



# *The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter*

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



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*Each of us has come out from God and we are being drawn back at every moment.  
The two movements are always in operation.*

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## Welcome to the Spring 2011 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

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for inclusion on our data base. The Newsletter is free but an annual donation towards costs is invited with the edition. Copies, for friends or interested organisations, can be provided.

Current and back numbers of the Newsletter are available on **[www.bedegriffithssangha.org.uk](http://www.bedegriffithssangha.org.uk)**

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## The Sangha

### **AM I A MEMBER OF THE SANGHA?**

Over time we have found ourselves using the word 'member' to describe those who become involved with the Sangha. Consequently, people ask what they need to do to become a Sangha member. In fact it is easy – initially your interest, and then your participation and contribution, in whatever form, all qualify you! If you are reading this - **Welcome** - please feel part of our Sangha. When we meet at events we consider all those present

as members of our Sangha, although some of us are more involved and have been around for longer! Everyone is welcome. You may enjoy reading the newsletters and attending retreats, or you may wish to become more involved and help on retreats and with the day to day running of the Sangha, if this is the case please contact:

*Joan Walters*

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to find out about how you can become more involved

## Polish Newsletter

The Newsletter is now to be translated into Polish by Andrzej Ziolkowski, who is a member of the World Community of Christian Meditators living in Poland and is happy to make the ideals of Fr.Bede accessible to an ever widening audience.

## Summer Retreat with Brother Martin

This year the Sangha will be holding its Summer Retreat from Monday 18th to Wednesday 20th July. Brother Martin will be joining us from Shantivanam. He will be talking on the theme of 'A New Song of Creation' – a retelling of the Creation story.

By the time we started to consider a retreat for next July we could not find a suitable retreat house with availability at a weekend. As a consequence and hopefully for this year only we have to hold the retreat during the week. However we have been very fortunate in being able to book Launde Abbey. **[www.launde.org.uk](http://www.launde.org.uk)**

Launde Abbey which is probably one of the finest retreat houses in England is a lovely country house within extensive gardens and 450 acres of parkland. Situated on the Leicestershire/Rutland border 15 miles east of Leicester and 6 miles west of Oakham it has good road and rail communications. The house dates back in part to the 16th Century and has a magnificent 12th Century chapel. Within the gardens is a labyrinth which we plan to use during the Retreat. A Victorian walled

kitchen garden supplies seasonal fruit and vegetables for meals served in the house. The main house has just re-opened following complete renovation and now meets all modern day standards of comfort and amenity. The gardens offer space for quiet reflection and it is a lovely countryside for walking in.

On the second evening we shall have the opportunity of listening to traditional storytelling with Elizabeth Vooght, an experienced storyteller who sees her art as opening new creations in our imagination, thus connecting with Brother Martin's theme.

To receive the wisdom of Brother Martin's teaching within the beauty and deeply spiritual space of Launde Abbey is an exciting prospect but spaces are very limited and we would urge all those who would like to come to book as soon as possible.

A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

*Nick and Mary Sadler*

## Ammerdown December 2010

by Jenny Ireland

### A HOME COMING Following the Returning to Centre Retreat at Ammerdown

Stepping through the front door of the place I call home with a reluctance sensed deep in my belly to begin the transition from one 'home-coming' to another. From a time of warm welcoming and togetherness and sharing; a time of holding; back to the ordinary 'stuff' of life, checking phone messages, emails, opening post; activities happily left behind over the past 48 hours, and getting on with it in 'mono', this life of mine.



Meeting again with friendly familiar faces from the Gaunts House retreat (my first experience of the Bede Griffiths Sangha) was a joy. And new faces soon became known, easy and safe to be around.

Slipping back into the "wonder-filled" (quote Jane L!) structure of thrice-

daily meditation, chanting/singing and prayer sessions with otherwise loosely arranged activities was blissful (if somewhat turbulent on a personal level, reaching a place in me that until now has been left scarcely un-tapped, resulting in repeated, out of the blue abundance of tears. Might then this be a 'home coming'?).

Seeing Bede Griffiths projected on the big screen from a DVD, life-sized, as if sitting within our circle speaking in our intimate midst... (in reality a talk on non-duality to an audience of Mystics & Scientists) was an extraordinary introduction to this truly wise and wonderful man. Oh to have met him...

Being at Ammerdown, a serene, caring environment with its cosy accommodation, bountiful meals so delicious it was hard not to over-eat, and the smiling staff and volunteers eager to make our stay as comfortable as comfortable can be. All this was a treat.

Taking time out to wrap up and go outside, discovering nature's 'temple' – breathtakingly beautiful! What a stunning part of the countryside in all its white and wintry glory, glistening with such delicate silvery frost and yet offering great depth of colour too

with not only the evergreens but here and there gold tinged leafy branches, not yet quite bare from autumn's de-robing. Frosted, crunchy leaves underfoot adding scrumptiously to the already overflowing senses, witnessing such glorious, natural scenes.



How then, to re-enter the regular day to day, yet keep a-hold of the richness of experience and of being, after such a retreat?

I shall continue to read Shirley du Boulay's oh so digestible 'Beyond the Darkness'; I shall dip into the little booklet of prayers, bhajans and chants and try to recall the tunes which so enchant me; and I shall challenge myself to sit in silence and solitude (as suggested by Father Lawrence at Gaunts) and meditate... until the next Bede Griffiths Retreat.

With heart felt thanks to all who were there  
Jenny Ireland



**Feminine Mystics - Sr. Sara Grant**by Sr. Bertha Wilcox 

*I am grateful to Val Cherry for the following piece on a most remarkable woman. It is reproduced here with the permission of the Sacred Heart Congregation.*

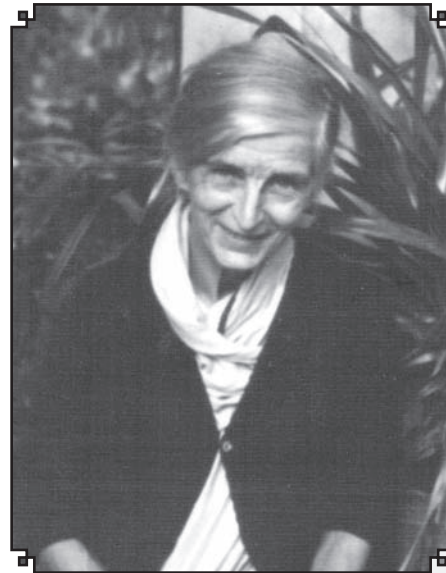
**In Memoriam: Sr. Sara Grant, RSCJ  
(1922-2002)**

*One of the great pioneers of interreligious dialogue in the twentieth century was Sr. Sara Grant. The following account of her life, written by Bertha Wilcox, RSCJ, and Josef Neuner, SJ, appeared originally in the Indian journal Vidyajyoti 64 (2000):456-59 and is here reprinted with permission. The readers of our bulletin will find it both informative and inspiring.*

**Sr. Sara Grant** of the Society of the Sacred Heart, died in Pune, India at the age of 77, she was the fourth of the great quartet of pioneers from abroad who gave their lives for the ideal of the ashram movement. From the seeds she planted, together with Jules Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths, green shoots are rising.

Sara Grant was born of Scottish parents in Shrewsbury, England, on December 19, 1922, and received her early education at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Brighton. She soon showed the keen, questing intellect, the integrity of mind and heart that was to characterize her whole life, "*haunted from childhood by the obsessive need to discover the secret bond of union drawing all things into one.*" She found the depth of her Christian life in the religious community that she joined immediately after school at the age of 19. Since it was war time, the novitiate had been evacuated to Kinross in Scotland for the duration of the war. The rather unorthodox way

of life there, and the influence of her Mistress of Novices, Mother Margaret Shepherd, who was also rather unorthodox in her ways, set her soul free and she wandered happily with John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and perhaps, above all Thomas Aquinas, whose Summa she read from cover to cover in English and in Latin.



Following her years of formation she went to Oxford, where she studied classics and philosophy. Her tutors included Iris Murdoch. Her serious studies helped her to deepen her understanding of the divine mystery, God's total transcendence, inseparable, however, from the most intimate union with Him. She could never conceive God and world as two realities: all is rooted in God, yet the reality of the world is not wiped out but is contained in God. Thus in her early years she anticipated her struggle for a non-dual conception of God, the true understanding of Advaita of her later years in India. It became the core of her spirituality. She found her understanding supported by the theological vision of St Thomas Aquinas.

In 1956 Sara was sent to India to head the newly formed Department of Philosophy at Sophia College, Bombay, a "*sending*" which she described as "*a death and rebirth for which I can never be grateful enough.*" Her first interest was the students, their personal growth to mature life. They came from different backgrounds and different religions. She saw her task as "*helping them to form themselves to an integrity of mind and heart which would lead them to acknowledge truth wherever they met it and follow it to the end.*"

To teach philosophy, she had to study the great Indian systems (darsanas). In India, philosophy is never conceived as a mere intellectual pursuit. It is meant to give an ultimate interpretation of life and the world and their meaning. Soon she was fascinated by the unique personality of Sankaracarya and had to face the very frequent misinterpretation of his Advaitic philosophy as pantheistic (if God is everything, then there is no other, and the world is illusion [maya]!). Advaita became the core of her philosophical search. She wrote her doctoral thesis on it. With characteristic thoroughness she plunged into the study of Sanskrit to read Sankara in the original texts and find out what he was really saying. In a meticulous analysis of texts she proved that the illusory interpretation of Sankara, widespread also in Europe, is wrong. All creation is coming from the one eternal Brahman and depends on It without, however, drawing It into the cycles of the cosmos or history. She shows Sankara's closeness to Thomas Aquinas. This search for the Absolute in which all life is fulfilled was the meaning of her entire life. It was one of the great joys of her later life that her dissertation was printed in 1999, after a very long period of gestation, with the title Sankaracarya's Concept of Relation. Soon Sr. Sara was drawn also into the great movements, which changed the life of the Church in the past century and had their impact also on the Church in India.

## Feminine Mystics - Sr. Sara Grant

by Sr. Bertha Wilcox

The Second Vatican Council saw the great religions of the world in a new perspective. The Church must learn to discover in their spiritual and cultural traditions the work of the Holy Spirit operative in the world from the beginning. At the time of the Council (1964) Sr. Grant took part in a seminar in Bombay on the theme "Christianity and World Religions," a theme still highly controversial at the time when the Council document on the Church and her relation to other religions was still being discussed in Rome. In the aftermath of Vatican II, when the All-India Seminar (1969) initiated the application of the Council to the Indian conditions, she became a member of the "Commissio Technica" in charge of the orientation of theological studies in India in the spirit of the Council. She was actively involved in the international Conference in Nagpur (1971) on "The Theology of Evangelization" and the subsequent Conference in Patna (1974) on mission. She also translated the pioneering book of Swami Abhishiktananda, Hindu-Christian Meeting Point, in 1970. Thus Sr. Sara's theological insights became fruitful in the wider spheres of the Church in India in this era of renewal and re-orientation. But it had to bear fruit in a particular way in the renewed understanding of consecrated life. When in 1972 she was invited to join a small group of her own society (RSCJ's) and a group of Anglican Sisters of St Mary the Virgin (CSMV's) in a venture to reopen the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune, she could not make up her mind what to do. She was often teased for her ability to see both sides, indeed several sides, of a question. A clear exposition of one approach would be followed by an equally lucid exposition of another, prefaced usually by her favourite expression, "But on the other hand"!

The Pune venture attracted her deeply with its call to interreligious dialogue and ecumenism and to a new form of religious life. At the same time, to accept the offer meant

giving up her lectureship at Sophia College, something she found equally worthwhile. For several months she tried to combine both ministries, residing at the Ashram and traveling weekly to Bombay by the night passenger train, packing all her lectures into one day and returning to Pune by the next night train. Such a grueling schedule could not continue and she decided to resign from the College and devote all her time to the Ashram, a way of life which she continued for the next twenty-four years. She was encouraged in her decision by her friend Swami Abhishiktananda, who had spent several weeks at the



Ashram when it re-opened, sharing his insights into the Upanishads, the Gita and, above all, his conviction that the Ashram way of life could lead to a new flowering of religious life in India. His untimely death shortly afterwards was a great sorrow to her. The C.P.S. Ashram was an ecumenical enterprise of special significance: first in the togetherness of Catholics and Christians of the Church of North India. The Ashram was ecumenical in a much broader sense, namely, universal: it became the meeting place of people of all nations and religions to live in an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect. During the packed years when Sara was the Acharya, many groups of novices, seminarians, religious, and seekers from India and

abroad came to spend time at the C.P.S. Some who had lost faith because of the institutionalized Church found it again in their contact with her.

For a time Sara was also a lecturer at the Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth theologate in Pune and encouraged her students to that deep philosophical/theological reflection which was her own forte: she did not see it as consisting of two separate disciplines, but as one single quest for truth. Her writings proliferated, mostly articles and pamphlets. The titles give some idea of the breath and scope of her reflection: "Religious Formation and the Challenge of Advaita," "A Call to a More Contemplative Prayer," "Ashram Living as Creative Ministry," and "What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?" This last question became to her a rule of life. In 1989 Sara was invited to give the Teape Lectures at Cambridge and to repeat them at the Ecumenical Centre at Bristol University. In these lectures, published in 1991 under the title Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian, Sara put in a succinct form the story of her own life's search and the challenge that Advaita had been for her. All this scholarly work may give the impression that Sara was a deeply serious person and so she was. But "on the other hand," she had her own brand of dry humour and could laugh quietly at life and all its quirks. The Ashram life opened for Sara possibilities of contact with other movements in an atmosphere of encounter and reconciliation. She had a great admiration and reverence for Vinobaji, and tried to live out his spirituality in her life. She also introduced some of Vinoba's thinking into the life of the Ashram. She was closely associated with the Shree Shakti Movement at Paunar, and attended some of the sessions there where her presence and contributions were much appreciated. One of the regular features of the C.P.S. Ashram was the welcome it offered annually to the Varkaris on their

## Feminine Mystics - Sr. Sara Grant

by Sr. Bertha Wilcox 

pilgrim route to Alandi. Impressed by the life of St. Jnaneshwar, Sara felt close to the pilgrims, having made the pilgrimage herself

Sara's Ashram experience—truly contemplative yet open to the vastness and complexity of human life—stirred also her critical-creative mind to wider reflections on the needs of religious life in India. These are contained in her last booklet, *Religious Life in a New Era*. She not only points out the deficiencies of religious life and formation, but also looks for reasons why religious do not play the role in

India to which they are destined in a country with such a keen sense of the divine and of total renunciation for the sake of God. She does not accept a basic distinction between active and contemplative religious: with Vatican II she feels that "the members of each community should combine contemplation with apostolic love" (PC 5). She wants Christian Ashrams to be "*places of deep prayer and reconciliation,*" reaching out to all who are broken, and to people of other faiths. This should become a feature of the whole Church and in particular of religious communities.

Though her health had long been declining the end came for Sr. Sara earlier than expected. Sara's song of praise ended on earth on an early Sunday morning. Her death was surrounded by the atmosphere of single-mindedness in which she had lived: God alone. She had desired to be cremated. She was laid in the chapel in great simplicity, no coffin, in her sari, on her face peace and serenity.

Nothing was there to separate her from God.

Sr. Bertha Wilcox, RSCJ  
from *Bulletin 69*, August 2002

## From Father Bede to a friend

by Hazel Eyles 

*This is the first of a series of letters written by Father Bede and edited by Hazel. In this letter he writes to his friend Martyn Skinner in 1931, where he writes of his decision to remain in the English Church. Approximately two years later he made the decision to become a Roman Catholic. How this came about will be in the next Sangha newsletter.*

From the moment when I first thought of the church as a profession, my determination has remained constant and I can't conceive of any other vocation for me. When I was most violently torn between the English and the Roman church, I never doubted that I must enter one or the other. Now that the storm has blown over, I am surprised that I was so carried off my feet my Newman.

I don't know whether the details will interest you, but the difference between Catholic and Protestant now seems to me to be this. Both Catholic and Protestant alike acknowledge the Bible to be the foundation of their faith, but they disagree concerning the rule for the interpretation of the

Bible. According to the Catholic the rule of faith exists in the Church by tradition from the Apostles, and the Church has been invested with an infallible voice (in the person of the Pope as supreme head of the Church) in the interpretation of the Bible in all matters of faith. If this is accepted (as I was willing to accept it) then the whole system of Roman Catholicism logically follows. But this claim is itself founded on the Bible and has to be proved reasonably from the text. Now the sole text on which this claim rests is:

*Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,*

*And the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*

*...and that this prophecy was fulfilled by St Peter becoming Bishop of Rome and acknowledged head of the Church.*

But of any sign of infallible power being invested in St Peter or any of the apostles, there is no evidence in the Bible; and there is, on the contrary, considerable evidence against it. But the question really involves the fundamental principle, whether such a claim is justifiable, and I can't believe

that it is. It seems to me that the one final criterion of truth which has ever been given to man is the voice of God in the conscience

This is what I take to be the Protestant position. According to that, the Word of God (that is the Truth) has been revealed in the Bible, and the Church has been given the power to interpret and expound the Bible: but the final oracle of truth in the interpretation of the Bible must be the conscience of the individual. Thus the rule of faith must be founded on the Bible and directed by the Church, but its final determination must rest in the individual conscience. The danger of this, as you can see in the history of Protestantism, is obvious, in that it tends to leave the interpretation of the Bible to the caprice of private judgement: but the danger of the opposite error of stifling the voice of conscience by forcing obedience to authority is equally great. Between the two extremes the English Church holds the middle way, giving due weight to the authority of the Church and the voice of the individual. So I have come back confirmed in my faith in the English Church.

Hazel Eyles

**Pravriddhi and Nivridhi**  
*'Each of us has come out from God and we are being drawn back at every moment. The two movements are always in operation. In the divine they are totally coincident. It is eternal, of course, rather than temporal so that every movement of going out is also a movement of returning.'*

Father Bede Griffiths A New Vision of Reality p.161

In this quote, Father Bede is considering the two words Pravriddhi and Nivridhi and the chapter discusses how the mystics of Islam and Hinduism perceive the relationship between God and the world. He writes: *"The Lord is expressing himself, manifesting himself, knowing himself in his creation."*

Behind this idea is the Islamic hadith, *'I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known so created creation in order to be known'*, and the Vedic, *'The Absolute desires to experience itself'*

Father Bede writes so very clearly on these magnificent insights so he continues:

*"But at the same time as he releases all his possibilities into creation and knows himself in the creation, he draws everything back into himself in a corresponding movement of unity."*

This process is also known as the outward and inward breaths of the Lord and this is how Father Bede understands the meaning of Pravriddhi and Nivridhi, he continues: *'Pravriddhi is the movement outwards by which everything flows out from Brahman, and Nivridhi is the movement of return. So the Infinite expresses itself, manifests itself, goes out of itself in the whole creation and then returns to itself. We ourselves, and the whole*

*creation, have this dual movement of going out and returning.'* And he continues with the quote at the head of this article.

Father Bede writes so clearly here because he is able to start from the 'top-down position', from 'the Infinite', rather than from the 'bottom-up', from 'me and my likes and dislikes'. The latter is so much more common as we seek a spiritual path that suits us and this leads us to adapting the meaning of Pravriddhi and Nivridhi. We locate ourselves so firmly in our individuality that these two words, Pravriddhi and Nivridhi, also refer to our own behaviour but in a different way to that described by Father Bede.

the outward &  
inward breaths  
of the lord

To understand this point we need to consider the word vridhi: this is a modification through which an object is known. Hence the Divine Unity knows itself through the modifications, in the universal mind as it were, of multiplicity. For ourselves as individuals we 'know' ourselves through our mental modifications, through the multiplicity of our likes and dislikes. So for us we need to purify the outward movement into our daily actions, the Pravriddhi, by remembering the inward flow, the Nivridhi. If we stand back from our activity, that is, if we perform the action without preference or concern for the fruits of the action, then we become the observer free from the modifications of likes and dislikes. This is spiritual discrimination or detachment and automatically direct experience of the Divine Unity manifests.

In the yoga school of Patanjali certain disciplines are taught for the Pravriddhi actions. Initially these

are: abstention from harming others, from falsehood and greed, these lead to purity, contentment, self-study and devotion. This prepares the way for the nivridhi experience.

When we read commentaries on Hinduism we may come across these terms Pravriddhi marga and Nivridhi marga. Marga means way or path. So Pravriddhi marga is the path of attached action that leads the 'Prodigal Son' to a world of famine while Nivridhi marga is the return journey to our spiritual root.

But if we just consider Pravriddhi and Nivridhi in this way, from the 'bottom up' view, then we miss something very important that Father Bede understands in his 'top-down' view. The outward flow is the will of 'God' as is the return and they are both occurring in any given moment. In Jesus' parable the Father rushes to embrace the prodigal son in the very moment of the latter's remembrance of his spiritual home. In truth the Father has been there all the time because the outward and return movements take place in that which is eternally present.

*'So the Infinite expresses itself, manifests itself, goes out of itself in the whole creation and then returns to itself'* writes Father Bede. This is a more complete understanding of Pravriddhi and Nivridhi which is realised when we start our reflection from the Infinite rather than from our opinions of ourselves and the world around us; from the universal rather than the individual.

This remembrance of the larger picture is enough to lift the veils of duality and for knowledge and grace to flow for the benefit of all.

Ken Knight  
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*A hadith is a saying of Mohammad that, like the Apocrypha in the Christian canon, is disputed by some so not included in the Quran but widely accepted as true.*

## Francis Acharya

by Fr. Sylvester 

### *In Memoriam: Francis Acharya The Life and Ideals of Father Francis Acharya*

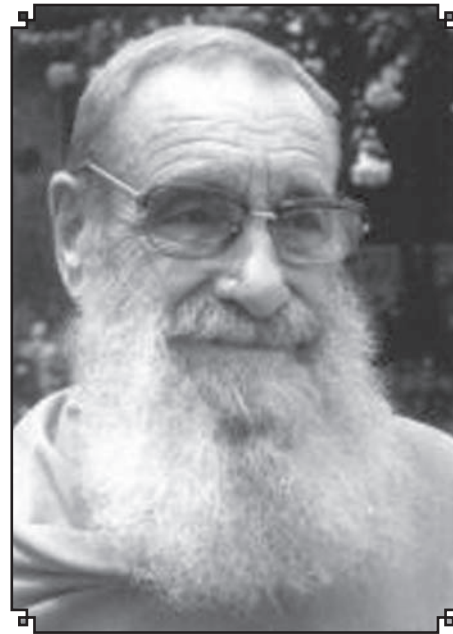
*Fr. Sylvester has been living at an ashram in Kerala, India, for the past twenty-four years. He knew Fr. Francis Acharya, one of the great pioneers of Hindu-Christian encounter, who died in January of 2002. The following article appeared in the U.S. Cistercian Regional Mailbag, number 273 (October, November, December 2003) and is here reprinted with permission. We wish to thank the mailbag's editor, Fr. Colombo Weber, OCSO, of the Abbey of Gethsemani.*

This is the story of one of the last century's greatest contemplative monks and a pioneer of Indian Christian Sannyasa, Fr. Mahieu, Dom Francis Acharya. The baptismal name of Dom Francis was John Richard Mahieu. He was born on January 17, 1912, in the village Ypres, West Flanders, Belgium, and was the fifth son of the seven children of René Mahieu and Anne Vandalanoitte. He had his early education and college studies in Brussels. At the age of twenty he went to England for higher studies.

In 1931, John Richard was very much impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's visit to London, when Gandhi came to participate in the second Round Table Conference as a half naked fakir. The young man sympathized with Gandhi's non-violent fight for India's independence. As his own spiritual development unfolded, he

saw in Gandhi a fellow traveler on the path toward a more spiritual and more harmonious world civilization based on a balance between action and contemplation, combining the best of East and West.

In 1932, Mahieu had to complete his compulsory military service. During this time, he decided to become a monk, join the Cistercian (Trappist) Order, and go to India to lead a contemplative life in an ashram. He asked his father's permission and found that his father was completely opposed to his desire to become a monk. In 1935, the young man joined a group of pilgrims going to Rome.



In an audience with Pope Pius XI, he expressed his desires and asked prayers for his future vocation. In September, 1935, at the age of 25, John Richard joined the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Scourmont, near Chimay, Belgium. He received a new name, Francis, with St. Francis of Assisi as his chosen patron. After his novitiate formation, Francis made his first vows and was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome to obtain a Bachelor of Divinity degree. He then did further theological studies at the University of Louvain in Belgium. He made solemn vows in 1940 and was ordained to the

priesthood in 1941. Soon thereafter, he was appointed novice master at Scourmont. At this time, the abbot of Scourmont was planning to start a Cistercian monastery in India, which corresponded very well with the desires of Fr. Francis. Somewhat later, the abbot's interests began to turn toward Africa. Nonetheless, Fr. Francis was given permission to undertake a foundation by himself in India.

It was very difficult to get a visa for India from Belgium. However, Scourmont had a daughter house in Wales and Fr. Francis was given the opportunity to go to this monastery on Caldey Island as its novice master. After three unsuccessful applications for a visa for India he was eventually granted one through the recommendation of Vijayalakshmi Panditpan, who was High Commissioner in England. Impressed by Fr. Francis's wish to work for the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism and by his determination to start a Christian monastic foundation rooted in the ashram tradition of India, Pandit Nehru, who was then the prime minister of India, approved the application on condition that he not proselytize Hindus.

Fr. Francis set sail for India and arrived in Bombay on July 12, 1955. Swami Abhishiktananda welcomed him. Let me quote from "*The Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*":

In Bombay Fr. Francis Mahieu's initiation to India was begun with visits to various ancient sites: Buddhist caves at Kanheri, the island of Elephanta, and Ajanta. At Elephanta they [Fr. Francis and Abhishiktananda] were profoundly impressed by the central cave, a magnificent temple with immense bas-reliefs (7th century) carved in the solid rock, dedicated to Shiva Maheshwara in his different manifestations. They passed the night in the cave, where the sight of Maheshwara Sadashiva (a huge

## Francis Acharya - con't

by Fr. Sylvester

carving of Shiva with three faces) had moved Swami Abhshiktananda to ecstasy. However the meeting of the two monks, so long anticipated, was not entirely happy, probably on account of the inner turmoil that was tormenting Swami Abhshiktananda at that time. In any case, after visiting Ajanta, Abhshiktananda went on alone to explore north India, while his companion returned to Bombay.

Fr. Francis spent about one year in the ashram at Shantivanam with Fr. Monchanin and Swami Abhshiktananda; he considered this year to be a period of novitiate for him in India with the two earlier pioneers on the same path. Afterwards, in November, 1956, Fr. Francis left Shantivanam for Kerala. Concerning Fr. Francis, Swami Abhshiktananda wrote in his diary:

I fear that his enthusiasm for Buddhism is chiefly the joy of rediscovering his beloved Cistercian conventual monastic life...The Hindu monk has neither community (Sangha) nor Dharma nor Buddha to whom he can give himself; he lets himself be consumed in the Absolute...These are two opposite poles. The Shaivite monk reaches beyond Shiva to the deepest essence of monasticism. The Buddhist monk, like the Christian monk, remains the prisoner of a form... How could collaboration be possible between one who had his enlightenment in the solitude of Arunachala, from a guru who never shows himself, and one who has received it from a flesh-and-blood master in the chapter house at Scourmont? In every fibre of my soul I am a Hindu monk. . . . All that remains is to attune my body and psyche with what takes place in the soul in the depth of Arunachalapan.

It was at the invitation of Mar Athanasios, the Bishop of Tiruvalla, that Fr. Francis came to Kerala to start the ashram. In the course of time, Bede Griffiths joined him there.

On December 1, 1956, the two of them started the new foundation at Tiruvalla in the Malankara Catholic Church. Eventually they were successful in obtaining 88 acres of land and on March 20, 1958, the eve of St Benedict's day, Fr. Francis, Fr. Bede, and two seminarians travelled sixty miles to the site, high up on the holy mountain of Kurisumala. Well contented with their hilltop, they spent the next few months in a hut made of bamboo and plaited palm leaves with no facilities, no furniture, and a floor covered simply with cow dung. While the center of their lives was the prayer of the Church and celebration of its feasts and mysteries, they had to find a way of supporting themselves, so they soon started a dairy farm with cattle imported from Jersey.

*Dom Francis  
was a man of  
prayer, a votary  
of divine love*

On August 6, 1968, Fr. Francis took Indian citizenship. Later the same month Fr. Bede, after ten years in Kurisumala Ashram, left for Shantivanam with two brothers, Br. Anugrah and Br. Ajit, to take over that ashram from Swami Abhshiktananda. By 1974, Fr. Francis's health was declining. For several months he underwent Ayurvedic treatment, staying in a Hindu doctor's house at Geethabhavan, Kottayam. In 1979, he traveled to Belgium, back to Scourmont, and in a hospital near the abbey he had a hip operation, which was not very successful. He returned to Kurisumala and soon the other hip was also affected. Already at an advanced age and battling against pain, fear, and ill health, he started and completed his masterpiece,

Prayer with the Harp of Spirit, four volumes translated from the ancient Syrian book Panqitho, with certain adaptations to Indian culture.

In 1996, Fr. Francis went to Rome, together with Bishop Mar Timotheos, to ask the General Chapter of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance to accept Kurisumala as a monastery of their order. The request was granted and after the necessary procedures were carried out, Kurisumala Ashram became a Cistercian Abbey on July 9, 1998, with Fr. Francis being installed as the first abbot.

Dom Francis Acharya's final days on earth were a hasty preparation for departure to the threshold of eternity. On the morning of January 31, 2002, rapt in bliss and having received his Lord in Holy Communion, his soul departed to the heavenly Father. His mortal remains were kept until February 4 at Tiruvalla Puspagiri Hospital. I myself had the privilege of accompanying the sacred remains from the hospital to Kurisumala Ashram. There the funeral ceremonies began with a concelebrated Mass with more than thirty priests from three different rites. Though Malankara bishops were present, I was asked to be the principal celebrant and homilist. More than ten thousand people of different castes and creeds gathered on the top of Kurisumala to offer their last homage to the pioneer of Indian Christian Sannyasa.

Fr. Bede Griffiths once wrote the line, "A silent ripple continuing to spread after the physical energy has been exhausted." These words hold true after the earthly departure of both of these sages. As Dom Francis was a man of prayer, a votary of divine love, he fully realized the power of prayer and the strength of virtue. As a person who had succeeded in transforming his whole life into an incessant prayer, he had acquired an interior silence which enabled him to

*Francis Acharya - Con't**by Fr. Sylvester* 

sense the voice of God and abide in the interior recesses of his soul. His spirit of prayer and hard work were extraordinary, especially during the early years of Kurisumala Ashram. And during the few years before his death it was edifying to see him support himself on two walking sticks and take full part in the community prayers and public functions. He also found time to impart his spirit to guests and visitors with a few well-chosen words. Though a Westerner, Fr. Francis manifested the strength of will to modify himself to suit his chosen country in dress, language, food, and life-style. This was a great and rare accomplishment. To those living in the bosom of mother nature, engrossed in a spiritual search characterized by asceticism and meditation, his very life was a model. He was one of that exceptional race of people who could discern divine revelations through manana nidishyasana. Heir to a life of luxury in his motherland, Belgium, he had given all that up, his home and homeland. He was a great man who renounced what was his own and accepted ours, becoming one of us Indians, assimilating the patrimony of India and encouraging us to make it ours too.

Dom Francis modeled his own life to suit the land of his domicile so that he could communicate to others the experience of the divine that he had acquired. Having set foot in India and directed himself towards God, he interpreted his Christian faith in tune with the culture of India. He was a model for all Christians. The great simplicity of the Indian lifestyle influenced him profoundly, so he was able to assimilate the whole gamut of elements associated with the total renunciation peculiar to Indian thought. He endeavored to live as one who possessed nothing, yet with a mind rich beyond dreams. He echoed the greatness of personality and simplicity of life of Mahatma Gandhi. His life engendered a new spiritual

dimension and his face radiated the divine love which he had made his own. Dom Francis was a lover of God and a lover of men and women. The way he helped the families who had settled around the ashram, collecting milk from them and donating land and cows, was a prime example of his humanitarian concern. There are many who lay the enculturation movement open to criticism and ridicule because they combine an Indian liturgy with a European lifestyle, but when Dom Francis adopted an Indian way of life, he did it in its fullness. He gave up his European manner of life and made the lifestyle of the great Indian sages his own.

*his face  
radiated the  
divine love*

Above all, this man of God lived in harmony with nature and made the patrimony of the rishis his own. He gave concrete form to a parivrajaka (renunciation) and to an Indian form of deep contemplative prayer, and he gave Kurisuinala Ashram the benediction of his teachings. And then he passed away from this world. I would like to conclude this piece by quoting from one of the early documents of Kurisumala Ashram, published in *The Tablet*, January 12, 1957:

On December 1 Mar Athanasios came with Vicar General Msgr Mathew Nedungatt to Bless the chapel, house, and grounds which he had placed at the disposal of the monks. Later, at sunset, the two monks (Fr. Francis and Fr. Bede Griffiths) with two aspirants who had joined them, sang the first vespers of the First Sunday of Advent, formally beginning their new religious life at the beginning of the

new liturgical year. A third aspirant has since arrived, a local man of the Syro-Malankara rite; but no more aspirants can be taken for the present, because Fr. Francis and Fr. Bede will have to concentrate for at least a year on the study of the Syriac and Malayalam languages and on the Syro-Malankara rite which they have adopted. They sing the office regularly and they also find time to cultivate the land that the Bishop has given them, a vegetable garden and a banana plantation. When they wrote the notes which we have been able to read, they were hoping to plant seventy-five trees before Christmas. They have a little hill, dotted with coconut trees, rubber trees, and a tapioca plantation. The town of Tiruvalla is only a mile away, yet the little bungalow-monastery is secluded by a double belt of paddy fields. We have, they wrote, two good wells, one of which is never dry; a rubber smoking tower; lovely Indian flowers, lovely for their colors and fragrance, and some snakes—they are not known as poisonous. And they conclude, We are known at present as a Cistercian Ashram; we are waiting for the approval of the Holy See before giving our community its baptismal name.

Let me add a few words to complete this presentation: When Dom Francis and Dom Bede Griffiths were writing the above document, I had close association with them and when the exodus took place to Kurisumala, I was one of the two above-mentioned aspirants who accompanied them. After twenty-two years in Kurisumala Ashram, I had another exodus, this time to Nambiarkunnu, Wayanad, Kerala, where I have been for twenty-four years and where I am now preparing for the last exodus.

*Fr. Sylvester  
from Bulletin 73, October 2004  
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from Fr. Colombo Weber OCSO of the  
Abbey of Gethsemani.*

## Sr. Vandana Mataji

by Stefan Reynolds

### Sr. Vandana Mataji (1931- ) Namajapa and the Dialogue of Religious Experience

Indian by birth, Vandana converted from her Parsee background to Catholicism in her late teens, in the face of much opposition from her family. On entering the Congregation of the Sacred Heart and after her studies in England she lectured at Sophia College in Bombay for eighteen years serving as Directress of novices and later as provincial of India for the Sacred Heart. A pioneer in the Christian Ashram movement in India, along with Sara Grant r.s.c.j, and with the inspiration of Abhishiktananda, she re-opened the Christa-Prema-Seva (Ecumenical) Ashram in Pune in 1972.<sup>1</sup> In 1976 Vandana, wanting to immerse herself more in Indian spirituality, went to Rishikesh and studied yoga for a year at the Sivananda Ashram with Swami Chidananda and Krishnananda.<sup>2</sup> The integral yoga system of Swami Sivananda and his disciples combined aspects of Gnani (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and Karma (selfless action) in a way that was, they hoped, not religion specific but accessible to all people.<sup>3</sup> Christian discipleship in effect was rare but Vandana persisted, and Swami Chidananda, who himself had studied with the Jesuits, accepted her as a disciple. In 1981, with Ishpriya Mataji r.s.c.j she founded the Jeevan-Dhara Ashram in Rishikesh. As a leading figure on the National Liturgical Commission she has been deeply involved in the work of Christian inculturation in India.

In 1984 Vandana published a seminal work on Namajapa in the Hindu and Christian traditions: A practise that was as important as to her as to her Hindu teacher who was a great proponent of the 'prayer of the Name':

*'This is the way of this age. The divine name is the Sadhana supreme of the twentieth century. Other paths are fraught with risks which the Divine Name avoids through its simplicity and divine dynamics. The Name sets into motion the divine vibrations of the spirit within the practisant by its inherent Divine*

*Power and Consciousness of which it is a spiritual vehicle and receptacle.'*<sup>4</sup>

Much of Vandana's later written work was concerned with how the spiritual practise could be "open to all cultures and nations" involving a delicate balance of inter-cultural dialogue. On the one side she felt Hindu Mantra meditation could be adopted for use by Christians, on the other hand there was, she felt, "a danger in a particular tradition being too freely tampered with, as for example has happened to 'yoga' in the west".<sup>5</sup> From Sivananda's disciples she had learnt the importance of an 'integral' practise which in turn must be carefully 'integrated' into one's



own faith tradition. The danger of losing the coherence of a practice by uprooting it from its religious origins meant she could be critical of secular adaptations of yoga and mantra practice in the west. She was critical for example of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's presentation of TM on that score.

However when it came to Hindu-Christian dialogue she felt strongly that, while maintaining their distinctiveness, the 'inner' logic of the two traditions were compatible.<sup>6</sup> Both religions were theistic and in both effort is secondary to grace. Grace, for both of them, is the operative, effective and affective cause of any response to God. Likewise the comparative systems of training are seen in both traditions as ways of being prepared and ready to receive this grace. Both traditions stress that the meeting place of ascesis and grace is the human heart. She sees the essential formation in both traditions as ways of re-finding the centre of our being by drawing the mind into the heart.<sup>7</sup> Method in both

traditions is never an end in itself. It is God who gives the grace to make the means practicable.

Although for Vandana there is no structural incompatibility between the two traditions she did feel that cultural contexts that have given rise to diverse forms of religious expression should be respected as integral to themselves. Yoga systems, she felt cannot be secularised or 'Christianised' without reference to their source. So, for example, despite her appreciation of John Main OSB's teaching on Christian Meditation she was critical that it did not own its Hindu roots. Assimilation of religious practices by the west should not be colonial. Transfer was valid if the source was respected.<sup>8</sup> Religious traditions, she felt, needed to be 'known from within'. Comparative religion, for her, needed to be based in the dialogue of religious experience. It was in this light that the external, phenomenologically different religious practices of Hinduism and Christianity could be seen as compatible; because of their "common intent of forming a contemplative body and simplified heart".<sup>9</sup>

In her book Namajapa Vandana looks at this common ground by comparing the Christian Hesychast tradition of 'continuous prayer' with the Hindu practise of Ajapa japa (p. 46-55). The goal in both traditions is uninterrupted prayer as the mantra begins to repeat itself spontaneously, without conscious effort. Vandana notes that the mantra recommended for this practise (from Shankara in the eighth century up to Swami Sivananda) was the Guru mantra So'ham:

*"These two syllables correspond to Vedantic formula 'I am That.' So'ham is also the sound of the breath itself. So is the sound of the ingoing breath, ham the sound of the outgoing breath. So'ham is modified Pranava or Om."*(p. 53-4)<sup>10</sup>

Vandana relates this to the fundamental principal of Nada Yoga; that the world is based on one sound OM, and later on, through its sound vibrations, the whole

**Sr. Vandana Mataji - con't**by *Stefan Reynolds* 

universe came in to existence. For her OM has its Christian equivalent in the Logos, the 'Word of God' with God from the beginning, through whom all things were made and in whom they returned to their source. The Logos is the inbreathing and out-breathing of God. It is the 'sound' that expresses ('stands out from') the Father. However OM reminds Christians that that 'Word' is both sound and silence. The Turiya, or silence at the end of the three syllables of A-U-M, is, for Vandana, that aspect of the Logos that remains always imminent to the Father (p. 198). Vandana also finds a Christian parallel of So'ham in Christ's saying; "He in me, and I in him".<sup>11</sup> This, Vandana says, leads to the consciousness that "I am He" – in the Pauline sense of "I live, now no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (p. 200).<sup>12</sup>

The other practice common in Hinduism, especially in the more 'personal' Bhakti traditions, is the repetition of an Ishta mantra or chosen 'Name of God'. Vandana points out that in such devotion "the 'Name' is the supreme mental icon and carries the power of that which it signifies" (p. 48). The Name is the person.<sup>13</sup> Likewise for the Christian; "The Name of Jesus, as His proper name, is ontologically connected with Him. The New Testament, in giving it to us, has given us a bridge and channel through which His strength comes to us." (p. 93)

For Vandana Hindu 'taking the Name' is synonymous with the 'second conversion' of Christian ascetical terminology in which we dedicate ourselves to God (p. 109). We repeat the mantra until we are one with it, 'absorbed' in that which it signifies (p. 129).

Vandana also sees a relation with the emphasis on 'the Heart' in the Byzantine and Hindu traditions. The anahata or heart chakra for the Hindu, she says, is the place where the 'lower' and 'higher' chakras are integrated. Like for the Orthodox Christian it is the centre of the human person. As the

seat of psychic sounds (anahata literally means 'unstruck' i.e not created by physical noise) it is the place where the mantra is 'sounded' interiorly (p. 153-61, esp. p. 157-9). She believes likewise that that the role of the body in prayer has always been respected in the Hindu and Eastern Orthodox traditions but has been somewhat neglected in the Latin Western Church. So Vandana believes Western Christians could learn from the yoga systems of India how the body has to be prepared for prayer:

*"Our contemplative faculties are also deeply embedded in the body; and in Asia there always been a particular skill in educating and forming a contemplative body."* (p. 185-6)



They could also relearn, from the relation of the Guru and disciple in the Hindu tradition, the importance of spiritual guides. Mantra-diksha especially, in the Hindu and Byzantine tradition, is a process of 'initiation'. This involves a devout commitment for life to the teacher and the practise they impart (p. 204-5).

When it comes to Christian mantras Vandana recommends 'Om Jesus' (p. 151). Prayer 'in the Name of Jesus' has become popular again she notes, in Pentecostal and Charismatic groups where it is used for healing, prophesy and praise. What fits especially with the Hindu idea of japa is 'Praising the name of Jesus' rather than just using it as a

mode of intercession and petition. Japa is always 'Praise of the Name' (p. 133-5). She also notes the current popularity of 'the Jesus prayer' (in its Orthodox form) instilled by the book The Way of a Pilgrim. However, she also points out phrases in Christian liturgical prayer that could be used as Christian mantras: Kyrie Eleison, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, even Pater Noster and Ave Maria. The widespread use of Amen and Alleluia points for her to them having, or having had, a mantric significance (p. 205). For Christians she also recommends the words "I AM" which Jesus applies to himself in John's gospel: "This", she says, "is the Name, found in the depth of our own 'I AM', which is truly our salvation." (p. 209)

Vandana says that opinion differs as to whether the mantra should be said with concentration in the meaning (p. 204). With an Ishta mantra, the presiding deity (Devata), must be recognised as the source of its power or shakti. However both the name and the form (namarupa) of the deity is contained in the sound (p. 189). Sound manifests form so that the correct use of the mantra 'evokes' the character of the presiding deity (p. 192-3). In the case of a Guru mantra one concentrates rather on the 'soundless sound' causal vibration (Shabda-Brahman) of the universe. This 'wavelength of God' is undifferentiated into name and form (p. 191). Personally Vandana follows, and summarises, the teaching of Sri Chidananda:

*"At first as one repeats the mantra mentally, the mind is conscious only of the sounds produced. In the second stage, along with the sound of each word, its meaning is evoked. In the third stage, the meanings of the separate words are replaced by the overall meaning underlying the mantra. With continued practise the overall idea underlying the mantra does not merely appear again and again but becomes fixed in the mind and is constantly present. The next stage consists in transcending the idea which exists on the mental plane and coming into touch with the reality behind the mantra which is beyond the realm of the mind. Finally the words of the mantra*

 **Sr. Vandana Mataji - con't****by Stefan Reynolds**

and their meanings pass completely into the background and the idea alone occupies the field of consciousness: but the Sadhaka's consciousness becomes so fused with the idea that they no longer remain conscious of themselves but only of the One to whom the mind is surrendered." (p. 207)<sup>14</sup>

Vandana was a pioneer in 'crossing over' into the experience of another faith tradition. Her concern was less theological than her friends Abhishikhananda and Bede Griffiths. For her it was always practical forms of inculturation, particularly the use of eastern practises and how they might be integrated in Christian life, that motivated her. She was committed to many community projects, setting up of ashrams, and the related issues of social justice in India.<sup>15</sup> As an Indian herself her concern from the beginning was the renewal of the Church in

India through contact with Hindu spirituality. As a long term member of the National Liturgical Committee and an accomplished musician she worked on an Indian-Christian liturgy. Her teaching on prayer was primarily to help Indian Christians to 'own' the riches of their Indian spiritual heritage.<sup>16</sup>

*Stefan Reynolds*

1. Abhishikhananda's book *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, (ISPCK, 1969), records the conferences on Ashram spirituality in preparation for the opening of the Ashram.
2. She writes about this encounter in her book *Gurus, Christians and Ashrams* (DLT, 1978).
3. This is still the case, see 'Mission Aim of The Divine Life Society' at [www.divinelifesociety.org](http://www.divinelifesociety.org).
4. Sri Chidananda's 'Letter' in *The Divine Life Society* magazine, (December 1980 edition), p. 423.
5. See Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, p. 43-4.
6. See Vandana, 'In Search of Being One with the One', in *Spirituality in Inter-faith Dialogue*, ed. Tosh Arai & Wesley Ariaraja, (Orbis, 1989).
7. In this she agreed with her friend Bede Griffiths in his book *Return to the Centre*, (Collins, 1976), Ch. 6, p. 256-261.

8. Some of these personal opinions of Vandana I have learnt through conversation with those who have known her. In the case of John Main his first publication *Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks*, (1977, Medio Media; 1999), p. 40, makes clear his debt to his initial Hindu teacher. This encounter was the catalyst of John Main's later recovery of a teaching on meditation from within the Christian tradition, which became the specific context of his own teaching. The inter-religious implications of similar meditative practices across the world religions has been brought out in the post-humous 'John Main Seminars', see [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org).
9. Vandana, *Namajapa*, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984), p. 183-5. Page references in *Namajapa* will continue within the text.
10. For a thorough analysis of So'ham in its Vedantic context see Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, *The Power of the Mantra and the Mystery of Initiation*, (Pennsylvania: Yoga International Books, 1996).
11. John 17: 21.
12. Galatians 2: 20.
13. The most usual names in the Hindu tradition are Hari, Ram, Krishna, or longer forms such as Om Nama Narayanaya or Om Nama Shivaya.
14. This is Vandana's summary of 'The Rules for Mantra Japa' given by Swami Chidananda in his 'Instructions to New Initiates'.
15. See Vandana's book *Social Justice and Ashrams*, (Asian Trading Corporations, 1982).
16. Vandana is currently in retirement and care close to her community in Pune.

 **Silent Retreats 2011****by Jane Lichnowski**

**'Hermits in Company'**  
**Silent Retreats 2011**  
**'Stillness within one individual can affect society beyond measure'** Father Bede Griffiths

The phrase 'Hermits in Company' captures the essence of our intention for these retreats which is to organise a quiet time where we can gather, mostly in silence, free to use the unstructured time and space as we wish. We come together for times of meditation, chanting and reading of scripture from different traditions, following the rhythm of the day at Shantivanam. They are 'DIY' retreats, in the sense that participants are invited to contribute to readings at prayer times, on a particular theme which is chosen nearer the time; and to help with whatever simple vegetarian catering and housekeeping activities that are needed. We are pleased to inform you that there will be two 'Hermits in Company' retreats in 2011.

**APRIL 29th – MAY 2nd 2011**  
**TYMAWR CONVENT,**  
**MONMOUTH**

Tymawr Convent is a small, Cistercian in spirit, contemplative community living in the peaceful Welsh countryside. We stay at Michaelgarth, the guest house, lying within the extensive and beautiful convent grounds. More details of the community can be found at [www.churchinwales.org.uk/tymawr](http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/tymawr) We can accommodate 14 people (9 sleeping in Michaelgarth & 5 in the Convent) in 8 single rooms and 3 double rooms. The cost will be £95\*

**OCTOBER 6th–9th 2011**  
**THE STANTON GUILDHOUSE,**  
**STANTON, WORCESTERSHIRE**

The Guildhouse is a beautiful centre near Broadway. Set on a hillside, it has stunning views towards the Welsh mountains. More about the centre can be found at [www.stantonguildhouse.org.uk](http://www.stantonguildhouse.org.uk). We can accommodate 13 people in simple shared rooms. The cost will be £105\*

Availability: There are places remaining on the October retreat. However, following notice of these retreats in the last newsletter the May Bank holiday weekend retreat is full - but we may well have cancellations - so if you are interested please contact me and I'd be happy to put you on waiting list - I am also keen to know who may be interested in the future. If you would like more information or to request a booking form please contact - **Jane Lichnowski, 82 Gloucester Road, Cirencester. Glos. GL7 2LJ Tel - 01285 651381 email - [Jane@lichnowski.com](mailto:Jane@lichnowski.com)**

\*Please note that a deposit of £25 is required when booking, also that it may be possible to accommodate one or two participants on a non-residential daily basis.

Recently, I found a diary entry from the early 1990's. Following a silent retreat I had written how much I was beginning to value 'being in silence with others'. Since then I have grown to value this more and more, and also to realise that I am not the only one who feels this way! The 'Hermits in Company' retreat, which grew out of the Sangha's Spring Silent Retreat held at the Screen in Wales, offers just such an opportunity.

## The Wider Sangha - Argentina

by Magdalena Puebla

I met father Bede on a TV program broadcast 15 years ago and he represented fully and completely my "human search" for transcendence and the Ultimate meaning.

Since then I have been studying and learning about his thought and philosophy. I translated *MARRIAGE OF EAST AND WEST* into Spanish (it is available now) and I am looking forward to publish *NEW CREATION IN CHRIST* (already translated by me) and a *NEW VISION OF REALITY*. It has been difficult to introduce father Bede's thinking in Latin America, nevertheless at the moment I am travelling within the country to

deliver lectures and workshops about his life and work with excellent results. We have some projects in mind, together with Carlos Carranza in

Chile and Marcos Monteiro in Brazil and maybe it is not far the time when we can bring brother Martin to Latin America to deepen our learning.

peace and prayers  
Magdalena Puebla  
malen\_puebla@hotmail.com



## The Wider Sangha - Brazil

by Marcos Monteiro

We are delighted to welcome Marcos as the contact from Brazil: He sent us the following news of his group

We are a group who engage in interfaith dialogue on the thought of Father Bede Griffiths and Swami Abishiktananda. We started two years ago when I read the book "Marriage of East and West" before I was of the Sivananda Yoga Hindu line I am still a yoga teacher of this lineage.



But I always I went back to the origins of Christian faith and Father Bede helped me organize this path, and also with the help of Sister Pascaline she sent me a cd, the booklet Sandhya Vandana and suggested I organize a



group. I have always played Indian harmonium and was able to study the bhajans of Shantivanam as I have a little knowledge of Sanskrit. In the group we do some simple pranayama, meditation, and we start the evening prayer singing the Vande Saccidananda, lectures with commentary, bhajans, prayers, arati and conclude with prasad. We have some times 20 persons in the group



and usually our meetings consist of 10 people. The members who are most active are; Joshua, André, Alda, Celia and myself. The others help with the lectures, yoga etc.. but we're not an institution only a simple prayer group.



I realize in my daily sadhana with yoga, meditation morning, evening we do also the prayers of sandhya vandana or the Liturgy of the Hours of Shantivanam, I do the psalms of psalms book by Bede Griffiths and readings from the Bible, Gita and Hindu scriptures in the morning. I try to follow the sandhya vandana, yoga and meditation every day morning and evening. I do the yoga classes and music classes also. *Om Shanti.*

Marcos Monteiro  
satsangmohan@yahoo.com.br

## Sangha News, Retreats & Resources

### Other events

From time to time members hold events that may be of interest to others. At the editorial discretion of the working group we are happy to make these known. However we need to point out that the Bede Griffiths Sangha Working Group has not endorsed these events nor can it be held responsible for their organisation or contents.

### Costing of Sangha Events

The cost of Sangha events varies. When planning an event we simply aim to break even. Thus the cost of any event reflects the expenses incurred putting it on, largely the cost of the venue. Recently the price of accommodation at venues has risen this is the reason for the slight increase in some retreat costs.

### The Caldey Island Retreat

September 3rd to 10th 2011

The theme of this year's retreat is Spirit in Practice. The retreat is limited to 15 people. The cost of £255 (£220 for low income) includes full-board simple vegetarian fare.

A deposit of £45 is required with your booking.

The retreat follows the Shantivanam routine with periods of meditation, chants & readings. We observe silence in the retreat house. The Caldey Abbey community and the natural beauty of the island provide further activities. See past Spring newsletters for retreat reports.

Enquiries for further details and/or requests for a booking form to Aileen & Martin Neilan tel 01834 871433 or e-mail aileen.neilan@btinternet.com

### Sadhu Videhi

We are delighted to tell you that Sadhu Videhi, a wandering sannyasi, well respected meditation teacher and clinical psychologist, will be coming to the UK in June 2011, when will teach meditation and Indian spirituality.

He will lead a weekend retreat Friday 17/18/19 in Talgarth, Powys, numbers limited to 12 people. A further retreat will be organised in Kent; date to be announced.

If you would like more information please do contact me:

**Jill Hemmings - jill.hemmings@btinternet.com**

### 'Hermits in Company' Spring Silent Retreat

Ty Mawr Convent - Monmouth - Wales  
From April 29th - May 2nd 2011

There will be a second 'Hermits' silent retreat later in 2011. It will run from October 6 - 9th at the Stanton Guildhouse, Worcestershire.

For more information about these retreats please contact Jane Lichnowski. Telephone 01285 651381 or email jane@lichnowski.com



### Arunachala

A painting by Ricardo Insua-Cao. Prints of *Arunachala* are available to buy, which are printed by a specialist giclee, fine-art print company, on Hahnemuhle 310gsm German etching, matt, fine-art paper.

A4 - £15 | A3 - £25 | A2 - £50. All prices include postage & packaging.  
Contact - ric@rdo.org.uk - 07986 605 774 - www.rdo.org.uk

### Editor's Choice

In the last issue I invited book choices from you – not reviews but books you found helpful. I imagined I would be inundated with titles to enhance our Spiritual Journey. I have not happened, so I will offer my own choice of author and hopefully it will inspire some of you to respond. I recommend the works of the lovely Satish Kumar – editor of *Resurgence*, founder of the Small School and Director of Schumacher College. “*No Destination*” tells of his 8,000-mile walk for peace. “*You are Therefore I am – A declaration of dependence*” is his response to Rene Descartes “*Cogito ergo sum*”. “*Spiritual Compass*” Deals with the three qualities of life as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita 1. *Sattvic*, 2. *Rajastic* and 3. *Tamasic*

### New Avaita (Non-duality) Course at Colet House London

The Study Society is seeking to share anew the teachings received over many years, from the former Shankaracharya of Jyoti, HH Shantanand Saraswati.

We thought especially that some members of Bede Griffiths Sangha, who attended this year's summer gathering at Gaunt's House, might wish to follow up discussions there, and hear more about the spiritual tradition of Advaita.

You are warmly invited to contact us for further details:-  
office@studysociety.org or 020 8741 6568

### The Interfaith Foundation

The Interfaith Foundation is a charitable organisation embracing the universal truth at the heart of all spiritual traditions.

[www.interfaithfoundation.org](http://www.interfaithfoundation.org)

Tel: 08444 457 004

email: admin@interfaithfoundation.org

### Books from the Sangha

#### Beyond the Darkness

Shirley du Boulay's definitive biography of Father Bede Griffiths.

#### The Four O'Clock Talks

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

Suggested donation of £7.00 each to cover UK p&p

Cheques made out to “**Bede Griffiths Sangha**” to:

Jane Lichnowski, 82 Gloucester Road, Cirencester GL7 2LJ

### From the WCCM

Books, dvd's and cassettes of Father Bede and books and tapes on meditation.

Medio Media, St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX  
mail@wccm.org or call Jan Dunsford on 020 7278 2070

### Greenspirit Books & Schumacher Book Service

Catalogue available from Tony Jarrett

[www.greenspirit.org.uk](http://www.greenspirit.org.uk)

Tel: 01380 726 224

email: greenspiritbooks@btinternet.com

Excellent range of secondhand books on spiritual subjects available from Alan Shepherd

14 Becksford Close, Warminster. BA12 9LW

Tel: 01985 215 679

## Regional & 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

<b>Cornwall</b>	<b>Penzance</b> - Swami Nityamuktananda 01736 350510
<b>Dorset</b>	Michael Giddings 07810 366 860 - mjgiddings2002@yahoo.co.uk
<b>Gloucestershire</b>	Victoria Glazier 01453 839 488
<b>Hereford &amp; Shropshire</b>	Annette Criswell 01568 770 436 - gooldena1@btinternet.com
<b>Hertfordshire</b>	Graham Thwaites 01279 834 315
<b>Jersey &amp; the Channel Islands</b>	Sean Arnold 01534 863118 - seanjarnold@googlemail.com
<b>London</b>	<b>N4</b> - Ann O'Donoghue 0207 359 1929
<b>London</b>	<b>SE (Kent)</b> - Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004
<b>Middlesex</b>	<b>Pinner</b> - Catherine Widdicombe 020 8866 2195 mjc.widdicombe@grailsociety.org.uk
<b>Norfolk</b>	Chris Smythe 01493 664 725
<b>Northants</b>	Henry Worthy 01604 513 032
<b>Staffs</b>	<b>Stoke on Trent</b> - Sr Sophia 01782 816036
<b>Suffolk</b>	Wendy Mulford 01728 604 169
<b>West Sussex</b>	Gillian Maher 01444 455 334
<b>Chichester</b>	Therese O'Neill 01730 814 879
<b>Worcs</b>	Nick & Mary Saddler 01386 751 443
<b>Yorkshire</b>	<b>Barnsley</b> - Margaret Cadnam 01226 217 042 Group

### Northern Ireland

**Ballyhornan** Stan Papenfus  
02844 841451

### Scotland

<b>Aberdeen</b>	Angelika Monteux 01224 867 409
<b>Glasgow</b>	Steve Woodward 01355 224 937
<b>Easter Ross</b>	Revd George Coppen 01862 842 381 - gcoppen@tiscali.co.uk

### Wales

<b>West Wales</b>	Martin and Aileen Neilan 01834 871 433
<b>Mid Wales</b>	<b>Montgomery</b> - Jonathan Robinson 01588 620 779 <b>Holywell</b> - Philip Francis 01352 711 620



### Overseas contacts

<b>Argentina</b>	Magdalena Puebla malen_puebla@hotmail.com 00542204761641
<b>Australia</b>	Andrew Howie iona@netspace.net.au <b>East St Kilda</b> - Samantha Semmens ssemmens@trinity.unimelb.edu.au
<b>Brazil</b>	M satsangmohan@yahoo.com.br
<b>Chile</b>	Carlos Carranza - carloscarranza@hotmail.com
<b>Denmark</b>	Vicky Lasheras - lasheras@frbpost.dk
<b>Eire</b>	Justin Carty - dustbin26@hotmail.co.uk
<b>France</b>	Nerte Chaix michoule2@wanadoo.fr <b>Paris:</b> Julia Tompson on 01 30 53 11 89 julia.tompson@gmail.com
<b>India</b>	Br. Martin - brothermartin111@hotmail.com
<b>Italy</b>	Mario la Floresta - laflor_1@libero.it
<b>Malta</b>	Godwin Genovese - shine@vol.net.mt
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>Christchurch</b> - Kevin Moran s.friend@paradise.net.nz
<b>USA</b>	<b>Florida</b> - Michael Spillane mspillane@legalaidpbc.org <b>Oklahoma</b> - Carolyn Cowan ccmission@cox.net <b>Nevada</b> - Jackie Greedy 775 883 0854 <b>Big Sur</b> - Father Cyprian Consiglio cyprianconsiglio@sbcglobal.net

### Meditation Groups

<b>Hertfordshire</b>	<b>Bishop Stortford</b> - Graham Thwaites 01279 834 315 Thursdays 6:30pm
<b>London</b>	<b>SE (Kent)</b> - Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004 - Wednesdays 7:30pm <b>SW (Barnes)</b> - Stefan Reynolds 07930 679 905 stefandreynolds@yahoo.co.uk - Wednesdays <b>SW (Barnes)</b> - Silvia Howell 020 8748 3722 sylvia@howell20.orangehome.co.uk Wednesday 3:45pm
<b>Middlesex</b>	<b>Pinner</b> - Catherine Widdicombe jcwiddicombe@tiscali.co.uk - Fridays 8:00pm
<b>Northants</b>	Henry Worthy 01604 513 032 - Thursdays at 8:00pm
<b>Somerset</b>	<b>Bath</b> - Daphne Radenhurst 01225 429 398 - Last Friday of the month 10am
<b>Surrey</b>	<b>Woking</b> - Kath Higgins 01483 833 101 - Wednesdays 5:30pm
<b>Sussex</b>	<b>Chichester</b> - Therese O'Neill 01730 814 879 - 2nd Wednesday of each month <b>Arundel</b> - Mary Corbyn 01903 882 508 - Tuesdays
<b>Yorkshire</b>	<b>Mirfield</b> - Margaret Cadnam 01226 217 042 - 1st Thursday of each month
<b>WCCM Groups</b>	<b>WCCM contact</b> - Kim Nataraja kimshankarnataraja@googlemail.com 020 7727 6779