

# The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 2

June 2000

## Editorial

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

The Spirit Zone of our much-maligned Millennium Dome somehow catches the tension between spirituality and religion in our contemporary society. The Dome reflects much of how we see ourselves as a people, and it is significant that the designers could not bring themselves to create a 'religion' zone, or even a 'faith' zone, but were happy to incorporate a 'spirit' zone. Somehow this reflects the ambiguous relationship that many spiritual seekers have with organised, institutional religion today. Religions fail to speak to many and hence we have the apparent contradiction of fewer people as churchgoers, while more than ever people speak of having a belief in God.

The great gift of Fr Bede was that he was able to stay rooted in his Christian, Catholic and monastic tradition, whilst at the same time being open to all traditions. This gift allowed many seekers to rediscover their own roots, but in ways that enabled them to escape the limitations of structure, dogma and authority that had alienated them from their tradition and birthright. In this edition Fr Bede's article on the church, reflects on the evolution of structures such as authority, sacraments and dogma out of the church of the spirit founded by Christ. Br Martin reflects on the story of the Garden of Eden and how the author of this story understood the divine nature of each person, and of all creation, and how in eating the fruit of Good and Evil, humanity seeks to 'become like God' whilst forgetting that it is already in God. Religion is the means people use to follow their search for God, although the reality is that God already exists within each one of us.

The Sangha, following the example of the founding fathers of Shantivanam, and indeed of Jesus, is placed in the difficult tension between institutional religion and that freedom of the spirit that Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Just as Fr Bede remained within the Church of his tradition, and was open to the spirit of God within all traditions (and none), so the Sangha is sustained and nourished by its Christian tradition, and offers a spiritual home to all comers who respond to Fr Bede's vision of the renewal of contemplative life in western society. Jesus did not deny the value of his religious tradition: he said he came to complete the law rather than abolish the law. In the same vein Br Martin has taught us of the value of religious tradition as a nest in which a person can grow and mature, and has expressed his belief that the experience of religion as a nest, rather than a cage, is a possibility for many people. Certainly this is what many people have found through their encounter with Fr Bede.

Namaste

**Adrian**

## Shantivanam Meditation Hall

You will all be pleased to hear that the Sangha, and individual members, have raised over a thousand pounds for the new meditation hall to be built at Shantivanam in honour of the three founding fathers, Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux and Fr Bede.

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# The Church (Part 2)

## By Father Bede

*Continuing the talk given by Father Bede at Osage Monastery, Oklahoma, USA, in June 1992. The third and final part of the talk will be published in the next edition.*

I had some correspondence with Swami Ranyanatgi ananda, a leading Rama Krishna swami who wrote a book called *The Christ We All Adore*. And in it he says: Jesus says I and the Father are one. And that he says, shows that Jesus is identical with the Father, as Advaita says. And I wrote back and said Jesus said I and the Father are one, he did not say I *am* the Father. And he *could not* say I am the Father. That would be pure Advaita, you see, identity, but Jesus is not identity, it's communion in love. The relation between Jesus and the Father and Jesus and the disciples is not one of identity, we all become God, but communion in love. This is a wonderful message really.

So Jesus communicates the Holy Spirit to his disciples which means communion, and the word communion in Greek is koinomia-it's community. And our koinomia our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Our koinomia, our common life, our communion, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. And that is Christian church-the koinomia-the communion of disciples who share the gift of the Holy Spirit coming through Jesus from the Father, you see that is the Church. And now, that gift was shared with his disciples, as I said, communicated with them so that they could go and share it with people, in the towns and villages of Galilee. And then that was a kind of preliminary, obviously you see, and Jesus always saw that his whole life was going to culminate when he went up to Jerusalem. In the synoptic gospels, they only speak of one visit to Jerusalem; John speaks of two or three visits. But it certainly was the culmination of his whole life when he went to speak before the leaders of Israel in Jerusalem you see. And of course that leads to his

death and then that leads to his resurrection. And everyone agrees today that the resurrection is the key to the gospel.

I'd like to point out something. A book came out recently, you haven't heard of it probably called *The Historical Jesus*. It's by a man called John Dominic Crossan. It's *extremely* learned about a thousand pages a vast what you would call sociological study and he calls him a Mediterranean Jewish peasant. That's the social order to which he belongs you see, and then he does a most elaborate critical analysis of the gospel, pages and pages of tabulating everything showing exactly how much Jesus said, about eight pages of the gospel and mixing up a lot of the apocryphal Gospels with it and giving a totally distorted view I think. And what I was going to say what he does reveal, which is extremely impressive to me, he gives a list of the primary sources and the primary source of the gospel is the letter to the Corinthians. It was written, we know exactly, I think it was 55 AD, twenty-five years after the event. There are two things in the epistle to the Corinthians: one, the institution of the Eucharist. "I told you what I'm going to do" on the day before he died, and he gives an exact description of the Eucharist-that is one of the few facts we know. That is twenty-five years after. And secondly, he gives an account of the resurrection. "He appeared to Cephas and to James and to the twelve and to others and then to 500 disciples at once of whom many remained at the present day." So twenty-five years afterward with many people remaining-this is an account of the resurrection. These are the two most certain facts in the life of Jesus: the Eucharist and the resurrection. This is surprising but very interesting.

So now, Jesus appoints disciples to preach then he goes up to Jerusalem, he dies and the resurrection changes the life of the disciples. They thought he was a great prophet, they thought he was the Messiah in some sense probably in a very vague sense, but they didn't realise until the resurrection, mind you these

were appearances, we mustn't mistake the appearances and the realities far beyond but he did appear to the disciples without any doubt and through those appearances he convinced them of his eternal reality, you see not that he was simply a prophet or even a Messiah in the ordinary sense, but he really was, and the word Son of God probably only came after the resurrection. They saw he was really the one who is the presence of God among men.

And so the resurrection is the turning point when they really began to see Jesus as he was. And all our Gospels and Epistles are written in the light of the resurrection. The light which came to them through the appearances through that experience of the risen Christ and this is very well put in this wonderful book *Belonging to the Universe* by David Steindl-Rast and Fr. Thomas Matus. The resurrection was a new way of Jesus being with his disciples. It was a real "Presence" as real as a physical presence when he was with them. Now a spiritual presence which was actually more real to them than the physical presence, that's why Jesus said "It is necessary that I go from you. When I go the Holy Spirit will come." He departs in the flesh to become present in the Spirit. That is how he is present in the church today. Jesus himself in his eternal reality is present among his disciples in the Holy Spirit always. And that is the Church. And so from the time of the resurrection the disciples received this fullness of the Holy Spirit. Luke places it at Pentecost maybe that was the time the dramatic moment, but of course it goes on continuously. The Holy Spirit is being given wherever the disciples open themselves to God in Christ and this gift of the Holy Spirit is given. And so that is where the Church comes into being.

And now this church is a church of the Holy Spirit. And this is where the Pentecostals have a point. It is the church of the Holy Spirit. It is the community of disciples appointed by Jesus and given the gift of the Holy Spirit which is Jesus' presence among them and that's what constitutes the church. And so they go out to proclaim this message.

And now I think it's important to realise you see that all that you can say about Jesus and about the gospel is only a kind of outer covering of the reality which

can't be said-you can't express the Holy Spirit you see-it's beyond words, beyond anything, it's a hidden mystery. And we receive that and then we have to put it into words, and the Gospels and Epistles are attempts to put into words the hidden mystery which can't be put into words. So you always have to refer back to it, and Jesus himself is the hidden mystery. We don't know him as he was, we never will until the end when I'll know him as he is. We know him only through the veil, if you like, of the Gospels and the Epistles. That is the veil where it is most transparent, then it gets thicker and thicker as time goes on but it also gets lighter as time goes on as well.

So, Jesus then founded, I would call the eschatological church, the church at the end of time you see. Not the institutional church, as I'll say in a moment that comes from it, but he founded the church with the Spirit, the eternal church we call the mystical body of Christ, which is eternal. Everyone who enters that church is taken up into the life of the Holy Spirit in Christ and the Father which is eternal life-you're taken into eternal life-that is the church the eternal reality and it manifests on earth.

Now this is where the institution begins. Once Jesus has departed, the disciples have to begin to organise and it happens in every society when the guru or whatever goes, the disciples have to begin to organise. The first thing they did was to institute Baptism. It's very probable, John said that Jesus himself did baptise but we know very little about it, but obviously it came to them as something necessary. After Pentecost they say what should we do, it says repent and be baptised you see, so baptism was introduced. And then it seems clear that Jesus was accustomed to celebrate a ritual meal with his disciples, probably every week, it was a custom among the Jews on a Saturday I think. And it's very probable the offering of bread and wine were the principle elements in that offering. And finally, at the Last Supper, the bread and wine were given a particular significance, "This is my Body" preparing them for his death and resurrection you see, and so it then becomes what we understand by the Eucharist.

So baptism was introduced and the ritual meal which began as an agape, sharing together of food and drink and everything and then gradually into the ritual which we're accustomed. But don't forget the agape went on all through the first century really and again and again you see you have to organise any community and it began to get disorderly, people began to get drunk and not have enough to eat or this sort of thing and so they had to organise it properly. So the ritual of the Eucharist began. We don't know *who* presided at the Eucharist. There's no evidence in the New Testament who presided at the Eucharist-very interesting. Now the apostles certainly would have, but in the Didache which is a very early text the end of the century, the prophets also celebrated, and we don't really know. But, by this time the Eucharist had become a central meal, central rite to the church, and it had to be organised and that is where the organisation of presbyters and bishops began to come. They needed some leaders of the church to be in charge of the Eucharist and Baptism, of the teaching, and they remained in the apostles teaching, the community life, the breaking of the bread and the prayers-that's how Luke describes the early church. The community, the koinomia of disciples based on the apostles teaching, had to come now by that time, the apostles had imparted, and the breaking of the bread, the eucharistic celebration and the prayers which probably were what we know now as Matins and Lauds and things like that were really begun.

So the church begins to organise itself and leaders are appointed and by the end of the century it's recognised every church practically had its presbyter bishops, either known as presbyters or as bishops and then toward of the century toward the beginning of the second century one of the presbyter-bishops was appointed as the head and he became known as the bishop; others kept the name of presbyters. and that's what we see in St. Ignatius of Antioch and every church he writes has one bishop as the head appointed by an apostle you see and that was his idea.

So this is how the church began to organise itself and now as I said there's no evidence of bishops in the first century but in the second century they become ex-

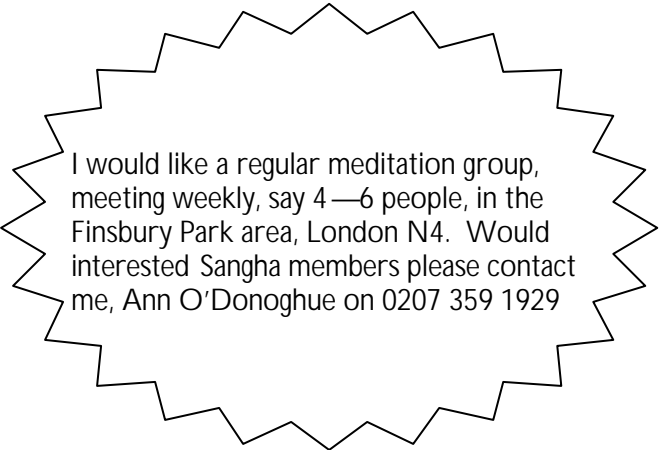
tremely prominent. But now what about the church of Rome? Now this is the point-we don't know who founded it probably disciples from Pentecost were Jews from Rome, Pentecost Jewish Christians went back and started a church there. Somebody may have organised it to some extent, but there's a letter of Clement written at the end of the first century in the name of the Roman church and it doesn't mention the bishop at all. There probably wasn't a bishop at that time. But what happened was this. Nobody knows who founded the Church of Rome. But Peter and Paul were both martyred in Rome and that is well established not only in document but in archaeology it's certain that they were both martyred in Rome in the sixties and they were seen as *spiritual* founders of the church. And the early tradition is not that Peter founded the church of Rome but Peter and Paul. That's why in our liturgy they're often put together you know, the feast of Peter and Paul. So this is the true tradition. The Roman church was founded upon the apostolic preaching of Peter and Paul you see and their witness to the gospel by their lives. And as a result, and also it was centre of the empire of course, it became more and more seen as the centre of all the churches.

And there's a wonderful text of St. Irenaeus who died about 180 AD where he says if you want to know the true church go to Rome which was founded by the glorious apostles Peter and Paul, not Peter alone, for there the true faith is always preserved by the faithful from all parts of the world. Everybody came to Rome and took the faith from it and brought-it was a centre for Christendom. And the present pope once said you know that the church of Rome should be a centre of reference. It hasn't got to rule everything but everybody should be in touch with it. And that's what was in the 2nd century, it was a place-you were in touch with that centre. And the eastern churches also, they would never have appointed-popes *never* appointed bishops in the eastern churches, it was unheard of you see. Because now, again it's important, there were five patriarchies you see. Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, later Constantinople and Rome. And the bishop of Rome was the patriarch of the West and he appointed bishops in the West. But the other patriarchs appointed bishops in their own patriarchy and the pope

never interfered in the orders or in the government or in their doctrine *unless*, and this is a point, there was some point of dispute, there could be an appeal to Rome. And that took place quite often and the pope could mediate between them you see. So this is how things grew, it's very important and so the church began to organise itself with bishops and then the bishops began to meet in councils. In the earliest council we have was a council of bishops from different localities you see and that became common and then when things got really exciting in the fourth century, they wanted to get all the bishops together they have what they call ecumenical council *ecumini* is the Greek for the world and it was the whole of the Roman empire the world as they knew it. And so the Council of Nicea in 325 was the first ecumenical council where bishops from all over the world were present, and don't forget again, the pope was not present at Nicea or at any of the early councils. He sends two presbyters to represent him and they were given a place of honour, but he didn't go himself. and all the decisions were made by the Eastern bishops, see at Nicea and Ephesus and in Chalcedon. Pope Leo was the pope, he was a great theologian, and sent a tome called "On the Incarnation" and it was so impressive all the bishops said Peter has spoken by the voice of Leo and that was how they understood at that time that he represented Peter by this time and he was seen as speaking in the name of Peter.

To be concluded

*If you would like a copy of the whole article by Fr Bede on the Church, this can be sent free of charge by email.*



I would like a regular meditation group, meeting weekly, say 4—6 people, in the Finsbury Park area, London N4. Would interested Sangha members please contact me, Ann O'Donoghue on 0207 359 1929

## Vision of Future Time

The Great World Clock ticks on and counts the time  
 Like beads upon a Cosmic rosary.  
 The years fade into the past,  
 But what of those still ahead?  
 Out of the mists of future Time  
 The echoes of huge events reverberate  
 And rend the atmosphere:  
 Mountains collapse, the Earth is split and torn:  
 Seas once obedient, contained within their tides  
 Run riot, mounting the shores;  
 Destruction is their aim.  
 The Four dread Horsemen plunge across the land:  
 Humanity upon its knees now has forgotten how to pray,  
 But forming in veils of shining mist  
 A Figure looms: it waxes and it wanes,  
 Gleaming then fading with a hand upraised....  
 Is it in blessing or condemnation at our folly and our sin?  
 Out of its mouth a flaming sword appears,  
 The sound of a thousand trumpets fill the air:  
 The eyes are like caves containing worlds and universes.  
 Suns and moons enfold it like a cloak of fire.  
 The vision dissolves and in its place  
 A Man whose upraised hand is wounded by a nail;  
 Blesses and beckons: 'Follow Me,' he calls,  
 'Into the future, into the New Age of Aquarius.'

**Winifred Dearden**

# The Garden of Eden (Part 1)

## By Brother Martin Sahajananda

The story of the Garden of Eden narrated in the first chapters of the book of Genesis is one of the most profound stories of the human genius, that describes the original state of the human beings and the cause of the fall from that original state. The author who wrote this story had been raised by the grace of God to the primordial state of human beings and has been shown the cause of fall from that primordial state. The author has been given the gift of describing that experience in a manner that can be understood by the simple and unscientific mind of his time.

The author tells us that God has created or manifested humanity in his or her own image and likeness. We can also extend and say that God has manifested the whole universe in his or her image and likeness but in humanity this image and likeness has the possibility of becoming conscious of that image or the possibility of forgetting that image and likeness of God.

### **God is Holy, whole, Eternal and Unfolding**

How can we understand the image and likeness of God? We know that God is beyond names and forms. No name or form can contain God. Then what does it mean that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God? We can say that God is Holy. God is Whole, God is Eternal and God unfolds. When we say God is Holy it means that in God there are no parts. God is not made of parts like a watch. A watch can be called total but not Holy. Its parts can be separated and they can be brought together. Water is holy or whole. Even if we separate a drop of water from the sea, the drop is whole and it lacks nothing. A drop of water is not a part of the water. The part is present in the whole and the whole is present in the part. The watch is not whole. It is the result of a process. A watch can be made more perfect. God is not perfect but he is Holy or Whole. God is not the product of a process or time. God is beyond time and space. He is Eternal. God does not become. We can say he unfolds. Holiness or Wholeness does not become but unfolds. Unfolding is an activity by which God's Holiness is not af-

fected.

Creating is an act of unfolding. By creating God does not become more or less. This nature of God can be described as a Virgin Mother. God is a Virgin, Whole and Holy. By creating the universe God becomes a Mother to the Universe but yet God remains a Virgin, Whole and Holy. This is the miracle of God and miracle of unfolding. The words 'Holy', 'Whole', 'Eternal' and 'Unfolding' are not four different qualities but only one reality expressed in four different words. To be holy means to be Whole, Eternal and Unfolding.

### **Human beings are Holy, Whole, Eternal and Unfolding**

If we understand that the nature of God is holy, whole, eternal and Unfolding then we can intuit what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God. It means humanity is also created as 'holy', 'whole', 'eternal' and 'unfolding'. They were created to unfold and not become. God placed them in the Garden of Eden. It is the place where human beings walk in the universal presence of God. They had no burden of becoming anything else, which frees them from the burden of psychological time, which is the gap between what I am and what I have to become psychologically. They had no sense of sin, sense of good and evil, sense of guilt, as they were naked and not ashamed. God lived and worked in and through them. Since all their actions are God's actions there was no reason to feel guilt of any of their actions since they were not the authors of their actions. We can say that this was the original blessing, which God had given to humanity and to the whole creation. We can describe the life of the original humanity in this way. It is a journey

*From holiness to holiness*

*From wholeness to wholeness*

*From eternal to eternal*

*From unfolding to unfolding.*

The whole creation unfolds according to the image and likeness of God. They do not have any other desire than being what God intended them to be. The sun un-

folds its being but does not desire to become a moon. A dog lives by its nature but does not want to become a cat. The whole creation, except human beings, unfolds according to its nature but does not want to become any other thing. There is no movement of becoming in them. Only human beings have been given the possibility of forgetting their original and true nature and also to remember it.

### **The forbidden fruit of Becoming**

God told to humanity that they could eat all the fruits of the garden except the fruit of good and evil. The moment they eat they will die, not physically, but spiritually, as it was clear that they did not die physically. What is the nature of this forbidden fruit and why God had forbidden humanity to eat this fruit? The first aspect of this fruit is that it is the fruit of good and evil. Good and evil belong to the dualistic consciousness. God is absolute Good, which has no opposite, Evil. The Absolute Good, which has an opposite, cannot be called the Absolute Good. God did not create evil. Everything that God created (or manifested) is good. In the original consciousness of humanity there was no consciousness of good and evil.

The second aspect of this fruit is that it is the fruit of becoming as opposed to unfolding. The serpent tells the women "If you eat this fruit you will become like God". We know that humanity was already created like God and there was no need for it to become like God.

### **The condition of human nature**

Though humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, just as other created beings, yet there is one thing that distinguishes it from the other created beings. That is the possibility to forget its image and likeness of God. Humanity can be seduced, can be deceived. It can fall into sleep from its original nature. But it also has the possibility to realise its mistake, to wake up from sleep and to remember its original state. It is this possibility that distinguishes humanity from the other created beings. From where did it get this possibility? Certainly it must be God who has brought them into existence with this possibility.

### **The beginning of the Fall**

When Eve heard the voice of the serpent she forgot what she really was. If Eve had told the serpent, "What a stupid thing you are telling me. I am already created in the image and likeness of God. There is no need for me to become like God", then things would have been different. But for a moment she forgot who she was. She thought that she was not like God and wanted to become like God. This forgetfulness creates the duality of "I am not like God" and "I want to become like God". So the desire arose in her to become like God. Forgetfulness is the beginning of the ego and this ego is strengthened by the desire. This desire creates separation, duality, distance, psychological time, means, striving and effort. It makes us forget the universal presence of God and our awareness of it, and projects God as an object outside of us and a goal outside of us to be reached through means and efforts. It creates boundaries to the truth that has no boundaries. It tries to define something that cannot be defined. It is this definition of truth that creates the consciousness of good and evil. So God told humanity that it could listen to all the voices of the garden except that voice which tells that it is not like God and promises that it can become like God by eating the fruit (by means and efforts). So the forbidden fruit is the fruit of becoming which is the source of good and evil.

Eve listened to the voice of the serpent and ate the fruit of becoming. She has taken the path of time and becoming, the path of good and evil. Not only she ate but also gave to her husband. It means that whatever choice we make we also make it for the others. When Eve chose to eat the fruit she made the choice for the whole of humanity.

Then they realised that they were naked and that they were ashamed and they hid themselves from the presence of God. Before that moment they were naked; ego-less, desire-less, unfolding. But now they realise that they are separate from God; they become conscious of good and evil.

### **The unconditional love of God**

But God did not judge them. It is humanity that says 'we are naked and ashamed', but God says, 'Who told

you that you were naked? Have you eaten the fruit, which I have forbidden? Only then would you become aware that you are naked". God knows that they had eaten the fruit but He is too gentle to accuse them directly.

### **Accusing the other**

Humanity does not take responsibility of its own actions. Man blames the woman and the woman blames the serpent. The consequence of this fall is suffering.

### **The Serpent**

The serpent is cursed to crawl on the ground and is told that mud will be its food. The serpent has two symbolic meanings. The serpent raising its hood is a symbol of vertical consciousness, the consciousness of eternity. The serpent crawling on the ground is the symbol of horizontal consciousness, the consciousness of psychological time, cut off from eternity. Before the curse the serpent was on the tree symbolising vertical consciousness of eternity but now the serpent is cursed to crawl on the ground; it is a fall from eternity into time. It is a fall from unfolding into becoming. Mud will be its food. Time feeds on time. Time trying to reach eternity through movement, through a process which is an impossible task.

### **The Woman**

The woman is also cursed to bear children through pain and suffering and she will long for her husband. Woman becomes dependent on her husband. Human relationships are no longer based on equality and independence, but they become dependent upon each other. Man depending on woman and woman depending on man. Woman has to bear children through pain and suffering. This does not apply merely to physical children and physical pain. But the whole way of life. Now humanity has to suffer in order to bring forth spiritual virtues. Spiritual life implies a lot of unending pain, suffering and sacrifice.

### **The Man**

Man is cursed to live by the sweat of his brow. In spite of his hard work, thorns and thistles will continue to grow. This labouring and hard work is not merely physical which cannot be avoided but is also spiritual.

Hereafter the spiritual life of humanity will be hard work, labouring. In spite of this hard work, the thistles and thorns will grow. The negative aspects form in the human psyche. In unfolding there is no place for negative things but 'becoming' naturally involves the appearance of thorns and thistles.

### **The Ground**

The ground is also cursed because of man's fall. Before the fall the ground had a profound communion with God through human beings. But when humanity fell, the earth, the creation also fell because it is no longer a reality which supports humanity in their communion with God, but it becomes an object of man's egotistic desires. The ground is no longer a place where humanity unfolds its divine likeness but it is a place where the ego tries to fulfil its perverted ambitions. Creation is no longer a place of unfolding but becomes the object of human being's desire. Cursed is the ground because of humanity. If humanity falls, creation also falls. If humanity raises creation also raises.

### **The nature of the Fall**

The desire to become other than being in the image and likeness of God makes humanity fall

*From holiness to unholiness*

*From wholeness to fragmentation*

*From Eternity into psychological time*

*From unfolding to becoming*

It is only that which is holy, whole, eternal, unfolds. Holiness cannot be achieved through a process of becoming, wholeness cannot be achieved through effort and eternity cannot be reached through time, an unfolding cannot be achieved through becoming.

### **Original Sin**

The original sin is nothing but to forget the real nature of humanity and the desire to become like God. God created humanity in his or her own image and likeness and holy, whole, eternal and unfolding, and God told humanity not to listen to any voice that tells them that they can become like God. God forbade humanity to eat the fruit of becoming, because humanity is not created to become but to unfold. Becoming is contrary to the human nature. So God told them that the moment they eat the fruit of becoming, they will fall, they will

die, they will lose their original state. But humanity ate the fruit of becoming and fell from the life of unfolding.

### **The cunning of the Serpent**

The serpent was the most cunning of all the animals. The desire to become is most cunning, most deceiving, and most seducing. The most important distinctive character of humanity is that it is capable of being deceived or persuaded or seduced. The serpent did not deceive Eve with material promises. The serpent did not say to the woman that if she ate the fruit she would become materially rich, powerful and famous. The serpent said to the woman, "If you eat this fruit you will become like God". The serpent told her that she would become spiritually rich, spiritually great. Who is not tempted by spiritual riches? Are people not ready to renounce everything to become rich spiritually? The desire to become is most cunning. It can take any form it wants, material, political, psychological, intellectual and spiritual. Its only motive is to make people choose the path of becoming; it can be either material becoming, political becoming, psychological becoming, intellectual becoming or spiritual becoming. It can put on any garb that is useful to persuade people to take up the path of becoming. Eve was seduced by the spiritual garb, spiritual becoming. It is for this reason that the serpent is said to be the most cunning of all the animals.

### **The consciousness of Humanity after the Fall**

Now the consciousness of humanity is no longer the consciousness of unfolding but the consciousness of becoming. The spiritual life of humanity is no longer the spirituality of unfolding but the spirituality of becoming. It is this spirituality of becoming which has been communicated from generation to generation. And this spirituality of becoming which has become a burden to the humanity. Humanity has taken a wrong path. A path that will not take them to the destiny that they want to reach. It is the blind leading the blind.

*This article will be concluded in the next edition*

*And...thank you to Martin from so many people who have been inspired by your teaching during your visit to the UK*

## **The Annual Silent Forest Retreat September 2000**

The Bede Griffiths Sangha will hold its annual silent Forest Retreat at The Rowan Tree Centre The Skreen, , Builth Wells, Powys, Wales from Sunday 10th September to Saturday 16th September 2000.

The Rowan Tree Centre, an ecumenical centre rooted in the Christian tradition, has been the Spiritual home of the Sangha from its foundation meeting led by Ria Weyens in 1994.

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

At the core of the retreat will be the three daily meditation periods with readings from the sacred scriptures of all Wisdom traditions. The focus will be Christ-centred, as was Father Bede. There will be periods of contemplative reading (lectio divina) and contemplative sharing. Yoga and chanting/bhajan singing will help to bring the whole person - body, mind and spirit - to contemplation.

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

There are only a few places left. So if you would like to join us, please write to Kim Nataraja, Flat 3, 24, Linden Gardens, Bayswater, London W2 4ES. Please include your phone number or e-mail address.

The fully inclusive cost of the retreat from Sunday supper to Saturday lunch is £160. Accommodation is in shared twin rooms. All meals are vegetarian.

*For those on low incomes concessionary rates are available.*

## Being with yourself

### John Careswell

Are retreats a waste of time? Or selfish? A response to these questions was given in the first reading on the recent Sangha Spring Retreat; 'Don't just *do* something, *sit* there!' This remark (by Fr Laurence Freeman) appears in the introduction to 'The Mystery Beyond: on retreat with Bede Griffiths'.

Gathered for a weekend at the Rowan Tree Centre, in mid-Wales, where the Sangha started life in 1994, we embraced Fr Laurence's comment wholeheartedly, and maintained a supportive silence throughout our retreat, with four meditation sittings daily, and regular services with readings from diverse traditions. Chants in English, especially written for Sangha retreats, were used for the first time, and a beautiful service was devoted to the anniversary of Fr Bede's death, which occurred over the weekend.

There was a lot of space for retreatants just to be with themselves: 'Drinking deep, in the desert of modern life, of the waters of divine being' - another phrase of Fr Laurence, which influenced us. The weekend was demanding, but nourishing, and characterised by a wonderful spirit of co-operation and involvement. It was a deeply personal, yet shared, experience.

Nearly half the participants were new to Fr Bede, meditation, and the Sangha - a tribute to Bede's continuing and expanding appeal. We were blessed though by good weather, which enhanced the natural beauty that surrounded us. The retreat ended with a lovely Indian-style Eucharist, celebrated by Revd Mary Lewis - director of the Rowan Tree Centre, and an encouraging friend of the Sangha since its beginning. After six years, there are calls for the Sangha to develop new directions in its activities. Small simple retreats based on the life of Shantivanam clearly still helps many people deepen the spiritual quest. Those attending hoped it would remain part of the Sangha's programme.

## Some memories of Fr Bede

Having been with Father Bede at Shantivanam Ashram is to have been in the Garden of Paradise.

Bede's ashram in the woods near a holy river, far away from cities, markets and busy roads among the palm trees in warm India is a true oasis.

Father Bede was a wise and loving father who loved and welcomed everyone. He had a feeling for each and for all. There was always a welcome, a recognition, respect, trust and care for everyone.

Father Bede had such a gentle smile and look at all and everything; he was such a loving presence, an image of God; Father of All!

Because of him all guests and visitors, along with ashram dwellers, brothers and sisters, workers, farmers, local people, artists, journalists, scientists, business men, coming from any country or continent,

turned from outsider to insider,  
and this created one big family,  
a new generation of humanity  
in brotherhood in joy, peace, freedom!  
This is an unforgettable experience  
that warms one's heart at any time and  
gives a hopeful vision for the future of our planet.

With love  
Sr. Jeanne Mechtilde

*Sr. Jeanne, now living in Belgium, lived with Fr Bede at Shantivanam for many years.*

I met Fr Bede on three occasions - all at Prinknash, on his various visits there. The first time when I was a postulant in 1971 or 1972. First my novice master said 'no' when I asked if I could go and see him. But I was so keen, so I asked, 'Can I just go for 5 minutes?' so he relented and let me go.

I remember the first 'round letter' Fr Bede sent from India (in 1955 or 1956). In it he said that many Hindus came there 'but of course we cannot pray with Hindus'. Already at that time I thought 'why ever not?' Thank God this has changed. Now even the Holy Father would pray with the Dalai Lama and leader of other religions in Assisi some 11 or 12 years ago. Let us pray that Fr Bede's example will bring more and more people of different religions together to meditate and pray and work together.

Br. Herbert Kaden  
*Br. Herbert is a monk of Turvey Abbey in Bedfordshire*

## Notes and Queries

### **The Mystic Heart**

by

Wayne Teasdale

(with a foreword by HM the Dalai Lama)

*The following is extracted from the publishers notice that was received by the newsletter.*

“Drawing on his extraordinary experience as an inter-religious monk and mystic, Br Wayne Teasdale, reveals in *The Mystic Heart* what he calls interspirituality, a genuine and comprehensive spirituality that draws on the mystical core of the world’s great religions. After years within the Catholic lay monastic community, Teasdale found himself drawn to the interreligious path of visionary Father Bede Griffiths, who initiated him in the way of *sannyasa*, the life of renunciation and dedication to the quest for God. As a *sannyasi*, Teasdale combines his profound Christian faith with an intimate understanding of other religions’ ancient traditions. In the meeting of religions a greater truth can be realised. He shows the power of a universal spirituality and describes 9 practical elements that can be the way of personal practice.”

*Published by New World Library, 14 Pamaron Way, Novato, California 94949. [www.nwlib.com](http://www.nwlib.com)*

### **Namajapa: The Prayer of the name in the Christian and Hindu Traditions**

By

Vandana Mataji. Motilal Banarsidas: Delhi, £5 approx.

As a westerner who came of age in the sixties counter-culture and was introduced to meditation in its eastern form but still viewed themselves somehow as a Christian, I have always felt internally spiritually divided. It was with great pleasure then, that when discussing aspects of Indian Christianity with Sr. Barbara Farquarson, a Sacred Heart Sister, she said that she would send me a book. The book is: “Nama Japa: The Prayer of the Name in the Christian and Hindu Traditions” by Vandana Mataji author of the now classic “Ashrams, Gurus and Christians”.

Her new book “Nama Japa” is a full exposition of the prayer of the Name both within the Hindu and Christian traditions. By prayer of the Name she means the constant repetition of a Name of God either vocally or mentally. This is a form of bhakti yoga found in most of the world’s faiths. Her range of reading and quota-

tion on this spiritual practice is vast from the Desert Fathers, and straying outwith the Hindu tradition to the Buddhist Shin Nembutsu sages.

Of particular interest to me was the attempted synthesis between East and West at the level of the Name. Of particular relevance is her inclusion of eastern style Christian mantras: Yesu Om, Om Namah Christaya, and Aum Sri Yesu Bhagavate Namah. She also presents a description of a Christian meditation that is in the puja form familiar within both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, where both visualisation (in this case of Christ) and recitation of mantra (Yesu Om) are advocated. Finally there is also a selection on *sadhkas* of the past who attained realisation through the prayer of the Name, again people within both the Christian (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Charles Wesley, and Abhishiktananda) and Hindu (Sankaracarya, Mirabai, Gandhiji, and Sri Aurobindo) traditions are mentioned. This is a book I can heartily recommend.

Kenneth Mullen

### **Friedensgasse Diakonische Kommunitat**

*The following is extracted from information sent to us by Urs Mattmann, a Sangha member from Switzerland.*

“The Friedensgasse is a modern Christian order, a community of faith and life. It is interwoven in the roots and foundations of the Christian religions, it adopts an integrated spiritual approach, it is influenced by the ministering (diakonia) tradition of Christians since the early Christian church and is connected with the ecumenical tradition of the church.

The life of our community is a calling to be shaped by love as the most important message of the New Testament and moulded by the commitment to live with the poor and disadvantaged in ministering communities.

Our vocation is sustained by a newly emerging Christian cosmology which has a comprehensive and connecting view of the world and the cosmos and connects the roots of the Christian faith, mysticism, and spirituality with each other in an integrated perception.

The inside (source) of our vocation and the heart of our spirituality is love. The outside (outward expression) of our vocation is the firm intention to live in solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged of this world.”

*For further information write to Friedensgasse Diakonische Kommunitat, Friedensgasse 72, CH-4056 Basel, Switzerland. Email: [Friedensgasse@datacomm.ch](mailto:Friedensgasse@datacomm.ch). [www.friedensgasse.ch](http://www.friedensgasse.ch)*

**If not delivered please return to:**

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

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



*We have had news of several Sangha members and friends who are ill. You may like to remember Ken Knight in your prayers; also Chris Lines, Pru Cherry and Ann O'Donoghue, all of whom are having chemotherapy, and Jill's mother, Kathleen Hemmings who is in hospital. We are putting you all in the light.*

**Future Sangha Events  
Annual Forest Retreat – The Rowan Tree  
Centre, The Skreen, Builth Wells, Powys.  
September 10th – 16th 2000 (details on p 9)**

**The Sangha Winter Retreat, St Peters  
Grange, Prinknash Abbey Nov 3rd – 5th  
2000 Please use the enclosed booking form**

**Spring Retreat 2001, The Rowan Tree Cen-  
tre. 4th—7th May 2001**



The Sangha has tapes of Br  
Martin's talks at Park Place.  
For details please contact David  
Caudwell, Brigden, Waldron,  
East Sussex, TN21 0RE.  
(01435 862869)

## Regional contacts

**The following members have offered to act as regional contacts for the Sangha**

**Gosport, Hants** Sue Howse  
01795 528601

**Taunton, Somerset** Valeria Ives  
01823 432468

**Guildford, Surrey** Therese O'Neill  
01730 814879

**Oxford** Olive Norton 01865 242227

**Essex** Chris Collingwood  
0181 504 4476

**SE London** Hilary Knight 0168 986  
1004

**East Kent** Jill Hemmings & Adrian Rance  
01227 752871

**W Sussex** Gillian Maher 01444 455334

**Exeter** Joan Uzzells 01392 276825

**Glasgow** Steve Woodward 01355 224937

**Belfast** Sighle Mary O'Donoghue 01232  
287471

If you are willing to be a contact for the Sangha for your region do let us know and we will print a fuller list in later editions. As a regional contact person you don't have to do more than pass on messages, but if you wanted to arrange local Sangha days then that would be great!