



The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

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

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Editorial

Ten years go by so quickly. I was at home on a Monday morning in January 1993 when I heard that Father Bede had suffered yet another stroke, and may be dying. That evening I was in a plane for Madras having got leave from work, and on the Wednesday morning I was in the chapel at Shantivanam for the early morning mass. In the event Father Bede did not die then; he was ill and needed 24 hour nursing care and, along with many others, I took my turn at a night duty by his bed that January ten years ago.

What would our Father Bede make of the world ten years on, as yet more war and violence pulls our tender world

apart? My feeling is that he would urge seekers of God of all faiths to look again for the truth that transcends religious division, the truth that is at the heart of all religion and that he would place optimistic emphasis on the new growth, the resurrection, which will inevitably follow death and destruction. .

This July the Sangha will celebrate the life and wisdom of Father Bede ten years after his death, with a special gathering at Gaunt's House. It will be an opportunity to reflect on how his wisdom and compassion has touched our own lives and to discern how that that same life and wisdom can help us work for a better world.

A happy and peaceful New Year

Adrian and Jill

Social Work Projects in India—update

The following report has been received from Brother Martin:

We are able to establish a good reputation with the companies in Karur (near Shantivanam ashram). We have the regular supply of the materials. There are forty persons both men and women who are employed. Yesterday they were in the ashram to wish me happy New Year. I had a casual talk with them. Men said that they were get-

ting Rs. 600 per a week and women get around Rs. 500 a week, which is rather a good amount for this area. We are thinking to extend the numbers slowly. For this we need more machines and also expand the area with new adjustments. The unit is running without any loss (rather we have a surplus amount since three weeks). The van is doing wonderful service. I would like to thank all our friends who have contributed for it. I shall say more about it when I am in the U.K.

The Incarnation as a Cosmic Event

Bede Griffiths

Most Christians tend to think of the Incarnation as a unique event, an intervention of God in the history of man which is without parallel. But there is another point of view which would see it as the culmination, the fulfilment, not only of all human history, but of the whole universe.

The elements which make up the human body, and therefore the body of Jesus, in his mother's womb, were being prepared when the original explosion of the matter of the universe took place. The appearance of the galaxies, of the stars and of the sun, and finally the planet Earth, were all stages in the evolution of matter, which was to lead to the appearance of life on this earth. Life on this earth again developed over millions of years, to produce plants and animals, until finally the point was reached when consciousness emerged in man. At this point the universe emerged into consciousness.

We are all of us thinking bodies, bodies composed of the matter of the universe, which has been so organised that it is capable of conscious thought. Each one of us inherits a body which has been moulded by billions of years of evolution and in each of us the same drama takes place of matter emerging into consciousness. The child in the womb goes through all the stages of evolution from protoplasm to animal and finally awakes to consciousness as a human being. It was the same with Jesus in the womb of his mother. He was linked like every human being with the whole history of cosmic evolution. In him also a human body emerged which was capable of thought, of feeling and sensation, of language and gesture, of a distinctively human life.

Just as we have a physical inheritance from the first matter of the universe, so also we have a psychic inheritance from the first man. All human beings are linked not only physically but psychologically with one another. As we emerge into consciousness, we enter into a cosmic consciousness; we inherit the consciousness which has been developing in man from the beginnings of human existence. This consciousness comes to us through our own particular family and racial and linguistic tradition, but each such tradition is a branch of the whole human evolution. Every child inherits certain archetypal images and patterns of thought which have been developed over the course of history. So also Jesus in the womb of his mother inherited the 'psyche' of a Jewish boy. His mind was moulded by the forces which had created the family of David, the people of Israel, and beyond that his consciousness reached back to Adam, from whom like every human child he was descended.

We have to recognise therefore that Jesus was a child of his time. He had the body and the mind of a Jew of the 1st century. His thoughts and feelings, his language and gestures, his understanding of God and creation were determined by his heredity. There is nothing in the language of Jesus, even in St John's gospel, which shows that he had any human knowledge beyond the compass of the Hellenistic Judaism of his time. Philo the Jew, who was a contemporary of Jesus, shows a knowledge of Greek philosophy which is far beyond anything revealed in the New Testament. Still less could Jesus have any knowledge of Hindu or Buddhist thought or anything outside the limited world in which he lived.

Jesus, therefore, had a body and a soul, a *soma* and a *psyche* of the same kind as every other human child, but one who had been moulded by the centuries of experience of the people of Israel. But, beyond the body and the soul, there is in every human being a spirit, a *pneuma*, which is his link, not merely with nature and humanity, but with God. The spirit is the presence in man of the Spirit of God. In itself it is a capacity for God, a point of human transcendence. There is in every human being a power of self-transcendence, a capacity to go beyond the limits of mind and matter, to experience what Rudolf Otto called the 'holy' and

which Karl Rahner has called the 'holy mystery'. This, whether it is recognised or not, is intrinsic to human nature. Man was made with this capacity for the divine which is reflected in primitive religion all over the world. In many people today this sense of the 'holy' has been almost obliterated, yet the urge remains, the urge towards truth and justice and love, which even the atheist experiences.

In Jesus also therefore as a human being there was this presence of the Spirit. But whereas in other men this capacity of the Spirit is limited and further damaged by sin, in Jesus this capacity of the Spirit was unlimited. He received from God this gift of the Spirit and his human spirit was able to respond totally to the Spirit of God. Other men and women receive a portion of the Spirit of God, according to the limits of soul and body in which the Spirit is received. But in Jesus there was no limit to this receptivity of Spirit. In him, as St Paul was to say, 'dwelt the fullness of the God-head bodily.' It was this that enabled him to say, 'No one knows the Son but the Father and no one knows the Father but the Son.' He experienced himself in the depths of his spirit as standing in relation to God as a Son to his Father. He 'knew' the Father, that is, God, in a way in which no other human being had because in the depths of his being his spirit was one with the Spirit of God.

But Jesus did not stop at saying that the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father. He added, 'and he to whom the Son will reveal him.' This is where we come in. Each one of us receives in his creation a capacity to know God, but through the Incarnation, this capacity has been activated. The sin which closed our spirit to the Spirit of God has been overcome. Each of us is now capable of receiving the Holy Spirit, in participating in the Son's knowledge of the Father. As St Paul again says, 'The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.' But this again is a cosmic event, the emergence of the universe into consciousness, so the awakening of the spirit in man is a further stage in cosmic evolution. This stage has already been reached in Jesus. He is the man in whom the cosmic evolution attains its end. 'It has pleased God', a St Paul says, 'to bring all things to a head in him, things in heaven and things on

earth.' In him the Spirit has taken possession of a human nature, a body and a soul, and nature has been transformed.

But this event has released a power in nature which penetrates the whole creation. As scientists today recognise the whole universe is an inter-dependent whole, a time-space continuum. Nothing happens in any part which does not affect the whole.

In the incarnation, therefore, the destiny of the Universe has been revealed. As matter evolved over billions of years to produce the planet on which we live, and life was able to appear on this earth, and as life evolved over billions of years to develop consciousness, so human consciousness has evolved over perhaps two or three million years to evolve into divine consciousness.

In Jesus we see the point of the evolution of the universe, when the divine consciousness took possession of a human soul and body and the plan of God in creation from the beginning was revealed. This is why when we look on the child lying in the manger with the ox and the ass and the star and the angels, we are looking at a cosmic event, a revelation of the purpose of God for all creation and for each one of us.

This article was first published in The Tablet, at Christmas 1981



**The Abbey
Sutton Courtney, Oxfordshire**

There are vacancies in the core community which is rooted in the Christian tradition and open to the wisdom of all faiths. One year contracts, with small stipends, are offered for those taking on particular responsibilities.

Contact the Acting Director on 01235 847401
admin@theabbeysc.demon.co.uk

Goodbye to the Rowan Tree Centre

Joan Walters

The Bede Griffiths Sangha was born at the Rowan Tree Centre, The Skreen, at a village called Erwood near Bwlth Wells in Mid Wales, ten years ago. The centre owned by Mary and Anthony Lewis has been our Spiritual home ever since. The warm welcome Mary and Anthony have extended to us in their idyllic home overlooked by the Black Mountain has been the bedrock from which our community has grown and blended together. During the September week and the May weekend our community has grown out of the silence and the extraordinary beauty and peace of the place.

During our time there this September we became very conscious of our roots and of what the Skreen really meant to us. At a very moving closing Ceremony we each had a turn to voice how the Skreen and the Sangha had helped our individual Spiritual journey. We remembered the many people who had accompanied us on our "Skreen Retreats" I will mention only Ria who initiated our visits to the Rowan Tree Centre.

Through our "stories" we became confident for the future of the Sangha. The deep bonds of love and friendship which exists between the members, a love which has grown out of the silence, Bede's teaching and Martin's presence all insure a firm foundation and a sure future. We did feel that the future will lie largely with the local groups, so it is up to each of us to care for the group in our own area, to "bloom where we are planted".

As we look for a new "home" we wish Mary and Anthony well in their future endeavours and thank them for their hospitality to us. My Celtic ancestors will bless me for re-creating this Blessing!

May the Road rise with them
 May the wind be always at their backs
 And until we meet again
 May God hold all of us in the hollow of His/Her hand

The Sangha Advent Retreat at Prinknash Abbey

Margaret Knox

*What a beautiful setting for this very special event!
 Terraced gardens, carved stone, stained glass, polished wood: an atmosphere of warmth and comfort within,
 and green hills with safely-grazing sheep without.*

A pink winter rose grows against an old stone wall, and in the meditation room more beautiful flowers help focus the attention.,

Everything changes now! A deep peace fills the sacred space! Warm messages from the past are here, and everyone is transformed in the stillness. The transition from natural to supernatural is in itself natural. Communion with the Godhead is part of our natural inheritance, how good it is to return to our source and experience that happiness!

Father Bede is with us, encouraging us all on our spiritual journeys which have led us here by many different paths.

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot 'Little Gidding'

The harmony of our chanting binds us together. New friendships are formed and old ones renewed. In the spirit of Advent we take our leave in a spirit of renewal, knowing that death has not taken Father Bede from us. He is loving and supporting us, inspiring us and leading us, today as always. And as each one learns from him it is easier for the others in our species to learn.

A very Happy New Year to all in the Bede Griffiths Sangha. What a privilege it was to be a part of the very special Advent weekend retreat of 2002. Bless you all. *Shanti Shanti*

A reflection on non-duality

Steve Woodward

'There is difference between a person who has had the non-dualistic experience of God and who then lives in the qualified dualistic experience. A person who lives dualistically thinks that he or she is a creature of God. He or she praises and worships God. On the other hand a person who lives qualified non-dualistically is a mystic. He or she might say that 'I am in God and God is in me'. A person who experiences non-duality is a 'realized' person. He or she can say, 'I am God' or 'My Real I is God'. But he or she also can be a mystic and a worshipper of God.

One has to grow from duality to qualified non-duality and from there to non-duality. Then from this experience one then has to come back 'down' to qualified-non-duality and back to duality.'

Brother Martin, Sangha Newsletter September 2002

Brother Martin's article explains so clearly to me the Advaitic or non-dual experience. My own personal experience of 'I am God' has been a feeling that is 'above the senses and beyond my human capacity, to communicate.' Sometimes such an experience is during the stillness and peace of meditation or it may be when I am at one with some form of beauty or moving experience. Sometimes such an experience just appears from nothingness. Often these timeless micro-moments, these flashes of 'something else' are almost missed. Certainly it is the case that they are very often not understood for what they are at the time.

For me also, there is always, particularly during meditation, a continual clamour from within to return to, to comply with, to obey the distorted child punished by the dualistic teachings of my early Catholic upbringing. A need to return to feelings of unworthiness, uncleanliness and uselessness.

Martin's teaching of the 'non-dual', the 'qualified non-dual' and the 'dual' positions as being dynamic, simultaneous and relevant parts of us as human beings has helped me to put another piece in the jigsaw that is slowly re-aligning and re-building that distorted early religious experience.

Equally significant to me at this present time is the greater insight and understanding of the Buddha's Diamond Sutra that has come about as I studied your teaching. What became apparent to me was that throughout the Sutra the Tathagata also continually refers to these three positions as being dynamic, simultaneous and relevant parts of us.

"To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field."

(Sect 10 Prajnaparmita Sutra)

The Tathagata repeats this line of information in various contexts throughout the sutra. Because something 'is', means it 'is not', which is why it 'is'. For many years this has been beyond my understanding. Only recently have I started to gain my own deeper understanding of the Tathagata's deep wisdom and teaching.

Several years ago I was on holiday with my wife in the French Alps in the early summer. We stopped for a picnic lunch in a small meadow high in the mountains. The weather was beautiful, the meadow was beautiful and the mountains in the background were beautiful. There was a sense of something 'greater than I'. A sense that something 'is'. A dualistic sense of me being separate from, and in awe of, while at the same time enjoying something beautiful. I was perfectly happy to stay there, separate from, but enjoying that beauty. Much the same as many in today's religious institutions and churches.

We ate our lunch and my wife settled down to read while I just stayed where I was and meditated on the beauty and peace that surrounded us. Slowly everything merged and I remember experiencing a felt sense of being at one with everything. The warmth of the sun upon my cheek. The feel of the earth beneath my body.

The yellowness of the flower's surrounding me. I was no more or no less than that which I was in and which was all round me. I was for however long, a second maybe or maybe fifteen minutes, (time in those moments has no relevance) at one with God. No longer was it 'I' and that 'beauty which was all around'. Everything was one. No 'me' and yet all of 'me'. No meadow and yet at the same time a beautiful meadow. No sunshine and yet the sun was warming every part of me. No flowers and yet I could feel, hear, and see them all around me. There was just a oneness, just 'the sense above'. A place of no words and no description. A place that was not a beautiful meadow – a buddhafield - anymore but a part of the beauty that was also me. A non-dualistic place where the only word in human communication that attempts clumsily to describe it is 'God', or one of its many different derivatives.

Time passed and we decided to move on. I could not describe or hope to pass on the essence of my 'God', my Advaitic, my non-dualistic experience to my wife. Indeed at the time I had no inkling as to the existence of any such experiences. I only knew that what I had experienced was special and different and had left me with feelings of wonderment and love. To relate to my human-ness and my wife I see now that I reverted back to a 'qualified dualistic' position where I could share with others (my wife at that particular time) in both language and human actions the beauty of that experience, place and time. We both acknowledged and said a last, fond and understanding farewell to a beautiful place (meadow / buddhafield) and time shared.

The particular experience described came to me as I studied the Buddha's Diamond Sutra because of the very practical and human reference to 'field' and 'meadow'. My human brain was able to link the two references and make sense and understanding of it all *to me*. I made sense of the fact that I am as a human being separate from and in awe of God some of the time. At other times I have as a human a God who is benevolent and loving and almost an inseparable part of me. In other words I need, at times, to create or have created for me, that 'serene and beautiful Buddhafield'. But now, because, and only because, 'I am God' has been experienced and is a part of me, can I understand fully the deep meaning of

the Tathagata's teaching of it not in fact being a 'serene and beautiful Buddhafield'.

It is something else that is unexplainable but which every time it happens I am altered and my own personal universe is 'enchanced.' But to explain it to others, to try and pass on that 'enhancement of my universe' I have to revert back to my humanity. I have to go back to creating a 'serene and beautiful Buddhafield' that others can relate to. This is the situation even when I am with others who have experience of non-duality, because their experience has been different from my own and equally un-explainable. 'This is 'it'', but I cannot really explain 'it', but this is as near as I can get to explaining what 'it' felt like.

World-Honoured One, that insight into the truth is essentially not insight. That is what the Tathagata calls insight into the truth.

(Sect 14 Prajnaparamita Sutra)

If I now look at the above line where Subhuti acknowledges his understanding of the Tathagata's Dharma and I again relate it to the 'meadow' experience, we see once again the pattern of 'is' and 'Not is' and 'that is why it is' emerging and tying in with the 'Dualistic' and 'non-dualistic' and 'Qualified non-dualistic' positions.

'that insight into the truth'.

Truth, or God, and separate from it, insight. Myself separate from the beauty of the meadow; i.e. - 'that which was all around me and of which I was in awe of.' The dualistic position is essentially not insight. As for the 'non-dualistic' position, my advaitic experience did not come with a label attached saying "this is what 'I am God' is like to feel and experience.' No, the experience just 'was'. The experience did not come with, or leave me with, words, explanations, ideas or 'insight into the truth'. I was just aware that afterwards I was left with feelings of wonderment and love. 'That is what the Tathagata calls insight into the truth'

This I see as the 'Qualified non-dualistic' position. I was aware that I had experienced something deep within me that I could not hope to explain rationally to

myself let alone anyone else. What I feel I did at the time was to be aware of the beauty (God) within me and pass on, in human terms (language, touch, intimacy) that very 'Godness' (Goodness) that had become an inseparable part of me at that particular time and place.

What the Tathagata is saying is that his teaching whether spoken or written down is a guide and as near as can be got to explaining how each individual may reach the truth/advaita/God. But the Tathagata's teaching is not the 'actual' truth for that can not be taught, demonstrated or written down. The 'actual' truth can only be found, experienced and lived by each of us as individuals in our own unique and timeless way. This the Buddha (and countless others throughout the ages) knew from his own enlightenment or non-dualistic experience.

"Subhuti, if there were someone with a body as big as Mount Sumeru, would you say that his was a large body?" Subhuti answered, "Yes, World-Honoured One, very large. Why? What the Tathagata says is not (really) a large body, (It is just) that (it) is known as a large body."

(Sect 10 Prajnaparmita Sutra. Bracketed words my addition)

Finally the above. I read 'The large body' as being the churches, scriptures, and the multitude of religious institutions of every sort. A large body indeed, with many interested only in maintaining their own particular position in respect of duality/non-duality.

The revolution, in Martin's teaching is that the truth, is not 'a large body' at all. Rather it is plainly and simply that the non-dual, or advaitic experience is available to every individual human being. The 'Miracle of life' as he puts it. However, for human beings to carry on growing as 'greater than religion', I accept the Tathagata's 'large body' as the practical human reality and I feel that the advaitic, 'miracle of life' as experienced by each individual, is part of the improving and healing process of that 'large body'

Well there we are. I love writing things down. It helps to clarify it in my mind but my past experience is that often my writing is not clear to others. I hope that Brother Martin will maybe publish an article on the similarities and commonalities of the Buddha's teachings. I personally feel this is quite important in the Western world as Buddhism seems somehow to be catching the imagination of an ever-growing western following as they search for 'the truth'.

Peace and love

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FREEDOM

And as I listened
and then as I looked,
It was if all the birds
in the world
Were singing in the tree outside...

Jubilantly, noisily
talking of the Great Move onwards
of the Big World-wide...

In one eyelid closed
the whole body of birds
song and wing
STOPPED
And then they took flight
in silence
And with that spectacular heave
of the Big Body-of-birds
I stood and felt
that instinctive urge to fly.

To fly! Oh how my wings
wanted to fly
To an unknown place
to fly, to fly, to fly!

But I stood
with my dear wings clipped
Cut so short that I could not fly...
I sat and thought
that I would try
And try, and try,
to fly, to fly.
I will, I know!
Straight through the sky!

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti

*Chelca Thurlow
Margate*

The Universal Presence of God

Brother Martin

Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God within you. To understand what Jesus is saying about the Kingdom of God we have to understand the way in which the Old Testament is presenting the spiritual journey of mankind. The biblical tradition of the Old Testament presents the spiritual journey in two ways. One way is the lower becoming the higher, whereas the second is the higher becoming the lower. This is very important because the spiritual journey is not only the lower becoming the higher but it is also about realising that we have always been there and somehow have lost this awareness. In the Christian tradition we have the story of the Garden of Eden, a story in which human beings were in a profound relationship with God and then somehow lost this relationship. We can say that the archetypal figures of Adam and Eve in this story represent a kind of involution of the human consciousness from the experience of God through our 'image and likeness' of God, to the experience of God through our ego.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden are symbolic of egolessness or the 'presence of God within ourselves'. It is described that 'they walked with God in the cool of the evening' and that they were 'naked and not ashamed.' This means they were living in the universal presence of God; to be naked means to be without ego, and that means there was no barrier between God and humanity. God was everywhere – they were walking from God to God. To be in the Garden of Eden is to live in the universal presence of God and the author is telling us how these human beings lost this universal presence of God, or, you can say, lost the sense of God within us, the kingdom of God within ourselves. How this happened is told in the story of the serpent who

told the woman, 'If you eat this fruit you will become like God'. In telling Eve that she would become like God, the Serpent was telling her that she was not like God, and in this way the serpent invited Eve to experience a duality between what she was and what she would like to become. It is this duality that creates time: today I am not like God, tomorrow I shall become like God. And the way to become like God is to eat the fruit. The story is telling us that the fall of mankind began with the desire to become like God.

If Eve had insisted to the Serpent that she was already like God, there is no need to become like God, then things would have been completely different. But she believed the Serpent, she forgot that she was like God, she had the desire to become like God and was willing to take the means to become like God. This is the fall from eternity into time, which is the gap between what I am and what I want to be. All religions, all spiritual paths are trying to bridge this gap between what I am and what I want to be. In the original state there was no religion, no commandments, and we can see that all religions belong to this fallen state of human consciousness.

This is a beautiful story for in the original state we have Adam and Eve, then, in the fallen state we have Cain and Abel, good and evil. Once you fall into the realm of time you fall into the realm of good and evil. So Cain and Abel the fallen children of Adam and Eve represent good and evil and then we have the consciousness of Noah, who represents the righteous and the unrighteous, then Abraham representing a consciousness in which God reveals to us in dreams, through words, through promises, and things like that, as we are no longer walking in the universal presence of God. Then we have Moses who represents the God of laws and commandments, who no longer speaks to us directly but only through the laws and commandments. In this stage of development, people cannot see God directly for only Moses can speak to God, although even he cannot see God directly, he can only see the back of God.

In this way God becomes remote. And when hu-

manity fell from the level of laws and commandments we have the Judges, who try to help the people in conflict with other nations, but the Judges are temporary for then the people become dissatisfied with them and ask for a King to help them in their fight with other nations. And although some asked why they should want a human king when they had a God who was a great King, the people insisted that they should have a king. So God said to Samuel, all right give them king and the people can learn from their own experience. But then even the kings commit sins and fall away from God so God sent the prophets to ask the kings and the people to come back to God. But here God is still remote as only the prophets know the will of God and still the people did not have direct access to the will of God.

If you read the Old Testament in this way with these 'levels' of relationship to God in mind, you discover that it is telling us that humanity falls from God within to God outside. It is not telling us that as we fall away from God we cease to experience God, for still God reveals to us, but we think that God is 'up there' and we are here below. We can say that we can experience God either through our 'image and likeness of God, or through the ego. All the scriptures and the religions belong to this realm of the ego, and not to the realm of the image and likeness of God.

Jesus begins his ministry saying 'the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the Good News.' The first part of the statement is that the time is fulfilled. To understand this you must understand how time began, so we go back to the first chapter of Genesis where it tells us that time began with humanity forgetting that it was like God and in the desire to become like God humanity ate the fruit of becoming. That was the birth of time and the birth of revelations, religions and everything. But Jesus is telling us that time which began with the fall of humanity 'is come to an end with me and I have gone back to the original state of humanity.' Jesus entered the universal presence of God and discovered that the fallen state had become a burden to humanity, and so he wanted people to come back to the original state and live in the uni-

versal presence of God.

There is a beautiful statement in the Gospel of John, it says that no one has ascended to heaven except the son of man who has descended from heaven. This means that Jesus comes down to the ordinary human experience to the lowest level of human-divine relationship and from there he moves up to the highest level and in that sense he becomes a ladder for humanity to climb up to the highest level of human-divine relationship.

The baptism experience of Jesus was the moment he came out of the womb of his religious tradition and, hearing the words, 'You are my beloved Son,' his consciousness became universal and was united with the whole of humanity and the whole of creation. We can say that this journey from the womb of religion into the universal presence of God is also the symbol of returning to the Garden of Eden. This womb of religion is also the womb of time, the womb of history, the womb of experiencing God indirectly. When you come out of the womb of religion you have the direct experience of God, you return to the Garden of Eden and time has come to an end. History has come to an end because I have discovered eternity here and now.

Jesus then goes beyond the experience of being the Son of the Father and says, 'I and the Father are one,' and in this way Jesus fulfilled the spiritual journey of his religion, saying that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil the law. In religions we can have the indirect experience of God through tradition and through the sacraments but fulfilment of the law, or religion, is when you outgrow religion and enter into the deepest level of the divine, the universal presence of God, where you can say, 'I and God are one.'

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This article is an edited transcript of a talk given by Brother Martin at Beech Tree Cottage in June 2002

A Sabbatical on North Uist

Mary Lewis

Jill and Adrian invited me to send something for the Sangha newsletter and so I offer a few thoughts. My sabbatical year on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides is proving to be more momentous and challenging than I could ever have expected. I arrived here in a gale at the beginning of February and in that first month experienced winds and storms that I have never seen before. However even in that wintery month there were wonderful days with great sky-scapes and blue seas. This contrast between the rough and the smooth, the exhilarating and the challenging, the heights and the depths, has marked this year in a profound way for me.

The weather is always interesting here but this was of no importance compared with the opportunity to be on my own. I was truly longing for this space, a space of my own in which to 'be' as much as to do. And North Uist has proved the perfect place to come for silence and space. It is incredibly quiet. It is a contemplative place, the silence, the stillness, the beauty, even the birds that sit on the sea, all call one to be still and quiet and to let go of the anxieties and tensions and the wind is so invigorating and refreshing and so strong that all 'cobwebs' are swept out.

I discovered how much I loved to go for long walks along the white-sand beaches or up onto a hill top and there are always such beautiful things to see here, the rock sparkles and is amongst the oldest in the world, the flowers on the machair were like a Persian carpet in July and the birds are just wonderful. I never feel alone here - rather there is an experience of blessing through the life of the place.

The space has also given me time to explore my own inner journey again. I think after so many years of directing the Skreen I had got out of touch with where

I was going myself and what I was really trying to do in my prayer and meditation. It has taken time to really feel that I am finding a true and fruitful path but the space has been essential - time without a timetable - this has enabled me to experiment more. I am especially interested to try and integrate yoga with Christian prayer and practice and at the moment I am finding this not only helpful, but something I really enjoy and which is very life-giving.

So while there were many challenges living up here on my own I was managing fine and feeling that the time was very worthwhile. In fact by May I was feeling very much at home and busy with many things and making some very good friends with people who lived here. Then two shadows fell across this time and plunged me into a different space altogether. The first was the possibility that Antony and I will have to leave the Skreen. I came away for this year always thinking that I would be going back to 'home' but it now looks as if this will not be so. I must say that this made me feel very sad as the Skreen has not only been the most marvellous home but I have loved directing the Centre and it has been the place of so many very happy times and marvellous events. But the wheel of life moves on and it is time to probably give great thanks for all that has happened there and to let go and let another stage of life and a new challenge emerge.

Then a far greater blow followed. At the end of May my mother died very suddenly with no warning from a heart attack. This was truly devastating. This 50th year was proving more momentous than I had bargained for. It felt as if my life was being turned upside down and all the anchors hauled up. The next day after hearing this news I found myself flying down to Norwich immersed in sadness and inserted into another type of world, but thankful to be reunited with my brother and sister. I spent six weeks in Norwich and I realise what a blessing it was that I was free to be there in my mother's house and near her friends. But then by the time the house was cleared I was ready to come back north, in fact I was longing to get back to North Uist.

And since mid-July, despite the deep sadness that still

is in my heart, I have had a wonderful time up here with two adventures on the sea and visits from several families. I have been out to St Kilda, islands 'on the edge of the world' and I have sailed in a restored 1900 Shetland fishing smack to Canna in a very rough sea. I have also explored many of the ancient sacred sites and begun to realise that these sites, which are usually close to the sea in magnificent locations, still have an energy that we can connect with today, a divine energy that is healing and liberating.

North Uist can disappear in a sea-fog or a storm but often it is unimaginably beautiful. The white shell sands mean that the sea can be a mix of turquoise and aquamarine and deep blue and the gentle landscape means that one can often see tremendous distances either out to sea or north to the mountains of Harris or south to South Uist and Barra and east to the Cuillins of Skye.

Yesterday was a beautiful September day and so I took the opportunity to climb the highest hill on North Uist. It involves a long walk from the nearest road and so it was quite an adventure on my own but as I approached the summit, I saw two Golden Eagles circling above me in the clear blue sky. It felt as if I have waited all my life for this experience. These birds are huge and awesome, committed to earth to feed but otherwise soaring high and free, silent and full of grace. For me the eagles summed up something of what I have experienced so far this year - commitment to the inner journey and to the celebration of the eucharist and re-creation and refreshment through the magic and beauty of this incredible island and its gift of countless birds and creatures, the seals, the otters and the deer who awaken the heart.

I send this with my very best wishes to all friends of the Sangha.

Mary Lewis was the Director of the Rowan Tree Centre in Wales where the Sangha has held many retreats over the last 9 years.

Books

Merci Beaucoup: A Story of Courage and Compassion, Joan Walters. ISBN 0-9541849-0-4

Joan Walters, a founder member of the Sangha, and author of numerous children's books, has written a comprehensive account of the history and influence of St Joseph's Convent of Mercy in Kinsale, County Cork. She outlines the growth of the convent itself from its founding in 1844 to its removal to new premises in 2001, and demonstrates that the primary mission of the Sisters of Mercy was and is social in its focus: to represent God 'in the world' through teaching, nursing, and other means of addressing the needs of the poor, distressed, and oppressed. The book therefore contains a great deal of fascinating social history. It also provides a snapshot of a particular facet of Irish history in terms of the role of the religious life as a means of opportunity for Irish women. The author was herself a member of the order for some 10 years, and her affection for it and commitment to its ideals are apparent throughout.

Personal reminiscences from a variety of sources also add richness and texture to the book. And, as the conclusion makes clear, the Sisters of Mercy are holding to their principles in a world, which is very different to the one, in which they originated. Perhaps their strength lies in a willingness to see the world as it is, rather than as it ought to be.

MPGL

What we can Learn from Hinduism. Marcus Braybrooke. O Books 2002 116 pp

Without doubt a 'must read' book for Sangha members interested in the enrichment of the Christian heritage through a deeper understanding of Hindu religion and philosophy. It is an insightful, thoughtful, reflective and personal account that brings the reader face to face with many theological challenges that confront Christianity today.

ABR

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10th Anniversary Celebrations 2003

Sangha Celebration of the Life and
Vision of Father Bede. Gaunt's House,
Wimborne, Dorset.
17th-20th July.
Places are limited and early booking is
advised.
See enclosed leaflet and booking form

John Main Seminar
*Bede Griffiths and the Future of
Christian Wisdom*
University of Reading
21st-24th August

Speakers including Shirley du Boulay, Andrew Harvey
and Bruno Barnhart.
Contact Christian Meditation Centre 020 7833 9615

Brother Martin's European visit 2003
Full details available in the next news-
letter:

Contact Jill Hemmings 01227 752871

*Paris: Talk by Brother Martin 30th April.
au Forum, 104 Rue de Vaugirard.
Contact Nerte Chaix for details.
(see country contacts)*

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*If any one would like to have their names added as lo-
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In the light

*Please put in the light Sangha members Margaret Knox, Joan
Burns, Winifred Dearden, Noreen Read, Anne Dew, Helen
Maher, Elizabeth Phillips., Hazel Redford, Gilliam McClennin
and Ann Tilly.*

*If you know of anyone you would like us to put in the light please let us
know*