



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

Those of you who know Father Bede's ashram, Shantivanam, will be interested to hear that a new novitiate monastery has been built not far from the ashram and that Father George will be moving there with some of the younger monks. Brother Martin has been asked to resume his teaching role at Shantivanam and moved back there this month. We hope to have further details in our next newsletter.

Several members of the Sangha have contributed to this newsletter and I am grateful to them for their insights and their generosity in sharing them with other members of the Sangha. A sangha is a community of like minded people who can support each other in their practice and spiritual journey. Sharing your thoughts, your hopes, your insights, is a wonderful way of contributing to and building this community. So please do keep writing.

Namaste

Adrian

The 10th Anniversary of Fr Bede's death

May 2003 sees the 10th anniversary of Father Bede's death. The Sangha will be celebrating with an extended weekend seminar/retreat to be held July 17th—20th 2003. We anticipate larger numbers than can be accommodated at Park Place so have booked Gaunt's House, a lovely retreat centre near Wimborne Minster, Dorset. Please do put it in your diary.

Also, the international John Main Seminar organised by the World Council for Christian Meditation will be on Father Bede. Details have yet to be announced but we understand that it will be held in Oxford, England, in August 2003.

The Bede Griffiths Trust will be marking the occasion with a special edition of *The Golden String*. The editor, Fr Robert Hales is seeking contributions which reflect the experiences and recollections of individuals who knew Father Bede. Space will be limited but if you are interested in submitting an article please let us know.

*There are still places available for the Summer Seminar with Brother Martin which will be held at Park Place Pastoral Centre, Hampshire, May 31st—June 2nd. Brother Martin's theme will be **The Miracles of Jesus**. See the enclosed registration form*

God as Mother

Bede Griffiths

One of the greatest defects of the Christian religion, whether Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic, is that it has no concept of God as Mother. The Holy Trinity in Christian tradition consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son are both masculine by definition and even the Holy Spirit, though it appears as a dove or as tongues of fire, is usually referred to as 'he'.

This is surely very strange, since the Supreme Being is by nature neither masculine nor feminine and there is no reason why it should be represented as masculine rather than feminine. The reason why it is so represented in the Hebrew tradition are clearly sociological. The Jews were a patriarchal people, and man alone was held to have supreme authority in the home and in public affairs. St Paul even suggests a theological reason for this, saying that 'man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man' and 'man was not made from woman but woman from man, neither was man created for woman but woman for man' (1 Cor II, 7-9).

But this is a view that would hardly be accepted today. It is clearly based on a peculiar Jewish understanding of man. For the Hindu there is no such problem. Even in the Vedas God is addressed as both Mother and Father, and the Hindu devotees call on God as 'my Father, my Mother.' The name of Siva, the figure of the supreme God can be masculine, feminine or neuter, and Siva is often represented as male and female.

Is it possible to discover a feminine aspect of God in the Christian tradition? I believe that it is. Though Yahweh in the Old Testament is generally represented as a very masculine figure, yet there is another side to him, and Isaiah puts into the mouth of

Yahweh the touching words: 'Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet will I not forget thee' (Is 49, 15). In the New Testament we have also the beautiful saying of Jesus: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you. How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not' (Mt 23, 37).

These are clear indications of a feminine aspect in God, but they do not take us very far. But there are two aspects of Old Testament thought, which would seem to give a solid basis for a conception of God as Mother. The first is that the Hebrew word for Spirit – *ruach* – is feminine. The significance of this is not developed in the Old Testament, but in the Syriac tradition, which is akin to the Hebrew, the word *ruha*, or *ruho* remains feminine, and this led to the actual conception of the Holy Spirit as Mother. The expression 'Our Mother the Holy Spirit' is found in the *Odes of Solomon* at the beginning of the 2nd century, in the *Gospel of Thomas* at the beginning of the 3rd century, and in the Aphaates in the 4th century. Here then one can say that there was a tradition in the Church which recognised the Holy Spirit as feminine and could speak of her as Mother. But unfortunately the word for Spirit in Latin is masculine and in Greek neuter, so that this development did not take place in the Greek or Latin Church.

There is, however, another concept in the Old Testament, that of Wisdom, which also has a feminine form, the word *hochmah*. Fortunately in this case both the Greek and the Latin had feminine nouns for wisdom – *sophia* and *sapientia*, so that the concept of a feminine figure of Wisdom was preserved in all three traditions. In the Greek tradition this led to the dedication of the famous church of Constantinople to *Hagia Sophia* or Holy Wisdom, and to the development of a form of sophiology by Russian writers like Soloviev in the last century, in which this aspect was given great importance. In the Latin Church these passages from the books of Wisdom, which referred to a feminine Wisdom were applied to the Virgin Mary, but in the original Hebrew tradition wisdom is quite clearly an attribute of God himself. In the book of Proverbs we read: 'The

Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was...I was daily his delight, rejoicing ever before him' (Prov 8, 22-23, 30). Again in the book of Sirach we read: 'Wisdom shall praise herself, and glory in the midst of her people. In the congregation of the Most High shall she open her mouth and glory in the presence of his power. I have come forth from the mouth of the most high' (Sir 24, 1-3). Finally in the book of Wisdom we have the clearest testimony: 'Wisdom is more mobile than any motion, yes she pervades and penetrates all things by reason of her pureness. For she is a breath of the power of God and a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty. Therefore can nothing defiled find entrance into her. For she is an effulgence from everlasting light and an unspotted mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness' (Wisdom 7, 24-26).

It is obvious that we have in these texts a clear affirmation of a feminine aspect in God. In the early Church these texts were applied sometimes to the Son and sometimes to the Spirit, but as the Latin Church could find no place for a feminine aspect in God, they were eventually applied to the Virgin Mary, where the application is, to say the least, very remote.

Would it not be possible for the Church today to apply these texts to the Holy Spirit, thus recognising a feminine aspect in God? In his brief period in office, Pope John Paul I spoke once of God as Mother. This is, I believe, the first time that a Pope, or any authority in the Western Church has spoken of God as Mother. Could not this be a precedent for a further development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as Mother? This does not mean, of course, that the Holy Spirit is properly feminine, but that just as there is a father figure in Christian life and worship, as well as the figure of the Son, so also there should be a mother figure to represent the feminine aspect of God.

It is permissible to speak of God as both Father and Mother, and Julian of Norwich even speaks of Christ as our Mother. But it seems most appropriate to use the feminine gender of the Holy Spirit, both because of the tradition of the Old Testament which we have mentioned, and because the characteristic of the femi-

nine is *receptivity*, and this would seem to be also the characteristic of the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter of Genesis the Spirit is described as 'brooding' over the waters. She is the mothering spirit, who receives the seed of the Word and nourishes it and brings forth the created world. In the same way when Mary is about to conceive it is said that the Holy Spirit 'overshadowed' her. The Spirit prepares the womb in which the Son of God is to be received. Can we not think of the Holy Spirit as the Mothering Spirit, who lies deep in the heart of all creation, nourishing the seeds of the Word and 'groaning in travail' as St Paul puts it, to bring the whole creation to fulfilment? Even in the Holy Trinity itself, could we not say that the Holy Spirit is the 'receptive' power of God, the womb, in which the Father places the seed of the Word?

These are speculations and I put them forward for what they are worth. But the need to study the feminine aspect of God and to give it a place in our theology is surely evident. The practical consequences of this are also only too clear. When God is conceived as wholly masculine in character, it is almost inevitable that the Church should be dominated by the male sex. The place of women in the Church and the very nature of sex and marriage would all be affected by a proper understanding of the place of the feminine in God.

Perhaps it will only be when we have learned to recognise God as Mother that woman will find her rightful place in the Church.

This article was first published in The Tablet and is printed here by kind permission.

Father Bede on meditation

Sr. Jeanne Mechtilde who lived at Shantivanam for many years and who now lives in Belgium, writes:

"Here is a little summary of Fr Bede's way to meditate and reach contemplation. It was dictated to me near his chair on the small platform in front of his hermitage, the place where Fr Bede meditated, surrounded by coconut trees and palms"

Be Still

Harmonise gently
The body first
Then breathing
Then the psyche

Empty the senses
The mind
The imagination
The will

Enter into Void
Opening into the Spirit
The Self – I – God
My true self

Return to the market place
and everything is new

~

It's helpful to sit relaxed
But straight
Deep breathing
Say a mantra

Stop thinking
Reasoning
Remembering things

Meet God; The Spirit

When you return
all is in deeper harmony
unity
oneness in God

4th December 1986

Contemplative Groups

The editorial in the last newsletter (December 2000) referred to Father Bede's vision of the renewal of contemplative life. I would like to share with you these words from Fr Bede's talk to the NYC Open Centre in New York in 1990 when he talked about the renewal of contemplative life and how it could be taken forward. I would like to share this with members of the Sangha.

"This is a very big problem, you know, because American culture is so opposed to this kind of contemplative awareness. I honestly feel we need centres, you know, and there are some to which many people do come. The Camaldolese (at Big Sur, California) is one, Sister Pascaline's Osage Monastery in Okalahoma, some may know, and there is another with Beatrice Bruteau in North Carolina. We need centres where we can go for a weekend or a week from time to time to renew ourselves; otherwise we get carried away by the forces around us.

So I think we just have to persevere and bide our time and (do our) meditation as far as we can, day to day. But have a little group if possible to meet with the support of one another, and then have a centre where we can take refuge from time to time. That is how I see Shantivanam, it's a place where people can come to renew themselves – and then they can go out again and face all the problems. But it is a big problem, how to live this life in the context of the world at present, everybody feels it, but it is a challenge perhaps, and I think the Grace of God can enable us to do it".

I'd like to add that in Canterbury we have a small group of people who meet every Thursday and we meditate and discuss spiritual matters, sometimes listening to a tape recording or a video. We also read our communications from Br Martin in India, and we share a lunch. A few of us have discussed the possibility of a centre, but are unsure of certain procedures and costs etc. But we do feel that the Kent area is definitely lacking in any kind of an open centre for people to come to and talk together about spiritual concerns.

Chelca Thurlow 2 Alicia Avenue, Margate, Kent,

The Truth will set you free—a reflection for Easter

John Martin Sahajananda

When the angel announced the good news of great joy, the birth of Christ, to the shepherds, the angels in heaven sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to the people of good will on earth" (Luke 2, 14). After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, "Peace to you" (Luke 24, 36). Christmas and Easter are the two important feasts which all the Christians celebrate. Though these two feasts appear to be different their essential message, the message of peace, is the same.

The birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus both bring peace to the individual and to the world as a whole. Peace is something, which we all seek and it is intimately connected with freedom. Where there is freedom there is peace. Jesus again says, "Truth will make you free". If we want freedom then we must seek Truth.

Truth has two aspects: eternal and historical. When Moses asked God his name, God first revealed his eternal aspect, 'I am who I am'. But Moses could not relate to that aspect of God. So God revealed to him his historical aspect, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. Moses was able to recognize God as the God of his ancestors and so could relate to Him.

The historical aspect of Truth is that which God has revealed in human history in the form of revealed scriptures. God is more than the revelations themselves which are conditioned by the psychological and spiritual needs of people at that particular time. If God is like a flowing river, his revealed aspect is like a pot of water taken from the river. The difficulty with the historical aspect of Truth is that it divides humanity as Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Pagans,

Believers and Non-believers. Only the eternal Truth that is not touched by time and space liberates human beings and brings peace to the individual and to the world.

The historical manifestations of Truth are necessary for the spiritual growth of humanity. They have preparatory value and, later, a functional value but they do not have eternal value. They belong to the evolutionary process of the human ego. They are as ladders that the human mind has constructed to reach God, or the outer shell of an egg, which gives protection to the chick until it grows strong enough to come out and face the immensity of the universe. They are only means to an end. If the means become ends then they limit the Truth to the revealed scriptures and also limit the spiritual potential of the human beings.

The historical manifestations of Truth try to define the Truth that cannot be defined. These definitions become belief structures, religions in which human beings find their security. In this sense religions are greater than human beings. Human beings serve religions by defending and propagating them and are even willing to die for them or kill others for them. These religions are a source of division, conflict and violence in the world. Each religion has its boundaries to protect and also desire to expand. This desire to protect and expand creates insecurity in those people outside the religion and so creates fear and violence. Where there is a boundary there is potential for war. Where there is desire for propagation and expansion there is inner violence. This inner violence then creates violence in people outside the religion. Religions are only means to seek God. They cannot unite humanity.

To unite humanity God needs a virgin. The story of

Christmas is connected with the virgin birth. Virginity is not only a physical condition but also a spiritual state. Spiritually a virgin is one who outgrows the historical manifestation of God and opens herself to the eternal aspect of God. Mary, representing the Jewish tradition, outgrew the movement of the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob and gave birth to the God of 'I am what I am'. In each one of us there are both the historical and the eternal. The historical aspect connects us with the past from where we receive our identity as Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists etc., but the eternal aspect connects us with the Timeless, where all labels fall away. The historical aspect belongs to the ego and the eternal aspect belongs to the image and likeness of God.

To give birth to the God of 'I am what I am' one has to discover one's own 'I am what I am' which is the image and likeness of God in each one of us. This is the eternal and virgin self in each of us, untouched by time and space. It is a free gift from God. It is this self which gives birth to the God of eternity. In it there is direct experience of God and there is no place for religions and scriptures. Mary, representing our eternal and virgin self, gives birth to a son who will not be a son of Abraham but Son of God or Eternity. Such a Son or Daughter does not belong to any religion or to any scriptures. "Foxes have their holes, birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay down and rest", said Jesus. He or she is above religions and scriptures and has the power over the scriptures. "It is written in your law but I say unto you", will be his or her expression. So the birth of Christ is an extraordinary event because it is the end of time and the beginning of Eternity. It is the birth of God and of a human being both of whom are greater than religions. It is this dual birth, which gives glory to God in the highest and peace to the people on the earth. It removes religious boundaries and establishes peace.

Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion and death. Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Living in a spiritual tradition such as Judaism, in which there were doubts about life after death, the appearance of Jesus after his death had a tremendous impact on his disciples. It might not have had same impact in the Indian spiritual tradition in

which there were profound insights on life after death and eternity and appearances after death of a subtle body were known about. The resurrection of Jesus must have a more profound truth to communicate than the simple physical appearance after death, but it can be said that it might have been necessary at that particular moment in the spiritual development of Judaism.

Jesus grew spiritually in the womb of his religion, but he saw the limitations of his religion, which limited God as the God of the Jews and divided humanity into Jews and Gentiles and he saw that he could come out of the womb of his religion and enter into the universal presence of God. This happened to him at the moment of his baptism.

As a faithful Jew Jesus must have said that Judaism was his way, his truth and his life. But when he came out of the womb of Judaism he said boldly that, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. It does not mean that he was replacing the Torah with himself. It is just a growth from external law to the inner law, from external religion to internal religion. It is to declare that God is greater than religions. Truth is greater than religions, and human beings are greater than religions.

Truth is not a definition but Life, and Life is not static but dynamic; it is a movement, it is a way. Religions are as tents built for rest on the long journey of Truth, They are as bridges, to be walked over but not to be settled upon, blocking the way for others. But religious authorities have transformed the tents into concrete buildings and they have become watchmen, settling down on the bridge, blocking the way. It is like a fence eating the crop. "The foxes have their holes, the birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay down and rest", said the one who followed the Truth.

Jesus saw the potential of human beings to outgrow religions and enter into the universal presence of God, and he was in conflict with his religion which was stifling people's spiritual potential. Jesus was the first to force himself out of the womb of his spiritual tradition

and he gave the gift of motherhood to his religion.

This is the context in which we can understand the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus entered the womb of religion (which was like a tomb), broke open the door and came out. He transformed the tomb into a womb. He freed himself from the limitations of religion; he became universal and experienced universal God, universal Truth and the universal human who can declare, "I am the way, the truth and the life".

Truth is an "I" freed from time and everything that time has produced. Symbolically the experience of Resurrection is the discovery of this "I". It is the birth of eternal God, eternal Truth and a universal human being, greater than religions. Jesus did not come to start a new religion. He did not come to convert people and make them his followers. Rather the mission of Jesus was first to discover the full human potential of divine-human relationship in which he was able say, "I am the way, the truth and the life", and "I and the Father are one", and then to invite people to discover their potential of outgrowing religions and be able to declare boldly that "I am the way, the truth and the life" and "I and the Father are one".

The reason why Christianity is in deep crisis in the west is that it has been announcing only half of the good news. It has forgotten the second part of the mission of Jesus, his invitation for each person to see that they are also the way, the truth and the light. The future of Christianity depends on the discovery of the other half of the good news and opening it to her followers. Many Christians have grown, can see the limitations their spiritual tradition and are ready to come out of her womb, or rather are already out of it, albeit unofficially. For this birthing to happen officially, smoothly and joyfully Christianity needs to become a spiritual virgin like Mary. She must be willing to give birth to children who will be greater than she. Then only she becomes a virgin mother. Until then she remains only a pregnant woman.

The messages of Christmas and Easter are one

and the same: it is a message of peace. This peace is brought by the birth of God of eternity, the birth of eternal Truth and the birth of a human being, all of whom are greater than religion. At Christmas, Mary, representing a religion, willingly cooperates with the plan of God and gives birth to a son who shall be greater than she. It was a painful and joyful event. In the case of Easter, Jesus, representing a human being, had to force himself out of the womb of his spiritual tradition. It was a painful and victorious event.

If both a religion and a human being are willing at the same time to give birth and to be born there is no need to celebrate the two feasts of Christmas and Easter separately but we can celebrate just one feast which can be called *Christer*, the first four letters of Christmas and the last four letters of Easter. We prepare for Easter in Lent and we look forward to Christmas through Advent. There would be no need of these two seasons but we could have only *Advent*, combining the first three letters Advent and the last three letters of Lent. Every new birth involves Advent and Lent, joyful expectation and suffering. With the preparation of the new *Advent* and the celebration of *Christer*, we celebrate this birth, which gives glory to God in the highest and peace to people of good will on the earth.

Jesus had this experience of *Christer* at the moment of his baptism. It is the moment when religion gives birth to a human being that is greater than she, a moment when a human being come out of the womb of religion. It is the culmination of Christmas and the anticipation of Easter. The message of Christmas and of Easter is the message of peace. Today the world longs for peace, and only God or Truth can bring peace. But God can do this only with the cooperation of human beings such as Mary and Jesus who will cooperate with the plan of God in giving birth to new human beings who will be greater than religions. Today the challenge to people, and to the religions of the world, is to cooperate with the will and the call of God to bring peace in the world.

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Being on the Way

Irene Anderson

This article is taken from a letter written by a Sangha member in Stockport in response to Jill's note in the last edition about undertaking a spiritual journey whilst in a partnership or relationship and in response to Br Martin's article on the Isa Upanishad.

Since fully committing myself to that journey into God I have never felt isolated as if I were 'going it alone' in spite of the fact that almost all of my fellow travellers see things from a slightly different perspective. I feel that this due to the common goal that we seek, and there is a unity in our diversity and from this companionship we encourage and support one another on the path, even to the extent of turning back and offering assistance if one of us 'falls'. We are all members of the 'body of Christ' and share in that communion of love. For this reason I feel deeply privileged to be amongst the 'spare parts' of our local Methodist church. I have made some wonderful soul friends who 'shine the light of Christ' albeit they are predominantly members of the Nicky Gumbel Fan Club and line dancers!

Of course I agree that the 'final leap into those arms that have always been extended' is an act of surrender that we are required to do on our own, but walking the path' (the way of the cross) need not necessarily be a private thing. For we are all wading through the mud together to find our own way back home, in the course of which we have a tendency to get rather mucky and it is beneficial for us to obey Christ's commandment to wash one another's feet.

And then having made that surrender and received that 'pearl of great price', rather than indulge in a state of otherworldly supernatural bliss our next task is to socialise yet again by climbing down from those lofty peaks to provide

assistance to the stragglers trailing along behind – thus obeying Christ's other commandment 'feed my sheep' (in particular the black ones).

Whilst on the subject of organised religion (however imperfect) Brother Martin (writing on the Isa Upanishad) sees the truth as like a pathless path, as does the sage Krishnamurti. Only those who renounce all paths (religions or psychological time) find eternity in time and time in eternity. For paths or ways imply distance between God and human beings but there is no difference between God and human beings. God is everywhere like an infinite ocean and human beings are like fish in the ocean, living and moving in God.

Brother Martin appears to be implying that because ultimately there is no path, those who follow organised religions are in effect shooting themselves in the foot. However, because we are in God and 'eternity is everywhere' this does not tally with the experience of the spiritual 'Indiana Jones' down the centuries who have always described enlightenment as being preceded by a way or journey etc. This I feel is an accurate representation for in our unenlightened state (where we experience duality) our consciousness has become separated from this recognition of our unity of God and so there is a vast chasm of ignorance – a distance – between our limited perception of ourselves and God. So there is indeed a journey to be undertaken which is 'the way of the cross'. This involves a gradual stripping away of those layers of illusion that prevent us from perceiving our true nature – which is divine, and has its ground of being in the mighty ocean, the heart of God.

Whilst walking that 'way of the cross' as well as having soul mates it is useful, if not necessary to have some sort of supportive framework of discipline, belief systems, rituals and the like. This, albeit imperfect, serves as a protective cocoon as that diamond body of our eternal nature is unfolding. And it is here that the importance of religion,

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The World of African Music

Stan Papenfus

Self and world arise in the moment. The potential of life itself seems to be summed up in the expression of African music.

Robert Sithole used to say to me, 'Music is made by a person', as if this summed up the very meaning of our human potential. Music gives us our meaning, our value, our sense of relatedness to each other, and yet the potential of music itself is never exhausted. The idea that it could be exhausted is unthinkable. The potential of music itself awaits our realisation of it in other forms of life. But that was not all. music evolves. We are channels that express it and yet no expression of it finds completion in its performance. Its potential gives rise to a self and world in the moment, but even this is incomplete. Music never finishes. The human person is more than music. This is what Robert Sithole's assertion also seems to say. This also mirrors what Sahajananda says about re-discovering the good news of Jesus Christ, namely, that "human being is greater than religion"

When Torera Mtedzisi facilitates a drum circle, its evolution into total responsiveness - each person to each other person - reveals the spiritual dimension of human life. It is something continually emerging, evolving, creating itself, being realised, becoming the foundation for new creation. It is the human ability to make music, along with music's capacity to inspire us to go further that enables us to understand ourselves as beings of spiritual inspiration. What we create transforms us.

But what is the basis of such creation itself? Spaces in the drumming fire our imagination. We realise the possibilities they present to us by playing them. This creates new spaces and new possibilities. These are realised by playing them, creating more new spaces and possibilities. This development presents what we are to us. It presents us with an infinite sense of our

human potential. 'Music is made by a person'. We experience this in a human world of shared communication and understanding. Person participates in community. Community benefits from the participation of persons. It comes to know itself in a new way.

It is through this participation that we enter the absolute realm of being. It is mystical and spiritual rather than analytical and objectifying. The split between subject and object is overcome. People enter each other's personal reality without being claimed by it. Because of this, laughter is natural. It is not misunderstood as laughter at someone, placing oneself outside the person and making a mockery of them. This is un-African. Laughter is participatory. It accompanies most conversations.

African community communicates itself without stultifying the person in the logic of what has been said. Instead, it takes what is said as the beginning of a new exploration. Such 'newness', far from being 'novel', is understood to form the basis of a natural progression of unfolding meaning. This, in turn, creates the basis of a fresh start.

The fact of people being dispossessed of their personal reality, by being excluded from what is said about them, is foreign to African culture. This is why, when I talk to black Africans, they make me feel alive. If my thinking leads me to a conclusion that is despairing, this, to them, is no conclusion at all. It is simply a new starting point, calling forth a new response and, so, it is transformed.

My wife, Sebi, loved to listen to Gibson Kente's music. His songs expressed the power of African music to transform human situations. This is how one of his songs goes:

*When Africa cries, Africa sings;
When fighting the enemy, Africa sings.
When Africa sighs, Africa sings;
In times of victory, Africa sings*

The power within African music cannot be lost. Amandla ngawethu - the power is ours. And yet I failed to realise the role it can play in unfolding the

meaning of dehumanising situations and, thereby, overcoming them. Little did I realise that the work I had undertaken, fruitful though it was, in the long run, was to keep me going round and round in circles, like the Israelites lost in the desert for forty years, unable to find the Promised Land.

I came to regard yoga and meditation as the best way to enable people to liberate themselves from cycles of reactive bondage. I could not see that African music could facilitate the same work. I, too, had unwittingly become a prisoner of the puzzle factory.

There were work songs used by Africans to regenerate energy in situations demanding physical exertion. These involved 'the-end-is-the-beginning' form of recreating cycles that repeated themselves, over and over again, with self-renewing effects. Such rhythms respected the body's heartbeat and breathing. They participated with these to maintain the level of activity required. Only the natural responsiveness of people can consolidate an underlying rhythm and add to it a personal blend of rhythmic interweaving.

When African music was taught at Professor John Blacking's course in ethnomusicology, at Queens University Belfast, I took my eldest son, Ken, to some of these facilitated sessions. My younger son, Carl, who actually became a drummer, along with Ken, in the band Relish - destined, no doubt, to enthrall the world - was too young at the time. The drum facilitator, Maki Mzawe, taught everyone to play a rhythm, but, when the whole performance came together, he said, "That's very funny. Everyone is playing the right thing, but, still, it doesn't sound right." This was because it was not built up through natural inventiveness. It was, instead, imposed from the outside.

African inventiveness is the true richness of Africa. Overlooking it gives witness to the ignorance and blind spots of a colonising culture. "When the light that is in you is darkness, how dark is that darkness!" Here is the freedom to be free: it is freedom to respond and to keep on responding.

The self-transcending, unfolding capacity, inherent in

the world of African music can be seen as a natural evolution of the Tao, the Purusha, the Dharmakaya, the Kingdom of God. The African Zionists, like the Bauls of Bengal, see the presence of God in our midst. It is an ever-present reality. Its claims lie beyond the limitations of all politicising, because they are not based on something yet to be established. Instead, they lie in the spirit that blows where it pleases, giving continuous birth to truths available only to those who are born of the spirit.

I used to participate in the worship of African Zionists in Johannesburg, joining in their ceremonies by playing hand drums. This was accepted, without question. It was inherent in the deep democracy of African culture. Here, participants would dance in a circle, followed by speaking in tongues and a process of healing. The whole meeting involved a natural, ritualised unfolding of what is both within us and beyond us.

African music is an art form, but, far from being something separate from life as a whole, it is treated as an integral part of life, where 'ubuntu' - the essence of being a person - far from being closed off from what I call "the pleni-potentiating Void", is instead integrally rooted within it. Ubuntu lies beyond all the boundaries of closed conceptual reasoning and the emotional reactions it calls forth. In contrast to the dynamic creative potential that exists within us and among us, we can look with compassion at philosophers of science who speak blindly about the so-called 'objectivity' of scientific understanding. Instead, the wellspring of creative thinking is something that Albert Einstein correctly envisaged to lie in the realm of mysticism. This involves the open-hearted capacity to respond to what is there, the mystery that is beyond our conceptual limitations to predefine.

Come, Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of your love. This is what I take our life on earth to mean. In our total responsiveness to each other, we discover the freedom to be free. It does not belong to any one person alone. We can only be redeemed together.

Stan Papenfus is a Sangha member from Ballyhornan, Northern Ireland

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even in the form of those we have today, comes in. I feel that rather than being an obstacle to progress, religion, if not fanatically adhered to, can be very appropriate whilst traversing the path. Adopting a belief system, devotional worship and relating to God as an external deity may appear to be irrelevant (for those in the know) but it can provide us with the 'oomph' needed to get us where we want to go – which paradoxically is the realisation that we are there already.

This is in a sense like the rubbing of two sticks (of ignorance) together which will ultimately produce the spark needed to start the process of melting our 'ice'. Once that process starts we've reached the point of no return and there is no turning back. Although having said that some advanced souls prefer to continue floating as 'ice' in the water of the eternal, perhaps to support stragglers (as found in Buddhist tradition of the bodhisattva) or also for the joy of relationship. God is very vain as well as a great lover – he loves admiring himself in the 'mirror'.

To melt into the ocean of eternal life means that all forms must be dropped and the last 'form' to go is the perception of God as being something 'other than' ourselves. Total renunciation of this sort may be appropriate for advanced souls but I do not feel that this applies to most of us who are still on the way and for whom religion can still play a vital role. Hence I have no problems with organised religion (with all its areas of light and shade) when viewed in its proper context as a means rather than as an end in itself.

Removing the spiritual framework—or should I say 'being rocked out of the boat' - can be taking on spiritual truths without having the equipment to grasp them. Seeing oneself as 'one with God' whilst still frosted up in the illusion of the ego can inflate that which should be deflated so that all becomes ice. Few of us are capable of walking on water and once I get my feet wet I am liable to sink like a stone. So relating to God in a personal way in appropriate for my stage of development although perhaps in common with many Sangha members I need a varied soil in which to grow.

Experiencing love: an encounter with Father Bede

A Christian contemplative who has actively pursued a spiritual life for thirty years tells this story:

"I had always been moved by the longing of mystics like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. When I spent a year at a convent after a failed relationship and family troubles, I read their works over and over. I had the romantic idea that I was going through the dark night of the soul. But for me it never ended, there was no big experience, no mystical illumination at the end. When I left the convent and became a social worker, I kept up my prayer life and contemplative practice, but it remained ordinary and dark for years. Now I realise that I was somewhat depressed and lonely – nothing very mystical about that.

Then ten years ago, I made a retreat with Father Bede Griffiths, a radiant old Catholic monk with an ashram in India. He had orange yogi-coloured robes and white hair and deep joy beaming out of his being like daffodils shining after a long winter. We talked and he told me that I had made up a whole story of how the spiritual journey should unfold. Then he held my face in his hands and beamed with such love into me and said, "Why not be your own unique self. That's all God want from you." And I wept and I danced and laughed at all I was trying to be. And now for years my life of prayer and contemplative practice has continued in its ordinary way, but I am not depressed and I've come to love my life. No great experience ever happened, but through loving myself, everything changed."

This extract from After the Ecstasy, the Laundry by Jack Kornfield (Rider Books) was sent to us by Lynette Lewis who lives near Salisbury

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Brother Martin's visit to the UK and Ireland

May 30—June 2

The Miracles of Jesus. Seminar at Park Place Pastoral Centre, Hampshire. Mary Begley 0208 642 0630

June 2—June 9

London Kim Nataraja 0207 727 6779

June 9—14

East Kent Jill Hemmings 01227 752871

June 14—18

South Wales Joan Walters 01646 692496

June 18—27

Republic of Ireland Michael Woods (00) 353 502 48696

June 27—July 1

Oxford and area John Osborne 01235 528701

July 1—4

Stockport and Manchester John Cotling 0161 976 2577

July 4—8

Birmingham Bill Neeson 01604 411581

July 8—10

London Solveigh McIntosh 0208 478 9338

July 10—15

Somerset James Fahy 01275 472262

July 15—18

Surrey—Guildford Jean Hopwood 01483 568669

July 18—29

Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dumfries Steve Woodward 01355 224937

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In the light

*Sr. Pascaline of Osage Monastery, Oklahoma,
a member of the Bede Griffiths Trust, is in
hospital and we wish her a speedy recovery*