeding program that we established here in Los Angeles to help feed the hungry and the needy in this particular area.

It's a simple idea. On a daily basis, we pick up from super markets food that would normally be discarded: dated food, dairy products, deli products, baked goods, produce that is cosmetically unsellable, and also sometimes damaged products: damaged cans, for example. These foods are still totally nutritious and good but are not as marketable as the stores would like them to be. We take that food to a distribution center. We have two of them at the present time — one in Eastern LA and one in South-Central LA.

Although there's a tremendous amount of the perishable foods that are very good - they don't supply a well-rounded diet. So, a second prong to our program is our food drives. Volunteers go to a super-market, stand outside and tell customers coming in what the LIFE Project is and what we're trying to do, and to give them a little leaflet which explains the items that we can use and that we're a tax deductible, non-profit organization. The volunteers ask the shoppers if they would buy an extra bag of beans or an extra canned item or an extra bottle of oil to put on our table outside the supermarket.

Really, we're a delivery service to the hungry in LA. All the food is taken to a food distribution center. It is packaged, cleaned and sorted into large orders, which are picked up once a week by an agency - such as a church, a shelter for battered women, or a drug rehabilitation facility. Sometimes we also service soup kitchens on skid row.

These agencies are all tax-deductible charities, accredited by the United States government. They come to us once a week, pick up a large order and take it back to their headquarters. There, it is broken down into small orders by volunteers from the community.

The agency identifies the hungry people in its particular neighborhood. It's a very simple operation as far as identifying the people that are hungry; there's not a lot of bureaucracy or red tape. It's done by agencies that deal directly with people in the neighborhood.

That's basically our program. It sounds very simple, but it hasn't been easy to implement. We started out feeding 5 hundred people a little over 3 years ago and we're now feeding over 23 thousand people - and we're doing it every day - 365 days a year.

We're processing through our centers about 160,000 pounds of food a month, which is a good number. We certainly are feeding many people.

*MM: Do you see this expanding?*

**DW:** Yes. We made one expansion. We duplicated our original program in East LA, in South-Central LA. We're working right now to get another center started in San Fernando Valley. And, I just met with people in Westside LA last night, the Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, we're thinking of our fourth one in that area.

We'd like to give other communities the benefit of what we've learned. The program can work any place in the US where there are super markets, because they always have a lot of waste. So, in view of that, we are creating a How-To Manual with a video film that will show people exactly what we do and, sometime down the line, help them to get started with programs in other cities. We will probably do a seminar to bring together people from other cities so they can observe what we're doing here and ask questions as they have an onsite experience of the program.

*MM: How long do you project be-fore the manual and the video tape will be available?*

**DW:** We'll be finished this year. We have all the pieces to the manual. We're looking now for a company, a corporation or an individual to fund that - for somewhere in the neighborhood of 15-20 thousand dollars, which is really not expensive at all when you're talking about both items. We get a lot of creative people to volunteer their time and talent. Some costs a normal video producer would have we won't.

*MM: What is your personal philosophy on world hunger?*

**DW:** Well, I personally feel that food is one of the most basic rights that we have as human beings. I look upon it as a right, it's as essential almost as air or water. It's the most basic of our rights, in a sense. If that one is destroyed, if that right is not there for everybody, then all of our other so-called rights almost become a mockery. The urge to survive is within everybody. It's the strongest drive that we have and we will do anything to fulfill it. And if it means that we destroy the so-called other basic rights in the process, we will do it or we will trample over all man made laws to do it. What I'm really saying is that if people do not have access to the means of fulfilling that right - to food - there is no possibility of true peace and true stability in the world today. That applies on all levels, whether family, community or inter-national.

There's no shortage of food, that's the irony of it! With the proper delivery system, the world is capable of feeding many more than are on the earth at this moment. There's so much waste. It's not distributed properly. It's not a question of us having a shortage, and saying, "Well, some have got to do without while others eat." Shortage is not the problem.

*MM: Many people - like yourself - are motivated to involve themselves in altruistic projects. What do you feel motivates a person to, say, bring food to others?*

**DW:** That's a large question! What motivates people to do what they do is what you're saying. Boy, to find the answer to the end of that string is difficult. You have to go back many many lives to have any realization at all as to what we are at this moment, because we are an accumulation of our thoughts, actions, environmental forces, habits, tendencies, moods - everything!

We all come into this world with certain natures and certain tendencies and certain feelings. One of those certain feelings, of course, which is very important to the survival of humanity is a caring feeling - that we should care for each other. Some people come into this world with that consciousness stronger than others. In this life, events either strengthen or weaken it.

I suppose your question is aimed at what has happened to me in this life, that I'm aware of, that makes me do what I do. Many things happen to us in the formative years which shape and effect us. It's so important for young people to be in a very creative and helpful environment when they're young and to associate with people that will inspire them and effect them in a very affirmative way.

When I was young I spent some time growing up on a farm, a very important experience for me. Food was a natural thing; we grew it. It was not only what enabled us to live day to day, it was also income for us. I learned about drought, lack of rain, that food could become scarce. There were times when we went without. I saw hunger. I went through the Great Depression and there was a tremendous amount of hunger.

As a kid in Missouri, one of my jobs was to go to the bakery in town and stand in line for day-old bread, because you could get it for a nickel a loaf. In the summer time, my mother would take my brother and me to California and Oregon to pick apricots and peaches, or work in the cutting sheds — anything to get money to eat. I didn't realize I was going through hard times. I thought everybody was going through it, so it was kind of a natural experience for me. I wasn't at all destroyed by that experience, I think I was probably strengthened by it. I think a certain kind of adversity is important for us. But I do re-member the lack. Perhaps those experiences helped shape what I'm doing.

You know people ask me that question a lot. Why do I do what I do? Or why am I involved in trying to feed the hungry? And I'm always stopped, because the answer seems so simple.

I'm doing it because there are people that are hungry! It just seems like a natural thing to do. I realize that I'm in a position where I can do it. We all have a certain amount of power in this world, or a certain amount of ability. We play a certain part - some have access to money, some have great talent, some have - whatever it is they have. And then, there are others who have very little power and ability to feed or educate themselves, little ability to do whatever is necessary in life. I think people in a position of power have a responsibility to do something for and help lift those that are in a position of no power. I just think that's what should happen in life.

In my next life, it may be changed all around. I may have no power and I'll be looking for somebody to give me a helping hand.

**MM:** I know that you're very involved in meditation. Do you feel that meditation in some way relates to this caring attitude?

**DW:** I'm laughing because it relates to everything; it effects everything. It gives you a sense of caring, a sense of humility, a sense of gratefulness, because in meditation you experience that which satisfies you like nothing else in this world can satisfy you. When you receive the benefit of that, you want to do something to please it. The thing that you intuitively understand and know is that it will please that experience, that consciousness, that presence of God if you will, that you feel in meditation, it will please that if you help others.

We're all one in that conscious-ness; we're not separated. You realize that your good is not separated from the good of others and that your hurt is not separated from the hurt of others. You try to look more to the large self, rather than to the small self. That becomes your attitude about life, the more you feel that all-fulfilling consciousness within you which is in each and every one. What makes us alike and connected is the spirit within.

**MM:** What type of meditation do you do? **DW:** I'm a follower of Paramahansa Yogananda. And, the highest technique of meditation taught by him is Kriya Yoga. But he is quick to emphasize that it is a technique, it is a means to an end. The goal of all meditation is the same: God Communion.

True meditation is concentration on the presence of God Within.

Any technique that helps you reach that state is very worthwhile.

**MM:** It seems that you see Kriya Yoga as compatible with other forms of yoga and other forms of meditation.

**DW:** Oh, absolutely.

We're all a little different, we're all in a little different state of consciousness. No two peas are alike and no two human beings are alike. And no two human beings are at the same exact level of development toward going back to that di-vine oneness which we're all after. One technique will perhaps work better for one person or is needed at their particular stage of development, where another technique works for another.

You can't lump everybody all together and say this is the best for everybody. It's very similar to diet. You can't make a blanket diet and say, "Everybody eat this." Because we all have different metabolisms, we're all a little different physically, we all have a little different karma, and we all have different problems with the body. You can't lump people. That's one thing I've learned.

**MM:** That's a great philosophy! I understand that in the early stages of practicing Kriya Yoga, the God-communion experience is achieved by the life force leaving the body. In later stages, that higher awareness becomes grounded in the body and one can go about daily routines within the God-communion state.

**DW:** I guess the experience, again, is different for different people. Everybody does not have the same experience. God will reveal Himself to us in His infinite variety. One of the aspects or qualities of God is that you cannot box God in. You cannot say this is the way it happens. What you describe has not been my experience personally. Of course, I'm just a beginner.

**MM:** How long have you been practicing Kriya Yoga?

**DW:** Practicing is a good word. It takes a lot of practice before you get close to perfection; it takes a lot of practice before you really begin to receive the benefits. It's like anything else, you're very clumsy in the beginning. A lot of effort and willingness on the part of the devotee is required — also a lot of perseverance, loyalty, willingness and time. I've never had the experience where I feel detached from the body. I feel no need for that.

The experience I want is a consciousness of peace - of bliss and joy and love. It never occurred to me that leaving your body is a necessary thing to experience that. The consciousness of bliss, or the consciousness of love comes through the grace of God. That grace is attracted by full surrender. Total surrender of thoughts, emotions and ego, surrendering to the will of God is extremely important. If you can do that, there does come a time during your daily activity, when you can feel that consciousness in your activity. In other words if you were filled with it in meditation, if your cup runneth over, so to speak, then it does overflow into outward consciousness. It effects everything that we do outwardly.

**MM:** Is the technique of Kriya Yoga basically Prana Yama, breath control?

**DW:** I'm not at liberty to give the specific technique and how it works. The only way you find an authentic teacher for Kriya Yoga is through Paramahansa Yogananda.

He came to the US and left lessons that are sent to the homes of people. Anyone can apply for these lessons through the Self Realization Fellowship. If they qualify, which most people do, they take the lessons and begin to meditate. The lessons include a couple of other techniques that are forerunners to Kriya Yoga. After meditating for a while using those techniques and after qualifying, in a sense, one is eligible to ask for Kriya Yoga and be initiated through one of the ministers of the Self Realization Fellowship. Kriya Initiations happen several times a year with large groups of people; many are doing that.

I can't give it to anybody. Paramahansa Yogananda wanted to keep it as pure as possible and to make sure people were truly interested in it — hungered for it. The great hunger for God — the yearning — is essential. Many people are curiosity seekers. When it doesn't work exactly as

they imagined it should, they dismiss it as unsound. Paramahansa Yogananda felt such people would not be ready and would be a destructive element. It's like going to school and getting a doctorate, you have to get your masters first and before that you have to graduate from high school. This is a process which requires energy, devotion and sincerity.

**MM:** Patanjali [pa.tan.JA.li] wrote that Kriya Yoga consists of physical discipline, mental control and meditation on the AUM. How would you explain the significance of the AUM?

**DW:** The Bible tells us that in the beginning of creation, Spirit moved. That Spirit is beyond vibratory creation. When it decided to create this dream like reality of matter, this finite world, it vibrated. Everything in creation is vibrating light atoms, and every vibration has a sound. The sound of the original vibration coming out of Spirit is the AUM, which can't be heard with physical ears. It's too subtle a vibration, It's too sensitive. Our ears are much too crude to register It, but It can be heard in meditation. The wonderful part about the cosmic sound of

---

### **You carry around a portable heaven.**

---

AUM is that its nature is peace and bliss. When you hear it, you feel that. It would be of no value just to hear it if the feeling wasn't there.

**MM:** As you talk about it I feel a tremendous sense of peace coming from you. **DW:** Because I feel it to some degree, I know it's there.

**MM:** What one idea of Parama-hansa Yogananda's teachings has had the greatest impact on your life?

**DW:** For me, the greatest truth has been that we're all made in the image of God, which has been placed within each and every one of us as God's presence. It is possible for each and every one of us to know who we are, to know that we are truly something beyond this mortal body which is here today and gone tomorrow. That knowledge impacts everything we do.

You can find comfort and fulfillment right within yourself - you are carrying around a portable heaven. You don't have to depend upon outward things for your fulfillment and satisfaction. Outward things always disappoint us. If we had no other source to go to for our fulfillment except outward things, we would live a life totally in frustration, anxiety, fear, doubt, anger- all of the things which make life miserable. Knowing you are the consciousness of God's presence, that it's right within you and that it can be known, is the most wonderful truth, I think, that anybody could realize.

He also said to behave yourself. That's important.

Lahiri Mahasya, Paramahansa Yogananda's Parama Guru, said, "Live in this world, but be not of it" - which is very important for us who are involved in the world and do feel a responsibility toward it. It's very important to have that kind of attitude. Do your job, do it with enthusiasm, do

the very best job you can, but know that it's not the final reality. Know that it's not really the source of your greatest fulfillment - that source lies within. So do it, live in the world, play your part, but know it's a part, know it's a great stage. It's wonderful. I can relate it very much to my own profession.

**MM:** That was my next question.

**DW:** OK, go ahead.

**MM:** You're a very spiritual person and you're also a very talented actor. How do those two aspects integrate in your life?

**DW:** What I do as an actor reinforces what Yogananda teaches. What all the great ones have taught as a matter of fact.

Shakespeare said that this world is a stage and we have many entrances and exits, and one person in their time plays many parts. The fact that I've been an actor made it easy for me to understand the nature of this world as a stage and as a play. You can have everything necessary to play your part on stage: the right wardrobe, the right makeup, the right props, given the right dialogue and the relationships which make the play work, the conflict - you have all those things, but you know as you're doing it that it's not real. You know that when the curtain goes down, you've got to give the props back to the prop man, you've got to give the wardrobe back to the wardrobe lady. It's the same with this world and life. We're using these things, they're on loan to us. We should have the attitude that they're really not ours, but have been given to us as a gift, in order for us to play a part. Then we wouldn't become attached to things - that's where the pain and misery come. We know that when the final curtain comes down, we've got to give back all the props to the Great Prop Man in the Sky.

**MM:** Do you make an analogy to the director or the producer?

**DW:** Oh, yes.

**MM:** Using the analogy, I imagine you have to keep a close contact and attunement with the director.

**DW:** Oh, absolutely, you've got to have a good relationship with the director. No question about it. And you've got to surrender, sometime, your particular will to that of the director so that the play will work correctly. And that's why sometimes we have to surrender to the will of God, so that the play - this life - will work more harmoniously. That's an analogy that I live with all the time.

**MM:** Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings include: "to encourage plain living and high thinking and to

---

**The universality of religion is the consciousness of God's presence within us.**

---

spread a spirit of brotherhood by teaching the eternal basis of their unity - Kinship with God." Would you comment on that element of unity within all religions that he professed.

**DW:** Kinship with God. That's what I was talking about a while ago. We all are made in the image of God and that image is within us. It is **that** image in all of us that makes us relatives and gives us our kinship with God. It unites us all. There's a universality of religion: it is the consciousness of God's presence within us. If we mean by "religion" the outward form, they're all different. But if you're talking about the essence of all religion - which is God realization - there's just One. Because, there's only one God. There's only one Bliss. There's only one Love. That's what God is. For people to realize that they all have access to that is what binds us together, what makes us One. We're all One in the Spirit.

When you feel God's presence within, then you behave differently. You automatically behave with more kindness, more respect for others, more consideration, more understanding, and more tolerance. Tolerance doesn't mean just putting up with somebody. It means trying to walk in their shoes, it means trying to understand their position, what makes them what they are, why they do what they do. It's being really considerate.

**MM:** Paramahansa Yogananda's principles reveal the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Christianity as taught by Jesus and original yoga as taught by Bhagavan Krishna and to show that these principles are truth or the common scientific foundation of all true religions. In essence that spirituality and science are one.

**DW:** Truth is truth. One of the ex-citing things about the age we're living in is we see science and religion merging. In the past they have been thought of as being opposed to each other and totally separate. There's nothing unscientific about true religion, it's very scientific.

**MM:** So, you're saying that this age is producing the fusion of science and religion through realization of the unity of their underlying principles?

**DW:** Yes.

**MM:** To demonstrate the superiority of mind over body and of soul over mind?

**DW:** Paramahansa Yogananda wrote the book called **Scientific Affirmations** which will prove that the mind is the architect of the body. What we think on the inside will eventually become manifest on the outside. Thoughts are things, very powerful things. So, the body is really a reflection of the mind in a sense. The mind is more powerful, more important than the body. Both the mind and the body are products of spirit, of the soul. Everything has come from spirit.

The soul is an individualized manifestation of spirit. You can only be aware of that through realization. If it stays on the intellectual level, it's meaningless. If somebody was describing an



orange to you, you can know its component parts, you can know the different molecules that make up an orange, you can know its color. Somebody can tell you it's sweet. But the orange will never become an orange to you nor

---

**When you experience peace and bliss, the soul becomes a reality to you.**

---

satisfy you until you taste it. It's the same with the soul or spirit, with God - you won't realize the importance or the power of it until you have an experience of It. And you cannot have an experience of it the way you would experience things in this world - through the senses. The senses are made to register the experience of matter, but the experience of the soul within is such a fine vibration, such a subtle vibration that these crude instruments, our senses cannot register that. To have that experience you must go beyond the senses, beyond the thinking process.

One saint said of God, "No man can think," and that's exactly right. You cannot know God through the mind or the intellect or through the sensory experience. You have to know God through the power of intuition and that comes into play when you can quiet the mind, still the thoughts, still the emotions. If you can do that and still be conscious - what is it that you are conscious of? It's your true self, it's your eternal self, it's nothing but peace and bliss. When you have that experience, then the soul becomes a reality to you - what you really are becomes a reality to you.

**MM:** What could people do to get involved, to help the LIFE Project, to further aid hungry people?

**DW:** Each one has to make that decision for oneself. I'll start with the big things - we need more vans to be able to pick up more food from the supermarkets. One thing we need now is a warehouse in the San Fernando Valley where we can create a distribution center. We can't do anything until we get that in the valley.

We have been able to identify about 180,000 people in San Fernando Valley that are living below the poverty level line - some way below. So, there's a great need, even in a community which is most often thought of as very affluent. There's enough food out there to feed them if we could just get the distribution center and the vans to pick it up. Those are the basic things that we need: warehousing and vans.

**MM:** And donations?

**DW:** Well, obviously, yes. Money is the oil that makes the machinery go. But if people feel uncomfortable about sending money, and they want to give a large donation of some kind, they can do it in the form of a van or a computer. We need all kinds of things for our office.

Service organizations can be of help to us, companies can have food drives for us, schools can have food drives for us. Individuals can have a party; they can tell their friends, "OK, let's do

something to help those that are less fortunate, bring food!" Call our office and we'll have somebody come and pick it up, as long as it's not just 5 pounds - as long as it's cost effective.

We need volunteers for food drives - people to go to the markets for 3 hours maybe once every three weeks and ask other people if they wouldn't buy an extra bag of beans for us. We need people in our office sometimes to help with volunteer work: mailings, and that kind of thing. We could always use money. That's very, very essential.

Since we've been in business we've always been right on the verge of bankruptcy. But every time we think we're going under, something happens - it's manna from heaven in one form or another and we're still going.

MM: Are you also looking for more supermarkets to participate?

DW: We've got those! That's no problem. They're just waiting there like ripe oranges, ready to pick. But we don't have the means to utilize them, we don't have the vans, we

---

**Only love will create a world where people feel they have a fair share in what the world has to offer.**

---

don't have the distribution centers in certain areas of the city. We need somebody in the San Fernando Valley that will donate a building and get a big tax write-off!

We can refurbish it, we can re-decorate it, we can remodel it - whatever is necessary. We have the capability to do that because we have a lot of volunteers that can help us in that way.

MM: Is there something that you'd like to say, that hasn't been covered?

DW: Oh, mercy, there's lots that hasn't been covered. We have so many problems in this world. You look around and it's rather discouraging sometimes. You see all the violence, you see all the people killing people - you say, "What is the answer? Is there any hope?"

Of course the only hope is love. It sounds like a rather naive, maybe a simplistic answer, but it is the only thing that will create a lasting peace. It is the only thing that will create a world where people feel they have a fair share or a fair chance to share in what the world has to offer. It doesn't make any difference what social or political system we live under. If love is not part of it, it doesn't work. And if love is basically what sustains it, it will work.

What is needed in the world is that the hearts of people should be changed. The only way you can change the hearts of people is to begin with your own. Most people go out and say, "OK, let's change the world - we need to change the hearts of all these people. We need to give them love." That's the wrong thing to do because you cannot influence the heart of someone else

unless you open your own first. It's like one of the great saints said, "Change yourself and you'll change thousands."

People should start thinking about how can I start changing my heart? How can I make myself a better instrument of God? A better reflection of His spirit? The way that you do that, the most dynamic way, the most practical way, is to meditate. It's the key to the whole thing, because it is through meditation that you have the experience of Love within, and when you have that experience it automatically changes your thinking, it automatically changes the way you feel, it changes your heart.