



# The Golden String

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Summer 1999

## WHAT BEDE GRIFFITHS MEANS TO ME

Richard Freis

*Dr. Freis' letter responds to the question of Sr. Maurus Allen, OSB: "What does Bede Griffiths mean to you?"*

Dear Maurus,

I owe you thanks for posing the question. After thinking about it off and on, I think I can give a partial answer, one that genuinely surprised me as I realized the depths Bede touches in me. The main elements are four, but all might be summed up as aspects of Bede's wisdom, understanding wisdom as something lived, integral and embracing all the humanly accessible ways of knowing. Let me list them and see what I can say about each one.

**1. Bede as Icon.** This is something that shines in his photographs and in the videos, in his face and graceful, rhythmic gestures; in his words, though they sometimes conceal it as well as reveal it; and in his whole life. He is not only a transparent embodiment of an *archetype*, in the Jungian sense, the Holy Man, and beyond that perhaps the deep, integrating personal Self. He is an *icon*, who mediates the transcendent. One could even apply to him the traditional description of an icon, 'a window into heaven,' as long as it is understood that what comes through this window is not only spiritual vision, but the stirring, transforming breeze of the Spirit itself. I don't mean to attribute to him a superhuman perfection, but something of the grace-given, mediating power that is shared by all recognized and anonymous saints. He embodies, in a phrase of Thomas Merton's, *sophianic love*; his presence opens onto all-seeing wisdom and all-accommodating love. Indeed, if I ask myself what I see in that beautiful photograph of Bede's face, I have to answer: Somehow, Everything. All Brother and Sister Creation. Fiery geysers of energy. Rocks and water. Earth in spring and earth in winter. All beings who do, have, and will suffer. All joy. Fathomless galaxies. Impenetrable light and impenetrable darkness. The seeds of all things. Time and Great Time; space and Great Space; flowing and still, differentiated and coinherent. The God - The Christ - The Gift. Silence that will not and silence that cannot be spoken. He is somehow especially stamped with wholeness and bespeaks deeper and broader wholeness beyond.

**2. Bede's Power of Continuing Conversion.** When I read *The Golden String* or hear Bede recount his life on the

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## SELF-SURRENDER AND SELF-REALIZATION IN BEDE GRIFFITHS

Bruno Barnhart

*This talk was part of the sixth anniversary commemoration of Father Bede's 'mahasamadhi' at Osage Monastery, in May 1999.*

Let me begin by proposing a few thumbnail principles for interpreting Bede Griffiths' writings. Each point is related to the others. First of all, the iceberg principle. There is always more of him invisible than is visible. Bede is bigger than his own mind, and his mind is pretty big. The mystery of Bede, the indeterminate and dynamic fullness that is just beneath his surface, is always larger, more alive and more intelligent than any particular affirmation. And his affirmations are often impulsive, enthusiastic and occasional - and consequently one-sided.

Secondly, the theological-literary factor. We must distinguish between Bede the subject of experience and Bede the interpreter, the theologian and the writer of crystalline prose. Sometimes the human, experiential reality with its irregularities and obscurities is not accurately reflected in the seamless and limpid theoretical expression.

Thirdly, dynamic paradox. Bede is full of paradoxes and polarities. He could pursue the logic of one principle at one moment and follow the logic of another principle at another moment, without feeling anxious about the compatibility of the two principles and their

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**What Bede means to me** (Continued from page 1)

videos, I am reminded again and again of some words of Joseph Campbell near the beginning of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

This first stage of the mythological journey - which we have designated the 'call to adventure' - signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of society [or at any point, his current conscious center and integration] to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger...

Growth moves through stages of consolidation and disintegration, wider and deeper consolidations and renewed disintegration as the present consolidation becomes constricting. Bede had a remarkable power of opening himself to one depth and breadth after another, transcending the limits but integrating the achievements of each successive step. I'm always specially moved by the passages of the last years of his life, when he becomes so amazingly whole and at the same time so amazingly open. Such a readiness to live wholeheartedly, nakedly, as *homo viator*, unwearingly to cross threshold beyond threshold, takes great courage. I think this is particularly true of religion, for it touches the entire spectrum of consciousness and identity from the most infantile to the most spiritual and every level must be persuaded in its own terms to let go and undertake/endure new birth. Bede always danced into the next disequilibrium: he learned to cooperate, against the resistance we so often surrender to, with whatever calls us toward transcendence. You quote from Bede the verse of William Blake that captures the way the deeper world beckons, but cannot fully disclose itself, to our present consciousness, like a three-dimensional object transcribed into a two-dimensional space.

I give you the end of a golden string;

Only wind it into a ball,

It will lead you in at heaven's gate,

Built in Jerusalem's wall.

There's a similar image I like for this, from a *New Yorker* profile of the pianist Alfred Brendel (4/1/96).

One of the most important lessons Brendel taught Imogen Cooper was that there is a tension that goes all the way through a piece of music and never lets up. "He used to talk about the long silver cord that one pulls on," she said. "He'd crouch down beside the piano and say, 'Go on, pull, pull.'...There's always a force irresistibly pulling it from the first note to the last. He used to say, 'You've got to get the audience from the first note.'"

One could say that Bede was especially awake to the pull of the first notes of the spirit's multi-dimensional cosmic music and attuned his life to its infolding, following it from level to level, from wholeness to wholeness,

openness to openness, depth to depth.

**3. Bede's Personal Integration of World Religious Traditions.** Whatever I might say here is all a gloss on the fact that Bede was a monk. Being a monk is a role that by its very meaning cannot be all-determined and all-determining; a 'professional monk' is a contradiction in terms; the *role* is eventually a self-destroying artifact, because its purpose is to transcend itself in openness to what is beyond. But there are some things about his way of proceeding that seem to me characteristically monastic. The first is that he did not keep what he knew and taught and proposed as spiritual principles in a separate space, as in an inner library, from which he departed when he set about the rest of his life: he lived all this as a differentiated unity of contemplative vision, understanding, and practice. And although he did not denigrate conceptual knowing (he was particularly not in the business of truncating the human person), he also embraced non-conceptual, connatural knowing, including (as you say) the *transconceptual* knowing of fully realized contemplation, in which by grace human beings 'know' God in the act of loving God with the Love which is Godself. In this he was a witness to ways in which *monastic humanism* implicitly criticizes normal *academic humanism* as narrowed and estranged from the full dimensions and movement of human life. This movingly confirmed, yet opened beyond, my own efforts to resist the reduction of *liberal* education simply to professional education and to keep it a means of *liberating* young human persons into what Ken Wilber resonantly calls the vision-logic stage of realization. And it was because I learn so largely through connatural knowing and personal integration and had become so centered in my spiritual journey that I was so drawn by Bede's way of opening to the world religions; you might say that Bede appeared at the right moment as my golden string. I had already marked a passage in Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* that seems to me to capture the nature of Bede's project, although Merton is speaking within the horizon of Christianity.

If I can unite in myself the thought and devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians. From that secret and unspoken unity in myself can eventually come a visible and manifest unity of all Christians. If we want to bring together what is divided, we cannot do so by imposing one division upon the other or absorbing one division into the other...If we do this, the union is not Christian. It is political, and doomed to further conflict. We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ.

And a later passage in the book seems to me to capture an attitude that underlay Bede's remarkable

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***What Bede means to me*** (Continued from page 1)

openness in carrying his project out.

The heresy of individualism: thinking oneself a completely self-sufficient unity and asserting this imaginary 'unity' against all others. The affirmation of the self as simply 'not the other.' But when you seek to affirm your unity by denying that you have anything to do with anyone else, by negating everyone else in the universe until you come down to *you*: what is there left to affirm? Even if you were able to affirm, you would have no breath left to affirm it.

The true way is just the opposite: the more I am able to affirm others, to say 'yes' to them in myself, by discovering them in myself and myself in them, the more real I am...

But this does not yet say what most touches me about Bede's journey in India. It is this. God needs to be praised in as many idioms and voices as possible. This does not exhaust God: the gathered energy of all our praise disappears to nothingness in the divine depth. Nor does it exhaust our human capacity. But it still seems terribly important that our multiple praise, the diverse strands in the tapestry of praise, be *less incomplete*. A passage from Thomas Hopko's book on the Christian mysteries may set the stage for my saying this more adequately.

The incarnation of God's Son is a cooperative effort. It is a collaboration between the Creator and his creatures. It is a *synergy* between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on one side, and all the angels and animals and elements on the other, with human persons at the center as the main mediators between heaven and earth, being those for whom the world was made and to whom it is given. There can be no coming of the Son of God, no incarnation of the Divine Word, no birth of Jesus unless everyone and everything cheerfully and gratefully join into the act. This is not only true 'physically' in history, but it is also true 'mystically' in our spiritual lives.

Our and the earth's reception of Christ always spills over into silent or sung psalms of joy and gratitude. Insofar as these psalms are sung, the heart wants them to be sung in as many languages as possible; even in languages that are not entirely commensurable. From some such spring, I think, flowed Bede's joyous and grateful attempt to find an Indian language to express the Christian mystery. And this seems to me very Benedictine: in this respect, his entire life in India was a continuous liturgy.

**4. Bede as Witness to That which Cannot be Thought, Named, or Pointed To.** It would certainly become me not to write at length after this heading! Speech cannot cope with emptiness. This is not, moreover, entirely a new heading, but the depth of the earlier three headings, as Raimon Panikkar says in his book on the Trinity, "the

infinite horizon, which, like a mirage, always appears in the distance because it is no-where." Indeed, I will let Panikkar speak further for me, in the paradoxical task of naming this unnameable to which Bede was so great a witness, on the grounds that his inadequate speech is less inadequate than my inadequate speech, if infinities can be compared.

In the Father the apophatism (the *kenosis* or emptying) of Being is real and total. This is what elsewhere I have called 'the Cross in the Trinity' i. e., the integral immolation of God, of which the Cross of Christ and his immolation are only the images and revelations.

Nothing can be said of the Father 'in himself', of the 'self' of the Father. Certainly he is the Father of the Son and Jesus addresses him as Father, but even 'Father' is not his proper name, though he has no other. In begetting the Son he gives up everything, even, if we may dare to say so, the possibility of being expressed in a name that would speak of him and him alone, outside any reference to the generation of the Son. Is it not here, truly speaking, in this essential apophatism of the 'person' of the Father, in this *kenosis* of Being at its very source, that the buddhist experience of *nirvana* and *sunyata* (emptiness) should be situated? One is led onwards towards the 'absolute goal' and at the end one finds nothing, because there is nothing, not even Being.

As you know, what most deeply moves me (far beyond any act of will) is the aspiration to know myself (and all my Sister and Brother creation in which 'I' am coinherent) as an expression of this full-emptiness beyond Being, an aspiration which it is more accurate to say I do not live but which lives me. *Sannyasa* embodies this aspiration and already expresses this goal. In the accounts of his living out Christian *sannyasa* Bede deepened in me the obscure awakening to living oriented to this 'beyond.' And here I must mention with him his predecessor at Shantivanam, Swami Abhishiktananda. How odd it is to write these words as a middle-aged family man living in Jackson, Mississippi who met neither of these men.

...To be honest, I am going to have to say one thing that Bede does *not* mean to me. This regards the texture of his thinking as I perceive it.

One way to do this is to use, in the lightest way, some of the terminology of the Meyers-Briggs profile. Such a profile wouldn't touch the deepest things about him, but I do think it would suggest that in its terms Bede was an iNtuitive-Thinker. The intuition shows in his drive toward synthesis; the thinking in the elaborate schemes of stages, levels, worldviews to which he is drawn and which he often (generously) frames by summarizing the views of some other thinker whose articulation he finds successful. I admire all this in itself. Within this overall admiration, my difficulties are perhaps two. First, it seems to me that Bede's impulse to synthesis is stronger than his impulse to analysis.

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**What Bede means to me** (Continued from page 3)

This means that I often find his formulation of the elements he is synthesizing *insufficiently differentiated*: his words could encompass two widely different significances depending on some factor that is left ambiguous. Sometimes the context allows one to make the differentiation, sometimes not.

A second sign of this for me is his easy reference to great dichotomous figures, often aligned with one another in parallel dichotomies: East and West, Feminine and Masculine, Reason and Feeling. These figures seem to me complex mental beings, compounds of concepts and imagination, with a real but again insufficiently differentiated reference to realities. Sometimes there is a contemplative immediacy, a connaturality, what Aelred would call an 'intellectual kiss,' even in his most universalizing passage (as there almost always is in Raimon Panikkar's words); but at times there seems to be a fissure between such contemplative immediacy and the impulse to theoretical synthesis. Bede's writing is certainly *logos* in the service of the spirit, but the insufficient differentiation of the elements of the synthesis and the impulse of the synthesizing schemas (sometimes summarized at second hand) to break loose from experience sometimes makes the account apparently clear but actually confused. I find this a problem especially in the longer and more complex works, *The Marriage of East and West* and *A New Vision of Reality*.

This means that I do not find it always serves Bede's deeper aspirations simply to summarize his teachings in their own terms or to repeat them as answers without the necessary clarification and critical reconstruction.

Of course, no writer who wants to awaken the reader is well served by having her or his books reduced to a treasury of beliefs. A simply imitated thought is not an authentic thought as a simply imitated action is not an authentic action: they cannot be transforming. I think Bede's aspiration to understand what a right synthesis would be, his agenda of questions, his demarking of positions understood as provisional and partial - these, assumed by a reader as starting points for her or his own thinking, can indeed be transforming.

So this is at least something of what Bede means to me. I don't know if it will be of any help to you, Maurus.

The Peace of Christ,

Richard

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**NEW AND FORTHCOMING**

**New Center for Spirituality and Dialogue in Tamil Nadu**

Father Chacko Valiaveetil, S. J., whose *An Indian Christology: the Shantivanam School* recently appeared in this bulletin, announces that the Indian Jesuits have opened a Center for Spirituality and Interreligious Dialogue at Kanyakumari, on the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, where the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea meet. The center offers both individual and group retreats, as well as courses on the various religious traditions, on spirituality, the Bible and other subjects. For information, contact:

The Director, Thozhamai Illam (Maitri Bhavan), Kovalam Post, Kanyakumari 629 702, Tamil Nadu, South India.  
Tel. 011 91 4652 71993.

**Course on Spiritual Masters at G.T.U.** Fr. Robert Hale, O. S.B. Cam, will teach a course at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, in February 2000, on six spiritual teachers for our time. One of those will be Bede Griffiths.

The course will encourage further studies of Fr. Bede, and thesis work, whether at the Masters or Doctorate level, also utilizing the Bede Griffiths Archives at the Graduate Theological Union Library.

**Bro. John Martin Sahajananda's** book, *A New Vision of Christianity*, 68 pp, was published in 1998 at Shantivanam: Saccidananda Ashram, Tannirpalli P.O., Kulitthalai, Karur (Dt.), Tamil Nadu 639107, South India.

Bro. John Martin is spending June of this year in Germany and Belgium, and July in the United Kingdom, where he is visiting many spiritual centers, offering retreats and talks.

**Wayne Teasdale's** *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, will be published by New World Library on October 12. With a Foreword by the Dalai Lama and a Preface by Beatrice Bruteau, the book offers for the future development of our spiritual paths a new perspective of *interspirituality* and *intermysticism*.

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18701 W. Monastery Road, Sand Springs, OK 74063;  
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**WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? John Martin Sahajananda**  
*(Concluded)*

The experience of Jesus at his baptism, in my understanding, is the moment where these two experiences of God are united: where not only humanity finds God but also God finds humanity. The baptismal experience of Jesus at the river Jordan is the third important moment in the life of Jesus, where his spiritual mother gives birth and the Eternal Mother, God, conceives. For Jesus the moment of baptism is the moment when he leaves the dreaming consciousness, the God of memory, and enters into the deep sleep consciousness, and discovers his true foundation who is the Father and thus enters into the eternal womb of his Father or Mother, where he affirms that "I and the Father are one." But this eternal womb is not like the physical womb or the spiritual womb which need time between conception and delivery; it is an eternal womb which conceives and gives birth at the same time. But where does God deliver his Son? God delivers in the temple of this world. "You are my beloved Son, today I have begotten you - or today I have given birth to you." To enter into the womb of God is to enter into the state of non-duality: "I and the Father are one." But Jesus does not remain in the womb of God; he returns into the world of duality and establishes a relationship with the Father in which appears a relationship of duality: "I am in the Father and the Father in me;" "The Father is greater than I." This duality does not belong to the ontological level but only to the functional level. The ontological identity does not abolish the functional duality and the functional duality does not abolish the ontological nonduality. To be identical with God at the ontological level and to act dualistically at the phenomenological level in the world is the miracle of life.

In the Upanishadic tradition there appear to be some schools of thought an obsession with the ontological identity to the extent of denying any reality to the world and considering the creation as an illusion, Maya. In the biblical tradition there seems to be an obsession with the functional duality to the extent of denying any place for the experience of ontological identity with God. The theory of creation itself prohibits this possibility. In the experience of Jesus there appears to be a place for ontological identity (I and the Father are one) and for functional duality (I am in the Father and the Father is in me...The Father is greater than I). Jesus opens human consciousness from the level of being a creature to the level of entering into the womb of God and realizing oneself as identical with God. This experience of Jesus, of being identical with God, is revolutionary in the Jewish tradition which has come to understand humanity as being created in the image and likeness of God. For a Hebrew God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For Jesus, God is no longer the God of

Abraham; God is his Father. This passage from the God of Abraham to God as his Father is a quantum jump.

Who is a human being according to the Indian tradition? The human being has two aspects: the transcendent aspect, where he or she is identical with God, and the immanent aspect where he or she is the manifestation of God, limited in time and space. It may be better to put the question in another way: who is God? God has two aspects: one is transcendent and the other is immanent. To say who man is is also to say who God is. To ask "Who am I?" is also to ask "Who is God?"

When an Indian Christian confronts the profound Indian tradition there arise very important and radical questions. In our Christian tradition we have limited the human person to being a creature of God, but created in the image and likeness of God. Human beings can have a beatific vision of God, they can participate in the nature of God, but they can never realize that they are one with God. The Upanishadic tradition says: the human being is not a creature of God but a manifestation of God. To say that humanity is a manifestation of God is not to formulate a theory of creation but only to say that God and creation are inseparable. Humanity is not condemned for all eternity to be a creature but has the possibility of realizing its identity with God. This does not mean that a human being becomes God. No human being can ever become God but he or she realizes that there is only one God, only one Reality, and that in the foundation of his or her being he or she is identical with God.

Who is a human being according to the experience of Jesus? According to Jesus' experience, a human being is one with God (I and the Father are one). In the Christian tradition this experience of identity with God is limited to Jesus, and the door to this experience of identity is closed to every Christian. Thus a Christian remains always not only outside God but outside Christ. In the Christian tradition one speaks of ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, theocentrism or the centrality of reality, but poor 'anthropos', man, takes second place. Anthropos or the human being is reduced to being at the service of the Church, at the service of Christ, at the service of God or at the service of Reality. In reality, the Church is called to be at the service of 'Anthropos'; in this way human being becomes ecclesio-anthropocentrism. Christocentrism must be at the service of humanity, helping human beings to reach God as the way, the truth and the life, so that it becomes Christo-anthropocentrism. We must remember the words of Jesus, who said: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Finally, theocentrism should be at the service of humanity, to help humanity discover its Divinity. In this way it becomes theo-anthropocentrism. When the upanishadic tradition speaks of theocentrism it also speaks of anthropocentrism, so we can call it theo-anthropocentrism. The dignity of 'Anthropos' consists in realizing that in the foundation of his or her being, he or she is Theos. In this way, Theos is Anthropos

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## JOURNEYING TO FIND THE OTHER HALF OF THE SOUL *a retreat-pilgrimage focussed on Shantivanam* facilitated by Asha and Russill Paul

On January 7th, 1999, a group of pilgrims set out for *Shantivanam*, the Hindu-Christian ashram directed by the late Bede Griffiths and recently discovered by a new wave of admirers across the United States and Europe through an excellent biography written by Shirley Du Boulay. The intention of this pilgrimage was to visit several famous temples and ancient sites while at the same time living in an atmosphere that facilitated the deepest level of interreligious dialogue and cultural cross-fertilization. There is, of course, no better place for this than Shantivanam - a popular name for the ashram which means 'forest of peace,' and a name that local people use for the Eucalyptus forest by which the ashram is situated. It is a gorgeous setting along the banks of the sacred river Cauvery, known as the Ganges of the South.

Shantivanam or *Saccidananda Ashram* (its proper name) is an exquisitely constructed configuration of simple structures that immediately conjures up nostalgic images of the dwelling sites of India's ancient Vedic seers. Unlike most Hindu ashrams that are built with cement and with buildings arranged in a linear fashion, *Saccidananda Ashram* is an enchanting combination of quaint little brick and thatch huts organically positioned in the lush foliage typical of southern India. *Saccidananda* is the name for the

### What is Man?

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and Anthropos is Theos. This is the liberating message of the Upanishads.

We began by asking the question, "What is man that you care for him?" The response of the Hebrew and Christian tradition would be: God remembers man because he or she is the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). The response of Jesus would be: God remembers me because in the foundation of my being I am identical with God. I and the Father are one. The response of the upanishadic tradition would be: God remembers me because in the foundation of my being I am identical with God. I am Brahman. What response can a Christian give? A Christian is prohibited from giving the second or third answer, but is allowed only to give the first. What response can an Indian Christian give? I do not want to give an answer; let me conclude by saying that the heart of an Indian Christian suffers the conflict between the first and the second responses.

Holy Trinity in Hindu theology and signifies the triad of being, knowledge and bliss. Life at the ashram is expressed entirely in the Hindu culture, although the community is well established in the Roman Catholic Church as a house of the Camaldolese Benedictines.

We began our journey at *Mammallapuram*, an ancient site of the great Tamil kingdoms, and visited many of the classic architectural monuments located in the area, which are carved entirely out of rock. During this time we stayed at a gorgeous beach resort on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. Following this experience we arrived at *Shantivanam* and introduced the participants of our tour to the life and the profound symbolism of the place. In addition, the group was taught the various chants and prayers used at the daily offices and at meal times, so that they could participate fully in the monastic life of the community.

After a few days we began visiting various temples, starting with the ancient *Kadambar Amman* temple dedicated to Shiva and his consort Parvati. This rare temple features the powerful *Navagrahangal*, a configuration of stone deities representing the planets. Later we made independent trips to other spots such as the historic *Ranganatha* temple associated with the god Vishnu and the famous temple of the fish-eyed goddess Meenakshi. In all instances we were able to arrange for temple priests or local artists to guide us through the temples, explain the symbolism and - most of all - give us access to the main deity dwelling in the inner sanctuary, which in most cases is barred to non-Hindus. Given the present political situation in India, with its surge of Hindu fundamentalism, this was indeed a phenomenal grace. There were innumerable situations like this that made us aware of the presence of God guiding us all throughout this experience. The one and only place where we could not enter the sanctum sanctorum was the *Meenakshi* Temple. This is one of the largest among the sacred temples of the South, and therefore heavily policed. Fortunately, exploring the temple's renowned thousand-pillared hall, which houses a museum of ancient Indian artifacts, and our freedom to visit other shrines within the vast temple complex, more than made up for this.

Another place of extraordinary interest was a *yogini* ashram. This is a rare and unique community of woman yogis who live a monastic life in accordance with the ancient *Tantric* tradition and perform some of the most exquisite rituals imaginable. In all these situations the pilgrims were made to understand the traditional vision in which a temple is approached. They were taught customs used in the worship, and the symbolism of various gestures was clearly explained to them. The cultural highlight of our trip was a special performance of classical music and dance presented by one of Russill's music teachers and her troupe of professional artists at the ashram itself.

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***Pilgrimage-Retreat to India*** (Continued from page 6)

The overall experience was so powerful and profound that we have decided to do it again! First of all, it was beneficial for Shantivanam. The presence of the ashram is made known here in the West and people begin to talk about it. More importantly, it helps dispel the notion that the ashram is not the same without Father Bede. Of course it could not be the same without him, but what is quite evident are the attempts of the community to keep his spirit and his vision alive. There is no doubt regarding the sincerity of their efforts. Bro. John Martin made a big impact on the group with his daily discourses on spirituality and Fr. George, the gracious prior, was extremely kind to the guests. It was an added treat to be present at his pre-ordination celebrations and first Mass.

Secondly, it was beneficial to the westerners who made the pilgrimage, because it made it possible for them to be together in a group, sharing similar experiences one after another. They were able to support each other in small and large process groups throughout the journey. Finally, it was rewarding for us as facilitators to bring people to our homeland and to Shantivanam, our spiritual home. It gave us a special feeling to be able to introduce them to our culture and spirituality in its own context. A tremendous lot of work is required to organize an event such as this, not to mention the amount of emotional stress that is involved in holding together a group of westerners, most of whom had never been to India before. It is the feedback from these participants, expressing the profound shifts in perspective they underwent, together with the radical transformation in their consciousness, that made us realize the significance of such a pilgrimage. The impact both of Shantivanam and of India on our lives is not to be underestimated, for the layers continue to unfold and the effects are deep.

*Journey To Find the Other Half of the Soul* is scheduled again from January 7 to January 22, 2000. Call or fax Asha at **510-653-5368** for information. We highly recommend early reservations to obtain the best possible rates for the tour. Keep in mind that the previous tour sold out despite extended allowances for late registration and a waiting list. This time, for logistical reasons, we have decided to limit our registrations strictly to a first registered, first accepted basis. We hope that you, dear reader, will be there. *Namaste!*



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**RECENT EVENTS**

**Bede Griffiths Commemoration at Osage Monastery**

Osage+Monastery, Forest of Peace, in Oklahoma, invited many Forest Friends to come and celebrate with the community the 6th Anniversary of Fr. Bede's Mahasamadhi. After festivities began with a buffet supper at 5 pm and a short portion of a video with Fr. Bede teaching, Fr. Bruno Barnhart from Big Sur, California, spoke on *The Self in Bede Griffiths's Thought: Surrender and Realization*. The talk was well received and deeply appreciated by the 60 persons who gathered at this monastic ashram in the forest.

On the following evening, Fr. Bruno gave a second talk for the community, on *Christianity in the Light of the East*, showing how dialogue leads to interiority and self-discovery through interaction.

[Audio tapes are available for \$6.00 from Osage Monastery, 18701 W. Monastery Road, Sand Springs, Oklahoma 74063;  
e-mail: osagemonastery@juno.com]

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**THE TWO TRADITIONS**

**Bede Griffiths**

Perhaps the essential difference between the two outlooks is that for the Semitic religions God is essentially transcendent, separate from the world, while in the Asian religions, God, or the first principle of being, is essentially immanent. It is the 'ground' of being, the inner reality which sustains the whole creation. Thus in the Upanishads, the early Hindu texts, we read: "In the beginning this," (meaning the whole universe) "was Brahman, one only without a second." This language is often interpreted as a form of pantheism, but in reality it is not pantheism, by which is meant that all is God, but pan-en-theism, which means that god is in all things. This is strictly orthodox Christian doctrine. St. Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the middle ages, asks in what sense God is in all things, and he answers that God is in all things first of all by his power, because he "upholds all things by the word of his power." But then he says that he is not in all things at a distance, because there is no distance in God. He is therefore in all things by his presence. He then says that he is not present in all things by a part of himself, as there are no parts in God, therefore he is in all things by his essence. In other words, God our creator is in every particle and sub-particle of matter, in every living thing and in every human being by his very essence. For a Christian this means that the Holy Trinity is in the whole creation, in every part of it. Oriental doctrine helps us therefore to realize an often forgotten aspect of our own Christian faith.

*Bede Griffiths, 'Christianity in the Light of the East', AIM Monastic Bulletin no. 49 (1991), p.52.*



**Self-Surrender**

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developments. He trusts in a unity which is deeper than the explicit parallels and deeper than the contradictions. When he speaks, for instance, of the marriage of East and West, it is not easy to pin that marriage down precisely, to say how Hinduism can be wedded to Christianity. Bede's synthetic optimism goes beyond the complementarity of Eastern consciousness and Western consciousness.

Let me briefly recall some of these polarities that we find in Bede Griffiths. First and most obvious is that between East and West. That leads us to a second tension between Christianity - a particular revelation at a concrete point in time and space - and the 'cosmic revelation' represented by Hinduism and Buddhism. Sometimes Bede will speak in the language and logic of the biblical Word, and sometimes he will follow the logic of nonduality, of advaita and the atman.

A further polarity is between past and future, backward and forward. It is astonishing that Bede looks in both directions at once: toward a new Christianity and toward a recovery of the pre-Christian spiritual traditions. For him the two are inseparable, are one thing. To look ahead is to look back.

Further polarities are between reason and intuition, conscious and unconscious, masculine and feminine consciousness: these are all related for Bede, as if aligned in two parallel columns.

In Bede's life and teaching we find coexisting nonviolence and aggressiveness, contemplative detachment and protest, obedience and criticism of authority. There is also a paradoxical co-existence of naivete and criticism in Bede's personality. Bede does not see the shadow of people close to him and he does not see the shadow of his own ideas, the other side. On the other hand he is acutely conscious of the shadow of western civilization and of the Roman Catholic Church. He moves by passionate intuition rather than by the judicious survey of alternatives which we observe in a Thomas Aquinas.

A final polarity is between a spirituality which ascends into unitive spirit and a descending or incarnational way. I shall return to this later; it is an important parameter for understanding Bede's own development.

**Self-Surrender: the Teaching** Let's look at Bede's teaching on self-surrender. Here are two quotes which Sr. Pascaline provided for me. "The surrender of the ego is the only way of life". Well, that's clear enough, isn't it? Further, "The surrender of the ego is the most difficult thing we have to do." Here we begin to discern the figure of the cross, at the center of human life. It is the only ultimate wisdom, as Paul would say, and yet a wisdom that is impossible to understand, that won't fit in the mind.

Do you recall the first chapter of Bede's beautiful *Return to the Center*? It's called 'A Sannyasi in India', and is about surrender of the self. He begins by describing his

own life in India, and then he goes on to speak of the tradition of sannyasa in India.

A sannyasi is one who does not possess anything, not even the clothes on his back. He has renounced all 'property.' This is the real renunciation which is demanded, the renunciation of 'I' and 'mine.' A sannyasi is one who is totally detached from the world and from himself. It is detachment which is the key-word. It does not matter so much what material possessions you have, so long as you are not attached to them. You must be ready to give up everything, not only material attachments but also human attachments - father, mother, wife, children - everything that you have. But the one thing which you have to abandon unconditionally is your self. If you can give up your self, your 'ego,' you can have anything you like, wife and family, houses and lands - but who is able to give up his self?<sup>1</sup>

Bede then describes the three religious vows in these same terms of the renunciation or surrender of the ego. You can see its centrality in his vision of the spiritual life. It is in the vow of obedience that the ego is most directly challenged.

...obedience is detachment from the self. This is the most radical detachment of all. But what is the self? The self is the principle of reason and responsibility in us. It is the root of freedom, it is what makes us men.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only in this final word that this definition of the self has a masculine sound. A little later in the same chapter, Bede will complement this definition with a description of the self which we might call 'feminine.'

It is a power of self-transcendence. It is the power to give oneself totally to another, to transcend one's self by surrendering to the higher Self, the Atman, the Spirit within.<sup>3</sup>

Here, paradoxically, he is affirming that the self is the power to surrender itself.

In 1992, near the end of his life, Bede will say that there are two principal ways toward the surrender of the self. One is meditation, which he calls the more direct way. That is the movement toward realization of the atman, the unitive self, by interiorizing, by moving into your own center. The other way, he will say, is to fall in love - that is, to move outward toward another. There is not only a surrender of the self and consequent realization of the Self in moving away from the world, therefore, but also in moving into the world. I don't think he would have said this earlier. It is an important sign of the change in Bede's perspective toward the end of his life, to which we shall return.

**Self-Surrender: the Experience** Now let's look at Bede's personal experience of self-surrender, in so far as we have access to it. It seems to me to manifest two peaks. The first is about 1930, at the beginning of his explicitly spiritual life in

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his conversion to Christianity. The second is at the time of his stroke in 1990. And between the two stretch six decades of monastic life with the self-renunciations which are intrinsic to it - and which Bede has outlined for us in *Return to the Center*. The two 'peak moments' or crises stand out from the rest of his life with a sharp discontinuity, however, because they were moments in which *something happened to him*. They were events, standing out sharply from the development of Bede's own thought and way of life, even though rooted there. These were distinct moments of 'grace', of receptiveness, rather than deliberate steps along a road.

His conversion was prepared for by his study of Christianity, his reading of the gospels and of Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine*. But the conversion experience itself washed over him like a tidal wave, carrying him beyond himself. Let me quote Bede's own account in *The Golden String*.

I had made a god of my own reason...Even if theoretically I now acknowledged the authority of God and the Church, in practice I was still the ruler and the judge. I was the centre of my own existence, and my isolation from the rest of the world was due to the fact that I had deliberately shut myself up within the barriers of my own will and reason. Now I was being summoned to surrender this independence. Something had arisen in the depths of my own nature which my reason was powerless to control. I was being called to surrender the very citadel of my self. I was completely in the dark. I did not really know what repentance was or what I was required to repent of. It was indeed the turning point of my life. The struggle went on for many hours, but I realised at length that it was my reason which I had to renounce...I had to surrender myself into the hands of a power which was above my reason, which would not allow me to argue, but commanded me to obey. Yet this power presented itself as nothing but darkness, as an utter blank.<sup>4</sup>

Then Bede was given a gift of repentance, and was overcome by a flood of tears. "I had come through darkness into a world of light." He began to see things with "a new power of vision." "Everything seemed to lose its hardness and rigidity and to become alive." And then, he says, he was flooded with love. We shall find similar language when Bede speaks of his experience at the time of his stroke, sixty years later.

Bede entered the Roman Catholic Church at a time - 1930 - when it was still in its very rigid Counter-Reformation phase. This implied a great deal of self-surrender. Further, he immediately entered a Benedictine monastic community. The Rule of St. Benedict is centered

in the renunciation of self through obedience, to the Rule itself and to the Abbot. The heart of the Benedict's rule is Chapter 7 on humility, and the key to this way of humility is the practice of obedience. "The third step of humility is that one submits to his superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: *He became obedient even to death* (Phil 2:8). Bede had a very strong will - as his friends testify - and this way was far from easy for him. Later, in India, he would struggle with the local bishop, who disapproved the 'indianization' of monastic life at Shantivanam. And we shall find him becoming very critical of the exercise of authority in the Church.

The second great moment of self-surrender was in early 1990, when Bede had his first stroke. Bede describes how he was sitting on his veranda meditating, when something struck him on the head. He fell from his chair and did not return to full consciousness for about a week. Christudas came and gave him a rubdown, to help him relax.

I had some breakfast, and then I felt sort of restless, disturbed, not knowing what was happening. The inspiration came suddenly again to surrender to the Mother. It was quite unexpected: "Surrender to the Mother." And so somehow I made a surrender to the Mother. Then I had an experience of overwhelming love. Waves of love sort of flowed into me. Judy Walter, my great friend, was watching. Friends were watching beside me all the time. I called out to her, "I'm being overwhelmed by love."<sup>5</sup>

This recalls the early conversion experience, does it not? Bede makes an act of surrender and then is flooded with love. It is as if the same door is being opened once again here, that had been opened within him sixty years earlier when he converted to the Church. That too was a surrender to a kind of mother.

Bede does not describe the later event in terms of mystical experience.

It was an extraordinary experience. Psychologically, I think, it was the breakthrough to the feminine. I was very masculine and patriarchal and had been developing the animus, the left brain, all this time. Now the right brain - the feminine, the chthonic power, the earth power - came and hit me. It opened up the whole dimension of the feminine, of the earth, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

While Bede was certainly masculine, and even patriarchal in a way, he was also saturated with the feminine. Bede had written, at the beginning of his *Marriage of East and West*, that he went to India, "... to find the other half of my soul which is the feminine side of my soul". Well, he already had it, that's what he already was. What he loved was that. I think he went to India to find the same thing that he already had, interiorly. Bede was a romantic even before

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## *The Golden String*

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his first experience of the divine Presence in nature and that spiritual initiation confirmed and deepened his orientation. I don't think he ever really lived in the 'patriarchal' side of his soul, though he may have spent a lot of time in the left side of his brain. What he was looking for was already inside him, and very present to his consciousness. But it could not yet flow freely through his being. *( to be concluded)*

#### **NOTES:**

1. Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center*, p.11-12
2. *ibid*, p.14
3. *ibid*, p.15
4. Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String*, p.104
5. *A Human Search*, p.89
6. *ibid*, p.89

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### **THE GIFT OF BEDE GRIFFITHS**

*from a letter to Sr. Pascaline Coff*

Thank you for telling me that *Beyond the Darkness* was available. I read it slowly, cherishing Bede's journey, and had trouble reading through the tears at the end.

I will never forget my reaction when reading Bede's *The Marriage of East and West*, how it brought parts of my life, of me, together. And when I wrote to him about it, he actually answered me! Saying he understood. What a model for us all. That contact with Bede has kept me going for many years. And now, this book of Shirley du Boulay gives a picture of Bede, the human, like us, struggling through this existence, with pains and joys. I think it's a beautiful picture of a real human in all our fullness, an objective yet empathetic account. I love Bede the man even more, and feel his inspiration even more, as I cope with my husband's illness (perhaps terminal) and learn to accept my responses to it and to him. **CDR** ■

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## **The Golden String**

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