



The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

Volume 4, Issue 2

June 2001

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

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Editorial

May 2003 will be the 10th anniversary of the death of Father Bede. We feel it would be appropriate to mark this with some special event and consideration is currently being given to how this can be done. Perhaps a conference with the theme of non-duality at the heart of all religions. If you have any ideas as to how we could mark this event please get in contact. Although 2003 seems a long way off, it really isn't very long and two years is the minimum needed for planning. So ideas please.

Thank you to everyone who has sent in a subscription/contribution for this year. This means we can continue the range of activities of the Sangha and we can publish more of your articles in the newsletter. We are pleased to have a new article by Father Bede, or at least new to most people, and some wonderful contributions by members of the Sangha. It is lovely that Ramana Maharshi finds devotees in the Sangha as he really was, through Abishiktananda, the spiritual 'forefather', of Shantivanam.

People from all over the world continue to make contact. We often get letters and emails from people who have been inspired by Father Bede and who are pleased to find a company of fellow seekers.

Namaste
Adrian

For my Teacher

Dedicated to Father Bede
by
Winifred Dearden

I was seeking a Way,
You showed me the Path,
I found a locked door,
You gave me the key.
There was much to be learned,
You opened the Book,
I heard what you taught
With my head and my heart.
There is Light on the Path
There is Light in my soul,
A see meaning in Life
And a reason for Death:
The door has been opened,
The Way has been mapped,
You lighted the lamp
And the Book can be read.

*Winifred Dearden is a Sangha member
from Hove in Sussex*

The Ashram and the Eucharist

Father Bede

The Vatican Council said that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the activity of the Church. I have always found difficulty with this. The constitution of the Sacred Liturgy at the Vatican Council was the work of the liturgical commission. Before the Vatican Council, for almost fifty years, there was a very strong liturgical movement in the Church, but it had certain limitations, and their horizons were somewhat limited. They had prepared this constitution well in advance and I believe it was one of the first to be completed. So it stood for a certain point of view at the beginning of the Vatican Council, but it did not really take into account further developments.

What I want to maintain is that the Holy Spirit is the source and summit of the activity of the Church and in the theology of St Thomas Aquinas the word sacramentum means 'sign' and for him, in the Eucharist, the bread and the wine are the sacramentum or the sign. And the sign is contrasted with the 'res', the reality. The reality is what is signified by the sign. The bread and the wine are signs and they signify something. Then he says the sacramentum et res, the sign and the thing signified, is the body and blood of Christ. That is our ordinary understanding. But then he says the res, the reality of the Eucharist, signified and effected by us, is the unity of the mystical body of Christ. He maintains that the meaning and purpose of the Holy Eucharist is the unity of the mystical body of Christ. This is a very traditional view and the Fathers actually used the words 'mystical body' for the body of Christ in the Eucharist.

In the Church until recently the majority of Catholics thought that the body of Christ in the Eucharist

is the body on the cross. Many people were brought up to think that at the Eucharist, as somebody once explained to me, it is exactly as if a sort of a screen was taken away and Jesus is there on the cross, exactly as he was, and you are present with him on the cross. This is not theologically correct. We have to distinguish what constitutes the body of Christ in the Eucharist. It is not the body on the cross but the body of the resurrection. He is present in his spiritual body, the body of the resurrection, which is not in time and space, not conditioned in any way, and is totally one with God.

So what we experience in the Eucharist, through the gross matter of the bread and the wine, is that we open ourselves to the real presence of Jesus in his spiritual body as one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Catholics have got attached to thinking that it is only in the bread and the wine that Jesus is really present, and so the most important thing is to take communion frequently, so that you experience the real presence of Jesus. But Jesus is really present in the Spirit everywhere. In the whole creation Jesus is present in every grain of sand, every particle and sub-particle. St Thomas Aquinas asked, 'In what way is God in Creation?' And he said, 'First of all he is in all things by his power; he upholds all things by the word of his power.' And then he said, 'He is not present in his power at a distance because there is no distance in God; therefore he is in all things by his presence. But he is not present in all things by part of himself because there are no parts in God; he is present by his essence. So the essence of God, the Holy Trinity, Christ in his spiritual body, is wholly present in every particle of matter. The whole universe is in Christ, in God. We see the veil of matter, but the reality of the body of Christ is always in God and is always present everywhere.

In the Eucharist there is a particular mode of the presence of Christ. Jesus wanted to make himself near to his disciples. People need some sign of his presence. The Holy Spirit has no sign, but Jesus wanted to give us a sign of his presence so he took the bread and wine, common food and drink, and made himself present to the disciples under these signs. You can keep that bread and wine in the tabernacle and you can venerate his presence there, but you must not for a

moment forget that he is present everywhere. He is present in every human being. Every human being is made in the image of God. Beyond our gross body there is this hidden presence of God himself in every human being. We encounter God in each person. So, in the Eucharist Jesus is in a particular mode of his presence, and a very humble one. We need something to touch and to taste and to feel, so he becomes present in that particular mode for our benefit.

There is a beautiful Hindu tradition that says that the avatara, or god, is present in the image in the temple. Lokacharya, a 14th century Tamil theologian, says, 'God who is invisible himself, makes himself visible in the image in the temple. God who is far beyond us, makes himself near to us. God who cannot be seen makes himself seen. God who cannot be touched makes himself touched.' It is a sacramental presence. This is deeply meaningful but God himself is not confined to the image, not confined to the Eucharist.

And that is why I say we should not centre on the Eucharist as though we cannot do without it. In the time of St Benedict the monks may not have had mass at all, and the certainly never had it except on Sundays and feast days. The word mass comes from *missa* which is found in the *ite missa est* at the end of the Eucharist. It means 'Go you are dismissed.' It is a dismissal but for some reason this *dismissal* was taken for the whole Eucharist. In the rule of St Benedict there is a frequent mention of *missa* but it has been discovered that these were not the Eucharist, they were prayer ceremonies. After the normal prayer ceremonies there was a dismissal, the *missa*.

St Benedict was not himself a priest, and all his monks were lay people. The monastic movement was a lay movement. In St Benedict's time monks were told to avoid two people – bishops and women – because a bishop would try to make you a priest and a woman would try to get you married. The monk was not a priest; he was a member of a lay community. Today, more and more, the movement is growing in favour of lay communities. We all feel our religious communities get too structured; we are bound by so many rules that they become a limitation after a time. I have met many sisters and brothers who feel the same thing.

The community is an institution with its rules and constitutions and we are all bound by these. We lose our inner freedom. Thomas Merton managed to find freedom in the very rigid Cistercian system by overcoming its limitations and opening it up. That is what we are hoping to do today – to open up these structures, because a religious community is intended to be a community of love. You may need some rules and guidance, but spontaneous love is what we are called for, sharing in the love of God.

Today people are looking for a lay community; men and women, single and married, living together and dedicated to God and community. The lay communities in South America are a model for this. They keep in touch with the parish priest and the bishop, but they organise their own communities. They reflect on their lives, read the scriptures, celebrate the Eucharist; they invite a priest but he is only there to serve them. They live with the aim of dedicating their whole lives to God, economically, socially, and politically. This is really the model of the church today.

That is why I say we must not emphasise the Eucharist too much. It is very valuable; it is a sacrament, a great sign of Jesus' presence, but he is present in so many other ways and if we bind ourselves to that we lose the openness to his presence everywhere. Jesus is present in non-Catholics and non-Christians. So many people think that Jesus is among us, but that all these other people are outside. But Jesus is present in every human being who is open to Grace, open to Love. Many Catholics and many Protestants today say you cannot be saved unless you believe in Jesus Christ. Quite obviously it does not make sense because the vast majority of humanity always has been completely outside the Church, they have never heard of Jesus Christ. The Australian aborigines have been 40,000 years in Australia and what was God doing with them all that time? They never heard of Jesus Christ until about 100 years ago.

Jesus died for all humanity and the Grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit is offered to every human being from the beginning to the end of the world. Even if

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you have no religion, wherever you have love, kindness, unselfishness, friendliness, these things are the effects of divine grace in you. And if you have a religion, Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim or whatever, the grace of God in Christ is coming to you in the Holy Spirit in that religion. We are all sharing in this grace of God, and a Christian would say that it is precisely the death and resurrection of Christ, his sacrifice of total love for the world which enables that grace to be present to the whole of humanity. But this grace can be totally invisible.

The Church is the sacrament of Christ. A sacrament is a sign – the whole church, the hierarchy, the sacraments, the doctrines, the laws, are all signs of this divine mystery that is Christ himself. Beyond all signs and words, that is the reality. In fact if I were asked, ‘What is the reality of the Catholic Church?’ I would say that it is the communion of the disciples of Christ sharing through the Holy Spirit, as children of the Father, in the life of the Trinity. This is the essence of the Church, this communion of people sharing in the love of God which is revealed in Christ. Communion in love is the ultimate meaning of the Church. Where there is communion in love there is the church.

As Christians, and particularly as Catholics, we must value the sacraments. They have a very important place in our lives. The doctrines of the Church and the hierarchy all have their place. But this is a sacramental church. The institutional Church is a sacrament, a sign of the presence of God. All the dogma of the Church are signs. The divine mystery cannot be properly expressed in words or in concepts. No words are ever adequate to describe it. The most they can hope to do is to point towards this mystery which is beyond all human expression.

We must go beyond the sacramental signs and even beyond the sign of Christ. Jesus himself is the sacrament of God. The human nature of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection is the sign of God’s presence on earth. We have to go beyond Jesus in his humanity to the divinity itself. But God himself is beyond all such signs. God is not confined to the Eucharist or to the Church or to Jesus in his human existence. He transcends all words and thoughts and signs.

Meditation is an art whereby we seek to go beyond the body and the senses. We try to calm the body, by the practice of yoga if necessary, and then to calm the senses. We do not suppress the senses, but we learn to harmonise them so that the body is in peace. Then we have to face the mind as it wanders all over the place, and we have to harmonise the mind. Again we do not suppress the mind, nor do we indulge it, but we try to bring it to stillness and to oneness, often by using a mantra. In the Hindu tradition they say it becomes *ekegraha*, ‘one-pointed’. From wandering about through the senses and the thoughts and the feelings, we centre on the one point. At that point we go beyond the body and beyond the mind and we encounter the divine reality.

In meditation we directly experience the divine. Indirectly we need him in the sacraments and the world, but directly and immediately we encounter Christ as God in this inner experience of the heart. That is contemplation. In the Christian tradition meditation is discursive, contemplation is the point where the human person opens itself to the divine.

In contemplation we bring the mind to the point of stillness, then God can enter and take possession. This is when we meet a total reality. In death we face this reality. So also in meditation we seek to enter into the silence which is like a death to oneself, and experience the hidden mystery.

That is the function of an ashram to enable people to discover the hidden mystery beyond this world. The Church, the world, the whole of humanity is in search of God, and it is going beyond all limitations that we enter into the divine presence. God is calling us. God is present everywhere, drawing human beings out of their narrowness, their egoism, their limitations, into himself. And that is the meaning and the purpose of life.

This article was first published in ‘Saccidananda Garland of Letters’, the newsletter of Saccidananda Ashram

saccidananda@hotmail.com

Sri Ramana Maharshi

by Michael Dillon

I write humbly and spontaneously with regard to Father Bede's article 'The Silence and the Solitude of the Heart' (March 2001 Newsletter), which raises the problems involved in being raised in a Christian tradition and yet finding oneself interested and immersed in eastern philosophy. This is certainly something that once caused me deep turmoil and it is ironic, perhaps, that it was Father Bede's (and Swami Abishiktananda's) work that helped me through that turmoil.

I do not come from an overly religious background, but from a young age had a strong attraction towards spirituality. This urge intensified in my mid-to-late teens to the point where I could only think of God. At that time, and influenced by biblical stories, I prayed intensely to God to show me the way, and at any time I expected, and hoped, to have a vision or hear a voice that would tell me exactly what I needed to do. However, and disappointingly, no blatant answer was forthcoming, and yet inadvertently a journey had been started which would ultimately lead (spiritually) to the feet of Sri Ramana Maharshi. I now totally believe that in praying to Christ for the Truth that He led me to an exquisite example of the Truth (apparently) becoming flesh.

Although I have now been blessed with spiritual certitude I can look back upon a period when I was full of doubts and turmoil. Although, as I said, I had no overt religious training or background other than religious education at school, I had been socialised enough to be suspicious of Christian traditions other than my own Church of England background. This suspicion was even deeper with regard to non-Christian religious traditions.

For all I knew all these other traditions could have been the work of the devil, and there were plenty of people around to tell me just that. So at that time I found myself on the one hand very attracted to eastern philosophy in general, and yoga philosophy in par-

ticular, but at the same time I was filled with a deep suspicion regarding this attraction. So it was such a blessing to discover Father Bede's work (and William Johnston's work more on the Buddhist side) and to begin to see that there was Truth to be found in all religions, and that each individual religion is a doorway into a truly universal religion, and a truly universal mystical experience.

Despite this there were many times when I felt that, because of my interest in Sri Ramana and other gurus as avatars, that I was being disloyal to Christ. However, Sri Ramana himself answered this question when he once said (and I paraphrase slightly here) that one's journey to Arunachala may involve walking or cycling to a bus station. The bus may then take you to a train station. The train takes you near to Arunachala and the final stage of the journey is completed by cart. At each stage of the journey a different vehicle was involved and served the purpose at hand at that time. We need to mourn changing one vehicle for another.

So here I am. I started out as a devotee of Christ, and yet gradually I leave Christ behind as Christ in theology fails to satisfy me. I go through all sorts of religious experimentation until at last Sri Ramana appears on the horizon and I gradually move towards him until I am totally absorbed in his teaching, his personality and the folklore surrounding him. Christ is forgotten long ago?

No it is not that way, not that way at all, for here is someone who is actually bringing Christ to life. In Ramana's teaching and daily behaviour we have an excellent example of the Gospel in action. Here we have someone who is a living expression of the Sermon on the Mount, a totally surrendered person living without any thought for the morrow, who lived only according to the instruction of his Father (the Self as Arunachala). I

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can't speak highly enough of Sri Ramana, and as I said before, I totally believe that Christ led me to Sri Ramana as an answer to my earnest pleading for the Truth many years beforehand.

In itself this would be a wonderful end to a fascinating spiritual journey. An encounter with a genuine enlightened person, such as Sri Ramana, who even physically died before I was born, is a glory in itself. But is it actually the end of the journey? Well no actually it is not, and it is not for a very fundamental reason.

The essential teaching of a genuine Guru (particularly a *jnani* in the *Advaita* tradition) is that there is no guru and there is no disciple. Why? Because the guru is reflecting the experience that there is only one thing here and that is God. The idea that one person is a guru and one person is a disciple actually perpetuates the notion of duality, and a genuine guru will wish to terminate this false idea at the earliest possible opportunity. The guru will emphasise in his teaching that the bodily form of the guru is not the real guru, but rather the true guru is the Self, the pure consciousness, the 'I am' within which all things are.

The guru pushes the disciple to an experience of the Kingdom of Heaven within and as this happens the disciple begins to experience that there is no within and without and that the Kingdom of Heaven within is a universal experience, expressed as the infinite 'I am'. In the Old Testament when Moses asks God his name, God replied, 'I am that I am'. Jesus in the New Testament alludes to this universal nature on many occasions, not least when he was questioned about the lineage of the Messiah, and replied, 'Before David was I am'. Not 'I was', nor 'I will be', but 'I am'. Christ's essential nature is the infinite 'I am' that permeates all things here and now. In Zen this is known as your original face before your parents were born.

When as a (very!) young man I asked Jesus for the Truth. I felt desolate and abandoned, but at that time a promise was being kept, and that promise remains that 'if you knock the door will be opened', and 'seek and you shall find'. Jesus, I believe, led me to Sri Ramana who

pointed people to their essential nature, as Self, as the 'I am' of pure consciousness that lights up the whole universe. This Self, this 'I am', is the real nature of God, of Christ, and of the genuine guru. There may be a moment of turmoil, of doubt, of deep loneliness, when to ultimately attain to one's divine nature we have to give up the idea of God, of Christ, of the guru, of our divine nature being separate from us. This moment involves death of the ego (the sense of separateness) and rebirth into our true nature as universal Self. Sri Ramana said that this is the essential symbolism of Christ on the cross.

Sri Ramana described the spiritual quest as a progression from indifference to confusion, from confusion to clarity, from (intellectual) clarity to experience and from experience to abiding in the Self. As a part of this process God, already pulling at the disciple from within, manifests as the external guru who pushes the disciple further within until one's true, divine, nature is experienced. I have no doubt that God, already manifesting as Christ, pointed me in the direction of Sri Ramana who in turn was able to point to Christ's true nature, and true teaching (not always explicit in the gospels).

At various times in his teachings, Sri Ramana said that the whole of Vedanta could be summed up in the biblical statements 'I am that I am'. 'Be still and know that I am God', and 'The Kingdom of God is within you'. What a marvel this is that an exquisite example of the traditions of the Vedas has become one of the most eloquent interpreters and advocates of the true message of Christianity. To doubters at his feet, Sri Ramana, often asked them to contemplate the extraordinary circumstances that led them to the ashram. 'Who can doubt the primal force behind all this?', he would say. When you have doubts and difficulties in reconciling your Christianity with your interest in eastern philosophy, I would likewise say, 'Who can doubt the primal force behind all this?'

Michael Dillon is a Sangha member who lives in Sheerness, Kent

Two trips to India

We have news of two trips to Southern India which may be of interest to Sangha members.

First of all further information about the tour to visit village projects and projects with street children being developed by Bernard and Janine Kilroy, which we reported in the last newsletter.

This will be organised by Soul of India Tours and is planned to take place over 17 days in January 2003.

The trip would involve visits to projects and short retreats at Shantivanam or Kurisumala, both of which are involved in local projects. Bernard write, 'The tour would aim to have an element of study by visiting a range of project types, including those which work towards self sufficiency and one with a commercial dimension, and to learn from each, if possible through briefings by involved local people. If possible, a cultural dimension would be included, e.g. Indian classical dance which communicates gospel and social messages'. It is proposed to have at least one study day beforehand to provide background briefing and for participants to get to know each other. If you are interested phone or fax 01252 843133.

email bernardkilroy@uk2.net

Kevin Tingay, Inter Faith Advisor to the Diocese of Bath and Wells is leading an inter-faith study tour of Southern India, also with Soul of India Tours.

The tour, '*Truth is Two-Eyed*' takes place between 23 March—7th April 2002 and will include Chennai, Madurai with its Sri Meenakshi Temple and four days at the Christian monastery of Makkiyad, also in Kerala. Easter will be spent at Ootacamund and there will be a short stay at the beach at Calicut.

For further information phone Soul of India Tours 01902 561485, or email info@soulofindia.com

Yoga and Christ by Humphrey Squire

Privately published. Copies available from 'La Retraite', Burbridge Close, Lytchett Matravers, Dorset, BH16 6EG. 23 pp. £4.00 inc p&p.

This thoughtful and informative booklet provides a Christian perspective on yoga. Each page contains a description, beautifully illustrated, of a classical yoga posture together with a meditation on an aspect of Christ's teaching. The following review is provided by Swami Satchitananda Ma.

This simple little book 'Yoga and Christ' touched something deep within my heart, because the humble sincerity of its writer, Humphrey Squire, and his deep devotion to Christ clearly shows through the pages, and Yoga is an obvious way to his deeper experience of Christ.

The book addresses the need we all have within, to bring a spiritual dimension into our lives no matter what it is we are doing. It is letting us understand that Yoga is not an alien philosophical way to the Divine, but a very practical and relevant way to suit people of all faiths. Yoga encourages a unity of body, mind and spirit, making every act an act of devotion and prayer. There is a lovely 'Morning Affirmation' at the end of the book, a wonderful touch.

Yoga is a way, a path which complements all faiths; it will bring out the very best in those who look towards the light of Christ. He came to show us the way, the way of love, devotion and service. Let us all follow his example.

I commend this modest little book for its essence, which supports a need within humanity.



The Religion of Love in the New Millennium (Part 2)

Ken Knight

This article is continued from the last edition, Volume 4, Issue 1

The above testimonies were in response to a question posed in the national press by Sir Alister Hardy who was a professor of Biology at Oxford, among many other academic appointments. His question was; 'Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?' It is not surprising that many of those who responded ended their letters: 'I have not spoken of this before.' They feared, quite naturally so in the increasingly secular world of the second half of the last century, that they would be called mad. Indeed, maybe this would also be the case at many other times in history:

'The madness of love is the greatest of heaven's blessings.'

Plato (Phaedrus 245b)

In his allegory of the 'cave' Plato has his prisoner, who has been freed from a cave in which the only reality is the shadows of objects cast by firelight on to the cave wall, returning to the darkness of the cave out of compassion for his companions who are still chained there. They dismiss him and his madness when he tells them of the world of colour and light outside of the dark cave.

When Shibli, a famous Sufi of Baghdad, entered a bazaar the people said, "This is a madman."

He replied, "You think I am mad and I think you are sensible; may God increase my madness and your sense." Similarly Al-Yafi'i relates:

'Ali ibn 'Abdan knew a madman who wandered about in the daytime and passed the night in prayer. "How long," he asked him, "hast thou been mad?"

The reply was, "*Ever since I knew.*"'

The love in God inspires a wisdom not of the physical world and the impulse is to share that wisdom and love with others, however the fear of rejection can be overpowering. All spiritual teachers know of this.

Boehme wrote:

'It is true the world will be apt enough to censure thee for a madman in walking contrary to it: And thou art not to be surprised if the children thereof laugh at thee, calling thee silly fool. For the way to the love of God is folly to the world, but is wisdom, to the children of God. Whenever the world perceiveth this holy fire in God's children, it concludeth immediately that they are turned to fools, and are beside themselves. But to the children of God, that which is despised of the world is the greatest treasure.'

The three qualities of Nature, *gunas* in the Vedantic traditions, are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. In the present era the mind of mankind is closed and hardened against words of Truth. There is a grasping and holding onto ideas and things and so we become bound in the holding, binding quality of *tamas*. The darkness of *tamas* veils the light and so the discriminating power of the faculty of *buddhi* is unable to function correctly through the activity of *rajas*. The result is that the activity of *rajas* powers the moving mind, *manas*, which is kept in ceaseless activity. However there is still the *sattvic* light available to the *buddhi* which will reflect the True Light that 'Lighteth every Man that cometh into the world' as St John describes it. *Sattva* brings a feeling of stillness, light and consciousness and in the natural state of the human being this light dominates in the heart. The heart is then open and a flow of love towards that which is in view will be experienced. The *buddhi* is now full of its correct quality, that of *tamas*, which is now able to hold the individual in the feeling of unity. This is the natural state and it would appear that the above testimonies are confirma-

tion of this natural state.

How this moment of religious or spiritual experience of love is to be interpreted will depend upon the individual. Even the wise may fail to acknowledge the aptness of an individual's expression of the love they feel for the Supreme. Although the feeling may be the same in essence in each of us as a natural human being, the daily reality of each one's experience will result in different expressions. Rumi tells the following story:

'Moses saw a shepherd on the way saying, "O Lord who chooseth as Thou wilt. Where art Thou that I may serve Thee and sew Thy shoes, comb Thy hair? That I may wash Thy clothes and kill Thy lice and bring milk to Thee O worshipful One; that I may kiss Thy little hand and rub Thy little feet and sweep Thy little room at bed-time."

On hearing these foolish words, Moses said, "Man, to whom are you speaking? What a babble! What blasphemy and raving! Stuff some cotton in your mouth! Truly the friendship of a fool is enmity: the High God is not in want of suchlike service."

The shepherd rent garment, heaved a sigh, and took his way into the wilderness. Then came to Moses a revelation: "You have parted My servant from Me. Were you sent as a prophet to unite or were you sent to sever? I have given everyone a particular mode of worship. I have given everyone a particular form of expression. The idiom of Hindustan is excellent for Hindus, the idiom of Sind is excellent for the people of Sind.

"I look not at tongue and speech, I look at spirit and the inward feeling. I look into the heart to see if it be lowly, though the words uttered be not lowly. Enough of phrases and conceits and metaphors! I want burning, burning: become familiar with that burning! Light up the fire of love in thy soul, burn all thought and expression away! The religion of love is apart from all religions. The lovers of God have no religion but God alone."

Mathnavi Vol.II 1720-1738

is imperative that the people of religion look to the true light of Love in their hearts so that the walls of separation, ignorance and bigotry are burned to ashes. This does not mean that each has to relinquish his or her chosen form of religious practice for if we are to understand Rumi correctly, this mode of practice is God given and being such is the experience of God Itself. By pursuing the religion of the heart, the source of light will fulfil the Will of God which surely must be unity in all, for all. This will require the dissolution, or the burning, of the ego (which is much better described by the Sanskrit word *ahamkara*). This word means that the real feeling of existence, the 'I am', is attached to the activity of the creation..... this is the state of the unnatural person as described above. When this 'death' of the ego has taken place then duality passes and certainty in unity is revealed. This is called *fana* by the Sufis and is described by Rumi as follows:

*My place is placeless,
My trace is traceless;
'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong
To the soul of the Beloved.
I have put duality away,
I have seen the two worlds are one;
One I seek, One I know, One I see,
One I call.
He is the first, He is the last,
He is the outward, He is the inward;

I am intoxicated with Love's cup.'*

For the Vedantin this state is well described by the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

'As a man, fully embraced by his beloved wife, does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does the infinite being, (the self), fully embraced by the Supreme Self, not know anything at all, either internal or external. That is his form in which all objects of desire have attained and are but the Self which is free from desire and devoid of grief.'

B.U. 4.iii.21

As the new decade introduces us to the new century it

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Blessed are Those who Find Wisdom

Blessed are those who place themselves
Under the wings of wisdom
She protects them as a mother protects her child
She nourishes them with the milk from her breast.
She is all penetrating and elusive
It is not possible to touch her.
It is not possible to see her,
It is not possible to accumulate her.

She is as light as a feather.
Those who have her can fly like birds,
And they can walk on the waters of desire,
Without being drowned.

Wisdom is as simple as milk,
As eternal as wine and
As sweet as honey.
Those who follow her
Live in the land flowing with milk and honey,
And their cup is always filled with the wine of im-
mortality.

Wisdom gives herself to those who trust her,
She gives only when it is necessary,
As a mother feeds her child.
We cannot accumulate her by force,
When one tries to acquire her she will disappear
When one tries to accumulate her she will become
useless

As manna in the desert.
Wisdom cannot be written down
The moment one writes it down
It turns into knowledge.

Wisdom is as eternal as God,
She was there when God unfolded the world,
But she is as new as a new born babe.
Those who are guided by wisdom are like those
Who are guided by a child.
The child cannot walk but leads them,
The child cannot see but shows the way,
The child does not know but teaches.

Wisdom is not a quantity but a quality
But she fills all things.
She is as gentle as a mother to her child,
She does not place burdens on the shoulders.
Those who follow her are without burdens.

Wisdom reveals the eternal nature of humans,
Only she knows the immortal nature,
Because she herself is immortal.
We cannot control the wisdom
But she controls everything.
We cannot predict her
But she knows all.
Mysterious is the nature of wisdom.

She is always vigilant
And protects her children
As a hen protects her little ones.
To those who place themselves under her care,
She penetrates into their hearts and reveals
The profound egoistic desires in their hearts.

She is all penetrating
And nobody can hide anything from her eyes.
She is as bright as the sun,
As powerful as the rays of the sun.
Her presence melts the desires
Which have become like ice
On which people have built their houses.

She is as compassionate as a mother to her invalid
child
But at the same time as ruthless as death,
She does not preserve anything that is not Real.
We cannot search for wisdom
She herself comes to those,
Who are humble and pure of heart.
Blessed are those who have found her favour.

She comes as a raid to a dry land,
She comes as a child to a sterile woman,
She comes as sight to the blind,
She comes as life to the dead,
She comes as riches to the poor,
She comes as light to those who are in darkness.

Blessed are those who have found her favour.
She is more precious than all world.
There is nothing in the world equal to her.
Those who have found her favour can be free
from the power of the world
Which is the Desire to acquire and to become.

Through Martin Sahajananda

(Continued from page 9)

In the new century then, we must wake up to the signs around us and listen to the wisdom of all, past and present. If, through grace, we are given a moment of insight then we are to share that with all who will listen. Those who do not listen now will come to the light in due course for that is the ultimate will of God. If we feel harassed by the difficulties encountered upon our journey we must remember that these difficulties themselves are a wake-up call. Knowledge and Love combine to form the condition of *para-bhakti* as described by the words of Rumi and the Upanishad above. Papa Ramdas gives us a concise summary:

'Bhakti is the mother. In the womb of Bhakti, jnana is born. They must go together. They say, Bhakti is the root, vairagya (renunciation) is the tree, jnana is the flower and para-bhakti is the fruit. The juice of para-bhakti is Brahmananda. That joy is the highest. In every movement there is joy, joy, joy. The foundation is jnana, the superstructure is karma and the dome is para-bhakti. These three comprise the one temple of God.'

There are abundant societies and groups in our communities that have arisen to serve the needs of all the various approaches to the one true reality; far more so than forty years ago. Will this availability increase in the emerging century? If those present now who have ears to hear and are obedient to what is heard, then yes, we will be able to echo Mary and say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." The only outcome of Love is service and by our own obedience to any call that we may have, we will be serving the children of this new century

Ken Knight is the Chairman of the London Group of the Alister Hardy Society that holds five meetings a year. At these meetings a wide variety of speakers present their work and insights in the field of science and religion.

If anyone is interested in learning more of these meetings e-mail: hilken_98@yahoo.com or ken.knight2@btinternet.com

The Annual Sangha Forest Retreat

The Rowan Tree Centre

Sunday 2nd—Sat 8th Sept 2001

Will be held again at The Rowan Tree Centre, The Skreen, BUILT Wells, Powys, Wales for people inspired by Father Bede and seeking spiritual nourishment.

The Rowan Tree Centre, an ecumenical Centre rooted in the Christian Tradition, has been the Spiritual home of the Sangha since 1994

This retreat is an opportunity to live out Father Bede's vision of contemplative living in a community in the Benedictine spirit of 'work and prayer'. There is a short work period every day and all participants help with the daily housekeeping tasks. An atmosphere of silence will reign apart from the evening we arrive and the day we are leaving.

At the core of the retreat will be the three daily meditation periods with readings from the Sacred Scriptures of all Wisdom Traditions. The focus will be Christ-centred, as was Father Bede. There will be periods of contemplative reading (Lectio Divina) and contemplative sharing. Jan van Ruysbroec will be our guide and inspiration. Yoga and Chanting/ Bhajan singing will help to bring the whole person - body, mind and spirit - to contemplation.

The rest of the time you are free to read, write, paint and go for walks in the beautiful surrounding countryside.

There are only a few places left. So if you would like to join us, please write to

Kim Nataraja, Flat 3, 24, Linden Gardens,
Bayswater, London W2 4ES

Please include your phone number or e-mail address.

The fully inclusive cost of the retreat from Sunday supper to Saturday lunch is £180. Accommodation is in shared twin rooms. All meals are vegetarian.

For those on low incomes a concessionary rate may be available.

IF not delivered please return to:

**The Bede Griffiths Sangha
Beech Tree Cottage
Gushmere
Kent UK
ME13 9RH**

For further information contact
Adrian Rance & Jill Hemmings
+44 (0) 1227 752871
+44 (0) 1227 750082 (fax)
arance@msn.com
www.bedegriffiths.com



The Sahajananda Ashram website has been open for 4 months. It has already proved useful for posting messages and making connections around the world. Members may join 'chat room' after 10-00 PM .UK time and post and reply to Messages .

If you have no computer you may have a friend who will help ! .

We now ask ' members ' and those who have looked at the site to respond to the S'A CONTACT TEST MESSAGE posted recently.

<http://communities.msn.co.uk/sahajanandaashram>
e-mail sahajanandaashram@hotmail.com

Future Sangha Events

Summer Seminar with Br Martin Sahajananda at Park Place Pastoral Centre, Wickham, Hants. July 13th—15th 2001. *Fully booked*

The annual silent Forest retreat at The Skreen will take place 2nd—8th September 2001. *For details see Page 11*

The Sangha Winter Retreat, St Peters Grange, Prinknash Abbey Nov 2nd—4th 2001 *Please use the enclosed booking form.*

Spring Retreat at the Rowan Tree Centre, The Skreen, nr Bulth Wells. May 3rd—6th 2002. *Details in a future newsletter*

Regional Contacts

Bedford Peter Forrest 01234 831361

Belfast Sighle Mary O'Donoghue 01232 287471

Bristol David Patterson 01823 444779

Dumfries Michael Giddins 01644 450689

East Kent Jill Hemmings & Adrian Rance 01227 752871

East Scotland Angelika Monteux 01224 867251

Essex Chris Collingwood 0181 504 4476

Exeter Joan Uzzells 01392 276825

Glasgow Steve Woodward 01355 224937

Gosport, Hants Sue Howse 01795 528601

Guildford, Surrey Therese O'Neill 01730 814879

Marlow, Bucks. Michael Day 01628 474034

Nottingham Dorothy Plater 0115 9100 361

Oxford Shirley du Boulay 01865 310332
N London/Herts. Edgar Holroyd-Doveton 0208 953 0727

London N4. Ann O'Donoghue 0207 359 1929

SE London Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004

Taunton, Somerset Valeria Ives 01823 432468

W Sussex Gillian Maher 01444 455334

Overseas contacts

Denmark Vicky Lasheras: email: lasheras@mail.tele.dk

Australia. Zoe d'Ay. email tropical-zoe@hotmail.com

Pamela Hardy who lives in Whitstable, Kent is offering her home for members of the Sangha to drop in or to stay longer as a base for exploring the area. Her phone number is 01227 282690.