

The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

Summer 2007 Volume 10 Issue 3

Interconnectedness

Welcome to the Summer 2007 edition of the Sangha Newsletter. Running through this issue is the theme of 'interconnectedness'. Starting with a further report on the Centenary Celebrations at Shantivanam last December from Michael Giddings, from there we move to the wonderful geographical and inner journey taken by Trevor Smith after leaving Shantivanam. The interconnectedness that arises in 'silence' is then considered in quotes from the Masters and how this can happen in meditation - particularly when we meet in groups to meditate. We recall the life and legacy of Father John Main, who Fr Bede met in 1979 and considered "one of the most important spiritual guides of the time" and we have an article about Sister Ishpriya and her links with Fr Bede through the development of Christian Ashrams in India. There is a report of the ongoing influence of Fr Bede as it flows out through the work of the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust. Finally we invite your increased connectedness with the Sangha by joining with us at various events, particularly the SANGHA DAY in London on Sunday 30th September, at which the future direction of the Sangha will be discussed with the Working Group and at which we can eat and worship together in true Sangha style.

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"When I think of Father Bede, my heart smiles"

Sister Stephanie Jones speaking at the Centenary Celebrations at Shantivanam last December. See report page 2.

Sr Stephanie Jones



Silence

*Silently a flower blooms,
In silence it falls away,
The whole flower,
The whole of the world is blooming,
The truth of the blossom,
The glory of eternal life is fully shining here.*

Zenkai Shibayama *A Flower does not talk.*

Continuing our theme of meditation, we consider the mystery of silence. Pages 4/5.

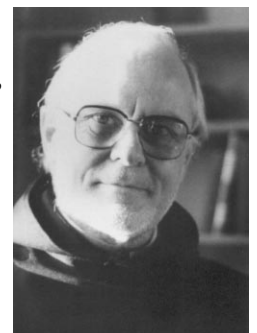
*The
Bede
Griffiths
Sangha is
committed to
the search for
the truth at
the heart
of all
religions.*



Dom John Main

On the 25th Anniversary of the death of Father John Main, we look at the contribution that he made to the revival of meditation as a universal practice for humanity and the manner in which he was able to make this available and acceptable again for Christians. See page 7

Dom John Main 1926-1982



Shantivanam Centenary Celebrations

Michael Giddings

“When I think of Father Bede my heart smiles!”



Sr Stephanie Jones

So said Sr. Stephanie when she shared her experiences of being around Father Bede. Her sentiments were typical of the many speakers at the Centenary Celebrations at Shantivanam.

It was a wonderfully joyous event: for three days people from many parts of the world spoke of the tremendous impact that Fr. Bede had had on them, either through meeting him, or through his writings. I had first met Father Bede in 1989, and the stories told by those who knew him brought back many vivid memories for me. I could almost imagine him appearing just around the corner, clothed in kavi, walking purposefully to the chapel!

The proceedings were inaugurated by the present Bishop of Trichy, Rt Rev Antony Devota. He lit the Kuthuvilakku, the traditional oil lamp, and then spoke movingly of the part that Fr Bede had played in the Catholic Church in India, and of the important role that Shantivanam can play in the life of his Diocese. In fact a few days before, the Bishop had hosted a meeting at Shantivanam of over 100 of his priests. This very visible support by him of the ashram and its work moved me greatly. His predecessors have not always been so supportive!

Among the many important guests was the present Abbot of Kurisumala. His descriptions of Father Bede's work with the cows and in the fields at Kurisumala gave a new perspective on his life, and when he gently laid a wreath at Fr Bede's tomb, tears came to my eyes.

There had been some separation and distance over the years between Fr Bede and Fr Francis Acharaya, Abbot of Kurisumala, and it was good to see such reconciliation. Fr George, Superior of Shantivanam, also referred to Fr Bede's time at Kurisumala. He spoke movingly of the time he had first met Fr Bede there as a young child when he had gone with his parents to visit his uncle Amaldass. Amaldass, together with Christudas, later came to join Fr Bede permanently at Shantivanam. He, as a yoga teacher, was instrumental in the building of the Dhyana Mandir, the large palm leafed yoga hall, there.



Laying a wreath on Father Bede's tomb.

Speakers from India and further afield, including Thomas Mock and Christian Hackberth Johnson from Germany, and Fr Cyprian from USA, added further personal details of Bede's impact on them and their lives. Brother Martin, Fr Alexander, Fr Selvaraj, Fr Thomas, and Sr Iona, each quoted an important incident when some word or advice from Fr Bede had helped them immensely on their spiritual path. For those present at this gathering, who had not had the privilege of meeting Fr Bede personally, these and many other speakers contributions brought to life this wonderful amazing man. *Indeed, everyone's heart was smiling, including mine.*



Rt Revd Antony Devota, Bishop of Trichy, inaugurating the Centenary Celebrations, with Father George and Sister Marie Louise.

Sr Marie Louise shared her own special experiences of Fr Bede, describing his life in three distinct phases. As a **'Prophet in the making'** when he remained mainly in India, with his involvement and support of the interfaith work of the late Amalorpavadass, Sr Vandana and Sara Grant: as a **'Prophet reaching the world podium'** when his books sent out *appealing shock waves into many parts of the planet* and when he *played the music of the universal flute*: and his **'Return to the Promised Land'** when she talked in detail of Fr Bede's last five months of life at Shantivanam, and in particular his last night when he wanted to be shifted to the chapel to die like his guru Benedict, surrounded by his monks chanting psalms.



A dancer performing at the Centenary Celebration

Correction: In our Spring issue it was said that Father Bede lived at Shantivanam for 35 years: in fact that was the time that he was in India and he was at Shantivanam for 25 years.

Inner Connections - a personal journey

Trevor Smith

Following the Advent Retreat at Prinknash Abbey last December, on the theme of *Silence, Sound and Scripture*, I headed for India and the Centenary Celebration at Shantivanam on the life of Father Bede. The Advent Retreat was a good preparation for the Shantivanam Celebration, and both, in their own way, represented the end of an era - the farewell to Prinknash where Father Bede lived and then an honouring of his life and contribution in the field of spirituality.

I had wanted to go to Shantivanam for many years. I had seen Father Bede in a video on Gurus of India when I was living in Canada and was impressed by what he said as well as his enthusiasm. More recently I had read and was influenced by his books and the theme of the marriage of East and West and the need to find the other half of one's soul, were particularly appealing. I believe people in the West are looking for a fullness of life which is not always supported by our own culture. There is a deep need for an integration so that we can live meaningful and fulfilled lives.

Father Bede had the vision, wisdom and understanding to follow this call. To discover the unity that is at the heart of all religions and hence at the heart of all existence and at the heart of all of us. In the words of T.S. Eliot - *to return to the beginning after all our journeying and know ourselves for the very first time*. Shantivanam provides this opportunity. It is peaceful and ideal for quiet contemplation and reflection. Swami Abhishiktananda one of the original founder's cabin is still there and together with Father Bede's cabin give a sense of continuity. It was special to sit in silence where Father Bede had stayed and meditate on his presence.

In fact it is this timeless quality that impressed me the most. Indian spirituality through the Sanata

Dharma - the perennial philosophy - addresses this point. That something exists that permeates all of life. If we can surrender and be receptive to this something and/or everything then we can inhabit a world which is ever present and accessible. Perhaps this is best achieved through silence and a freeing up of all our concepts and notions of what spirituality is and who we are. A silencing of the mind seems to be a precondition for a greater awareness that allows true wisdom to emerge.

After the Celebration I was sorry to leave Shantivanam but I had made arrangements to go to Rishikesh for the Christmas Retreat at Sivananda Ashram - Swami Sivananda was the great sage and saint and founder of the Divine Life Society. I also visited Ajanta Ashram - Swami Ajanta had been a disciple of Abhishiktananda and thus there was a strong connection with Shantivanam. Actually the more I travelled the more I realised the inter-connections that do exist. This included a chance encounter with one of the participants from Shantivanam and a sighting of another: I wonder if many of our meetings were previously determined. Part of the web of life which underpins and supports and structures our relationships.

Brindavan was my next destination. The place of Krishna's lila and nearby Mathura where he incarnated. Much has been written about Krishna. Perhaps the only true response is a silence and awe at this divine personage.

I then proceeded to Hyderabad at the invitation of Dr. Raja Reddy the Founder Director of the Shanti Ashram Charitable Society, who I had met at Shantivanam. He had been encouraged by Father Bede to study medicine and Father Bede, who had anticipated the problem of Aids in India, had visited Hyderabad to bless Dr. Reddy's Aids projects. I visited many of these which included the clinic, res-

idential and school programmes and community support in affected slum areas. The visit coincided with my own birthday and the visit of Mata Amritanandamayi or Amma, the hugging saint. It was wonderful to receive her darshan. She is a tireless worker and shows great compassion in helping as many people as she can in all parts of the world

From there I proceeded to Pondicherry and the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo's yoga is unique. His outlook is that the next stage in human evolution is to bring the divine energy or what he calls the supramental down to earth. The vastness, the overwhelming calm and silence in which you feel merged is called the Atman or the silent Brahman and it is the aim of yoga to achieve this realisation and live in it. Father Bede had been in correspondence with the Aurobindo Ashram and this series of letters has been published by them.

In addition I met an Ashram resident who had heard of and had been drawn to visit Father Bede. After many months he had heeded the call. He arrived on the day that Father Bede had passed away. It was a remarkable story. Perhaps it also points to the knowing beyond all names and forms. The deep intuition that bypasses the rational mind of which we can be too fond.

The most recognised exponent of this approach was Ramana Maharshi and the final stage of my journey was to visit the caves of Arunachala where he meditated: Arunachala is Shiva's sacred mountain loved by Ramana. The peace that pervades these places is palpable even overpowering - the gift of a liberated sage that, I trust, will remain with me always. While I was there I got talking to a young Dane who had been to England. He asked me if I knew Prinknash Abbey which he had visited. *The journey had come full circle.*

Silence *Continuing our theme of meditation we consider the ‘mystery’ of silence.*



What the Masters say:

When you become aware of silence, immediately there is that state of inner still alertness. You are present. You have stepped out of thousands of years of collective human conditioning.

Eckhart Tolle.

There is nothing so much like God as silence. Meister Eckhart (1260 - 1327) Sermons and Treatises.

We are what we do in silence.

Friedrich von Hugel (1825-1925)
Mystical Elements of Religion.

The great silence itself in which God himself is, is not the negation of thought. It is its transcendence. Henri Le Saux /Abhishiktananda (1910-73)

I think what all of us have to learn is that we do not have to create silence. The silence is there within us. What we have to do is to enter it, to become silent, to become the silence. The purpose of meditation and the challenge of meditation is to allow ourselves to become silent enough to allow this interior silence to emerge. Silence is the language of the Spirit. Dom John Main (1926-82) Moment of Christ.

I saw many saved by silence, but by much speaking not a single one. Bishop Ambrose.

He enfolds the whole universe and, in silence, is loving to all.
Upanishads.

“There was Silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.” Revelations 8:1 AV:

Commentaries by two other Masters on that ‘mysterious’ passage in Revelations:

St Gregory the Great (c. 540-604 CE) wrote:

“If we wish to contemplate things within, let us rest from outward engagements. The voice of God is heard when, with minds at ease, we rest from the bustle of this world, and the divine precepts are pondered by us in the deep silence of the mind.”

In another place he writes that in this life we cannot expect to see God as he is, but we can contemplate something of his glory:

“In that contemplation already the taste of inner quiet is experienced. And as it is, so to say, partial and cannot now be perfect, rightly is it written in the Apocalypse: ‘There was silence in heaven about half-an-hour.’ For heaven is the soul of the righteous. When therefore the quiet of contemplation takes place in the mind, there is silence in heaven; because the noise of earthly doings dies away from our thoughts, that the mind may fix its ear on the inward secret. But because this quiet of the mind cannot be perfect in this life, it is not said that there was silence in heaven a whole hour, but about half an hour: because as soon as the mind begins to raise itself, and to be inundated with the light of interior quiet, the turmoil of thoughts soon comes back, and is thrown into disorder from itself, and, being disordered, is blinded”.

How reassuring that even this great saint could not hold himself in contemplation for more than half an hour, but found as we do, that after such a period of time all the wandering thoughts come creeping back in! I wonder if this

is the reason that it is suggested that we meditate for just half an hour, two or three times a day?

St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 CE) also wrote about this passage, in the context of experiencing the indescribable joy of truly hearing a passage of Scripture:

“In that day, in that hour – if there is an hour then, and it may not be even an hour but half-an-hour, according to the words of Scripture: ‘There was silence in heaven for the space of about half-an-hour’ – in that hour my mouth shall be filled with joy and my tongue with gladness, for I shall sense the fragrance of every Psalm, every verse more fragrant than any perfume.”

I think we may recognise this joy and love which blazes up when Scripture comes alive to us. Bernard calls this ‘the taste of contemplation.’ In The Steps of Humility he describes contemplation more fully:

“...the soul is led into the chamber of the King for whose love she pines. Then, while silence reigns in heaven for about half-an-hour, she rests secure in the King’s embrace; and although she may fall asleep, her heart remains alert and watchful while it searches the secrets of truth. Returning to herself, she delights to savour the memory of these things, while in this chamber she sees things that man’s eye cannot see, and hears mysteries that no tongue can repeat, and secrets greater than any one night can pass on to the next”.

1 Moralia in Job xxiii.37

2 Revelation 8:1 AV: ‘And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.’

3 Homilies on Ezekiel, Bk II, Hom ii.14

4 Sermons on the Song of Songs, 67.7

5 Steps of Humility and Pride, chapter 7

Hilary Knight

Sanskrit Corner - 'Muni' and 'Mauna'

Ken Knight. hilken_98@yahoo.com

People may have heard of the word *muni* used generally for a wise person but it refers especially to one who has taken a vow of silence, *mauna*. This vow may be seen as a progression of restraint in speech to restraint from speech until one rests in silence, unmoving but being everywhere as one.

While Ramana Maharshi may be the first name to come to our minds we know also how the direct experience of 'the ground of being' left St Thomas Aquinas silent:

'All that I have written seems to me nothing but straw....compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me.....'

This depth of silence is not just an emptiness but a fullness to which no word can be added without subtracting from that fullness. It is the silence known by those in love.

The ultimate silence can only ever be Self-revealing but this fact does not negate the use of spiritual practice, *sadhana* through such disciplines as the vow, *mauna*, prayer, meditation and study etc. These polish the mirror and we may take the example of the late Swami Nirmalananda of Karnataka who served in the Army Postal Service in Europe during World War II. He travelled the world and studied the world's religions and philosophies. In the end, his burning search for truth culminated in silence.

"If you desire to live in peace, hear all that falls on your ears, see all that appears before your eyes, realize that everything is in accordance with the eternal law of nature, and be silent."

He did not speak for eleven years, and thereafter spoke sparingly. When he did, it was with clarity

and conviction. *"Wisdom to me is not a set of words, but freshness and emptiness of the mind. Empty the mind by self-observation, self-awareness and inner attention. Thus make the mind shine like a mirror. Then nothing is seen or known but the limitless radiance of eternity. This is a wonderful source of ever-renewed joy and inspiration beyond words."*

Abhishiktananda in his visits to Ramana enquired about the practice of silence and wrote:

'I used to visit a nearby monastery where the Abbot, Sri Ramasami, kept two days of silence each week. On one occasion there we met an old monk who had spent 10 years in total silence and was therefore called 'muni'.

With Sri Ramasami I discussed silence and he explained:

'There are three types of people who keep silent: Firstly there are those who keep silent out of their dislike for their fellow-men, or at least as a way of protecting themselves from others. Such a silence is always accompanied by some degree of egoism. Then there are those who bind themselves to keep silence under a vow and observe it by an effort of will with a view to their spiritual advancement; such a silence is praiseworthy. Finally there is the true silence which is no more a matter of obligation but is spontaneous; the silence of one who has plunged so deeply within that it is well nigh impossible for him to abandon it for conversation with others.'

The Secret of Arunachala 130-131

Such a muni is at that point from which the eloquence of silence is the Guru, as this story of Ramana illustrates:

'A devotee once asked Ramana, "Research on God has been going on from time immemorial. Has the final word been said?" After a long interval, in which Ramana did not respond, the visitor asked, "Should I consider Sri Bhagavan's silence as the reply to my question?" Ramana replied, "Yes, Mauni is Isvara-svarupa [God-state]. Hence the text: "The Truth of Supreme Brahman proclaimed through Silent Eloquence."

To Ramana, silence is not a negation but truth itself, it is ever-speaking, it is the perennial flow of "language." It is interrupted by speaking, for words destroy this mute language. Silence is unceasing eloquence. It is the best language. There is a state when words cease and silence prevails.

Study Days with Ken

The first Sangha Study Day was held at the beautiful Fintry Trust Centre in Surrey. Ten of us met to study *bhakti* - devotion, the Kaivalya Upanishad and concluding with the consideration of a chapter from the Bhagavad Gita. Ken, with his deep knowledge of sanskrit and the vedantic tradition, taking us to a deep level of understanding.



Ken Knight leading the Study Day at Fintry

The Next Study Day will be held at the Fintry Trust on Sunday 27th October. If you would like to attend please contact him at his email address above or on 01689 861004.

Meditation Groups

In the Spring Newsletter we stressed how helpful it is to have a meditation group that you can attend on a regular basis and also that you might consider starting your own group. The following are reports from those who attend or run groups:

Ken and Hilary Knight wrote:

The group started about twelve years ago as a Christian Meditation group of Roman Catholics and Anglicans. It has changed and evolved over the years; we have different 'regulars', and we often welcome visitors. As well as those following the Christian path, some members are Hindu and some advaitin – although they would not like to have such a label attached! We meet once a week and start with music. Sounding the Tibetan bowl starts and ends the half-hour period of meditation. We end with more music and readings from all members of the group present. Although we come from such a variety of traditions, we find there is great unity in the group.

Shirley du Boulay wrote:

Our group is held at my flat, which is quite small so we cannot easily have more than eight people. Before they arrive I light a candle and some incense, switch off the telephone and put some music on. I leave the door on the latch so there is no need to ring the bell and people can arrive quietly to an atmosphere that is already peaceful. We try not to engage in conversation yet, though, as we have become good friends, this is sometimes hard!

At 5 o'clock one of us strikes a bell and we sing the Gayatri Mantra and settle down for 30 minutes meditation, each of us following our own practice. This is the heart of our meeting and the main reason why we are there together, but after the meditation we also read sacred texts such as the Upanishads. At about 6.15 we stop talking and end with ten more minutes of meditation, so that our discussion is framed by silence.

Then we have a drink and chat for a while.

Thérèse O'Neill wrote:

We started getting together nearly five years ago, we are a small group, our numbers have fluctuated and there are now five of us; living in the country we are all rather far apart.

We meet once a month at 12.30 and usually begin by celebrating a "Kiddush" (sharing bread and wine after the Jewish tradition). It includes a reading (chosen by one of us in turn) and reflection on the text, and bidding prayers or intercessions. After the Kiddush we enjoy a meal and the opportunity for sharing our problems, joys, family events or "putting the world to right".

We end with a period of silence and meditation.

Once during the summer, we have a picnic outside an old and beautiful small church, an idyllic setting, and this has become a sort of tradition!"

Timothy and Victoria Glazier wrote:

Our group has developed because of the beautiful sacred space near to us in South Gloucestershire. It is a dedicated meditation room at the Matara Centre that has been established for workshops, healing and spiritual work. Created from the outhouses of a large Georgian House, these have an oriental serenity and the meditation space itself, in the loft of the old stables, has cushions round the wall with a Buddha on the window sill/altar that has been blessed by a senior Lama and other sacred object from various traditions. To enter the space is to become quiet.

Each Monday at 6.30pm people from various meditation backgrounds gather for half an hour: we commence with the sounding of the singing bowl or someone may

be invited to chant. We conclude with the sounding of the singing bowl and usually some conversation develops. We then leave - wonderfully energised and nourished.

We are delighted to be able to announce several new meditation groups - for details of these, and the groups described on this page, see the back page. Below is a letter from Roger Layet of the WCCM, with the kind invitation to Sangha members to attend Christian Meditation Groups.

Dear Tim,

As UK coordinator of the World Community for Christian Meditation I read the articles in your spring newsletter with great interest.

I write to emphasise that members of the Sangha who would like to come to any of the meditation groups in the Community would be most welcome.

The groups exist to support meditators on their individual paths, and to pass on John Main's teaching on meditation, which was based on the use of a prayer word, or mantra. They include many who use slightly different approaches, for, as the Dalai Lama memorably said at one of our seminars years ago, "in the silence, we do what we do".

There are about 260 groups in Great Britain in the Community. Our office will provide contact information: email uk@wccm.org or call 020 7833 9615

*For those interested in setting up their own group, may I recommend a booklet called *The Pearl of Great Price*, by Laurence Freeman, which is about starting a meditation group, and can be ordered from our office.*

Peace

Roger Layet

Fr John Main and the revival of the practice of Meditation.

The Legacy of Fr John Main

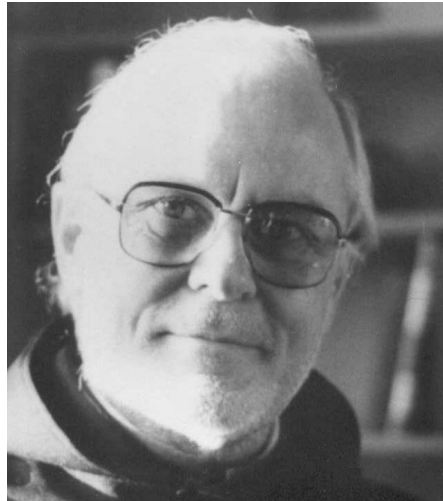
As we considered in the Spring edition of the Newsletter, the phenomenon of the revival of the practice of meditation throughout the world, has possibly been the most significant spiritual event of recent decades. One must assume that this had come about because of the great need in our world today for some form of contemplative practice that can counteract the downward spiral into materialism. But it is also clear that it has been consciously facilitated by the insight of spiritual masters from a number of traditions: Fr John Main being one.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the death of Father John Main, and his life and remarkable legacy are being celebrated by those who acknowledge his great contribution to the renewal of Christian contemplative life.

John Main's journey towards becoming a teacher of Christian meditation began when he was in the British Colonial Service in Malaya in 1955. One day he was sent by the governor to deliver a goodwill message to the Swami Satyananda, a Hindu monk and justice of the peace who had started an interfaith school and worked for religious and racial harmony in his divided country. It turned out that Satyananda was also a teacher of meditation so John Main asked the Swami to teach him to meditate, immediately realising that this was something that he had been seeking. Swami Satyananda had a lasting influence on Father Main, who wrote he was "deeply impressed by his peacefulness and calm wisdom" and this encounter bore fruit in Main's later discovery of his own Christian tradition of meditation.

When Main returned to Ireland in 1956, he taught law at Trinity College, continuing to meditate. However, when he brought the topic up with priests he sometimes encountered suspicion and hostility but mostly lack of understanding. Later, when he became a Benedictine monk at Ealing Abbey in London, John Main was advised that as this was "not a Christian form of prayer" and he should give it up, which for a number of years he obediently, but reluctantly,

did. However, in the 1970s, while studying the work of the 4th Century monk John Cassian, John Main noted Cassian's description of "pure prayer" as a method that "restricts itself to the poverty of a single verse." Reading further, he found this same tradition in the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Written in the 14th century by an anonymous mystic, this work suggested to "use this little word and pray not in many words but in a little word of one syllable."



Dom John Main 1926-1982

By 1975, Fr John Main was teaching others to meditate and to repeat interiorly and silently the Aramaic word "*Maranatha*" which comes at the end of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and translated means both "Come Lord" and "The Lord comes." From this beginning grew the Christian meditation movement, and the prayer practice he developed has spread to be practiced throughout the world. Although Fr Bede met him only once in 1979, he considered him "*one of the most important spiritual guides of the time*" and whom he credited with with being the person responsible for bringing Christian contemplative life to lay people.

My personal introduction to meditation also came in the 1950's, a few years after John Main had met Swami Satyananda, with the arrival in this country of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his 'Spiritual Regeneration Movement', later to be known as Transcendental Meditation or TM. He had been sent to take meditation to the West by his Master, the great teacher known as Guru Deva - Sri Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, who apparently was also the teacher to Swami Satyananda. Subsequently I was

involved with the founding of The School of Meditation in London that also taught meditation from the same Himalayan tradition.

As John Main discovered when he spoke about meditation on his returned to Ireland, the response to the idea of meditation at that time was very 'challenging' - meeting resistance and often ridicule from a somewhat cynical society and, to my great sadness, a great deal of suspicion and lack of comprehension from the Christian community.

Some years later I was delighted to become aware of the work and story of Father John Main: I visited the Christian Meditation Centre in Kensington, (which also gave me one of my first introductions to the Sangha when I met Jill and Adrian there) and in due course I helped to establish and run a Christian Meditation Group in Hemel Hempsted, following a visit to St Albans Abbey by Fr Laurence Freeman, the spiritual leader of The World Community for Christian Meditation, which was founded in 1991 as a development of Father Main's work.

Meditation for the Householder.

Today the awareness of and attitude to meditation is quite different and it has become an accepted part of modern society. But perhaps the most important factor is, as Fr Bede says, meditation has been made available to the *laity*, or as they would be described in the East, the 'householder' - one who is not a monk or renunciate. This, as Sangha Member Rev Adrian Smith, who has researched this says, is what happened within the tradition of the Maharishi and Swami Satyananda in which they had deliberately "*simplified the practice of meditation so that it would better suit the life of the householder.*"

Since that time, through many sources of meditation teaching from the East and West, the remarkable work of the WCCM and other contemplative Christian organisations, millions of 'householders' throughout the world now practice meditation - the impact of which upon the planet can only be wondered at.

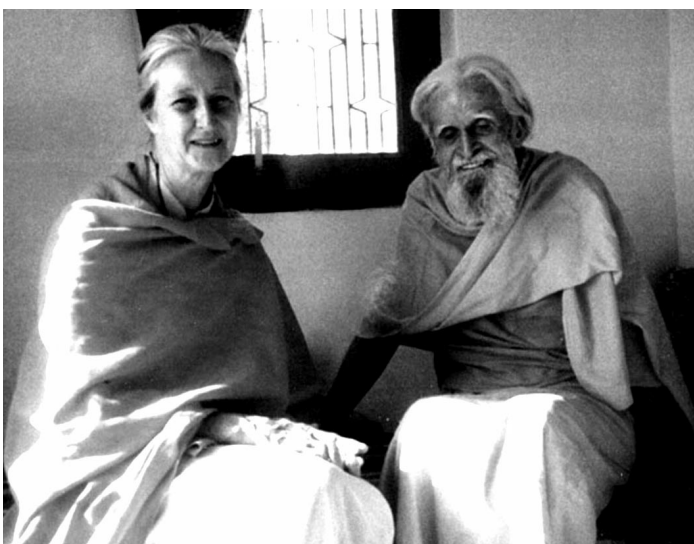
Timothy Glazier

Sr Ishpriya and the International Satsang Association.

Throughout his life Father Bede came in contact with, helped and communicated with innumerable Christians throughout the world - particularly those who were working in India: one such was Sister Ishpriya Mataji. Elizabeth West has written this account of her life and current work which she felt would be of interest to readers of the Sangha Newsletter.

Some members of the Bede Griffiths Sangha, I am sure, will be familiar with the name of Ishpriya and also Vandana Matajis, two sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Together they were part of the development of Christian Ashrams in India along with Fr Bede and Swami Abhishiktananda and others. They began at the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune along with the Anglican Sisters from Wantage. Swami Abhishiktananda spent ten days with them in the early days exploring ashram lifestyle in a Christian context.

Later they both moved north and spent six months of the year living in Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh and studying with Swami Chidanandaji. The rest of the year they spent leading retreats in India and the West. Later they had their own small ashram in Rishikesh, and also founded a larger ashram higher in the Himalayas at Jaiharikhal.



Sister Ishpriya and Father Bede.

Ishpriya Mataji, being English by birth, began working more in the West and in 1991 together with Sr Gitti Linhart, founded the International Satsang Association (ISA), from the people in various countries who were following her teaching. The ISA is now a world-wide community of people seeking genuine wisdom and guidance for their spiritual journey. It is open to people of any faith or none. Members of the ISA make a triple commitment to: i) their personal growth in spiritual awareness and practice; ii) helping remove the barriers

of prejudice and ignorance which divide persons from each other, wherever they encounter them in daily life; and iii) to building up relationships of compassion and appreciation across frontiers of race, language, culture, religion or economic status.

In 1996 along with members of the ISA, Sr Ishpriya and Sr Gitti, opened the spiritual resource centre Die Quelle (The Source). In the last 10 years it has become known as an open door between east and west through which to enter the richness of our universal spiritual inheritance.

This year, in addition to being a home for the ISA, Die Quelle, will be a Sadhana Ashram in Central Europe. For periods during the year it will be open to all who are seriously seeking a space, the silence and an atmosphere conducive to spiritual practice and guidance. The life style in Die Quelle, while guarding the essentials of the authentic eastern ashram tradition, is rooted in the contemporary Global reality. In her teaching Ishpriya Mataji transcends religions and draws on all the wisdom traditions of the world. She sees this as the way forward for the future of religious traditions as resources for everyone, but not restricting or limiting.

Die Quelle – The Source – La Fuente, A-8241 Dechantskirchen, Hohenau 25, is situated between Vienna and Graz and is accessible from either by public transport. It is in the foothills of the alps, and a most remarkably silent place with beautiful views and walks in the pine forests around. The Centre itself is a place of beauty and simplicity of life. The life-style includes 3 periods of meditation daily and regular conferences on spiritual life and practice. There is plenty of time for personal practice and the days include times for service to the community. Personal guidance is also available from Sr. Ishpriya. It is truly a Source of life and refreshment to all.

If you are interested in participating in any of the Ashram times or meditation courses at Die Quelle please contact: Sr Gitti Linhart, Schorgelgasse 58, A-8010 Graz Austria. Or email: glinhart@aon.at. If you wish to know more about the Centre or the ISA visit the website: www.international-satsang.org.

Elizabeth West

Elizabeth is the organiser of the Buddhist Christian Vedanta Network which is for those who are on a spiritual journey using the resources of more than one faith and which publishes a regular Newsletter For more details visit:

www.buddhist-christian.org or email ewest@ahs.org.uk

Report in the work of the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust

Adrian and I spent a rich and wonderful three months in Shantivanam and Muttom over the winter and wanted to bring you up to date with the work of the Charitable Trust. There is so much good news that it is hard to know where to start and I can only give you the highlights.

For the 100th anniversary of Fr Bede's birth, Senthil Kumar, the initiator of BLESS, the educational trust at Inungur, was determined to build a new English medium school in his honour. Bede had sponsored Senthil's education and given him so many opportunities for which he is eternally grateful. We were thrilled to be present on 18th December at the inauguration of the new land bought by BLESS with £3500 from the BGCT, thanks to the hard work of Joan Plunkett, Sangha member from London.



Fr Cyprian blessing the new school at Inungur

Because of a the wonderful donation of £7000 to the Trust from visitors from Chigwell School, Senthil has been able to build the first new classrooms, one of which will be named after a donor's son who died very tragically last year. Lessons will begin in June. The family have also very generously decided to sponsor a 14-year-old boy's education.

In Veerambur, a small dhalit village built by Fr Bede, 23 children continue to be sponsored for their educational needs, school books, uniforms and after school tuition and a new teacher. In response to a request from parents the Trust is to donate £1500 towards building shelter and provide lighting for the children who currently do their homework under

street lighting! The Home for the Aged is now completed, furnished and staffed thanks to the money donated specifically for this project.

The news from Muttom is equally exciting. On January 9 just over two years since the tsunami struck these villages, St Adrian's Reachout Centre was formally inaugurated. It was a fantastic, miraculous, joyous day. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Arul and Fr George, who came from Shantivanam, 6 coconut trees were planted. milk was boiled over to symbolise the abundance of God's love, ribbons cut, plaques unveiled, children danced and a wonderful vegetable biryani was enjoyed by everyone, the children, their parents, the local community and the four visitors from the UK who had a really memorable time. So phase one is up and running.

To complete the Centre we need to build upstairs. Selvi needs a school hall large enough to accommodate all the children, a chapel and rooms for the tailoring and computer centres plus a changing room for the older girls. The outside fire kitchen blew down in the storms so we urgently need to rebuild something more substantial. All this will cost about £30,000, which sounds a lot, but so far £50,000 has been raised to complete phase one and clearly this is "God's work" as Selvi calls it, so we trust all will be well.

The 30 children are fantastic and literally growing in stature and confidence. They stay at SARC all week going to their schools during the day. The mothers come frequently to visit their children and are so happy with the Centre and the local community are very eager to be involved. The Sangha's Chris Collingwood from Chigwell School observed, echoing Fr Bede's words that "he felt overwhelmed by love at SARC".

Visiting the many and varied projects it is very clear that the Bede Griffiths Charitable Trust is really making a difference to many people's lives. £20,035 was donated to different projects at the Trustees Meeting in February 2007. Total income for



Brother Martin with Jill and Adrian and the children of Veerambur

2006 was £58,600 of which £7,200 came from Standing Orders. Total grants made in 2006 were £55,400 and the Trustees would like to thank all those who have contributed so generously for their wonderful support.



The children at the new St Adrian's Outreach Centre

The AGM will be held on Saturday 21st July at the Park Place retreat at 2.00pm everyone is most welcome. If you would like more information about the work of the Trust please get in touch.

The Trustees are very keen to maintain the Trust's support for all the projects and expand its commitment when requested. If you would like to help with this work and Standing Orders are particularly welcome, do please get in touch with us:

**Jill and Adrian,
Beech Tree cottage,
Selling ME13 9RH
01227 752871**

jill.hemmings@btinternet.com

Sangha News

'HERMITS IN COMPANY'

The Stanton Guildhouse, Worcs.

May 4 – 7th 2007

We came; fourteen pilgrims from North, South, East and West, travelling through brilliant sunshine and glorious country-side to our oasis of peace – at the Stanton Guildhouse. Pilgrim hermits seeking silence, solace and solitude – in company.

The joy of greeting the day with the Guyatri Mantra; then meditation, before sharing in the chants, together with readings and prayers, returns us to the centre – not just of our being but also of our universe. And it is in this that we rested; while preparing, eating and clearing away meals; resting, relaxing - and for those who wished to, sharing yoga, sacred music and meditative movement.



The Stanton Guildhouse

Stanton Guildhouse is a beautiful traditional Cotswold stone house – filled with marvellous paintings, pottery and furniture. The fruits of craftsmen and women who came together to give expression to their ideals of preserving ancient crafts. This was the vision of Mary Osborn,

the founder of the Guildhouse, who shared her dream of giving impoverished people the means of recovering the essence of community life in shared enterprise and activity, a vision she shared and was inspired in by Mahatma Ghandi. In a letter that was read out during the gathering he heartily endorsed her work, describing it as a “cell of good living in the chaos of our world.”



A spinning wheel that belonged to Mahatma Ghandi.



Around the Mandala build at the end of the retreat - each one of us having a section in which we could tell the story of our experience as Hermits in Company.

Mary and the Mahatma shared their belief in spinning, as a meditative exercise and in the Ultimate Truth at the heart of every religion. How appropriate then, for the Sangha to

come, so many years later, to live and pray for that vision at the Guildhouse, so close to Eastington where Fr Bede began his own journey.

As we were captivated by the new life on the hills all around us - with a foal in the field below the house prancing around it's mother on wobbly legs and the lambs gambolling on the slopes of the hills - we were filled with the presence of the new Life which surrounds us every day – if only we can make time to appreciate it...



Gillian Maher

Coming Events

Three Events with Br Martin

Park Place Summer Retreat

Park Place Pastoral Centre, Fareham, Hants.

Friday 20th July - Sunday 22nd 2007

“Who do people think Jesus Christ was?”

Information from: Nick Sadler, Box Farm House, Birlingham, Pershore, WR10 3AB 01386 751443
nicksadler@dsl.pipex.com

A FEW PLACES REMAINING.

“From Becoming to Unfolding”

Tuesday 17th July, 7.30 – 9.30pm

London Christian Meditation Centre,

St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX

Donation on the evening.

Email or phone to book. 020 7833 9615 uk@wccm.org

An Evening in Guildford Cathedral

Wednesday 18th July 2007 at 7.45pm

Brother Martin will talk on the centrality and relevance of meditation today especially as inspired by the work of Fr John Main and Fr Bede Griffiths.

There will also be time for meditation.

Booking Essential via Philip Kitchen 01372 200558
or surreymeditation@yahoo.co.uk

Caldey Silent Retreat

10th September - 17th September 2007

Enjoy the magic and peace of the holy Island of Caldey in the silent company of others. Places limited.

Contact Joan Walters for full details.

Joan Walters, Church House, Steynton, Milford Haven,

Pembs SA73 1AW 01646 692496

johanna@merci-beaucoup.co.uk

Sangha Study Day with Ken Knight

The Fintry Trust Centre, Brook, Surrey.

Sunday 27th October 2007

contact Ken Knight on hilken_98@yahoo.com

or 01689 861004

Sangha Advent Retreat

The Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, Bath.

Friday 7th - Sunday 9th December 2007

Prepare for the Christmas Season at the Sangha's Annual Advent Retreat at the beautiful new venue of the Ammerdown Centre. Extensive grounds and single and double en-suite accommodation.

Booking Form and full details in the Autumn Newsletter.

To make a provisional reservation contact:

Victoria Glazier, 2 Tynings Road, Nailsworth, Glos GL6 0EJ

01453 839488 victoria@timothyglazier.com

SANGHA DAY

11.00am - 4.00pm
Sunday 30th September

MARIA ASSUMPTA CENTRE,
23 Kensington Square, London W8 5HN
www.maria-assumpta.org.uk

Whither the Sangha?

This is an invitation to meet with the **Working Group** who, since February 2006 have been guiding the activities of the Sangha - taking over from the dedicated work of Jill and Adrian who had fulfilled that role for nearly 10 years.

The purpose of the day is to give the opportunity for any one associated with the Sangha to come and join in discussing plans for its future direction. There will be contributions from members of the Working Group including the Group Co-ordinator, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor and others who look after Reception, Retreat Organisation and many other roles.

During the day we will join together with Christopher Collingwood who will lead an Indian style Eucharist.

We hope that many of you will wish to come to this day of sharing ideas, celebration and prayer.

Please complete the form with this Newsletter,
phone Jane or Andy on 01285 651381
or email jane@lichnowski.com

There is no charge for the day.

Resources

Two New books by Sangha Members.

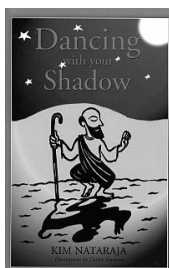
“Dancing with your Shadow” – Integrating the Ego and the Self on the Spiritual Path

by Kim Nataraja, published by Medio Media

Joan Walters writes: Kim is no stranger to Sangha members being a founder member and having led some wonderful retreats at the Skreen in Wales.

Her book reflects her own deep understanding of what Meditation is and how we respond to it. It is a practical book, well written and inspiring and is an invaluable companion for the Spiritual Journey.

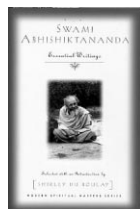
Those of us who, like Kim, learned to Meditate in the John Main method, will find it a most welcome publication in the essential recovery of the spiritual dimension in the Christian tradition. Certainly Kim has much to say about our mystical heritage, so thank you Kim for providing this timely book which I have no hesitation in recommending. The cartoons by Carlos Siqueira are wonderful.



Swami Abhishiktanda - Essential Writings.

Selected and introduced by Shirley du Boulay.

Published by Alban Books in the Modern Spiritual Masters Series.



A superb selection of writings from Swami Abhishiktanda's books, diaries and letters showing the breadth, depth and passion of 'this modern spiritual master'. *“Many of you who have loved Abhishiktanda's writings in his individual books will find in reading this explosive collection that you are 'plunged head over heels completely dazzled', all but 'consumed in the divine embrace'”* Sister Pascaline Coff OSB

BOOKS, CD's and VIDEOS:

CD or Audio Tape

MEDITATION AND THE NEW CREATION IN CHRIST
Talks by Fr Bede Griffiths at the John Main Seminar 1991.
3cds or 6 audiotapes £10.00 (plus £2.00 postage and packing)

A NEW VISION OF REALITY - Fr Bede on themes from the book of the same name. Set of 3 CDs £18.00/set of 3 audio tapes £14.95

THE FUTURE OF HUMAN WISDOM - talks from the John Main Seminar given in Reading in 2003 in honour of Bede Griffiths, with the participation of Bruno Barnhart, Shirley du Boulay and Andrew Harvey. Set of 6 CDs £27.00/set of 6 audio tapes £23.50.

BOOKS

Christ in India - £14.95 River of Compassion - £12.99
Bede Griffiths Essential Writings – Thomas Matus - £8.99
Falling in Love with India from the Letters of Bede Griffiths, edited by Adrian Rance - £10.00
The Mystery Beyond – On retreat with Bede Griffiths - £5.99
The One Light: Bede Griffiths Principal Writings - £20.00
Bede Griffiths, daily readings - £3.60

*The Golden String - £5.00, *Return to the Centre - £5.00.

*Marriage of East and West - £9.99

*All three titles can be purchased for £15.00

Dancing with Your Shadow. Kim Nataraja. £7.99

VIDEO

CHRIST IN THE LOTUS. Laurence Freeman in conversation with Bede Griffiths. This interview reveals Bede's extraordinary depth and clarity of vision. - £12.00

All available from:

Medio Media, St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London

EC1R 1XX mail@wccm.org; 020 7278 2070

£2.00 postage will be added to all UK orders; postage on overseas orders will be charged according to weight

FR BEDE'S BOOKS also available from:

The Inner Bookshop of Oxford,

111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RQ Tel. 01865-245301

www.innerbookshop.com

DVD now available of:

Fr Bede at the Mystics and Scientists Conference 1992.

A NEW VISION OF REALITY. 2 Lectures - (3 hours)

Available from the Scientific and Meditcal Network,
PO Box 11, Moreton in Marsh, GL56 0ZF 01608 652000
£20 + £2 post UK, £4 Europe, £7.50 rest of the world.

Sangha Contacts

Sangha Contact and Welcome

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Sangha Working Group

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Regional and Overseas Sangha Contacts

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020 8386 4323
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jcwiddicombe@tiscali.co.uk
Norfolk: Chris Smythe 01493 664725
Northants: Henry Worthy 01604 513032
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shirley.harriott3@btopenworld.com
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
Worcs Nich & 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 Coppen 01862 842381
gcoppen@tiscali.co.uk

Wales

West Wales: Joan Walters 01646 692496
Mid Wales: Montgomery - Jonathan Robinson
01588 620779
(Holywell - Philip Francis 01352 711620)

Channel Islands Jersey:

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

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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

If any one would like to have their names added as local contacts please let us know.

Meditation Groups

Gloucestershire: Nailsworth. Timothy and Victoria Glazier
01453 839488 *Group Mondays 6.30pm*
Cirecester. Flora Hoskins. 01285 654369
florah@talktalk.net *Group meets first and
third Wednesdays each month 10.00am*
Hertfordshire Bishop Stortford. Graham Thwaites.
01279 834315 *Group Thursdays 6.30pm*
London SE (Kent) - Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004
Group Wednesdays 7.30.
Middlesex Pinner. Catherine Widdicombe
jcwiddicombe@tiscali.co.uk
Group Fridays 8.00pm
Northants: Henry Worthy 01604 513032
Group Thurs at 8 p.m.
Oxon: Oxford - Shirley du Boulay 01865 310332
shirley.harriott3@btopenworld.com
Please contact as spaces limited.
Sussex Therese O'Neill 01730 814879
Group meets 2nd Wed of each month.

Please also let us have details of any meditation groups you would like included.

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The Bede Griffiths Sangha
82 Gloucester Road, Cirencester
Gloucestershire, GL7 2LJ, UK