

The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

March 2004 Volume 7 Issue 1

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

Brother Martin's Visit

Many of you will know that Brother Martin has been acting as Superior at Shantivanam whilst Fr George has been away in Kerala studying for a research degree in theology.

Unfortunately for us, albeit fortunately for the ashram, Brother Martin is not now able to visit Europe this summer. With great regret, Martin has had to cancel his visit because he is needed at Shantivanam. As we discovered when we visited the ashram in January and February, he is very busy there with many guests to be attended to as well as the social work projects in the surrounding villages.

In addition there are two important events in the life of the ashram this summer. One is the simple profession of two novices -and the other is the ordination of Br Amaldas as a priest in July. Very special events for them,

and both very special milestones in the growth of the community.

Several planned meetings will go ahead despite Br Martin being unable to come and it is wonderful that there is the enthusiasm and commitment for this.

The Park Place Seminar will go ahead as it is such an important part of the annual life of the Sangha. In place of Brother Martin, there will be a special opportunity for Sangha members to hear about, and reflect on, the great mystic, and one of the founding fathers of Shantivanam Henri le Saux, Abishiktananda.

Therese O'Neill has kindly offered to organise the bookings for this event and the booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

Finally, welcome to David and Gillian - we have our first members from Egypt!

The Swami Bede Dayananda Trust buildings near the ashram. It is here that the Trust has a nursery school, a typing school, a computer centre, and the tailoring institute. A recent addition is a stitching unit funded by donations from the UK.



A TASTE OF SOUTH INDIA

Friday 25 June 2004

The Othona Community invites you to a Day Out in Salisbury. Featuring spectacular traditional dancers on tour from Kalai Kaviri College, Tiruchirapalli. Also Jyoti Sahi (who designed Shantivanam's temple vimana) speaking on "Faces of Jesus - an Indian perspective". Sarvadhana Sangam: pioneering social action in Tamil Nadu. And Christian/Hindu liturgy. For details: Susanna on 01308 897130, mail@othona-bb.org.uk or www.othona-bb.org.uk/southindia_k2.net

The Scottish Sangha

Will be holding a weekend retreat at Dunblane

Fri June 18 - Sunday June 20

cost for full board £95

For details contact

Mary Laidlaw 01505 614988

marylaidlaw@btopenwoprld.com

Steve Woodward.Tel 01355 224937

swoodshawk@hotmail.com**Christmas trip to Shantivanam2004**

Shantivanam literally means 'Forest of Peace' and it is indeed a wonderful oasis of peace in our troubled world.

The regularity of the day, with its Benedictine rhythm, meeting people from all over the world, prayers three times a day in the chapel, talks by Br Martin, and the over-riding sense of friendship on the spiritual journey, all make Shantivanam a very special place.

The ashram welcomes visitors and a particularly good time to visit is December for the celebration of Father Bede's birthday on 17th December, and for Christmas.

Several Sangha members have already expressed interest in the proposed visit to Shantivanam this December. Adrian and Jill

are willing to help facilitate this, and to help people make travel arrangements. We will be flying out before the 10th December and we will be there for at least three weeks. We will be happy to meet Sangha members at Trichy or Chennai (Madras) and travel with them to the ashram.

We will also arrange some visits to local sites of interest including the famous Siva temple of Chidambaram, and visits local social work projects.

If you want to come, or would like to discuss it further, please phone Adrian or Jill on 01227 752871 or email

bg.sangha@btinternet.com

**Kalai
Kaviri
Liturgical Indian Dance Group
June 2004 UK Visit**

**PROGRAMMES of LITURGICAL
and SPIRITUAL DANCE**

This award winning troupe has toured most major western European countries. It is now on its first visit to England, en route for its USA and Canada tour.*

Indian classical dance or Bharathanatyam has a long history of liturgical dances for temple worship. As part of Christian inculturation Kalai Kaviri University College of Fine Arts, which has an open access programme for all castes, has choreographed this tradition for local church worship and scriptural themes as well as for Hindu temple festivals (it has performed 45 times in Hindu temples in the last ten years).

The dances use a sophisticated language of movement and gesture ('mudra') to communicate. The effect for the West is a new spiritual dimension - with all the colour, grace and energy of South Indian dance drama.

The Group will be giving workshops and performances at temples and churches in London, South England and the Midlands. For details of the programme contact:

bernardkilroy@uk2.net

01252 843133 (also fax)

www.SOULutions.co.uk/InscapeRetreatswww.kalaikavirifinearts.com

The World Social Forum at Mumbai

Susanna Hodgson



The WSF March in Mumbai

Susanna is a Sangha member who lives with the Othona Community in Dorset. In January she went to the World Social Forum after visiting Shantivanam

My WSF experience began on the 34-hour train journey to Mumbai when I spotted a WSF banner proudly hanging out of a train carriage window. On seeking out the owners, I met 12 women from the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective. With their limited English and my significantly more limited Tamil, I gathered that they worked on savings schemes



and micro-credit, (I have since found out that's not the half of what they do), and that they were Hindus, Muslims and Christians working together. It gave me a sneak preview of what was in store in the next few days, the diversity and the unity, the participation of so many working at grass roots level.

The WSF is held as a counter to the annual World Economic Forum (WEF). Heads of corporations and governments go to the WEF. The WSF is held to give the rest of the world a voice. While there were some Nobel Prize winners, government ministers and authors, the vast majority were grassroots activists, individuals and groups of ordinary people. Over 100,000 of us from some 130 countries had come to learn, share experiences and just to be with fellow citizens committed to a world of equality, dignity, justice and peace.

The WSF was a huge celebration of protest, pluralism and diversity, of

hope, struggle and creativity. It was inspiring, challenging, thought-provoking, heart wrenching and heart warming. It contained the most amazing amount of energy, it was a place of anticipation, curiosity, exchange and connection.

There was an overwhelming selection of seminars and

workshops on every imaginable topic and many unimaginable ones. Thousands gathered in huge halls; four or five people sat chatting in a circle on a tent floor. The subjects included: Trees for survival, Resistance in Art Art in Resistance, Muslim Women and Sexuality, Transit of Venus Mass Experiment (I never did find out what that was!), Women reimagining the UN, Engineers' Ethics, No to War Toys and Shea Nut Cosmetics Workshop.

I was invited to attend the international launch of IFAT's new Fair Trade Organization mark. (www.ifat.org). Symbolically held in Dharavi, Asia's largest slum area, it was a reminder that fair trade helps small producers to sustain their rural livelihoods, and avoid ending up in such urban slums. Fair trade is a good example of what WSF is about. A practical protest against the free market

and neoliberal policies which rule most of trade, it's an effective way of establishing connections between people around the world. Buying fairtrade marked coffee in the Co-op (unsobtle plug for Britain's most ethical supermarket) does make a real difference to the life of a coffee farmer and his family in Nicaragua. ([Www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk))

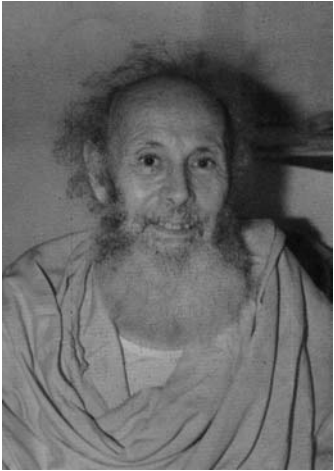
At a workshop on the role of spirituality in development, I was delighted firstly to sit next to an Indian priest who'd been to Shantivanam and secondly that the speakers defined spirituality as being beyond religions. They highlighted how the western definition of progress had led to the marginalisation of spirituality within society and how religions often thrived on control rather than freedom and were used as a tool of oppression. NGOs frequently saw religion as one of the main causes of underdevelopment.

The speakers gave their vision for an authentic spirituality. One which sees meaning in pain and suffering and meets God in the marginalised; is accessible to all; doesn't condemn or condone but brings healing for victims and accusers. (cf Gandhi if you hate the oppressors, you have lost the struggle); includes others' genuine

(continued on page 6)

The Priest and the Swami

Shirley du Boulay



Abishiktananda

It was a dark Indian night in 1959, in Uttar Pradesh, some 70 miles from the Himalayas, and the ecumenical community of Jyotiniketan were ending compline as they always did, standing at the door of the Chapel to give the Peace to the neighbouring villages. By the light of the kerosene lamps they saw a strange figure, patiently waiting in the mango grove. He was wearing the saffron robes of the *sadhu*, a wandering monk, and the bags containing his worldly possessions were slung round his neck. It was the Benedictine monk Henri le Saux, better known as Abhishiktananda. He had come at the suggestion of Raimon Pannikar, a pioneer in East-West dialogue, but he had been lost until the lanterns shed light on the ashram and its chapel. The community members took the wanderer to their hearts; it was the beginning of a remarkable friendship, particularly between Abhishiktananda and Murray Rogers, the ashram's founder.

Both men were in their forties, both Christians, both considered to have wandered from their traditional paths; but in some ways they were very different. Murray Rogers had come to India as an Anglican missionary under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society. He was a tall, imposing figure, married with three children, the son of an

English stockbroker from a privileged background. Soon after he arrived in India he had fallen under the influence of the Gandhian movement and been forced to re-think his ideas, especially on poverty. He decided it was not possible to share the Christian message by standing outside the situation, so he and his wife Mary resigned from the Church Missionary Society and asked that no more allowances should be sent to them. God is in the mud and the suffering, they argued, and that is where they wanted to be.

Abhishiktananda was a Frenchman, an old-fashioned priest of Breton seafaring stock, who had spent the last nineteen years as a Benedictine monk in the monastery of Kergonan near Briac. He was bearded and untidy, his charm lying more in his vitality, his gesticulations and his humour than in his physical appearance. His coming to India in 1948 was the fulfilment of a dream that had lingered round his consciousness since he was a novice - he wanted to bring Benedictine life to India. At the time of this meeting he was living at Shantivanam, an ashram in Tamil Nadu he had founded with another French priest, Fr Monchanin. Overwhelmed by meeting the great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi, he had become so attached to silence and solitude that he was to

spend his last years as a hermit in the Himalayas. As a monk he had of course taken vows of poverty, but he took the vow to its limit saying 'No man is free until he has nothing.'

Abhishiktananda had never met an Anglican, nor had he met a married priest of any denomination. At first he found it hard to believe that Murray and Mary were Christians at all, indeed he was, says Murray, 'chary', constantly needing to remind them that he was a Roman Catholic. Nonetheless Murray's overriding impression was of a man who was deeply authentic, open and human. He was a solitary who loved company.

Their separate lives and the size of India meant that they only met two or three times a year, but these times were charged with energy. They were serious and they joked. Abhishiktananda had a refreshingly down-to-earth understanding of God, seeing him, as Donald Nicholl noted, 'as much in the making of a good soup or the careful handling of a train as in our most beautiful meditations.' He had no problem seeing God in other denominations or religions, so when friends of the community came over for Bible Study, that very Protestant activity, Abhishiktananda entered into it with gusto. More often they sat under a tree studying the Upanishads together, when

Shirley du Boulay is currently writing a biography of Henri le Saux, also known as Abishiktananda. She will be a main speaker at the Sanga Seminar on Abishiktananda at Park Place this July

Abhishiktananda would read a passage and say, 'You and I have Christian hearts, what echo is there in your Christian heart to what you've just heard?'

As the friendship grew Murray appreciated more and more the rare depth of holiness in Abhishiktananda and Abhishiktananda, for his part, saw that Murray's work at Jyotiniketan was a real contribution to the church; he even came to see the value of a married priesthood and 'the sacerdotal value of the couple'. But it was more than mutual admiration that drew them to each other. Both felt they no longer completely belonged to their own traditions and were, as Murray puts it, 'blessedly at home with a fellow eccentric.' They shared a vision, a longing to find God beyond the different religions, beyond the clothing of name and form. Both longed to get back to the "source", where all is one.

Abhishiktananda has written extensively, crucial to all his thinking being the value of experience. At around the time he met Murray he wrote in his diary: "If I am the bearer of a message, as people tell me, then what is this message? You can bear witness only to your own experience. There is only one thing I know, that "I am". This I am, *aham*, which bursts out in all creation, in everything, in every event, natural or historical."

He always remained Christian and faithful to his Benedictine roots, but his discovery of *advaita*, or non-duality, the fundamental insight of the Hindu scriptures, caused him the greatest anguish.

Abhishiktananda called *advaita* 'a royal secret.' *Advaita* is pure being. It is Christ's 'Before Abraham was, I am.' It is the mystery that God and the world are not two. It is the ultimate experience of mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Rumi, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

The full advaitic experience was eventually known to Abhishiktananda and then he found reconciliation and great peace, but on the way he was torn apart. How could he reconcile the apparent incompatibility between Christianity and *advaita*? What if in *advaita* he was only finding himself and not God? The tension brought him to the point when he wrote in his diary: 'I wrestle with the angel. I constantly try to deny the ultimate value of *advaita*.' For years he tried to reconcile his total commitment to Christ with his conviction that the advaitic experience is the deepest experience known to man.

Murray described his own vision as 'The wish that the reality of God - Father, Son and Spirit - might grow inside me, might swallow me up, it I dared to let it.' This longing for what can be seen as a Christian understanding of *advaita* must have been balm to the soul of Abhishiktananda, who for many years found few with whom he could discuss the overwhelming tension in his life.

Abhishiktananda died in 1973 so we must rely on Murray, who now lives in England, to answer questions like how they dealt with denominational differences, for instance the Eucharist. At first,

when Abhishiktananda was staying at Jyotiniketan, he would celebrate Mass alone, standing in his room, wearing his crumpled Roman vestments, using his portable Mass kit and Latin missal. Gradually he and Murray came to celebrate together, sometimes cross-legged by the Ganges, the altar-stone a rock, taken specially from the river. Not wanting to cause offence, least of all in anything concerning the Eucharist, they never concelebrated in public.

Another question, inevitable in the Indian context, was that of guru and disciple. Though Abhishiktananda was not concerned with having disciples he lived both experiences, his guru being Sri Gnanananda and his closest disciple, at the end of his life, a young Frenchman called Marc Chaduc. Was there anything of the guru/disciple relationship between him and Murray? The humility of Murray's answer is touching: 'I think I wasn't deep enough - to put it in a very Western way - to make use of what Swamiji had to share.'

Murray feels that Swamiji, as he was known by his friends, was Sancho Panza and Don Quixote rolled into one. He was Sancho Panza in that he was down-to-earth, never taking for granted, for instance, where the next meal was coming from. He was Don Quixote in the courage with which he tilted at windmills, even at the structure that tries to keep Christianity in one box and Hinduism in another. "Not" as Murray says, "because you can find where they interlock and

say this doctrine agrees with that doctrine - not on that level at all, but by surpassing both. He moved beyond comparisons - that's a real windmill." (The Tablet cut this line - would it be wicked of us to re-instate it???)

So profound were Abhishiktananda's experiences that he sometimes thought he was mad, and Murray feels the courage of his persistence on this hard path was all the more remarkable because he had a painful sense of inferiority. Though well versed in theology and philosophy, he felt nervous with learned people; he was overwhelmed by them. "He couldn't cope when he was faced with a human being who spoke about the eternal, about the Christian experience or the advaitic experience as if they knew what they were talking about. Swamiji knew that however much he knew he was in the first form. He was extraordinarily humble." Perhaps even more than most of us Abhishiktananda needed appreciation and love. (They also cut this)

"Beyond, always beyond" Abhishiktananda used to say, and that took him to realms where some Christians doubted his Christianity. Just as he could share with Murray the tension he experienced between Christianity and *advaita*, so he was able to share thoughts that were, at the time, unacceptable to many. For instance he wrote to Murray just two months before his death, "The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of every deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the

amorous Krishna! And the kingdom is precisely this discovery...of the 'inside of the Grail! The awakening is a total explosion."

If proof of the depth of their friendship were needed it lay in the depth of their sharing, in its combination of intensity, humour and trust. It lay in Abhishiktananda's grief when Murray and his community left India, far exceeding the concern he usually felt when parting from friends; it lay in the three day journey he made from his hut in the Himalayas to Delhi, to spend just one evening with Murray, who was passing through.

As for Murray, he says his friend 'opened my eyes on what it means to be in God. I remember him saying "Prayer is simply believing that you are in God." Apart from my family Swamiji is the greatest gift God has given me.'

Friendship like this not only changes lives but can affect the spiritual lives of people around them. Here were two people who could share at a very deep level. They could even share what Abhishiktananda called the 'Ah' of the Kena Upanishad. 'That which is the hearing behind hearing, the thinking behind thinking, the speech behind speech, the sight behind sight. It is also the breathing behind breathing.'

This article was first published in The Tablet

Dear Sangha friends,

It was good to meet old and new friends at Prinknash, some might have been surprised to see me wearing orange clothes, wondering why. We associate orange robes which you know via Bede with a Hindu monk Sannyasin/Swami.

Well let me use this opportunity to share something with you. The use of the word Hindu or Hinduism, all though quiet common, is a misnomer. Variations of this word were used by invading forces, whether Alexander the Great, Persians, Moguls or British to describe the land beyond the river Sindhu. Furthermore its use was popularised by the British as a useful tool to "divide and conquer" that which was Moslem and - the others. The 'others' lumped together many cultures, states, legal systems, customs and religious practices; a huge variety of things, albeit all sharing the Vedic Truth that all life is sacred and governed in all aspects (including expressions of religious life) through eternal principles.

These are referred to as Sanātana Dharma. All "Hindu" cultures evolved out of this expanded vision; and many still refer to their religion as Sanātana dharma. So to cut a long story short, a Swami is not a "Hindu monk", but a monk dedicated to the Sanātana Dharma. Now what is that?

The Sanātana Dharma is not referring to a particular God, faith, prophet or religion, it is looking at universal principles behind all religions; thus it is addressing all human beings (regardless of a particular faith, time, place of birth or practice of worship). It is "scientific approach that looks at three components:

(Continued from page 3)

spiritualities and connects to the rest of creation. They had a vision where spirituality can contribute to development in society, allowing for people's hope and meaning to be incorporated.

In a video message, Nelson Mandela said the struggle against apartheid showed what people power could

achieve. "All forms of discrimination is wrong. Determination, commitment and clear mindedness can lead to a better world. A good world is possible and through efforts it would become a reality," he told us.

The WSF provides a unique space for the marginalised and disenfranchised people of the world to have a voice. The emphasis is on learning,

the world, the individual and God.

The world is what is; the individual experiences this world and God is whatever governs the interaction of both." These are meaningful only in relationship to each other (Jiva, Jagad, Ishwara), even mutually dependent.

Furthermore since they are variables, they need to be supported by a reality, a substratum (like a canvas supports the picture) independent of time, form, custom, tradition, culture etc. This Ultimate Reality is the 4th. Factor of attention in Sanātana Dharma. Now in all this there is no mention of any particular God, faith, dogma, history etc. Because it is not specific it is open to look at principles shared within the "community of religions".

Thus people who are open can learn from each other in all different religions i.e. go beyond a specific (thus limiting aspect) to universal Truth. This process is what Father Bede and others like him were involved in. It is from this understanding that I feel able to help to build bridges in our minds. As a former Western Dr. of Philosophy I dedicated my life to the universal Truth, when accepting Diksha to become Swami.

Bridging the gap between Western and Eastern mind-patterns, is what being a Swami is for me. If any individual or group would like to get into contact, may be, we can expand our minds together and answer some questions.

Swami Nityamuktananda

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understanding and sharing, providing a chance for people to discuss their struggles and challenges, and to look together for solutions.

The challenge for me is about how we live in each moment and how we treat those around us. As Ghandi said 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'

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From the letters of Father Bede

Falling in love with India



Father Bede is widely known for his books, most of which are in print today and which are still loved and valued. What is not so well known is that he was also a prolific letter writer and work is now starting on a project to collect these letters together for a publication. His letters to his friend Dr Mary Allen, which span the years 1945-1967, provide wonderful insights into how he reacted to his encounter with the East when he eventually went to India in 1955. The extracts given here show something of how Father Bede came to fall in love with India.

In March 1955, Father Bede set sail for India with his friend Fr Benedict Alapatt; his passage was paid for by Mary Allen to whom he wrote:

I can't tell you how the sight of these black and brown people affects

me. It brings back all that I have ever learnt from D.H. Lawrence. They seem to live with a different kind of life. It is partly, I think, that the body, being continually exposed to the sun lives its own deep life and draws the soul after it. There is a wonderful sense of well-being, as though they are drinking in life continually. It glows in their limbs and their eyes and faces, in the way they sit and stand and walk...

It filled one with a sense of worship for all the beauty in life which we have driven out of it. We ended up on the sea-shore and watched the sunset. It set as always in a red ball and then the whole horizon was filled orange and yellow light and a mass of cloud above was caught in the radiant glow. I think I felt more open to nature than I have felt since I was at school. I don't know whether it will last, but it is like the beginning of a re-birth. (Aden, April 3rd 1955)

...My love for the people and the country grows daily. How I wish I could describe it all to you. It is the encounter of east and west which is most fascinating...and what grace there is in everything! The dignity of the human form, the beauty of the women (their saris are still the loveliest things I have seen) the grace of their movements whether they sit or stand; the laughter and the joy and the quiet, easy peaceful ways. When I see all these poor people (and their standard of life is scarcely above that of an animal), I keep saying to myself 'blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven'. If the kingdom of God is in love and peace and joy and kindness and truth, then these people possess it, and all our western civilization is a mere accident. (Kengeri, April 17th 1956)

I must say that after envisaging so many ways I which I might possibly be called on to die, as I would most willingly for India, I have now discovered a totally new one. I am really afraid that I may die of sheer love and happiness! I feel inclined to say each day, Nunc dimittis servus tuum, domine

in pace. Do you know what I mean, how the sight of anything absolutely beautiful makes one want to die, because it brings the eternal so near? Well that is how I feel when I go about the streets here. (Kengeri May 1955)

...I feel (India) very, very deeply as my home in a sense, & yet not separate from Prinknash or from England. The beauty of it, for one thing, is overwhelming. The night sky with its stars which are somehow so near & warm & friendly; the crescent moon, the rising sun seen through the mangoes, & above all the sunset, day after day, the western sky radiant with red & gold & orange, a long, deep afterglow which goes on all through Compline. I have never felt so much one with nature. Then my love for the people is so deep & strong...It seemed as though a barrier had been broken & I had touched the heart of India. There is no doubt that India stands for my unconscious. I touch something there deeper than I have ever known, & somehow necessary for me. (Kengeri Dec 18th 1955)

SANSKRIT CORNER

ADVAITA

Sangha member Ken Knight, is a Sanskrit scholar and has offered to provide readers with a series of short guides to the meaning of commonly used Sanskrit words. This month he offers an explanation of the word advaita

There are six schools of philosophy based in the Vedas: *sankhya, yoga, mimamsa, vaishesika, yoga and vedanta*. Each contributes to the teachings of Father Bede but it is *vedanta* that is at their heart. To understand the three branches within *vedanta* we may use the analogy of the drop of water in the sea. The drop of water may be in the sea but always individual, it may merge with the sea which is of the same nature while maintaining its individuality or it may merge totally with the sea when the false supposition of its individuality is realised. These branches are called *dvaita* (duality), *visishtadvaita* (qualified non-duality) and *advaita* (non-duality) respectively. The first is to be witnessed in our times in the Hari Krishna movement, while the last is very popular in the various groups attempting to teach Shankara's philosophy. The second, being the teaching of Ramanuja, is less well-known but is more in tune with Father Bede's teachings than the others.

Advaita means 'not-two, non-dual'. This is the simplest way of saying that the way of negation, *via negativa*, is the correct way to reveal that which is ineffable, beyond name and form. St. John's reported words of Jesus, in Chapter 17 of his gospel, are often described as being *advaitin* in essence. They may well be, but an incorrect expression has risen in recent times '*Christian advaita*'. Such a theo-philosophical position is impossible to sustain and Henri Le Saux, Swami Abhishiktananda, demonstrates this in his life. For many years he maintained a hold on the supremacy of his Trinitarian teaching as the ultimate experience of Union in the divine, of the 'I am' experience. However, after his rigorous retreat into the Himalayas at the end of his life he was writing:

'Yet I am interested in no Christology at all. I have so little interest in a Word of God which will awaken man within history ... The Word of God comes from/to my own 'present'; it is that very awakening which is my self-awareness. What I discover above all in Christ is his 'I AM' ... it is that I AM experience which really matters. Christ is the very mystery 'that I AM', and in the experience and existential knowledge all Christology has disintegrated.'

This is an expression of the '*tat tvam asi*' statement which is at the core of *advaita*.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE BOOK OF ONE Dennis Waite (O Books 2003) 288 pp £9.99 ISBN 1 903816416

The Book of One is an excellent resource book for Advaita Vedanta websites, books, organisations, dictionary, index and references are carefully tabled in Appendices etc. The purpose of the book is to show what Advaita is and it is much more than a useful resource book. The main body of the text uses a criss-crossing between eastern and western philosophy very helpfully for western readers seeking the intellectual background to this particular spiritual path.

Waite offers Advaita (which means 'not two') as the tradition to answer all the questions of 'life, the universe and everything'. While *The Book of One* offers much to engage the minds of modern seekers after the mysteries of the east, it is quite clear about the depth of change in values and thinking that is likely to be needed to follow the path.

Members of the Bede Griffiths Sangha may find the importance of meditation in Advaita particularly interesting. There is a chapter devoted to the subject. Dennis Waite has made his extensive subject matter accessible by division into sections, by employing a very clear layout and sub-headings, as well as a consistently lively style and humorous quotations.

The pace of the book is pretty rapid and I found in large parts of the text that the polished process of Dennis Waite's writing made very enjoyable reading, for example in the chapter on Appearance and Reality, he takes us through metaphors and paradox in a delightful way.

Sangha members wanting to widen or revise the theoretical foundations of their meditation are likely to find *The Book of One* is very interesting and very informative.

Angela Stoddart (A Sangha member from Throwley, Kent)
Angela@cforstal.surfaired.org

Father Benedict Alapatt

Sr Bede M Barker OSB

Father Benedict Alapatt played a crucial role in the life of Father Bede.

He was the 'agent' through which Father Bede first established a small Benedictine community at the village of Kengeri, near Bangalore, but the foundation failed to obtain ecclesiastical approval and lasted less than two years.

Benedict Alapatt followed his commitment to establish the contemplative life in India, this time with the help of the sisters of St Cecilia's Abbey. This account, by Sr Bede, of St Cecilia's Abbey, pays tribute to the life of Benedict Alapatt and his part in the development of Christian monastic life in India.

Our retired Abbess, Sr Bernadette Smeyers, has asked me to write on her behalf to thank you for your kind good wishes on the occasion of her 100th birthday. One of the achievements of her long abbacy was the making of a monastic foundation in India. Here is how it happened.

The originator of the first foundation of Benedictine nuns in India was Fr Benedict Alapatt OSB. In his search for monasticism, Fr Alapatt began with the Silvestrine Benedictine monks in Ceylon now Sri Lanka but they were too much engaged in teaching and pastoral work. So he came to Europe in quest for a contemplative form of Benedictine monasticism. I do not know the details of the dates, but he seems to have received a monastic formation and made profession of vows at the Abbey of St André, Bruges,

Belgium. This community was not fully contemplative, but it was committed to the making of foundations in countries where Christianity was developing. Perhaps Fr Alapatt hoped they would be able to begin one in India. I am not sure whether his going to Prinknash Abbey near Gloucester was on account of poor health, needing a milder climate, or whether he was in search of English speaking monks for his project. Whichever it may have been, his eloquence gained him the support of the Abbot and community, and in particular Father Bede Griffiths.

It is a strange fact that although Christianity came to India very early (treasured tradition says with the Apostle St Thomas), Christian monasticism did not follow later, after its development in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. Had it done so, it would surely have flourished. Christianity itself remained localised in the south-west, first in Kerala and then in Goa. Fr Alapatt maintained that the Indian soul was naturally contemplative, a wisdom-seeker; but these aspects did not appear to have much importance in Christianity, even when lived by Indian people in an 'Indianised' form. But he did not consider that 'Indianisation' (or 'inculturation') was the main factor requiring attention: this was the pre-occupations of European theorists. For Fr Alapatt, 'inculturation' was not something to be imposed by Europeans; rather it was the *natural inner development of Indians being true to themselves as they lived the monastic life.* And it would take time and

experience, advancing step by step.

So Fr Alapatt and Fr Bede went out to India together, full of hope and enthusiasm, to found a community of Benedictine monks at Kengeri, near Bangalore. But after a time their viewpoints began to diverge. Fr Bede, inspired by the French priest pioneer, Fr Monchanin, began to feel strongly that a more Indian or Hindu lifestyle should be adopted, and that Fr Alapatt was not 'Indian enough'. Fr Alapatt, however, considered that a more up-to-date 'westernised' form was called for by the changing of the times, and the progressive modernising of India. He accepted that modern technology would spread in India, as in all developing countries, and that, although a simple life-style must be maintained, educated people coming to the monastery would expect hygiene, proper medical care and a reasonable use of modern technology. He was a realist - not a romantic. Nevertheless the experience was not without its fruits and there is a sense in which *both* can be understood as correct, and the Catholic Church in India is wise enough, and broad-minded enough, to include both in a fruitful way.

The two monks went their own ways, but remained on good terms. Fr Alapatt decided to concentrate on a foundation of nuns and wanted them to have their initial formation in a Benedictine Abbey in England. He asked Fr Bede to initiate contacts in this country. Fr Bede first contacted Stanbrook Abbey and presented Fr Alapatt's scheme and request. At

Fr Bede went to India in 1955 through his collaboration with Benedict Alapatt. In this article Sr Bede, of St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde, Isle of Wight, UK, tells the story of Benedict Alapatt's subsequent contribution to the establishment of the contemplative life in India

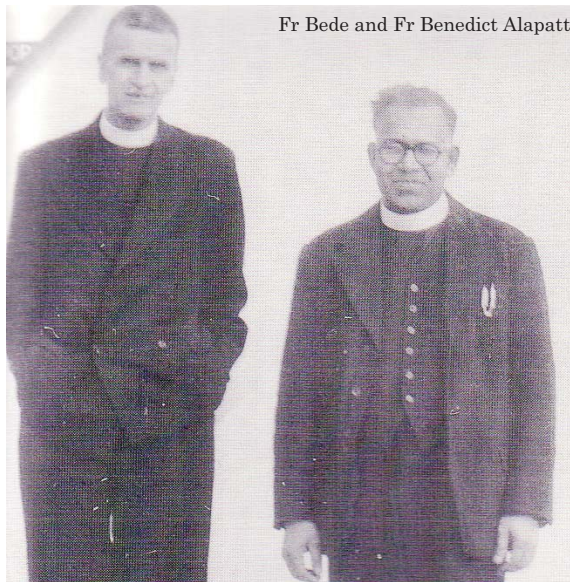
that time (1962) that community was considering making a foundation in Sweden and so passed the information and request to Mother Bernadette here at St Cecilia's Abbey. After prayer and consultation, she and the community decided God was asking this of them, and a favourable reply was sent to Fr Bede and Fr Alapatt.

Fr Alapatt had gathered together five of his nieces whom he judged had a real religious vocation, and placed them for a year with the Religious of Jesus and Mary at Poona in order to learn the English language and manners. He then personally accompanied them to England, and brought them to St Cecilia's in August 1963.

We took inculturation seriously right from the beginning of the project, and during the year that elapsed between the first contact by letter and the actual arrival of the first five Indian girls escorted by Fr Alapatt, we read up everything we could about India, its history and culture. We borrowed from the Indian Embassy in London slides, films and tapes, which included Indian music and classical dance! We wanted to be able to understand the girls better, and help ease the cultural shock of coming to Europe.

They were postulants for one year; novices for 2 years; and then made temporary vows for 3 years. Two more Indian girls came a few months later. During their time at St Cecilia's Fr Alapatt visited the sisters several times. He spoke several times to Abbess Bernadette, myself and the

community about the whats whys and wherefores underlying his project for contemplative monastic life in India. It was his burning conviction that Christ's light and love would never penetrate fully into the hearts of the Indian peoples until they could see and experience that Christians can and do live an ascetic life of prayer and contemplation



on a par with the Hindu sannyasis. This deep spiritual aspect seemed to be lacking from Christianity in India up to that point in time. The many religious orders present were active in teaching, medical and social work excellent in themselves, but apparently lacking in spiritual depth. A handful of convents of Carmelite nuns existed, but these were hidden away and unknown.

After delivering his nieces here in August 1963, Fr Alapatt stayed at nearby Quarr Abbey for several days, and used to come over to celebrate mass and see his candidates and how they were settling in. After that he spent five months or so travelling around England, giving lectures and trying to raise

some funds towards an eventual purchase of land for his projected foundation for nuns. From time to time he would return to the Isle of Wight to see how his nieces were getting on before he returned to India. He has asked us to complete their general education as far as possible, so quite a programme was set up. Several of the community

the foundation, and shared Fr Alapatt's hopes for its future.

Fr Alapatt wanted the new foundation in India to be Indian right from the start, with a native superior, and we agreed to this. He felt that the Indian nuns should be responsible for the running of their monastery and he wanted them to have a thorough and all-round formation.

He was ahead of the times. He was one of the first to bring native vocations to Europe for formation. Until then, the usual procedure was for a group of Europeans to settle in a developing county, found and determine for many years the life of the monastery. Then, only after a lengthy period, when they judged the natives ready, allow a native superior to govern. Fr Alapatt also asked us to be responsible financially for the purchase of land and the erection of buildings, with on-going help after they were established as a community. These conditions were accepted and fulfilled; but not without effort and some difficulty as may well be imagined!

The Second Vatican Council had not yet ended, but Fr Alapatt was foreseeing the use of the vernacular for the liturgy. He wanted to employ not the Syrian rite with its difficult language, but the simpler and more universal Roman rite which he saw as more open to adaptation. He wanted his monastic foundation to use English where possible, because this was/is the general language used throughout India and he foresaw

had been professional teachers before becoming nuns.

Fr Bede visited St Cecilia's Abbey at least once while the Indians were having their monastic formation here. He was in England on a lecture tour and he stayed about 3 days with the monks at Quarr Abbey and spent most of the days at St Cecilia's. He spoke with Abbess Bernadette, with the Mistress of Novices and myself (I was her assistant at that time) and he talked to the community in general. He was a goldmine of interesting information about India, and gave us much useful advice about formation and lifestyles. We felt at ease with him, and on the same wavelength. He was very encouraging concerning

vocations coming from any different language regions: time proved him right..

Abbess Bernadette took one of the Indian sisters with her (Sr Teresita now the Abbess at Shanti Nilayam Abbey, near Bangalore), to the famous monastic meeting at Bangkok in 1968, during which Fr Thomas Merton tragically died. The two then went to Bangalore to join the two pioneer nuns from St Cecilia's, who had already been in India three years, prospecting, buying suitable land (20 acres) and overseeing the building of solid but simple monastic buildings. Abbess Bernadette returned to England after three weeks, and in 1969 the remaining Indian sisters went to Bangalore. They all made their final monastic vows in India at Shanti Nilayam, constituting an all-Indian community there.

During the next years the community grew slowly. It proved necessary for one or two of our nuns to stay on with them to assist for a couple of years, helping them solve all the problems which inevitably arose. For years we continued to help them financially, to get books and equipment and have a couple of bore-wells drilled to allow a proper water supply for irrigation. The community has slowly built up numbers; they have expanded the poultry-farm, extended the cultivation of the land and built a small retreat house. Fr Bede visited them several times; and once preached a week-long retreat to them. The sisters were prudently guided by Sr Teresita, and have slowly 'Indianised' their lifestyle. The sisters

are free to choose whether they wish to wear a saffron coloured sari or a white Benedictine habit of tunic and scapular.

Our sisters have attempted two daughter-foundations of 'ashram' style: but both failed through lack of interest and vocations in this type of life. A third foundation in the far north of India at Shillong, which was requested by the Bishop there, is taking time to develop. Both culturally and ethnically it is very different in the far north, and there is strong resistance to anything viewed as 'Hindu'. So there will have to be another and different process of adaptation up there! The possibility of a second foundation in north India is currently under consideration.

Two years ago, nine Burmese girls got across the border from Myanmar and joined Shanti Nilayam. This may result later in a foundation in their country if the political situation eases up a little. In 1996, Shanti Nilayam (numbering over 30 sisters) was raised to the status of an Abbey, and Sr Teresita elected as abbess.

The prudent middle course that Fr Alapatt adopted, between simplicity and the use of modern technology, is exemplified in the community at Shanti Nilayam where the sisters use modern technology where appropriate. But they avoid having more that is strictly necessary. They had a typewriter from the start, but now the necessity for reliable and speedy communication with places abroad, Rome or the USA or Britain, has obliged them to adopt email!

The sisters participate in inter-religious monastic dialogue, sending delegates to various events in Asia. Some have visited Buddhist and Jain monasteries. Recently two Buddhist nuns resided at Shanti Nilayam for a few months, at the request of the Dalai Lama, in order to learn typing and computer skills. It was a very pleasant ecumenical contact and sharing. Such relationship would be entirely in accord with Fr Alapatt's outlook.

What Fr Alapatt foresaw and prudently planned and worked for, has gradually become reality. It would be very interesting to know how much he influenced Fr Bede in their initial contacts in England, and then during their first two years together in India at Kengeri.. Certainly Fr Alapatt must have captivated Fr Bede's interest in India, and the possibility that he saw for contemplative Christian monastic life there, otherwise he would not have gone there with him. That Fr Bede's viewpoint gradually diverged and developed in another direction is simply part of the story. I do think that Fr Bede was considerably influenced by Fr Alapatt, particularly the vital role of a Christian ascetic life of prayer and contemplation in order to manifest the light and love of Christ to the soul of India and form a bridge. It seems to me that Fr Bede was living just that ideal during the second half of his life.

Personally I think Fr Alapatt's role has tended to be over looked. We (the older nuns here) got to know him quite well, and I feel that his life-story remains to be researched

and written. He never succeeded in really founding *his* monastery for monks, suffering failures, setbacks and misunderstandings. He could be opinionated and tactless! One cause of suffering for him was his appointment by his bishop to be chaplain to a large boy's college and not to the nuns at Shanti Nilayam.

Fr Alapatt died on December 6th 1981; he had a bad heart condition and was in a nursing home for his last years, suffering a lot from depression. The community at Shanti Nilayam remained in contact with him and news of the nuns was the one thing that cheered him up! He is considered (rightly) to be their founder, as much as Abbess Bernadette and St Cecilia's Abbey. Shanti Nilayam was both his consolation and his lasting achievement.

I hope all this may be of some interest to you. We hope that your Sangha will help people to deepen their spiritual lives, through contact with Dom Bede's writings. He was an exceptionally gifted monk.

With all good wishes and in union of prayer, in Christ our Lord.

Sr Bede OSB

To contact St Cecilia's Abbey visit:
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To contact Shanti Nilayam Abbey, Bangalore email:
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www.bede Griffiths.com
and

<http://uk.msusers.com/sahajanandaashram>

Sangha Events

Stanton Guildhouse, Stanton,
Glos. April 2004. Weekend
silent retreat (*fully booked*)

Summer Seminar on
Abishiktananda at Park Place
Pastoral Centre, Fareham 16th -
18th July 2004. (*Booking form in
this newsletter*)

Silent retreat, St Non's Retreat
Centre, St David's, Wales. 9 - 16th
October 2004. Contact Joan
Walters 01646 692496

Advent Retreat, St Peters
Grange, Prinknash 4th - 6th
December 2004

Christmas at Shantivanam

If you are interested in travelling
to Shantivanam for Christmas
this year, to join a group of
Sangha members there, please
phone Jill on 01227 752871

and putting in the light, our new grand-daughter Elea
Mary Barton, a sister for Camille, and Mary Laidlaw from
Scotland, who has just had an operation

England

Beds: Bedford, Peter Forrest 01234 831361

Bucks: Marlow, Michael Day 01628 474034

Cornwall: Penzance, Swami Nityamuktananda 01736 350510

Devon: Exeter, Joan Uzzells 01392 276825

Dorset: Michael Giddings 01308 897159

Essex: Chris Collingwood 0181 504 4476

Gloucestershire: Timothy and Victoria Glazier 01453 839488

Hants: Gosport, Sue Howse 02392 528601

Kent: Canterbury, Jill & Adrian 01227 752871 *Meditation
Group 1st Friday of each month 7.15 p.m.*

London N4: Ann O'Donoghue 0207 359 1929

London SE (Kent): Hilary Knight 0168 986 1004 *Meditation
Group Wednesdays 7.30 p.m.*

London N/Herts: Edgar Holroyd-Doveton 020 8386 4323

Northants: Henry Worthy 01604 513032

Meditation group Thursdays at 8 p.m.

Oxon: Oxford Shirley du Boulay 01865 310332

Somerset: Taunton Valeria Ives 01823 432468

Somerset: Bath Kevin Tingay 01761 470249

Staffs: Stoke on Trent Sr Sophia 01782 816036

Suffolk: Wendy Mulford 01728 604169

W. Sussex: Gillian Maher 01444 455334

Chichester: Therese O'Neill 01730 814879 *Group 2nd
Tuesday of each month*

Yorks: Barnsley Margaret Cadnam 01226 217042

Northern Ireland

Belfast: Sighle Mary O'Donoghue 02890 287471 *Meditation
Friday at 7.00 pm*

Ballyhornan Stan Papenfus 02844 841451

Scotland

Aberdeen: Angelika Monteux 01224 867409

Glasgow Steve Woodward 01355 224937

Edinburgh: Laird McLean 0131 478 1673

Wales

West Wales: Joan Walters 01646 692496

North Wales: Jonathan Robinson 01766 514225

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California Santa Barbara Nicholas Dewey
805 898 0865

*If any one would like to have their names added as local
contacts please let us know. Please also let us have details of
any groups you would like included*