



# The Golden String

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## MY MONASTIC INFLUENCES

Pascaline Coff

One of the monastic influences in my life, early on, was *Thomas Merton*, even before I became a Benedictine. He was a Cistercian at Gethsemani, so human, humorous and holy. Merton had a great love for monastic life, and his singleness of heart regarding contemplative prayer, his deep insight into what constituted it and what prevented it, truly spoke to my heart. He also had a great openness to Eastern religions and their classics, their mystical writings and their contemplative practices. He wrote introductions to several of their classics and frequently quoted from their scriptures. Tapes from Gethsemani were available in which he taught the junior monks about the Sufi tradition, and he was in contact with Buddhist and Hindu writers. Merton traveled in Asia, visited the Dalai Lama and eventually, as we all know, died in Bangkok while attending an intermonastic East-West conference. He literally died in the dialogue which he himself had called "communication that becomes communion."

Another great monastic influence for me was the English Benedictine *Fr. Bede Griffiths*, one of the three holy founders of Shantivanam, Saccidananda Ashram, in South India. While reading the little magazine called *Spirit and Life*, our own publication, my eyes fell on a center spread with a picture of Fr. Bede sitting in the tea circle at Shantivanam. There was an explanation of the monastic ashram dedicated to the most holy Trinity. Knowing my term of office in the congregation was coming to an end, and aware that India was famed for her interiority, I sat down and wrote to him,

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## AWAKEN AND SURRENDER!

(Part I) Cyprian Consiglio

In Shirley du Boulay's biography of Fr. Bede, she quotes at length a series of letters that Fr Bede wrote to his dear friends Russill and Asha in which he writes beautifully about the relationship between *eros* and *agape*. He had already for years been in search of, as he put it, "the other half of his soul." His experiences through undergoing two strokes indeed opened him up to a great experience of maternal love; often in his last months when he spoke of this love his voice would tremble and he seemed to be on the verge of tears. This relationship at the very end of his life undoubtedly fleshed out that love, as is evidenced by what he wrote in these letters. Some years ago I collected a series of sentences culled from those afore-mentioned letters of Bede to Russill and Asha, and formed them into one paragraph which has become for me a sort of manifesto of sexuality and spirituality. I shall quote the sentences and then explain what they have come to mean to me.

What is the meaning of life? The meaning of life is to love and there are two ways to love. One is through a dedication of the whole of your life to the spirit and the working out of that dedication. The other is to love another human being so profoundly that that initiates you into the divine love.

First of all what Bede discovered, and what he spoke about and wrote about openly, was the relationship between love for another human being and love for God. Not only are they related to each other, they are in a sense two equivalent paths, indeed there are two ways to love, one through a dedication of one's whole life to the spirit and the other to love another human being profoundly.

One of the frailties of language is that it can often be too general. For example, we use only one word over and over again for the concept of love. Bede's mentor and friend C S Lewis of course wrote the famous book last century on *The Four Loves*. We shall concentrate on only the two types of love that Bede mentions here: *eros* and *agape*.

Agape without eros simply does not work. It leaves our human nature starved. Of course, eros without agape is equally disastrous. It leaves us to the compulsion of human and sexual love.

Agape is generally thought of as "good love"—even dictionaries call it "Christian love". I was taught since my youth that *agape* is love as God loves, love that asks for

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**Monastic Influences** (Continued from page 1)

asking three questions: 1) do you take women? 2) is it possible to stay for an entire year? 3) what would it cost? The reply was warm and welcoming. In his typical English style, responding “yes” to the first two questions, he said regarding the cost: “I should think a dollar a day would cover it.”! After obtaining the necessary permissions and making the arrangements, I found a great Benedictine companion who begged to come along, Sr. Maurus Allen. The two of us arrived at Shantivanam in a bullock cart at 5 a.m. on a day in August of 1976. Fr. Bede came out of the gate to meet us and welcomed us heartily. We loved every facet of that year from the first gong of the 5 a.m. meditation bell till the last evening *bhajan* sung in the starlight of the temple. Bede Griffiths was truly an icon of integrity, giving enriching homilies at daily Eucharist, afternoon classes on Hindu classics under the coconut trees, and lively *satsangs* (faith sharings) after supper each night. These nights were like experiencing “the crossroads of a thousand private lives,” deeply enriching, always in flux, from Poland, Goa, Germany, Africa, Sri Lanka and other places. We accompanied Fr. Bede to Harwegin villages for Hindu feasts, to the Poona and Trichi seminaries for interreligious conferences, and to an occasional East-West gathering and sharing under the coconut trees by the side of the Kavery river on the East side of the ashram.

From Father Bede we imbibed his love for the Hindu people, the simple lifestyle of the ashram, his gift of availability and his “listening heart.” From his daily conferences we learned of God’s universal call to contemplation. He insisted that the reason it is not more effective is that people are not receptive, not ready for it, and that is where monasteries and ashrams can play a great role. He taught us that the most important thing we must do on the spiritual path is to surrender the ego. For him, the greatest gift that Hinduism has given the human family is its teaching on the presence of the Atman, the Spirit dwelling within each one’s heart. Even the tiniest youngster in the poorest village in India will fold hands over the heart and not just acknowledge but worship the Spirit present in your heart (*namascara*). Fr. Bede showed us by his example and his life the goodness, beauty and uniqueness of these holy Hindu people celebrating their feasts and living their day-to-day lives, beating their clothes on rocks at the riverside, washing their bullocks in the Kavery, worshipping their Creator on almost every hillside, gathering dry leaves to make fire for their dinner, and always ready to exchange a *namascara*.

Sr. **Vandana**, a religious of the Sacred Heart and a convert from Zoroastrianism, a Parthi, was another great influence along the Way. She converted while attending a Catholic nuns’ school in Delhi and that caused sufficient uproar between Catholics and those of other religions around the city; but when she entered the Religious of the Sacred Heart, they say she all but caused a riot. Vandana Mataji, as she later was affectionately called, eventually became Pro-

vincial of her community in India, a task in which she excelled. At the completion of her term of office she requested permission to create a Christian ashram, but first to study more of her own Hindu and Parsi and Christian traditions at the feet of the masters. Shantivanam and Father Bede were included in this project. Swami Chittananda, at the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, became her most frequented guru (teacher). The Hindus made a great exception in allowing her to build a small *kutir* near their larger ashram.

Vandana wrote many books, once she had begun the Jeevan Dhara ashram in the foothills of the Himalayas. In her meditation room, around the walls, she had small framed photos with sayings from each of her cherished teachers. Swami Chittananda’s final message to her read:

The Eternal Current of Self-awareness is ever flowing within you. It is your spiritual heart. Ever abide in that by diving within. That is peace profound. I leave you there.

There were quotes from Mohandas Ghandi, Swami Vivekenanda and Ramakrishna, Bede Griffiths and many others. Vandana was frequently invited as speaker and participant in East-West dialogue conferences in different countries. She was present with us at the World Council of Churches in Japan when we visited a Buddhist temple on Mt. Heiei. Vandana was a great help in suggesting possibilities for beginning a Christian ashram within a religious community, and she later came to visit us at O+M. She assured us that the vocation to ashram life comes from within the heart, not from hierarchical structures.

Fr. **William Johnston, S.J.**, at Sophia University in Tokyo, became a friend and another important, semi-monastic, influence from the time when he made a 30-day retreat in St. Louis and asked for hospitality at our mother-house there. I drove him daily for his Ignatian conference, and thereafter he frequently autographed and sent new books that came from his pen. In his books he always seems to keep one foot in the East and one in the West. *Arise My Love* is filled with references to Fr. Bede and to intermonastic dialogue.

In the twentieth century. . . The person who spoke most eloquently and wrote most prolifically about universal wisdom was Bede Griffiths. At the end of a long life spent mostly in his tiny ashram in South India, Griffiths saw that the wisdom of the great religions was necessary for the survival of a world in crisis. There must be a marriage of East and West . . . (p. 46)

So, with these and other monastic influences, an American monastic ashram was founded!

(This is an excerpt from “Monastic Spirituality for the 21st Century: Creating Bridges,” an address given by Sr. Pascaline during the fifth annual “Listening to Other Voices” gathering at Glastonbury Abbey, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Abbey. See p. 6.) ■



## SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### Wayne Teasdale

The world is in desperate need of people who have awakened to the deeper spiritual life in its mystical dimension and truth. Such souls go beyond a merely religious level of observance, as good and as necessary as that is, to embrace the responsibility of a total commitment to spirituality and all the demands that it makes on one to change. These generous persons who walk this path, who persevere in its course, eventually arrive at a degree of spiritual maturity. It is not an easy journey, nor is it rewarding in the earthly sense, but it does grant many benefits both to the countless individuals from all traditions who traverse this way, and to our fragile planet that is now so polarized and fraught with so much violence.

Some years ago the Dalai Lama was at Harvard for a dialogue with a group of professors. After the introductions and an opening statement by His Holiness, each professor was given ten minutes to present their basic point of view on a particular topic; then the plan called for a discussion between the professors and the Dalai Lama. The best laid plans of mice and men! The first professor spoke for more than half an hour. He took advantage of being first. When he had been talking some eleven minutes and showed no sign of ending, the other professors began to stir in their seats. As the minutes passed without any sign of coming to a conclusion, the other professors were getting resentful and angry. They wanted their equal time, and this man was cheating them out of their opportunity. and They were all losing their composure, and their anger began to become verbally violent.

During all this time His Holiness listened intently to the professor, and looked at him with kindness. He was not offended, nor impatient, and certainly not angry in any way. His Holiness saw deeply into this man's need, and compassionately gave him the space to speak simply because he needed to be heard. While His Holiness heard him in a profound way, the others heard hardly anything he had to say, so intent were they on insisting on their time, their rights in this situation, nor were they sensitive to the first professor's need. I bring up this example because His Holiness' attitude and behavior are characteristically those of a spiritually mature being, and illustrate what maturity looks like in the concrete. . .

#### The Universality of Spirituality

Mysticism exists in all ages and cultures; it is essential to life. It is the main reason why we are here; that is, to live the mystical life, the progressive experience of the Ultimate Reality in a committed process of spiritual pursuits. When this commitment is present and deeply informed by one's intention, spirituality is born in one's life. Not only is mystical spirituality found everywhere and in all times, though often confined to a few; it is the origin of all the

world's great religions. It is the source of the *Sanatana Dharma*, the Eternal Religion, as Hinduism is called. The *rishis* or forest sages of ancient India are the founders of the *Sanatana Dharma*, giving birth to it through their transcendent experiences of the Absolute, the *Brahman*, or Godhead, and of the *Atman*, or Eternal Self. Similarly, the mystical is the beginning of the Buddhist faith, what is known as the *Dharma*, the Teaching. Buddhism is based on the inner process of Gautama Siddhartha Sakyamuni who became the Buddha, the Enlightened One. His awakening to enlightenment, wisdom and compassion is paradigmatic for every Buddhist.

The same is true of the Jewish tradition, which traces its origin to the encounters with God of the Patriarchs and Prophets. These encounters were all mystical because they were direct, or unmediated, and they were initiated by God. Their relationship with the Divine became the foundation of the Torah and the whole tradition of Israel. The Christian faith likewise owes its birth and sustenance to the inner consciousness of Jesus as the Only Begotten Son of God. His continual experience of intimacy with God, whom he called his Father and our Father, is the substance of the Christian tradition and of the faith of the Church. His relationship with God is totally mystical. Then we have a similar situation with Islam, which is grounded on the mystical process of a private revelation to the Prophet Mohammad from Allah through the mediation of the Archangel Gabriel. This revelation, again a mystical process, is the heart of the Islamic tradition, and is celebrated by the Sufis, the mystics of Islam.

We can discern the presence of the mystical as source in Taoism, Sikhism, Jainism, and most of the indigenous traditions around the world. It is this mystical spirituality that informs spiritual maturity, since this kind of maturity is about growth in the inner experience of which the mystical is the essence. It also includes the development of the virtues, particularly faith, hope, love, mercy, kindness and compassion.

#### Spiritual Maturity and Transformation

The inner growth that the spiritual journey introduces into one's life, when it culminates in a nearly total change affecting all aspects of one's being, propels the individual into a more mature way of spiritual life. This transformation is actualizing the person's potentiality for greater life in the Divine, and for the manifestation of fruits in the person's life. These fruits are levels of transformation that include the understanding, will, memory, imagination, the unconscious, the character, and behavior. Let us examine these different aspects of inner change that are the fruits of the spiritual journey.

Spiritual maturity requires a transformation of the *understanding* of the nature of reality. This transformation brings about a far-reaching alteration of the mind's capacities to grasp the meaning of existence, its source and des-

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*Spiritual Maturity* (Continued from page 3)

tiny. The transformation of the mind or understanding is an expansion of its abilities to know, to discern and to intuit. It means it is capable of receiving divine illumination. The mind becomes established in wisdom. The mystic knows in a more adequate way, and is in touch with the unconditioned reality of the Source. It is the Source, the Divine, Ultimate Awareness that sparks the change in one's capacity to understand.

Spiritual maturity also demands a deep transformation of the *will*. As one's understanding expands to embrace more and more of the real, and there is a realization of what is important, why we are here, the person's will conforms to this understanding; it becomes more stable in the intention to seek the Divine, or ultimate awareness, and to pursue attitudes and actions that are motivated by selfless love, mercy, compassion, and kindness. The will is transformed and equally expanded, like the understanding, to conform to wisdom. The will's intention, the thrust of the person's life, moves steadily in the direction of the Absolute like the vigorous stream of a great river in its transit to the sea.

Similarly, the individual's *memory* knows a change, an alteration of its course; it is also transformed through a process of healing that the Divine brings about in this important faculty of recollection. Memories often have a tendency to become obstacles in the way of growth, and that is why a significant part of the spiritual journey is healing them; that is, allowing ourselves to become free of their determining and limiting power. Transformation in this sense is a process of untying the memories' hold on our attitudes, our convictions, our emotional blocks. Our memory must operate in harmony with our transformed understanding and will. The person whose memory is healed acts in harmony with the change in his or her life. Part of this healing of the memory or the memories that might hold us back is the mystical process that goes on in prayer, meditation or contemplation. There is, as Thomas Keating points out so eloquently, a "divine therapy" at work.<sup>1</sup> Characterizing it, he says, "The healing process is primarily the work of contemplative prayer which, along with the homework of daily life, constitutes the Divine Therapy."<sup>2</sup> The "homework of daily life" is the effort to live in conformity with divine love in every situation.

*Imagination* is a sacred faculty that inspires us, envisioning for us, but sometimes the imagination can be disordered or out of sync with our spiritual lives. In the mystical process the imagination is brought into integration and harmony with the understanding, the will and the memory, as well as with the unconscious and the person's character and behavior. The imagination is also transformed in the spiritual journey, and it falls into step with the other faculties and the deepest intention of the heart focused on God. Imagination receives the impulse of the divine life that is infused into us through grace, our own efforts and the constant intention of our being expressed in the will, the unconscious, our atti-

tudes, thoughts, aspirations, and stabilized in the understanding and memory. The imagination, in its transformed mode, finds its capacities deepened and increased, and so can do its part in the soul's growth into divine love, illumination and wisdom.

Then there is the nitty-gritty work of transformation that goes on in the *unconscious*. It is critically necessary that this change occur, and this work is basically that of purification. The unconscious contains seeds of motivation that precede the advent of the spiritual life of the person; that is, before he or she made the commitment to embrace the spiritual or mystical journey. These seeds are deeply embedded in the hiddenness of the subconscious, but they are profoundly influential and persuasive in motivating conscious intention and behavior. Much of the labor of the mystical life is the conscious dissipation of these seeds lodged beneath our conscious knowing and experience. It is a difficult process, this weeding out of these early experiences, traumas, barely conscious memories, raw emotional contents and raw feelings. All of these residues of childhood must be evacuated from the unconscious domain, and this occurs quite naturally, organically, in the contemplative process.

The individual's *character* is then gradually refined, and knows a total transformation. This change is actually captured in a shift away from self-cherishing and self-preoccupation, to other-centeredness and the cherishing of others. The character of the person becomes refashioned by love, compassion, kindness, and mercy; it is reinforced by a sensitivity that is intensely aware of everyone the person meets. The character becomes saturated in holiness, which is nourished in prayer, meditation, contemplation, and in the whole gamut of spiritual practices. The character is integrated with the enlarged understanding, the stable will, the healed memory, the expanded imagination and the purified unconscious.

The final aspect of the transformed being is the person's *behavior*, the way he or she acts in relation to others. Everything comes together here. Our understanding guides our action, informed through the will's intention and attention to what's important, through the lens of healed memory, the clarified imagination, the purified unconscious, and sustained perseverance, into patterns of relating that emphasize deep compassion, kindness and love. Transformation affects all aspects of our being, and integrates them in love. All the faculties work together in carrying the soul into the beauty, intensity, vividness, joy, mystical passion, clarity and peace of the mature spiritual life. ■

1. Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), see ch. 8.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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Having found the Ultimate the person is totally at one with the whole world. One gets the impression that one is going out of this world to the Supreme but now comes the discovery that when one reaches the Supreme it embraces every level of reality. Fr. Bede, *A New Vision of Reality*, p. 202. ■

**MAUNDY THURSDAY 1985  
WITH FATHER BEDE  
Nan Pulsifer**

I came late for the service and stood awestruck by the beauty of the trees and by the beautiful flower petal decoration on the ground in front of the darkened temple. There was only the “light in the cave of the heart” inside the temple, shining on the simple altar now dark as Good Friday approached. It was a simple clay mound you could hold in the palm of your hand, hollowed out to contain a tiny oil lamp and the flame of Love.

Sister Mary Louise was sitting on the ground at my feet. She tugged on my pant leg. “Sit here, Nancy,” she said and moved back out of the inner circle of people who represented the disciples of Jesus. “No, no,” I protested, “It’s for you to sit there, not me, I don’t belong there.” She persisted, more firmly now, trying to drag me down to her side. “You must! I can feel it. This place is for you, not me. I’ve sat here many times. Come! Sit here!” Sister Mary Louise was a determined woman. Finally, overcome by her persistence, I sat down in her place and she moved further back, satisfied.

Everyone fell silent as Father Bede approached the inner circle of people playing the role of the disciples. Ten were men and two were women, an unhappy nun from Great Britain and myself, a New Yorker, very intimidated by the profound significance of the simple service. “I don’t belong here, I’m not Christian,” I said to myself. I was a religious dissident in the search and service of the Unknown — but one who had been warmly welcomed at Shantivanam.

Carrying a small basin of water and a clean towel to bathe the feet of his disciples, Father Bede transposed us all into the time of Jesus before his betrayal. He knelt and rose up again before each one of us, washing, drying and kissing the right foot of each man in the circle and tenderly bathing, holding and blessing the right foot of the women.

When he lifted my foot to bless it, a terrible image rose up from a deep well of silence to the surface of my conscious mind and floated there. Hatred of my former husband. Fifteen years of unforgiving animosity, justified. With that awareness came the lesson, “If we are alienated from any human being anywhere in the world, we are separated from the whole.” It came simply, without judgment.

I separated myself from the community, overwhelmed with memory, and sat far from the great fire on Saturday night where people sang and waited for Easter dawn. A young man came to join me. “You look so lonely,” he said, and told me about his life, himself, his desire to become a priest. I was comforted by his presence.

Slowly, slowly, the light in me dawned. I knew I must return home and reconcile with my former husband. And so I did. I returned to America, sat down at the table with my enemy and we were healed, both.

Alleluia, Father Bede! ■

**SPIRITUALITY IN DAILY LIFE  
*In Honor of Dom Bede Griffiths*  
Douglas Conlan**

Meath Douglas Conlan, who is Australian Vice President of the Bede Griffiths Trust, has completed his doctoral dissertation: an exploration of the spirituality of daily life. The late Father Bede Griffiths, who was friend and mentor to Douglas, was also the inspiration for his research. The resulting distillation of that research is called a “creative synthesis,” and in spirit is just that, as the final outcome of the data analysis, close to the thought of Father Bede. Douglas has attempted to capture the essence of the experience of spiritual connectedness with an abiding sense of self-transcendence. Through each of the stories that Douglas was able to participate in listening to and sharing, he had become aware that through recollection of the experiences — times, persons and events — of the past, individuals could revitalise that memory as though it were really now, in the present.

By reviewing together the stories of his co-researchers, and others through his professional role as a spiritual director, Douglas considers that the various aspects of the individual sense of self-transcendence are connected. He also deems that the stories each participant co-researcher has shared in his study, though varying in detail, are also broadly interconnected. This sense of interconnectedness between individuals is, he found, especially evident among the whole possible range of persons who claim to have derived meaning, wholeness and wellness from a sense of spirituality in daily life.

This creative synthesis is the result, of the amalgamating of all the stories shared with Douglas by the small group of Western Australian co-researchers who participated in his study. It is an interpretive creation, derived from the process of transforming the stories and experiences of himself and others in his study.

The process of deriving this creative synthesis is personal, based on tacit and intuitive abilities, as Father Bede would say of the poet: “striving to express his idea in all its emotional and imaginative context, to represent [the] whole emotional experience [rather than in the] abstract language of conceptual thought.” Douglas chose to capture the qualities and essence of the experience through words of his own crafting, a process that necessitates his being open to the intuitive process, or what Father Bede called, “that unifying power of the mind . . . which gathers the faculties of the emotion, imagination and intellect together in such a way that . . . we *see into the life of things*.” What follows does not reflect the impressions or reflections of a particular person in this study but the overall experience of spirituality in daily life.

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## The Golden String

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### Spirituality

(Continued from page 5)

#### The Spirituality of Daily Life

The experience of being understood  
builds bridges of empathy and connection.  
Bonds are forged between self and others:  
the 'I' becomes 'We', the 'It' becomes 'Thou'  
and the Spirit within and between us is recovered.

Observing and learning from the seasons of Nature,  
I come to understand my place of original unity  
within universal variety.  
Beyond fear and inner division, I feel cradled and  
nurtured.  
I live; I change, and growing, experience  
transcendence,  
to feel born again in this and every moment.

Courage and hope grow in the soil of perseverance.  
Daily recommitment to the larger vision of  
connectedness through ritual, prayer and  
contemplation builds my capacity to be the best  
I am.  
Spiritually empowered, I become my self, not by  
what I strive to achieve,  
but by the value of the effort I expend in so doing.

Through my networks of friendship, love and  
compassion grow: in open-heartedness, I look  
beyond my limitations and narrow walls  
to other ways of walking the path of life and peace.  
Together, I, and Thou, look in the same direction,  
drinking from the sources of wisdom that refresh  
In us the memory of an earlier unity.

My desiring of inner harmony and peace inspires  
me toward the freedom of responsibility: discarding  
the clutter of old and worn-out negativities, of anger  
and resentment. I move on in simplicity and  
gratefulness: aware and alive, relieved and healed.  
Thus empowered in will and heart, I surrender to  
the unfolding fullness of life  
and forgive.

It is within my sacred solitude that I experience the  
awakening sense of 'just being,'  
the elusive yearning at the heart of all loneliness.  
I climb out from under the layers of masks and  
roles, and emerging  
I feel more centred and spiritually enhanced;  
perceiving new perspectives, and with the ability  
to validate my self and others.

Sensitive as I am to the great gift of life,  
I recognize the beauty and order of my pilgrimage.

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I accept the infinite forms of life as one  
indivisible unity,  
beyond the comprehension of a single life, a passing  
thought, an uttered word.  
There is more to this great gift and mystery of life  
than can be held or expressed.

Sensing the sacred disguised in the everyday  
ordinariness of my life  
I celebrate in wonder and awe the miracle of a  
whole forest  
reflected in the heart of a tiny dewdrop;  
the sensation of crisp wind across my face;  
the feel of warm sun on my back  
as I sit quietly in my garden; the nobility of  
the human search for meaning,  
and the primacy of love.

In the course of my life I sometimes feel I have  
climbed to the top  
of an inner mountain, or, that there are within me  
streams of spirituality  
that shall never run dry. I sense that by accepting  
the unknowable,  
and seeking out the inherent goodness in my self,  
and in every person,  
and each moment, and through the wonder and  
perfection of art and Nature,  
I must come nearly to a glimpse of God. ■

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### EVENTS

- **New Camaldoli** During the month of April, Fr. Bernardino Cozzarini of the Monastery of Camaldoli gave a series of six talks on various aspects of the life and work of Father Bede Griffiths to the hermitage community in Big Sur, California.
- **Glastonbury Abbey** The Benedictine monks of Glastonbury Abbey, while celebrating the 50th anniversary of their foundation in Hingham, Massachusetts, held their fifth annual lecture series of "Listening to Other Voices," creatively exploring areas of spirituality in a context of interreligious dialogue. Speakers this year included Sr. Donald Corcoran, OSB Cam, Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB, Kit Dollard, Swami Tyagananda, Rev. Yifa, Lonnie Collins Pratt and Dan Homan, OSB, and Sr. Pascaline Coff, OSB. Sr. Pascaline's talk on May 6th was entitled *Creating Bridges*. (see p.1) Arriving in Boston, Sr. Pascaline was graciously hosted by Mother Sudha Ma Puri at the Vedanta Center in Cohasset. The entire community attended the evening's lecture.
- **Osage Monastery** The 11th anniversary of Fr. Bede Griffiths' passing was celebrated at Osage+Monastery, Forest of Peace, in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, on the

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**Events** (Continued from page 6)

weekend of May 16-17. Fr. Bruno Barnhart gave two informative talks: *The Noonday of East and West*, and *Bede Griffiths and Thomas Merton*. This year Friends of the Forest were invited to join the community for a visit to the new Lakshmi temple in Tulsa, with a guided tour by our Hindu friend Raj Raghavan, who also arranged for some chanting, a *puja* by the new *Pujari*, and *prasad*: each one present received sacred water and a banana. Vespers with a reading from Fr. Bede followed in the sundance circle at O+M before a buffet supper for all. After Fr. Bruno's second talk, the evening concluded with the sacred fire blessing and a chant: *From the Unreal* . . .

- **Camaldoli, Italy** On the weekend of May 28-30, a conference on Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) was held at the Monastery of Camaldoli, entitled *The Passage to the Further Shore*. Speakers included Arrigo Chierigatti, who spoke of Abhishiktananda's interior life and his relationship with the two teachers Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Gnanananda, Jacques Dupuis, speaking on his theological thought, and Thomas Matus, who discussed the place of *advaita* or nonduality in his vision.
- **Osage Monastery:** John Douglas will bring Sam Oeur, Buddhist monk, poet and Cambodian holocaust survivor, to share with community & friends, July 16-17.
- **The Bede Griffiths Sangha** (UK) is holding its Summer Seminar July 16-18, entitled *Abhishiktananda*, with Shirley du Boulay and Murray Rogers. ■

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**BEDE GRIFFITHS' TRAJECTORY**

**Thomas Matus**

His orbit was like that of a comet, whose axis is the sun but whose parabola swings into a far aphelion. . . To the untrained eye, a comet arcing out of the solar system might seem lost in space. But the true stargazer knows that a parabolic arc always has its turning point, at which the comet, in obedience to the law of gravitation, resumes a centripetal movement. Bede saw a far galaxy — India, if you will — and embraced it in his orbit. But then he swung back, and the shape of his return was the mirror image of his departure.

Here is the metaphor done into conceptual categories: *The Golden String* is a perfect outline of Bede Griffiths' thought and work during the second half of his life. Every theme of the essay in autobiographical form can be found again and again in his subsequent essays, still subtly autobiographical. Change and development there were during his years in India, but his new ideas were always consistent with the wisdom he acquired before in his discovery of biblical revelation and monastic living. "The other half of my soul," which Bede sought and found in India, was as much an identical twin as a spouse of the Western half. (*Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings*, Introduction, p. 12-13.) ■

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**PUBLICATIONS**

- **Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings**, selected and with an introduction by Fr. Thomas Matus OSB Cam, has been published by Orbis Books in the *Modern Spiritual Masters* series, 128 pages, US \$15.00 The anthology contains extracts from Bede Griffiths' published books, and begins with an introduction by Thomas Matus, "Bede Griffiths, a Universal Monk."
- Shirley du Boulay's celebrated *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* has been re-published in a paperback edition in the UK and the USA by O Books ([www.O-books.net](http://www.O-books.net)), 308 pp., US \$17.95.
- Wayne Teasdale's new book, co-edited by Dr. Martha Howard and published by Skylight Paths (800-962-4544), is entitled *Awakening the Spirit, Inspiring the Soul*, and includes 30 stories of "interspiritual discovery in the community of faiths." The book has received a very favorable review in *Publisher's Weekly*: "This ambitious anthology of spiritual autobiographies steps toward building the foundation for a viable spirituality that can serve to unite rather than divide humanity for the countless millennia ahead. . ."
- Besides Russill Paul D'Silva's new book and CD on *The Yoga of Sound*, another new CD has just been released with Wayne, Russill and Asha in dialogue with Michael Thoms. *New Dimensions presents: Bede Griffiths: Interspirituality for the Twenty-first Century*. It is program #3009; 59 minutes and very well done by all three of our fellow trustees. *New Dimensions* is on line at [www.newdimensions.org](http://www.newdimensions.org).
- Douglas Conlan has completed his doctoral dissertation at the University of South Australia, entitled *The Experience of Spirituality in Daily Life: A Heuristic Investigation*. His research project employed the heuristic methodology of Clark Moustakas, with its six phases of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. Eleven volunteers responded to this question: "Describe as fully as possible your experience of spirituality in daily life." The final creative synthesis of these responses appears in this issue of *The Golden String*, p. 5-6. ■

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**Awaken and Surrender!** (Continued from page 1)

nothing in return. *Eros*, on the other hand, is generally thought of as sexual and sensuous love—not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with that, obviously, but "erotic" in common usage usually has the connotation of being somehow a lesser love, and "dirty" at that. And yet, *eros* is not just, or even primarily, sexual, at least in the original Greek conception; it's that and so much more. *Eros* is the love that is a longing, the love that draws us out of ourselves and draws us into others.

When Bede speaks about "a dedication of the whole

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of your life to the spirit", I take that as referring to *agape*; and when he speaks about the other as being "to love another human being so profoundly that that initiates you into the divine love", I take that to mean *eros*. However, what Bede ultimately comes to understand, it seems to me, is that these two ways are actually not two different ways at all, but part of the same process. And so he says

My love for you is not only *agape*; it is a deep natural urge of love which draws me to you. Often I feel your presence as a tremendous force in my life, making me realize that I cannot experience divine love unless it is united with my human love for you.

*Eros* and *agape* are part of the same movement, because *agape* without *eros* simply does not work; and, of course, *eros* without *agape* is equally disastrous.

**James Hillman, *Eros and Psyche***

We find strong resonances with this line of thought in James Hillman, the great Jungian psychoanalyst, especially in the section on "Tortured Love" in his book *The Myth of Analysis*. Rather than *eros* and *agape*, he writes about *eros* and *psyche*, using the Greek myth of *Eros and Psyche* by Apuleius, in which the fundamental theme is the torment of the soul (*psyche*) in its relationship to *eros*. The fable itself, as well as the various works of art that were inspired by it especially from the 4th century BCE until the 6th century CE, and then again during the Renaissance, tell of Psyche being tortured by love, full of sadness, on her knees, weeping after having been struck by Eros' arrow, depressed and sad at being unable to re-unite with him, and destined to fulfil a series of impossible tasks assigned to her by Aphrodite, Eros' mother.

Hillman teaches, based on his own experience in psychoanalysis as well as on studying the archetypes of this myth, that the torture of the soul seems inevitable in every intimate involvement. Despite everything we do to avoid or alleviate it, we always seem to end up involved in the very process that generates suffering, almost as if a mythic necessity were compelling us to act out the myth of *Eros and Psyche*. What the myth tells us, according to Hillman and Jung before him, is that young girls enter into adult femininity through a type of torture. In the Renaissance depictions of this myth, for instance, we see Psyche depicted as a butterfly, with her wings burnt by the flames of Eros. But the soul of a man is also subjected to torment through which he is awakened to the *psyche*; indeed Eros is tortured by the same fire as well. While Eros burns others, he also burns alone when he is separated from Psyche, deprived of her gifts of intuition and psychological reflection. Psyche's torture is depression and nostalgia; Eros' torture is mania.

Hillman says that we experience this separation under the form of a split in ourselves: while *eros* burns in mania, *psyche* performs her labors without hope or energy, without love, inconsolable, depressed, trying to understand. Before their reuniting becomes possible, the *psyche* must pass

through the dark night of the soul, the mortification in which she feels the paradoxical agony of a "potential pregnancy in her own depths and yet a sense of guilt and isolating separateness".<sup>1</sup> For Eros too this torment transforms the manic energy. Eros will remain in a state of burning unease and agitation (dominated by the mother, but that is a whole other story!) until he realizes that he himself has been struck by his own arrow, that he too has found his companion, his mate, in Psyche—let us say, "the other half of his soul." In the process he is meant to acquire psychic consciousness. And the torment continues until the work of the soul is—the labors of Psyche are—completed, and the *psyche* is re-united to a transformed *eros*. It is only at this point that the union takes place, and *psyche* really becomes Anima, soul.

All this is very similar to the dynamic to which Bede was referring. Whereas Hillman speaks of the erotic obsession or erotic mania that occurs in *eros* when it is separated from *psyche*, Bede says simply that *eros* without *agape* is disastrous, because it leaves us to the compulsion of human and sexual love. But *agape* without *eros* is equally disastrous. Bede says human nature starves; Hillman explains Psyche without the wings of Eros cannot find any kind of proper perspective nor raise herself above her immediate compulsions either, which are melancholy and depression. So Hillman asserts that until our *psyche* can legitimately unite itself with the creative energy of *eros* and bring to a sanctified birth that which she is carrying in her, we are doomed to live out our loss of primordial love.

Even though this reading of the human condition presupposes suffering, this is not blind and tragic suffering, or at least it doesn't have to be. This type of suffering, according to Hillman, has to do with initiation, and with the transformation of the structure of our consciousness. Jung says, "The ardor of love always changes fear and compulsion into something higher and freer."

The trials of Eros and Psyche are initiatory. They symbolize the psychological and erotic trials which we all have to undergo. All of this gives us a completely different image, by the way, of neuroses; neuroses in this light can become initiation; consequently psychoanalysis, at its best, can become the ritual of our process of psychic and erotic development, that leads to their mysterious union.

Let us also remember that according to the universal archetypes present in this myth, *eros* is divine energy, because Eros himself is a child of the gods.

**Tantric Yoga: the chakras**

In meditation we can learn to let our own natural desires, our *eros*, awaken and surrender it to God, that is, let it be taken up into *agape*. It must neither be suppressed nor indulged. It is surrender that is called for.

Bede uses even stronger language than this later when he says that if the sexual energy is suppressed, even in prayer, it becomes neutral or terribly destructive. There is great danger here which many Christians do not realize,

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Bede says.<sup>2</sup> Here is where I want to bring in specifically the lessons that can be learned from Indian psychology. Hillman himself makes reference to bhakti yoga, that is, the yoga of devotion, in the context of the psychological discipline of developing *eros*, or the erotic discipline of developing *psyche*, either of which tend toward "psychic integration and erotic identity," but one sees immediately a connection with tantric yoga and the chakra system. In *New Creation in Christ* Bede says that Christians should know about this *kundalini* way of yoga, and he wrote of it in other places as well.

Working with the chakras is for the eventual rising of the kundalini serpent energy coiled in the base of the spine. All forms of genius and creativity involve some form of awakening of this essence. As Bede writes,

This idea is particularly worked out in Kundalini yoga, where the understanding is that Kundalini is the serpent power. The serpent was always the symbol of this earth power. That power is supposed to be coiled up like a serpent at the base of the spine and is understood to be the source of all psychic energy. That energy, kundalini, rises up through seven chakras, or energy centers, from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. As the Kundalini . . . rises up through the body the whole being is gradually transformed, from the physical, through the psychological, until finally spiritual evolution is attained.<sup>3</sup>

According to kundalini yoga, the universe is composed of centers of energy known as chakras. These seven centers of energy in the Universe are also within the human person. So what takes place within the human person—the marriage of Shiva (consciousness) with Shakti (energy)—reflects and resonates with what is taking place in the universe outside.

The chakra system begins with the *muladhara* chakra, the muddy area at the base of the spine where the kundalini energy is coiled. This is the place of creation and *eros*, primal passion. The awakening of the *muladhara* chakra is very important; all the passions are stored there, also all guilt, every complex and agony. The yogis believe that when kundalini is ascending from the *muladhara* to the next chakra, *svadhisthana*, the practitioner experiences a crucial period in which all repressed emotions, especially those of a primal nature, express themselves. In this period all kinds of infatuations ensue, but it should be pointed out that this is in a sense pre-sexual, more primordial than sexual. (I tend to think of this as the "adolescent" or "puberty chakra".)

The next chakra center is the *svadhisthana*, located in the region of the genitals. This is the place of sexuality, also of good taste and aesthetics, where seeds within seeds of generativity are stored. One swami wrote that when kundalini is residing in the *svadhisthana* chakra,

the last vestige of karma is being thrown out and all

the negative *samskaras* express themselves and are expelled. . . . This is the stage of evolution known as purgatory. . . . When the explosion takes place and *svadhisthana* begins to erupt, the aspirant is often confused and disturbed by the activation of all this subconscious material . . . which is often attributed to a disturbed mental condition.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps here we have Hillman's neuroses that can actually be seen as rites of initiation, the constellation of *eros* in *psyche*. Unfortunately, according to Swami Satyananda Saraswati, if one fluctuates even slightly, kundalini will return to *muladhara* and the real awakening will be more difficult. The energy must not stop there, Bede says; if the energy is stopped at any of these centers it becomes destructive.

I won't go much farther; we've almost reached my point. The next chakra is the *manipura*, in the abdomen; its element is fire. This is where rising passion begins to be transformed by the heat. It is the center of honesty, dependency and autonomy. According to the Buddhist tradition, the actual awakening takes place here, and from here the awakening is ongoing, so if one has made it this far there is practically no danger of devolution. Only then comes *anahata* chakra, at the solar plexus-heart, where passion becomes non-physical, compassion. This is the place of devotion and self-service, where need is transformed into love and courage. This is the stage where one attains the freedom to escape from a preordained fate and determine one's own destiny, and where love overcomes ego. Perhaps this is where *eros* finally frees himself from the grip of Aphrodite, where love overcomes fear. Most importantly, this is where *eros* transforms into *agape*.

From here we reach the *vishudha* in the throat, where passion is transformed into dispassion and tranquillity; and then *ajna* at the brow, the third eye of wisdom, where passion becomes *vairagha*—the wisdom of non-attachment before reaching *sahasrana*, the crown chakra, where the restrictions of time, space and mortality are transcended.

But we are most of us not ready for that. My main point lies back in the *anahata* chakra: according to kundalini yoga, the teaching of the chakras suggests that we cannot even experience authentic *agape* until it has been brought to fruition by the rising of *eros*, until *eros* constellates in *psyche*, until the primordial energy has been brought up from *muladhara* where it has been stored. Even further, I want to suggest that we cannot adequately transform our *eros* into *agape* until we first not only acknowledge it, but reverence it as a sort of divine madness planted in us. So Bede says, "I cannot experience divine love unless it is united with my human love for you".

Schlobotsky in his book on *bramacharya* yoga called *The Passions of Innocence* writes that the problem with Christians, and monastics in general, is that we try to start with the heart chakra, that is *agape*, and forego acknowledg-

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## The Golden String

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ing and reverencing the *eros*, thus attempting a very difficult enterprise.

What is to be noted, not unlike what we said of *Eros* in the thought of James Hillman, is that this energy within us, according to the Hindu tradition, is itself divine; it is really the goddess Shakti herself. It is also important to keep in mind the idea of transformation and surrender, not suppression; that we need to not only accept but also reverence *eros*, reverence the creative madness within us. Whether we are speaking of actual *loci* in the body or not does not matter to me; what I love about the chakra system is the notion of awakening, reverencing the divine madness of *eros* within us, neither indulging it nor suppressing, but surrendering it, allowing it to be burnt and transformed into another kind of love. It not only seems preferable, it seems inevitable. ■

1. James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis*, p. 94.
2. See *The New Creation in Christ*, p. 42.
3. *A New Vision of Reality*, p. 77.
4. *Kundalini Tantra*, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Australia, 1985.
5. *Ibid.*

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