

## The Shantivanam Sangham

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Welcome to the 2nd Newsletter of the Shantivanam Sangham. The Shantivanam Sangham was established in 1994 when a few people who had been touched by Father Bede and his vision of contemplative renewal, came together. Some had been to Shantivanam, his ashram in Southern India, others had been inspired by his wisdom, compassion and life's work. The Sangham (the word means community in Sanskrit) is a loose community, coming together for meetings and for retreats, seeking to integrate this experience of Shantivanam into their lives. Over 200 people are now keeping in contact through the Sangham.

During 1996 the Sangham held a week long 'desert retreat' at The Skreen, a retreat centre near Builth Wells. The retreat was led by Ria Weyens who at that time was a member of the London Christian Meditation Centre. The celebration of the Eucharist in the Indian style of Father Bede is a feature of all our retreats. Victor de Waal celebrated for us at The Skreen.

In November, the Sangham held the 2nd Annual Father Bede Griffiths weekend retreat for 40 people at St. Peter's Grange, Prinknash Abbey, where Father Bede started his monastic life. Fr Tom Curtis Hayward, who took part in the retreat, and who celebrated the Eucharist in Indian style, contributes a reflection on the retreat in this edition.

Some of you have expressed an interest in having local meetings of the Sangham, to meditate, read scriptures from different traditions, talk about Fr Bede's ideas and, perhaps, to sing bhajans. Many are not confident about how to do this. To start a meditation group along these lines would most certainly have delighted Father Bede and we have asked Shirley du Boulay, who has a meditation group, to share her experience of this. If you would like to initiate a meeting in your area and would like some support, John Careswell, who has also arranged local meetings of the Sangham, would be glad to offer advice, and is sometimes available to attend and help lead local meetings. He lives at Frome in Somerset and can be contacted on 01373 471317

It has been a delight and a blessing to have been in contact with so many of you during the year, both at the retreats and by phone or letter. We will be travelling in Thailand and India during the first few months of 1997 (including a stay at Shantivanam). Joan Walters, whose address is at the head of this newsletter, has volunteered to be the point of contact for the Sangham during this period. On the last page you will find details of the events for 1997. Joan will send out booking forms for the July retreat with Brother Martin in March. If you would like to make an early booking please do contact her.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year  
ADRIAN RANCE AND JILL HEMMINGS

## The 2nd Annual Father Bede Griffiths Retreat at Prinknash

My experience at Prinknash the second weekend of November brought me straight back to Shantivanam in 1988 - the Bhajans, the video, the namjapa with its varying speed and volume, the silence. The food was distinctly more plentiful, though still vegetarian; the shrine room was no temple though a little imagination made it seem like one. Above all, the presence of devotion and attentiveness marked out the Retreat as authentic. For me Fr Bede was present throughout - not needing the bodily manifestation to be with us. I have always felt that I didn't need to return to the ashram: the journey and the visit have wrapped themselves up and come home with me: the prayers and the Asian culture have found their home in my own place of prayer. The task has been to discover the message of Shantivanam in our own part of the world, to follow where Fr Bede has been pointing.

At this time so soon after his departure as a figure in a yellow robe we need to come near to the picture in the memory, to allow the feelings to be stirred. But gradually we need to be receiving the work, just as the apostles did after the Ascension of Jesus. What is Fr Bede asking us to do? We have several books and tapes to aid our recollection and also the Sangham to embody his presence as a prophet. Witnessing to Christ in an Indian culture has forced us to discover the jewel at the centre of ourselves in a universal setting. Fr Bede has shown us how to transcend the boundaries marked out by colonial enterprises and patterns of control to be essential witnesses. Christ is in the heart of Brahman: we have made him too mean when confined to a narrow agenda of European survival. The mystery of the Godhead is as far beyond us as it is for the others. Perhaps my most precious experience at Shantivanam was to be introduced to Ramana Maharshi and Arunachala and the way of enquiry. He has a claim to be the patron of the ashram by the way he inspired the founders in their work: Fr Monchanin and Fr Le Saux. As I learn to say 'I am' more meaningfully, I come to the place where God says 'I am'. We learn to emerge from our state of dreaming to become real people.

*Tom Curtis Hayward*

## A Retreat Towards Life

For all too brief a while  
The cacophony of the world  
Was allowed to fade away.  
Our thoughts and feelings  
Could be reflected and deflected,  
And the tiny seed of love  
Planted in each person's heart  
Could put on new growth  
Nurtured by the warm,

Gentle company and the peace;  
And enlightened and enlivened  
By inspirational words  
Read, sung and spoken.  
The eyes are the mirror of the soul,  
And communicate more deeply  
When speech is not an option.  
For this and so much love  
Thanks be to God.

*Anna Corser*  
*Following my first ever retreat. Prinknash, November 1996*

## The Gayatri Mantra

The Gayatri Mantra is chanted at the start of morning, midday and evening prayers both at Shantivanam and at our Sangham retreats. The singing of the mantra is one of the many ways in which Father Bede sought to bring the spiritual wisdom of the Vedas to enlighten and enrich the Christian revelation of God. This following reflection is contributed by John Ryder, a member of the Sangham.

Om Bhur Bhuvah Svah  
Tat Savitur Varenyam  
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi  
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat

This most ancient and profound Sanskrit mantra, known as the mother of the Vedas, provides a bridge between the silence of meditation and the activity of the liturgy. While its sound alone is beautiful and potent, its complex and deeply layered meanings give much light to its use in our contemplation and celebration. I hope these few simple reflections will help.

Om, the great cosmic "Yes!" is the Word which expresses the inexpressible Reality beyond space and time, experienced as pure Being. Consciousness and Bliss. Bhur is the earthly realm which maintains our body, perceptible through the senses. Bhuvah is the heavens (the sky), apprehended by thought and imagination. Svah is the heavenly realm beyond the reach of sense and mind, discerned through intuition.

"Tat" (literally "That") designates the Supreme Self, who transcends name, form and concept. it is found, for instance, in the great Upanishadic sentence "Tat Tvam Asi" (Thou art That). its manifestation is through "Savitur", the Spiritual Sun, source of all life and power, of which the visible sun is a sacramental sign. By contemplating on this Being as "Varenyam" (adorable), the desire to worship unfolds spontaneously as we open to the outpouring of divine love.

By "Bhargo" is conveyed the energy which streams forth as light, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and sin, filling our nature with vitality. "Devasya" means the Glory of God, radiating from the heart to pervade the whole of creation. So - "Dhimahi" - "we meditate", and in this prayer of union, partake in the divine life.

Our response is through "Dhiyo", the Buddhi, the intelligence of both heart and intellect, and "Prachodayat" implies illumination, invigoration and guidance. The complete final line - approximately, "May he enlighten our understanding" implies that in this work the doership is His alone and our task is simply one of letting go.

## Starting a Meditation Group

Just two of us started meditating together once a week, but in no time we were three and after a few months had eight committed members, with others coming occasionally. We changed and developed as we went along, but have now settled into a pattern which has three stages, a different member of the group taking turns to be responsible for each one. Before we start one of us lights a candle and an incense stick and puts some music on the tape recorder; we all take off our shoes and settle down, not meditating, but just being aware of our bodies and letting the strain of the day fall away. When the moment seems right - usually between 5

and 10 minutes - we fade down the music and the person looking after the timing hits a Tibetan bell three times to signal the second and central stage - the half hour of silent meditation. We do whatever meditation we are accustomed to, we don't all follow the same method, but if anyone has not found a way that suits them it is worth writing to the Christian Meditation Centre in London who have pamphlets about the John Main meditation that Father Bede used to recommend.

When the time is up, a third person reads two passages from scripture, one Christian and one from one of the other faith traditions. Then we sit quietly until we are ready to leave, when we gather in the kitchen for a drink. There are many other ways, but we find this works well - and it's very democratic.

*Shirley du Boulay*

Sangham Events for 1997

"Stillness within one individual can affect society beyond measure..."

*Father Bede*

A weekend retreat with Brother Martin  
Park Place Pastoral Centre, Fareham, Hants  
July 18th - 20th 1997

Brother Martin, Sahajanda, known to many visitors to Shantivanam, is an Indian monk and disciple of Father Bede who, for many, has taken on the mantle of Father Bede as a teacher. Br Martin will travel to England specially for this event from Rome where he is studying theology. Martin will lead the retreat.

Park Place is run by Indian sisters who welcomed the Sangham for its first retreat in 1995. Places will be limited to 40 people and the cost will be about œ65.

The Sangham Silent Retreat  
The Rowan Tree Centre, The Skreen, Erwood, Builth Wells  
September 6th - 13th 1997

This will be the third week long silent retreat held at The Skreen. Mary Lewis who runs the Rowan Tree Centre wrote, "...the time-table based on Shantivanam contained very little teaching. It was a 'monastic' time table giving priority to meditation and devotion and silence. I think the retreat achieved a wonderful balance between silence and celebration, between community and time apart...it offered to people, perhaps the things that they most long to find - a group of seekers who genuinely want to worship God but in a new, yet ancient, way".

Places are limited to 15 participants. The price will depend on the number of participants but will be about œ120.

The Third Annual Father Bede Griffiths Retreat  
St Peter's Grange, Prinknash Abbey, Gloucestershire  
December 12th - 14th 1997

The Sangham will return to Prinknash, this time for an Advent Retreat. St Peter's Grange is an ideal setting. It was here that Fr Bede started his monastic life and it was the location for the Sangham's 2nd retreat honouring the work and vision of Fr Bede.

There are places for 38 residential participants and the cost will be about œ60. A small number of day participants can also be accommodated.

Saturday Meetings of the Sangham  
The Christian Meditation Centre, 29 Camden Hill Road, London, WC8 7DX  
Saturday February 1st and Saturday May 3rd 10.30 am - 3.30 pm

These day meetings of the Sangham are opportunities for those who can make it to meet together, sing bhajans, meditate, and share in a contemplative way their ideas and ways in which Fr Bede's vision has touched their lives. Shared lunch - please bring something to share.

If you want to attend please contact Stefan Reynolds at The Christian Meditation Centre.  
Tel: 0171 912 1371





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