

The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

The Bede Griffiths Sangha is committed to the search for the truth at the heart of all religions.

Summer 2008 Volume 10 Issue 6

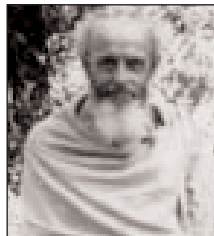
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The Meeting of West with East.

The inspiration for the work of the Sangha, although primarily dedicated to the universal vision of Fr Bede Griffiths, has also stemmed from the lives of two other spiritual giants who bridged the gulf between Christianity and the spirituality of India - Fr Henri Le Saux, later known as Swami Abhishktananda, and Fr Jules Monchanin, who together founded the Shantivanam Ashram in Tamil Nadu, where later Bede lived for 25 years.

In 2010 the Sangha will be celebrating the centenary of the birth of Abhishktananda and in this Issue we again bring you recently recorded memories from the man who was their cook and friend at the time of the establishment of Shantivanam. We also include a letter from the present Abbot, Father George, about the rebuilding of the Temple and a fascinating account by a Sangha member of her introduction to the inner truth of Islam in Istanbul. There is our regular glimpse into the wisdom of Sanskrit, news on the charitable projects in India from the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust, reports of Sangha events and announcements of activities to come. Timothy Glazier



Hermits of Saccitananda.

Memories of Swami Abhishktananda from the early days of Shantivanam.

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Rebuilding the Shantivanam Temple.

Update on the work to enlarge and strengthen the Ashram Temple. Page 8



Islam in Istanbul

Witnessing tolerance, peace and understanding within the Istanbul Muslim community.

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*“It’s easy
...the Lord
is Everywhere.”*

A visit to one of India’s holy mountains. Page 9.



Welcome to the Summer 2008 Edition of the Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

This Newsletter is published three times a year to provide a forum for articles and comment within the remit of the Sangha to search for the truth at the heart of all religions, to record Sangha activities and give details of future events and resources available. *Correspondence and contributions for inclusion in future editions are welcome and will be considered by the editorial team.*

To receive a printed copy of the Newsletter, please send your details to the Editor for inclusion on our data base. The publication is free but a donation towards costs will be invited. Copies, for friends or interested organisations, can be provided.

Current and back numbers of the Newsletter are available on www.bede Griffiths sangha.org.uk

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Hermits of Saccitananda. Atmajyoti (Carrie Lock)

This article is a continuation of the extraordinary conversation that Atmajyoti (Carrie Lock) had last year with Mr Vishvasam who was cook to the founding Fathers of Shantivanam, which gives an insight into the character, wit and challenges of these two indomitable individuals.

I first met Mr. Vishvasam at his home in the village of Tannirpalli, close to Shantivanam, in late 2007. When we met, he was seated under an old black and white photograph which featured five people, one of whom was unmistakably Swami Abhishiktananda.

I had initially visited Mr. Vishvasam to record his memories of Fr. Monchanin. It was immediately clear though, that the stories of Fr. Monchanin, Swami Abhishiktananda



Swami Abhishiktananda, Mr. Vishvasam and family, August 1968

and Shantivanam were all intrinsically inter-linked in the heart and mind of Mr. Vishvasam. Further to the article in the last edition of this newsletter, here are some more of Mr. Vishvasam's memories of those years so long ago (1949-1968), when he was not only the cook for Fr. Monchanin and Swami Abhishiktananda, but more precious, their friend.

"You sometimes tell me that my life is so difficult to understand. In fact, it was hardly my own choice, it has landed me from above, day after day, year after year. And truly it is marvellous. If at least I could pass on to the Christian world the honey which I gather in the Hindu world, and vice versa, however dislocating it may sometimes be"

Swami Abhishiktananda
18th April 1969 Life 237-38.

Mr Vishvasam's Memories of Swami Abhishiktananda

"Fr. Le Saux was like an Indian. He lived a very simple life. He had no money; he suffered like a very poor man. But he was very happy and always laughed. Fr. Le Saux was a true sannyasi.

The affection the Hermits felt for Mr. Vishvasam was clear as he told the following touching incident:

"Once, I had a quarrel with someone at Kulittalai and so I left and went to Bangalore (laughing). After about ten days I came back. During that time, Fr. Le Saux and Fr. Monchanin managed without a cook. I returned one morning at about 4am. As soon as Fr. Le Saux saw me, he hugged me and cried with joy and said, 'one day or another you would come back, I knew you would!' Fr. Le Saux was crying tears of joy. Fr. Le

Saux and I then both went to Kulittalai and bought some dhal, rice and chillie and we prepared the lunch. We three, including Fr. Monchanin, then had lunch together."

"In 1957, when I stopped working full-time at the Ashram, I started working at the nearby sugar factory. Fr. Le Saux helped me get that job."

After finishing my duties each day at the factory, I would come back here to look after the ashram. I helped look after Shantivanam until 1968, when Fr. Le Saux left Shantivanam (to live in his hermitage at Uttarkashi). Fr. Le Saux would send me money for my family during that time but there was no work for me to do at the ashram as such."

"In 1968, Fr. Le Saux packed up all his things, took his luggage and happily went to Uttarkashi, via Chennai, where he spent some time, and there he stayed in his kutiya hermitage until 1973, the year he passed away.

No-one, no candidate, was willing to stay in Shantivanam. For the twenty years that Swamiji was at Shantivanam no-one wished to be here with him. When he left he was very sad about that."

"This photograph (featured) was taken the last time I saw Fr. Le Saux; it was in August 1968. When Fr. Le Saux was about to leave Shantivanam to go to North India, he had this photograph taken of our family as a memento. The photo was taken in Kulittalai between 8-9am. He left

after finishing his lunch, at around 1pm. We went to the Trichy railway station with him and stayed there. We saw him off on the 10pm train for Chennai."

Mr. Vishvasam's wife, Antonia sat on the floor nearby, listening attentively to her husband's stories. I asked if she had any memories she wished to share.

"Fr. Le Saux accompanied Vishvasam to see my parents. Fr. Le Saux asked my parents permission and we got married in January 1961. After, Fr. Le Saux managed to buy us a four cent block of land and to construct us a house, so that we could be here and remember his name. That's how it is that we are here in this house, due to his great blessing."

"When Father would return from the North, we would go to the ashram to see him and we would help him. He was very kind to us. He would spend time with our two children. He would

take my son on one shoulder and my daughter on the other and he'd walk to the nearby village of Pattavarthi

with a turban around his head. He'd buy some pots there for cooking at Shantivanam."

"We gave the name of 'Le Saux' to my grandson (born 2000), in remembrance of Fr. Le Saux and all the help he gave us."

Mr Vishvasam ended with the words, "Fr. Monchanin and Fr. Le Saux were my friends. They never thought of me as the cook, or treated me as a servant, but they saw me as a friend, like a brother, till the end.

There were no differences between us. I was happy".



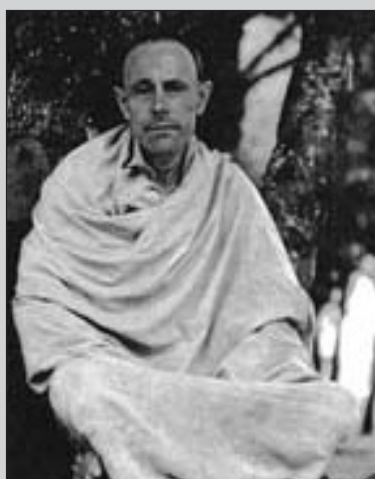
Mr. Vishvasam and his grandson Le Saux.

Atmajyoti (Carrie Lock) is a member of Ajatananda Ashram, an interreligious monastic ashram on the bank of the Ganges in Rishikesh. The Ashram is inspired by the life and message of Swami Abhishiktananda and his disciple, Swami Ajatananda. Atmajyoti can be contacted at aum.atmajyoti@gmail.com

Swami Abhishiktananda Centenary Gathering Gaunts House July 2010

2010 is the Centenary of the birth of Father Henri Le Saux known as Swami Abhishiktananda. In honour of this occasion the Sangha is to hold a Centenary Gathering at Gaunts House in Dorset in July 2010. As well as presentations from a line up of notable speakers, who have already been invited, we would value ideas from any Sangha member as to how, at this event, you feel his life could be most appropriately remembered and celebrated, by telling us how your life has been touched by this remarkable man - through his ideas, writings or example.

Please write to the Editor with your thoughts before the end of September. For the best suggestions submitted the Editorial team will give a signed copy of Shirley du Boulay's two acclaimed books - his biography *The Cave of the Heart* and *Swami Abhishiktananda - Essential Writings*.



Dom Henri Le Saux, a Benedictine monk, later to be known by his Indian name Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973).

In *Swami Abhishiktananda - Essential Writings* Shirley du Boulay writes:

"Swami Abhishiktananda would have been seen at any time as a remarkable man, for he was uncompromising, passionate, bold, eloquent and fearless.

So what puts this Breton-born country boy among the most significant figures of the twentieth century, deserving a place in a series called "Modern Spiritual Masters"? He has earned it for the courage with which he endured the anguish of being torn between two great religious traditions, for the radiance that emanated from him after his great "awakening" experience and for his legacy of diaries, books and letters,

which confirm that he was not only a pioneer in inter-faith relations, but a mystic on a par with Meister Eckhart, St John of the Cross, Ramana Maharshi and the Dalai Lama."

Islam in Istanbul

Angelika Monteux

“Those who travel learn more than those who read”

This sentence was spoken by a 14 year old boy who I met in Istanbul in June 2007 when I was invited to his family for a festive evening meal. How did I get there? This is a long story:

The invitation

At the end of last year I went to a performance of Sufi music, poetry and dancing in Aberdeen. During the break there was a raffle to win a cultural trip to Istanbul and among the ten lucky winners were four co-workers of the Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools! We were told that we only had to pay for the journey – everything else would be free and that we would hear details later.

We had to wait a long time, but eventually some more bits of information came and finally we boarded the plane to Istanbul, still not knowing what exactly to expect and who would meet us when we arrived.

We need not have worried: once we had read all the hundreds of signs held up by the crowds in the arrivals hall and found one saying: ‘English Trip’ we were safe. A group of young people was waiting for us and took us to a restaurant for a welcome dinner. There we were introduced to our ‘sponsors’ who told us how happy and grateful they were that we had come and offered us a most delicious meal.

Hardly any one of them could speak English, however, so it was not easy to find out who these gentlemen in suits and ties actually were and why they were so happy to meet us and as we were tired from the journey it was all a bit confusing. Then we were taken to our hotel, the ‘Golden Horn’ in the old part of Istanbul, a very posh 4star hotel.

Just as I started to unpack my suitcase the calls to prayer began at the nearby mosque and when I opened the window I found out that it was not just any mosque, but actually two and that the hotel was right next to the famous

Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia. The chanting was hauntingly beautiful and powerful and I went to bed still wondering what this week would bring, still unclear about the purpose of the invitation to this cultural trip.

First Impressions

On the first day we had a historic tour through the old Istanbul, learning fascinating aspects of Middle Eastern and Turkish culture, art and history; The Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia are of course magnificent and impressive, but three things left a strong impression on me:

The front door of the Hagia Sophia has a large iron arrow on it to show the way in. When it was a Christian Church this used to be a cross; instead of destroying it the Muslim conquerors took the cross beam and turned it into the arrow head – transformation rather than destruction!



A Whirling Dervish or Semazen.

Inside is a grave marked in the marble floor: that of a crusader who died there in battle.

Outside there is a hollow pillar. This used to be the place where the rich people would leave money for the poor who could come after Morning Prayer to take what they needed. This was done when it was still dark, to avoid embarrassment.

By this time we had discovered that our hosts were an organisation known as the Dialogue Society.

The Dialogue Society

The Dialogue Society was established in 1999 by a group of Turkish-Muslim intellectuals, academics and volunteers as a not-for-profit charitable organisation. *Their aim is to be a ‘New Voice for Peace’:*

The objective of the Dialogue Society is to promote tolerance, understanding, mutual respect and acceptance of people as they are, between people from all walks of life. The Dialogue Society therefore actively encourages and nurtures dialogue between followers of different ideologies, different ethnic communities, adherents of different religions and members of society generally.

Again and again we were told how important love, understanding, human values and dialogue are to create worldwide peace and that these values and attitudes are rooted in Islam and the Qur’an:

“We are all children of Adam and Eve, we are brothers and sisters, and this planet is the only place where we can live, so we better make peace with each other!”

It is important to point out that these people are not religious fundamentalists and that their aim is not to spread Islam all over the world. They want to build bridges between East and West, integrate old Islamic traditions and wisdom with modern scientific achievements. They represent a tolerant, loving and peaceful Islam, they want to strengthen and build on the values of respect, tolerance, compassion, non-violence of the Qur’an; Aggression, terrorism, hate and violence have no place in Islam and the Qur’an forbids the killing of any other human being.

“You cannot be a Muslim and a terrorist at the same time”

The founder of and inspiration behind the Dialogue Society is Fethulla Gülen, an Islamic Sufi scholar, writer and poet. One of his great concerns is the need for the right Education, because he is convinced that hate, intolerance and terrorism are grounded in ignorance.

Sufism

Sufism is a mystical and esoteric stream within Islam with an especially strong quality of contemplation and inwardness, and addresses the heart forces of love and compassion; it is a path towards utmost humility and submission to the will of Allah, leading to love and compassion for the whole of creation. Jaleleddin Rumi is just one of the outstanding Sufi teachers and poets.

A special group within Sufism is the order of the Whirling Dervishes or Semazens.

“Sema – the ritual of whirling is not a performance, but a deeply spiritual ritual. ‘Sema’ means to hear or to listen. It is the whirling out of bliss whilst listening to the meaning of the Qur’an and the purpose is to make a spiritual journey towards God and to return, able to love and serve the whole of creation without discrimi-

nating in regard to belief, class or race. Contrary to popular belief, the semazen’s goal is not to lose consciousness or to fall into a state of ecstasy. Instead, by revolving in harmony with all things in nature, with the smallest cells and with the stars in the firmament, the semazen testifies to the existence and majesty of the Creator; thinks of him, gives thanks to him and prays to him.” (Aydin.E. 2004, 14-15)

This beautiful and quiet, yet powerful striving lies at the heart of true Islam and inspires the life and work of the members of the Dialogue Society who aim to make us aware of the values of Islamic culture that are sadly hidden and not proclaimed loudly enough in our part of the world. Therefore I finish with a quote from Fethulla Gülen which sums up everything we met during this magic week amongst Turkish Muslims and which can be a call to all of us:

“Be so tolerant that your bosom becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for human beings. Let there be no troubled souls to whom you do not offer a hand and about whom you remain unconcerned.” (Gülen 1998 in: Hunt, A. R. 57)

Angelika Monteux, August 2007
Angelika is a long standing member of the Sangha and is Curative Education Programme Director at Camphill Rudolf Steiner School, Aberdeen.

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Gülen, F. (2006): ‘Essays, Perspectives, Opinions’. Somerset, New Jersey: The Light.
Hunt, R. A. (Ed.) (2007): ‘Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World – Contributions of the Gülen Movement’. Somerset, New Jersey: The Light.
www.DialogueSociety.org
www.Zaman.org

Father Bede and Inter-faith

Father Bede Griffiths

There is little doubt that Father Bede would have empathised with this initiative of the **Dialogue Society**. In his introduction to **Universal Wisdom** he said: *“One of the greatest needs of humanity today is to transcend the cultural limitations of the great religions and to find a wisdom, a philosophy, which can reconcile their differences and reveal the unity which underlies all their diversities.”* and

one of the writings he included within **Universal Wisdom** p 362 are these words of the Sufi poet Rumi:

‘I have bestowed on every one a particular mode of worship...the idiom of Hindustan is excellent for Hindus, the idiom of Sind is excellent for the people of Sind.

I look not at tongue or speech, I look at the spirit and the inward feeling.....

The religion of love is apart from all religions.

The lovers of God have no religion but God alone..’

In **A New Vision of Reality** he writes: *“For the Semitic religions in particular, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is important that they give up the exclusive claims which characterise them. This would free them to recognise the action of God in all humanity from the beginnings of history. For the Semitic religions this is a particularly difficult problem. All three tend to extreme exclusivism and on that account have brought so much conflict into the world.”*

Father Bede might equally have included this Rumi poem in **Universal Wisdom**:

‘What shall I do, O Muslims? I do not recognise myself

I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Magian, nor Muslim.

I am not of the East, nor the West, not of the land, nor the sea.

I am not from nature’s mine, nor from the circling stars.

I am neither of earth nor water, neither of wind nor fire.

I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust on this carpet.

I am not of the deep, nor from afar. I am not of India nor China, not of Bulgaria, nor Saqsin;

I am not of this world nor the next, not of heaven, nor of purgatory.

My place is the placeless, my trace is the traceless. It is not the body nor is it the soul, for I belong to the soul of my love.

I have put duality away and seen the two worlds as one.

One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.

He is the first, He is the last. He is the outward, He is the inward

I know of nothing but it, none but Him.

Intoxicated with the cup of Love, two worlds slip from my hands.

If once in my life I pass a moment without You, I repent my life from that moment on.’

TG

Remembering**The Sangha Study Weekend at Fintry, May 2008**

'Spring and the Garden are the messengers from the Paradise of the Unseen; listen, since it is only for the messenger to deliver the message.' Rumi

Arising from the success of two previous Study Days, the Sangha held a Study Weekend, facilitated by Ken Knight at the house of the Fintry Trust in Surrey. In accordance with the theme of *Remembering*, those attending were invited to memorise this Rumi verse before moving on to consideration of the four great statements from the Veda, the Mahavakyas: *Prajnanam Brahma - Consciousness is Brahman, Aham Brahmani - I am Brahman, Tattvamasi - Thou art that and Ayamatra Brahma - Brahman is the Self.* Here are two reactions from those who attended the weekend.

Purposeful Tranquillity

Some twenty of us met at Fintry for the Sangha Study Weekend. It was good to see the study group enlarging, no doubt because a two-day session with an overnight stay enabled Sangha members to come from further afield. Both the weather and the welcome from the Fintry hosts were agreeably warm, and the timing was auspicious, Sunday being the feast of Pentecost, as Ken Knight reminded us in his introduction.

It was a full programme. The focus was the Mahavakyas, the four great sayings of Hinduism, which declare the unity of the individual with Brahman. Ken had prepared an introduction to these through a programme of readings, and it was good to have him share with us his own study of Sanskrit texts. Throughout, there were opportunities for reflection and discussion.

In the event time did not allow for a full consideration of all the Mahavakyas, a situation which some of us, I think, found disappointing. In particular I would have liked more time and opportunity to look at Tattvamasi, and to reflect on it. Nevertheless the ground we covered was both revealing and thought-provoking, and the study weekend provided another opportunity for Sangha members to work purposefully together and keep good company.

Fintry was an excellent location for the weekend; we were made to feel comfortable, and were able to eat together well and at ease, and to share in the peacefulness of the place. Our thanks go to Ken and to all who helped to make this a positive weekend.

Eric Cunningham

Remembering

The wonderful warm welcome from Fintry in the most beautiful peaceful surroundings began the time of the Heart I was about to encounter over the weekend. I had so much anticipation, in the form of a yearning, for what was about to unfold into the unknown.

Ken Knight created immediately, as is his gift, a relaxed informal but very important space. It was a space of Spirit.



Ken Knight addressing the group on the Sangha Weekend at Fintry.

We gathered immediately into the Silence that holds us always as a group, it beautifully clarified the path for the feast to come.

Ken speaks directly to my heart so it is difficult to recover what was experienced and place into form.

The fruit of our time was discovering the essence of Remembering. Our remembrance back to the beginning, to form and complete the circle.

In opening up and tearing apart our concepts in the form of words using the origin of words alongside Sanskrit Ken is able to help us see and hear

with a different eye and a different ear. In fact our senses are released from their usual expectations.

He asked us to consider during our time together *'what is the point of contact between me and the tree'*.

My experience was instantaneous and I felt the yearning move to my chest as I could have groaned.

The loosening of the words to discover Brahman behind all things was a physical experience for me.

In taking me out of the bondage of the language I am exiled to use I had a discovery of *'being'* the Word in Christ Consciousness, in Brahman.

Through chant, both Indian and Taize, through Rumi's

words, through the beloved sacred scripture of the Vedas and the Gospel and in the silence and stillness of our being, we encountered something of the unknown, uncreated.

Ken has a gift of shining the light within him so brightly you cant help catching fire.

I am still nourished and the fruits of this banquet are in my life each day. Once again, I look forward to when we meet again.

Amanda Moss

Sanskrit Corner

Ken Knight. hilken_98@yahoo.com

Atman

When we first encounter Eastern thought we bring with us our learned meanings and try to superimpose these onto the new words; so some have translated **atman** as soul. The danger here is that traditionally the word 'soul' gives us an image of a separate particle, whereas **atman** is better envisaged as an all pervading 'wavelet' as in quantum physics. Mary's pronouncement, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord' may then also be understood as the outward flow of the **atman/brahman**, the all-pervading, expanding continuum and this would be more in accord with the Vedic vision.

In some systems of Indian philosophy, **atman** may indeed be regarded as atomic but in Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy favoured by Father Bede, **atman** is a unity that is all pervading. It cannot be experienced but nothing is experienced without it. It is self-revealing.

The root meaning of **atman** shows that it comes from **ap** which means 'to pervade', or **at** meaning 'to breathe'. These are the meanings at the core of the RgVeda where it is usually termed **tman**.

With this meaning of Atman the question of salvation or liberation cannot be understood in the usual way. The **atman** is ever free for it is

boundless and all-pervading. To realise this, the paths of action, devotion or knowledge may be undertaken to dissolve the ignorance arising from attachments to 'name and form' in such statements as 'I am Ken, I like Maths, I don't like basketball.'

These attachments 'cover' the underlying, all-pervading truth of the **I am**, the **atman**. They can be individual or embedded in our social and religious traditions and teachings which we have assimilated. Release or salvation, **moksha**, is then a matter of removing these veils or a 'thinning of the fabric of the universe' as Archbishop Rowan Williams describes it. Or, in the advaitin tradition, 'We come out of what we are not to realise whom we really are.'

Abhishiktananda was greatly attracted to the teaching of Ramana Maharshi who described the Judaic traditional **I am** sayings as some of the great statements of Truth. There is a highly subtle and important discussion to be had on the teaching of the '**I**' and the '**I am**' mantras in Asian and Western spirituality, too much for it to be undertaken here in a brief article.

However, a pointer can be given for individual study through reference to the **I am** sayings of Jesus, particularly John: *I am the Bread of Life* (6v32-35), *I am the Light of the world* (8v12-16),

I am the door of the sheep (10v7-9), *I am the Good Shepherd* (10v10-16), *I am the Resurrection and the life* (11v24-26), *I am the Way, the Truth and the Light* (14v5-7) and *I am the true vine* (15v1-8).

In the Vedic tradition the **I am** is the **brahman/atman** union which is the underlying, unchanging unity breathing behind the veils of separation and is the ultimate guru.

Note: To see how the links between Christian and Advaitin teaching on the **atman** and the **I am** statements of the Judaic tradition can be understood, may I recommend you look at an article by David Godman: <http://www.david-godman.org/rteach/fnofgod1.shtml>

SANSKRIT DISTANCE LEARNING

For those wishing to start on a study of Sanskrit as a language, a Distance Learning Course has been developed by Isabelle Glover, BA Hons Sanskrit.

The aim of the Course is for Sanskrit to become accessible to all-comers however much or little time they have for learning it. The Course is an introduction to Sanskrit and, as such, it covers some of the basic groundwork of the grammar as well as an introduction to some of the literature.

The Course Book contains 34 lessons with answers and is accompanied with a Chant Book and CD giving the pronunciation of the alphabet and the Chants. Purchase of the course (price £90) gives access to Isabelle as tutor. For full details or to order the course, contact Isabelle direct:

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Correspondence

A letter from Nicholas Dewey

Transcendental Meditation and the Study Society.

As a footnote to the articles in the Spring issue of the Newsletter by Father Adrian Smith and Tim Glazier, concerning Transcendental Meditation and the late Maharishi, it is worth recording that one of the very first groups to respond seriously to his mission in the UK was the Study Society (also known as the Society for the Study of Normal

Psychology) under the then leadership of Dr Francis Roles.

It was his initiative, as early as 1959 or 1960, not only introduced members of that Society to this method of mantra meditation, but also enabled contact to be established later with the successor to the Maharishi's teacher, Brahmananda (Guru Dev), as the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math in Northern India. This was His Holiness Shantanand Saraswati, whose teaching based on the ancient tradition of Advaita has continued to

enrich the spiritual life of Study Society members for almost half a century.

Readers of the Sangha Newsletter who would like to learn more about the work of the Study Society are welcome to get in touch by writing to the Secretary at Colet House, 151 Talgarth Road, London W14 9DA or phone 020 8748 9338. There is also a website www.studysociety.net Branches currently exist in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Mexico.

The Temple at Shantivanam

A Letter from Father George

Fr. George has written about the reconstruction of the Temple at Shantivanam. I was there when the branch of the tree went through the corner of the building, and also when the roof and walls were knocked down. It was a great shock. That building held many important memories for me, and for a while I grieved. However I realised that what was happening was a vivid reminder of Impermanence! Before I left Shantivanam at the end of March, the foundations of the new building were well under way. It will be octagonal in shape and similar in design to the meditation hall opposite Fr. Bede's hut. It will be more user friendly - for example mosquito netting! The original Vimana and Shrine will be incorporated into the design. As Fr. George has said, they have raised half of the money needed to rebuild. I know that any financial help from Sangha members will be most gratefully received.

Michael Giddings

To all our benefactors and friends, a request for help to the reconstruction of Temple at Shantivanam.

Saccidananda Ashram was established by Fr. Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux OSB on 21st March 1950, on the feast day of St. Benedict on the banks of the river Cauvery near Kulithalai, Tamilnadu.

Monchanin and Le Saux built the original temple in 1950 with Sanctum Sanctorum and a small Mandapam (front portion) with locally made simple tiles. In the seventies Fr. Bede built the present Vimana over the Sanctum Sanctorum. In the eighties it was felt that the Mandapam was very small to accommodate the visitors so Fr. Bede extended it. However, because the original foundation of the Mandapam and Sanctum Sanctorum were very shallow and the pillars made of mud, and because the Vimana is also in urgent need of repair, it was becoming clear that urgent work needed to be carried out. Then recently, during a heavy rain, a big branch broke off the nearby badam tree and fell on the roof, badly damaging it, as a result of which the tree has had to be cut down.

Taking all these things into account, and following consultations with the superiors of our congregation who have visited the Ashram and seen the situation and with other friends and well wishers of the Ashram, it was decided to go ahead with the reconstruction of the temple. Being the first Catholic Ashram in India it was important to preserve its heritage and message, so after consultation, the new design, which takes into account the sandy nature of land and proximity to the river which overflows periodically, has been approved by the Community.

Wishing to be sensitive to the vision of the founders the original Sanctum Sanctorum with Vimana will be strengthened and preserved, so also the entrance Gopuram (door) of the temple, which was built by Monchanin and Le Saux.



Construction of the foundation of the new Temple, and the Temple as many of us remember it.



We have to say that it has not been an easy decision but we assure you that the Temple will be simple; it will be in harmony with the rest of the architecture of the Ashram building - and more than all it will be a comfortable place for the people to meditate and pray.

The present estimation of the structural part of the temple is around Rs. 10,00,000.00 (\$25,000, or £15,000). The decorative part will be extra which is not yet finalized. The work has already begun and reached to the level of foundation.

I am delighted that we have already received around Rs. 5,00,000.00, half the cost of the Temple construction which has enabled us to start work, so we are now making this general appeal to all our benefactors and friends to contribute towards this task significant development in the life of Shantivanam Ashram.

The cheques can be sent to the address below made out to **Saccidananda Ashram:**

**Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam,
Thannirpalli -639107,
via Marudur,
Karur Dt. Tamilnadu, South India.**

Or money can be transferred direct to our Ashram account:

**State Bank of India, Main Branch,
Tiruchirappalli 620001, Tamilnadu, India
Account No. 10848480873
SWIFT CODE: SBININBB467**

The Prior and community of Shantivanam request that you give a generous contribution to fulfil this desire of the reconstruction of the Temple. Whatever is your contribution, we will be grateful to you.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. George and Community of Shantivanam

Hermits in Company Silent Retreat Tymawr Convent, Monmouth May 2008

Hermits in Company consists of a group of around fifteen Sangha members, which meets over the May bank holiday each year for a weekend of silent retreat. The silence is broken only by conversation in the kitchen, as we prepare and cook simple food together, though we speak until after supper the first evening, so that we can get to know one another a little. Our days follow the familiar pattern that we experience at Shantivanam.



The Hermits

This year, at Tymawr, our theme was, “simply being present, supporting each others’ silence”. We bring flowers to decorate, and candles to light the shrine, on which are placed a Christian icon, a Buddha, a Shiva, and photos of Bede Griffiths, and other great teachers. Our chanting may be Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist, thus bringing together these religions in expressions of Divine love, and honour to the world.

This year we avoided distractions by having no discussions, talks, nor guided meditation, nor group walks. However, we enjoyed some lovely music on CD during two of the evenings. Some found joy in joining the nuns at some of their services. We felt we became bonded through the silence at a deep level.

We have been alternating our venue between Tymawr Convent Guesthouse, south of Monmouth, and the Guildhouse, in the Cotswolds. In May, at Tymawr, the spring green of the trees, the flowers, and birdsong, the cuckoo’s call and the hoot of owls, all helped to bring the group into a profoundly contemplative space, and we blessed the time together, wishing we, and others of the Sangha, could meet more often in such a nourishing way, and hoping it might somehow be arranged. For me, it was indeed, refreshment for my soul!

Valerie Cherry

“Its easy.....you just have to realize that the Lord is Everywhere”

How wonderful to be back in India! The chaos, the smells, the traffic, the impassable pavements – but everywhere, in roadside shrines, great temple, on the sides of lorries, in every motor richshaw and taxi, in the homes that we visited and, to my surprise, also in the workshops and offices – acknowledgements of the divine in the form of shrines, icons, pictures and calendars! One of our hosts was even wearing a kurta shirt printed with the Gayatri Mantra!

It was seven years since I was last in India, when Victoria and I spent three months of pilgrimage, starting at Shantivanam and including three weeks at the Maha Khumba Mela in Allahabad.

This time my visit was not primarily a pilgrimage – if a visit to India can be anything other – as I had joined a small party of local friends with an interest in textiles, to see traditional village textile manufacture in Tamil Nadu. In fact the trip, beautifully organised by a friend’s small tour company, Kamala Tours*, was dominated by the Lord Shiva, with visits to see the beautiful Chola bronze Natarajas – Shiva as Lord of the Dance – in the Chennai Museum, then to various temples dedicated to

Shiva as the different elements. But central for me was a day in Tiruvannamalai – the home of mount Arunachala, which is seen, and worshiped as an incarnation of Shiva. We had had a very busy schedule of travel up to this point and so, while the rest of the group opted to relax in our hotel overlooking Arunachala and



Mount Arunachala at dawn. ‘Aruna’ means ‘dawn light’.

a swim in the pool, I set off on my own before dawn on the route trodden by thousands of pilgrims throughout the year, the 12 kilometre circumambulation of this sacred mountain, that has been important to so many saints, including Swami Abhishiktananda and, of course, Ramana Maharshi.

Pausing at many of the myriad shrines, sharing with a begging Sadu the nan bread that I had brought with me from the previous night’s supper,

in due course I reached the great temple where I received a blessing from the trunk of the temple elephant with a thump on my head: then to experience the great pilgrim destination of Ramana Maharshi’s Ashram, from which I set off up the mountain to the hermitage where Ramana lived for many years, close to the cave, overlooking the temple below, that was such a turning point in the spiritual journey of Abhishiktanda.

Half way up I fell into conversation with a friendly Sadu resting on a rock: he asked where I was from and then my age. When I replied he stood up and invited me to sit on his rock with the words “*but I am only 56!*” Although tempted I declined saying that I bowed to his holiness, to which he laughingly replied “*but that is easy – you just have to realise that the Lord is everywhere.*”

I have to admit that when he said it, there on the side of this sacred mountain, revered as the incarnation of Shiva, it really did seem easy!

Timothy Glazier

**Kamala Tours are organising further ‘Temples and Textiles of South India’ tours in November 08 and February 09. For details contact Camila Hale on: 01453 751370 sricam2000@yahoo.com*

News from the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust

As readers of the Sangha Newsletter will know, through the extraordinary enterprise and dedication of Jill Hemmings and others in creating the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust and the phenomenal generosity of those who have donated to the Trust, a number of remarkable projects have been supported. One of these has been the building of the St Adrian's Reachout Centre for children of Muttom, a village devastated by the 2004 Tsunami. Here Jill updates us on the progress of this project and the work of the Trust.

Hazel Eyles, a new trustee, Katherine O'Donovan and I spent a wonderful three weeks in January visiting all the projects supported by the Trust. We began in Muttom, the village devastated by the Tsunami, at the St Adrian's Reachout Centre (SARC) children's centre.

Katherine writes "The first surprise was the warm welcome I received on arrival at the airport from Sr Selvi and by the children. The second was that each and every child is engaging in their own way and so appreciative of love and attention. One can sense just how much they need warmth and adult response. Perhaps this relates to the trauma suffered by the whole community. Of course they are not angels but I saw no tantrums, moodiness, aggression - just happiness and love.

Lots of aspects are very touching. Tata the gardener is elderly but maintains a bountiful garden which supplies the centre with vegetables, tapioca and fruit. A widower, he was turned out by his children and has found a haven in his old age.

We visited some of the children's homes on the rocks, where the houses survived the Tsunami but little else. In one of the houses, from which two girls attend the centre, there are three more girls in the family and virtually nothing in the house. The mother is a widow, the future for these girls is bleak without a dowry, so the Centre is all-important in ensuring educational success for the girls and support for their mother.

The saddest image I have of my visit is the graveyard at Muttom. Near the entrance were the tiny graves of children swept away by the water; just a little mound above the level of the ground. Some had a stone recording name, date of Tsunami, but others showed evidence of poverty of parents, with the simplest crosses, with maybe a name fading already."

Now that the upstairs building work is finished at the Centre, Sister Selvi is able to take the full complement of 30 children for the new term starting on the 6th June. (If additional funding can be found she could increase that to 35). The children live with her all week, attending their

own school and go home for weekends. All the children passed their end of year exams, a considerable achievement!

News of our visit to the projects around Shantivanam will be covered in the next edition of the Newsletter but I would like just to say they are all thriving, in particular the new English medium school being built by Senthil in a very poor, dry area in memory of his beloved mentor Fr Bede.



Katherine O'Donovan (back) and Hazel Eyles (front), with Sr Selvi (front right), Sadhu Videhi and children from the St Adrian Outreach Centre, Muttom, Tamil Nadu.

The Trustees met in April to allocate grants to all the projects, a total of £37k. Greville Norman the treasurer writes "Over the 4 years of the Trust's existence £238k has been raised and used for the projects. A total of less than £2k - less than 1% of income - has been spent on administration. Whilst the Trustees are happy that we have been able to support so many excellent projects and invest donations so quickly, we are keen to raise further funds to meet the ongoing requirements of the projects, not least because India is suffering serious inflation.. Don't forget gift aid adds 28p in the pound!"

In other words we need to raise more money! Do help if you can, a small amount of our money still goes a long way. Its a miracle that so much money has been raised. A BIG THANK YOU to everyone for all your support.

With love **Jill Hemmings**

For details of how to donate to the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust please contact Jill at:

**Beech Tree Cottage, Gushmere, Selling, Kent ME13 9HR
01227 752871 bg.trust@btinternet.com**

In the last Newsletter Hazel Eyles wrote: *There is a plan that small groups might enjoy a week's holiday at SARC as 'eco tourists' seeing India where life is very simple indeed. Tamil Nadu is one of the poorest states in India and few white people visit. Those who come would pay for their holiday and would be well looked after, as I have experienced, and would feel they have been in touch with rural India. We hope some Sangha members may be interested to find out more about such a holiday.*

For more information email: hazelmof@tiscali.co.uk

Sangha News, Retreats and Resources

Sangha Working Group

The Bede Griffiths Sangha is run by a Working Group, who are responsible for all aspects of the Sangha's activities. The next Working Group meeting is to be held on Saturday 27th September in Cirencester. Anyone interested in playing a greater part in the running of the Sangha should contact Jane Lichnowski:

82 Gloucester Road, Cirencester.Glos. GL7 2LJ
Tel 01285 – 651381 email Jane@lichnowski.com

Caldey Island Autumn retreat

The Afternoon of Saturday 6th
to the morning of Saturday 13th September 2008

*A silent retreat with the theme:
Holy Water ~ Holy Well*

*This retreat is now fully booked. Organisers:
Martin or Aileen Neilan on 01834 871 433
or email to aileen.neilan@btinternet.com*

Sangha Advent Retreat

The Ammerdown Centre
12th-14th December 2008

Once again the Sangha will be meeting together at Advent at the beautiful Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, Nr Bath, to consider an Advent theme in preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

Booking Forms, with full details, will be sent out with the Autumn Newsletter in September. Those wishing to make a provisional booking can contact Victoria Glazier on 01453 839488 victoria@timothyglazier.com



The Abbey Sutton Courtenay Oxon OX14 4AF

“Rest and Renewal in a unique medieval setting”

“What it is to be human”

A weekend retreat with Brother Martin.
Fri 11 – Sun 13 July. £150/£165 (sgl supp)

“Zen for Everyday Life”

A silent retreat with Pete Lowry,
Senior Fellow of the Western Chan Fellowship.
Sat 16 – Sun 17 Aug £120/£135 (sgl supp)

Deep Creativity

Weekend workshop in meditation and inspiration
from the Buddhist tradition with Alistair Appleton.
Fri 22 – Sun 24 August £150/£165 (sgl supp)

Buddhist Christian Retreat

With Ajahn Candasiri of Amaravati Monastery and Elizabeth West.
Fri 29 Nov – Mon 1 Dec. £150/£165 (sgl supp)
with donations to the teachers.

www.theabbey.uk.com
01235 847401

Centrespace

Rev. Richard Podger & Heike Podger,
friends of the Sangha, would like you to know about
their retreat house near Canterbury.

*“A place to spend some time quietly – a few hours or days
to reflect – rest – re-create – read – pray – meditate”*

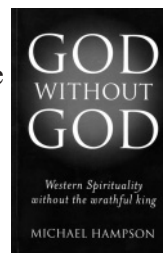
Read more on our website:
www.centrespace.freeserve.co.uk
Phone: 01227 4620383

God without God.

Michael Hampson

This is a stimulating and scholarly book written by a theologian, who for 13 years was an Anglican clergyman, that “rejects the God of presumptive monotheism – the wrathful, autocratic, vengeful and demanding king – and acknowledges and seeks the God who is ... the ground of all being, and the essence of all that is good.” At a time when a feature of popular publishing is the success of evangelising atheism, this is a reassuring and thought provoking book. In his clear restating of the basis of the Western Spiritual tradition, Michael Hampson penetrates the mystery at the heart of faith in chapters that include God, the Bible, the Creed, Prayer, Community and Sacraments and he raises challenging questions on the nature and implications of belief.

Published by O Books £9.99 Paper Bk.



BOOKS FROM THE SANGHA.

Beyond the Darkness



Shirley du Boulay's definitive biography of Father Bede Griffiths. *“Beyond the darkness is a magnificently clear, finely written and untimely inspiring biography of one of the twentieth century's greatest spiritual pioneers”.* Andrew Harvey

The Four O'Clock Talks

Transcripts of Brother Martin's daily talks at Shantivanam, recorded and presented by Atmajyoti (Carrie Lock)



*Suggested donation of £6.00 each to cover cost and postage.
Cheques made out to “Bede Griffiths Sangha” to:
Timothy Glazier, 2 Tynings Road, Nailsworth, GL6 0EJ.*

FROM THE WCCM

BOOKS, DVD'S AND CASSETTES OF FATHER BEDE AND BOOKS AND TAPES ON MEDITATION

Ask for complete list of Father Bede Griffith's and Father John Main's books, CD's, Videos and DVD's.

All available from MEDIO MEDIA

St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX
mail@wccm.org Call Jan Dunsford on 020 7278 2070
Add £1.00 postage in the UK orders; postage on overseas orders will be charged according to weight.

Regional and Overseas Sangha Contacts

*For Sangha and Newsletter Contacts see page 2
If any one would like to have their names removed
or added as local contacts please let us know.*

England

Beds: Bedford - Peter Forrest 01234 831361 Bucks:
Cornwall: Penzance - Swami Nityamuktananda
01736 350510
Devon: Totnes - Susan Hannis. 01803 867416
susan.hannis@phonecoop.coop.
Dorset: Michael Giddings 07810 366860 or
mjgiddings2002@yahoo.co.uk
Essex: Revd. Chris Collingwood 020 8501 5771
Gloucestershire: Timothy and Victoria Glazier
01453 839488
Hertfordshire Graham Thwaits. 01279 834315
Kent: Canterbury, Jill Hemmings 01227 752871
London N4 - Ann O'Donoghue 0207 359 1929
London SE (Kent) - Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004
London N/Herts - Edgar Holroyd-Doveton
020 8386 4323
Middlesex Pinner. Catherine Widdicombe
jewiddicombe@tiscali.co.uk
Norfolk: Chris Smythe 01493 664725
Northants: Henry Worthy 01604 513032
Somerset: Taunton - Valeria Ives 01823 432468
Bath - Kevin Tingay 01761 470249
Staffs: Stoke on Trent - Sr Sophia 01782 816036
Suffolk: Wendy Mulford 01728 604169
W. Sussex: Gillian Maher 01444 455334
Chichester: Therese O'Neill 01730 814879
Worce Nick & Mary Saddler. 01386 751443
Yorks: Barnsley: Margaret Cadnam
01226 217042 Group

Northern Ireland

Ballyhornan: Stan Papenfus 02844 841451

Scotland

Aberdeen: Angelika Monteux 01224 867409
Glasgow: Steve Woodward 01355 224937
Edinburgh: Laird McLean 0131 478 1673
Easter Ross: Revd George Coppin 01862 842381
gcoppin@tiscali.co.uk

Wales

West Wales: Martin and Aileen Neilan 01834 871 433
Mid Wales: Montgomery - Jonathan Robinson
01588 620779
Holywell - Philip Francis 01352 711620

Channel Islands Jersey:

Sean Arnold. 01534 747643.
seanwalter@uku.co.uk

Overseas contacts

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malen_puebla@hotmail.com
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Malta Godwin Genovese shine@vol.net.mt
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s.friend@paradise.net.nz
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mspillane@legalaidpbc.org
Oklahoma - Carolyn Cowan:
ccmission@cox.net
Nevada - Jackie Greedy 775 883 0854
California Santa Barbara - Nicholas Dewey
805 898 0865
Big Sur - Father Cyprian Consiglio
cyprianconsiglio@sbcglobal.net

Meditation Groups

Gloucestershire: **Nailsworth.** Timothy and Victoria Glazier
01453 839488 *Mondays 6.30pm*
Hertfordshire: **Bishop Stortford.** Graham Thwaits.
01279 834315 *Thursdays 6.30pm*
London : **SE (Kent)** - Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004
Wednesdays 7.30.
SW (Barnes) Stefan Reynolds 07930679905
stefandreynolds@yahoo.co.uk *Wednesdays.*
Middlesex: **Pinner.** Catherine Widdicombe
jewiddicombe@tiscali.co.uk *Fridays 8.00pm*
Northants: Henry Worthy 01604 513032
Thurs at 8 p.m.
Surrey: **Woking.** Kath Higgins 01483 833101
Wednesdays. 5.30pm
Sussex: **Chichester.** Therese O'Neill 01730 814879
2nd Wed of each month.
Arundel. Mary Corbyn 01903 882508
Tuesdays.
Yorkshire: **Mirfield.** Margaret Cadnam 01226 217042
1st Thurs of each month
WCCM Groups **WCCM contact** - Kim Nataraja
kimshankarnataraja@googlemail.com
020 7727 6779