



The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 4

December 2000

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

Inside this issue:

<i>Father Bede and ecology</i> <i>Sr Pascaline Coff</i>	2
<i>Reincarnation</i> <i>Br Martin Sahajananda</i>	4
<i>The Sangha in Northern Ireland</i>	6
<i>Prinknash Retreat</i> <i>David Patterson</i>	8
<i>Father Bede on medita- tion</i>	10
<i>The poetry corner</i>	11
<i>The Skreen Retreat</i> <i>Joan Walters</i>	11

Editorial

First of all an apology for the late appearance of this newsletter. Jill's mother died in November and her daughter got married in December so we were not able to do the newsletter in December and this edition has had to wait until we came back from the Sangha trip to India. Sorry for the delay.

The trip to India was a wonderful experience. At Shantivanam we witnessed the opening of the meditation hall built to honour the three founding fathers on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the ashram. You will be glad to know that many Sangha members contributed to the building of the meditation hall.

There is a Tamil saying, "To see is salvation at Chidambaram, to meditate is salvation at Arunachala". Our visits to both of these places were both very

powerful and moving experiences. Chidambaram is the most sacred temple of Shiva Nataraja, and here we were permitted a puja in the *Chit Sabha*, the holiest place in the temple. Arunachala is the sacred mountain which is itself a manifestation of Shiva, and here the energy of meditation was extraordinary. We hope to publish a supplement about the trip in another edition.

We have had many wonderful contributions for this newsletter. So many in fact that we almost have enough for the next one as well! Gandhi was a great exponent on the value of a newsletter to help keep a group, or community together so the more contributions there are the more it really feels like an extension of the Sangha.

Namaste

Adrian

Sangha subscriptions 2001

Please, Please, please... could you return the enclosed subscription form. If you can't afford a subscription but want to have the newsletter, that is just fine, **but please do return the form**. We really would like to know whether you want to continue to receive the newsletter.

We regret overseas subscribers have to pay a subscription as the cost of mailing is now very high.

Jane and Andy have taken on the task of maintaining the Sangha database and you see that the enclosed subscription form should be sent to their address in Cirencester. Thank you all.

Father Bede and ecology

Sr Pascaline Coff OSB

Sr Pascaline is a member of the community at Osage Monastery in the United States and was a friend of Father Bede's. She is a member of the Bede Griffiths Trust

During his recent three-month sabbatical from the University of New Hampshire where he is Professor of Environmental Conservation, John E. Carroll visited the community and retreatants at Osage+Monastery, Forest of Peace in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. John and his wife, Diana are driving across the country to gather insights and experiences from monks and nuns and other religious groups deeply involved in the new resurgence of ecology and its vital importance for quality of life for everyone.

Professor Carroll is co-author of a new trilogy of books on the subject: *The Greening of Faith – God, the Environment and the Good life; Embracing Earth; and Ecology and Religions: Scientists Speak*. Reviews praise Carroll's work highly. "No one is doing a better job than John Carroll at addressing the serious moral and ethical issues of our time," a Catholic Worker journalist wrote in reviewing the three books. John also wrote the leading environmental Textbook in 1983: "Environmental Diplomacy".

The Professor had high praise for the works of Fr. Bede Griffiths and includes him in his bibliography "The Catholic Church, Catholic Thought and Ecology: A Partial Bibliography (2000)". He told the monastic ashram community at Osage that he could have gone to many monasteries in the Southwest on this sabbatical but he chose Osage deliberately because of "your strong link with Bede Griffiths". Carroll believes Fr. Bede's teaching on body, soul and spirit and interdependence is basic in his research project : the linkage of spirituality and ecological sustainability. His colleague Al La Chance says "To praise the creator and destroy the creation is blasphemy."

Dr. Carroll, former two -term member of the National

Catholic Rural Life Conference, is friends with many of the best in his field. In *Embracing the Earth* he invited Thomas Berry, CP to pen the forward:

The renewal of religion in the future will depend on our appreciation of the natural world as the locus for the meeting of the Divine and the human. The splendor and the beauty of the natural world in all its variety must be preserved if any worthy idea of the Divine is to survive in the human community.

John Carroll hovers between the scientific and the mystical in his appreciation for and urgent call for reverence and respect for Mother Earth and the cosmos. In *The Greening of Faith* he exhorts readers to beware of the sin of hubris, and speaks of the need to have "jaw-dropping experiences," for an awe of nature and a reverence of the sacred are necessary ingredients to answering the ecological question." In the monastic Rule of Benedict all are exhorted to handle everything like "sacred vessels of the altar."

In our Bede Griffiths Memorial Library at the monastery at Osage, the Carrolls enjoyed browsing through a newly completed dissertation on the ecological connection in Fr. Bede's writings. The dissertation was written and submitted to the Faculty of the Catholic University of America by J. Samuel Savio, a priest from S. India, toward his Doctorate in Theology. It is entitled "The Principle of Relatedness in the Ecological Ethic of Bede Griffiths." The volume contains chapters on Griffiths' understanding of the Material Universe; his Vision of Harmony with the World of Nature; his Vision of Wholeness in a Dialogal context-advaita; his Theory of Complementarity as Promoting an Ecological Consciousness. The work is a masterful coverage of the pioneer efforts and originality of Bede Griffiths' gift to the human family.

In a talk at the Open Center in New York City in 1990

Fr. Bede spoke on interrelatedness in our global family:

Scientists see the universe today as a complicated web of interdependent relationships. We are living in a world where everything is interdependent, and we share the earth and the sky, the sun and the moon, and the stars and the animals and the clouds. It is all part of this one world. And we are all part of this one world. As human beings we arrived very late on the scene. We form a community within this one vast community of the world and we have to learn to share with one another. One of the things that has come about through modern communications etc. is that we are able to reach to all parts of the world and we are discovering this global unity and the tremendous impact it has. We have all been living in such a small world, whatever religion or race or culture we belonged to and now we are beginning to see what it is to belong to humanity and how humanity belongs to this cosmic whole. We had very little sense of our communion with the earth. We think of the earth as something below us which we've got to control, manipulate and manage and we have lost the sense that it is a cosmic whole. It is a living whole. You will be surprised to know that in the ancient world they were always aware of the universe as a living whole. They called it anima mundi, the soul of the world and were living in communion with the earth and the stars and the sun and moon, the trees and plants and animals and with our fellow human beings. It is with this cosmic vision that science and mysticism – the two extremes – are meeting now.

Father Bede often quoted from poets and mystics in their vision of the cosmos: "Touch the wing of a butterfly and you will move a star." And again the Upanishads were a favorite: "All this world, moving or unmoving, is pervaded by the Lord, therefore renounce and enjoy." (Isa Upanishad)

From our own Christian tradition St. Paul tells us that God has placed all things under Christ's feet, and has given him authority over everything for the Church which is his body, "the fullness that fills everything in every way." (Eph. 1, 20,22) Is not our moral task praise, adoration and sacred stewardship in "embracing earth" with body, soul and spirit?

Susanna Tieze

It is with sadness that we have to let you know of the death of Susanna Tieze in December.

Susanna was a treasured member of our Sangha. She died peacefully in a hospice after a short illness. She had experienced much in her long life. As a Czech Jew, although in TheresinStadt camp she survived the holocaust.

After the war and the death of her husband she came to England and cared for child survivors of the concentration camps. She then worked as a Montessori teacher until she retired in her early 70's to pursue her work as a foot reflexologist. She was still 'doing our feet' until a few weeks before she died in her late 80's.

It meant a lot to her and us that she was able to come to the Skreen Retreat in September. She touched the lives of so many with her direct, fun loving child-like quality and her wisdom. She was not afraid of dying and had a strong faith that 'All would be well'.

Jane Saunderson

We would also like to let you know of the death of two other Sangha members. Jill's mother, Kathleen Hemmings and Chris Lines both died in November within a week of each other.

Chris was a great supporter of the Sangha and he welcomed Brother Martin and local Sangha members to his the shrine he had created in the barn near his house. Chris' funeral service began with Fr Bede's favorite chant, *Jesu Jesu Jay Jay Namoh*, which is sung each evening at *namajapa* at Shantivanam.

Reflections on reincarnation

Brother Martin Sahajananda

The belief in reincarnation was very much confined to the eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. But today it is spreading very fast and many western Christians believe in it or have no difficulty in accepting it in one form or another. They do not believe that it contradicts Christian faith. Many people think that the early Christians believed in it but later the Church suppressed it. Even the statement of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God" is quoted as proof of that belief.

What is reincarnation? Did Jesus really teach the belief in re-incarnation? Can a Christian believe in reincarnation and still be a Christian?

There is a subtle distinction between rebirth and reincarnation. Rebirth is general and is an involuntary movement based on the cause and effect. Reincarnation is a voluntary action. A person chooses to reincarnate though he or she is not bound. The present Dalai Lama is the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama because the previous Dalai Lama had willed to reincarnate though he was not bound. He renounced his privilege of entering the realm of Nirvana and voluntarily chose to reincarnate for the liberation of the sentient and non-sentient beings. Rebirth, on the other hand, is a mechanical action. The present life depends on the actions a person has done in the previous life. This mechanism goes on until a person is liberated. For our reflection we limit the idea of reincarnation to 'rebirth'.

In the Vedic tradition the concept of *karma* is very important. *Karma* means action. The Vedic sages saw very clearly the importance of action and the nature of cause and effect. They came to the understanding that action binds. A good action binds to positive results and bad action binds to negative results. What we are today (the effect) is the consequence of what we have

done yesterday (the cause). Being born in this world was seen as a bondage and people wanted to escape from this birth. To be born means to die, and there was a fear of death. People did not want to be born because they did not want to die. They longed for freedom from birth and death. Life in this world had for them no value. The idea that action binds led some people, particularly Jains, to go into caves and fast unto death.

There is an interesting statement in the Isha Upanishad which says that 'Actions done in God bind not the soul of man. Living thus a man may wish to live a hundred years'. What the Sage was saying was that it is true that action binds but if you surrender your actions to God then you are free from the consequences and you can live happily in the world. There is no need to go into caves and die because of a fear of your actions. The essential teaching of this Upanishad is 'Renounce and Enjoy'. Renounce your self-will and you can enjoy this life; life can be lived even for a hundred years quite joyfully.

Today there are many people who believe in reincarnation and there are people who do not believe in it. Officially the prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not believe in reincarnation. They believe in one life and the final judgement after this life, with either heaven or hell as the ultimate consequence. Religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism officially believe in reincarnation. One will be reborn until one finds final liberation. Heaven and hell are temporary states, and there is no eternal hell. Every person will be liberated one day although it might take a million rebirths.

My reflections on this subject have made me come to the conclusion that the solution does not lie either in believing in reincarnation or disbelieving in it, but in seeing it as a fact. This alone can be helpful in our spiritual life.

Reincarnation and Continuity

To understand the concept of rebirth we have to understand the idea of continuity. The essence of reincarnation can be summarised as 'the past enters the present and the present goes into the future'. This is continuity. This continuity can be at various levels: physical continuity, psychological continuity and spiritual continuity. Children receive their bodies from their parents. This is physical continuity, physical rebirth. There is also the continuity of cultures and values though now and then some changes might take place. There is also the continuity of belief structures. Hinduism might have begun thousands of years ago but it is given continuity until now. People are born to give continuity to the belief structures of Hinduism. Judaism was also born thousands of years ago but Jews are born to give continuity to the belief structure of Judaism. Buddhism was born two thousand five hundred years ago and Buddhists are born to give continuity to the belief structure of Buddhism. Christianity was born two thousand years ago and Christians are born to give continuity to the belief structures of Christianity. Islam was born one thousand five hundred years ago and Muslims are born to give continuity to the belief structure of Islam. We can say that these are the rebirths of belief structures.

There is also the possibility of the reincarnation of great personalities in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, such as the Dalai Lama and other Lamas. There is also the possibility of the reincarnation of personal memories. We might have come across many stories of the rebirth experience where the people concerned have been able to remember their past lives and have recognised people and places. Though these experiences are not very common they still have something to tell us. However they do not mean that the experience applies to every human being and that every human being is a reincarnation of the past. Each human mind is connected to every other mind so it is possible that some memories can enter into the conscious level, like the downloading of material from the Internet.

The realm of continuity is vast. The Mandukya Upanishad speaks of the dreaming consciousness in

which the past enters the present and goes into the future. This is the realm of continuity and we live in the dreaming consciousness. But this Upanishad also speaks of the deep sleep consciousness in which this movement comes to an end.

If we see reincarnation in the wider sense of continuity then we have to accept that it is a fact. But in the realm of continuity there is nothing original. We cannot say that we are living our lives, but rather than we are giving continuity to the past. We are not the masters of our own house but somebody is living in our house. Today is not meant for today, but rather today is meant for yesterday. If we believe in reincarnation without understanding it as a fact, reincarnation will bind us and we will allow this belief structure to condition our lives. We act according to our belief. If we see reincarnation as a fact then we have no choice and we have to free ourselves from its control. When we see clearly that the 'present' is not the master of its house but that the 'past' is living in it and controlling it, then the 'present' has no other choice than to free itself from the past and to affirm its own authority. When Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life', he is affirming its authority. He stopped the movement of continuity in him and he lived for eternity. His good news was that 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand'. The movement of continuity has come to an end and the manifestation of eternity is here. He also used symbolic language to describe this experience. No one puts new wine into old wineskins, lest the skins burst. New wine needs new wineskins. No one patches a new cloth to the old garment lest it shrinks. The message of Jesus is the message of discontinuity and eternity. To say, 'I am the way, the truth and the light' is to be free from all belief structures. To believe in something is to be under that belief. Belief is greater than the human being. To say, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' is to affirm that the human being is greater than belief.

It is of course natural that we start with belief structures but we also have the possibility of growing out of them. To say 'I am the way, the truth and the light' is the most liberating and humble statement. It is most liberating because a person stops the movement of the past, the continuity or reincarnation. A person be-

comes original and creative. A person lives for eternity. It is also the humblest statement because a person refuses to continue into the future, refuses to reincarnate in order to give life to the future. The future is meant for the future and not for the continuity of the past. It needs tremendous humility to renounce one's desire for reincarnation and to accept that the future is meant for eternity and not for one's continuity.

From the biblical point of view we can say that humanity was created for eternity and for the manifestation of the image and likeness of God. But humanity has taken the wrong direction by choosing the path of becoming. The cause of this path was the desire to become like God. It was this desire which was the cause of ways, means, religions and belief structures.

It was this desire that was the cause of time. In this sense we can say that ultimately it is the reincarnation of desire and time in which every movement of the past is present. Jesus has called humanity to stop this movement of time and desire and to enter the realm of creativity and originality.

To be concluded in the next edition

Tales of Awe and Wonder Our Medieval Heritage

by
Johanna O'Mahony Walters

Joan Walters, a long-standing member of the Sangha has published yet another delightful book of the lives of saints.

Tales of Awe and Wonder brings our rich spiritual tradition to life in a direct and straightforward way that will appeal to young people. It is both comprehensive and clear, each story bringing out the essentials of a saint's life, starting in their childhood, so young people can immediately relate. Each biography is followed by material to deepen thought and to teach, beautifully pitched at the right level. The map and the timeline add to the clarity of the whole book.

Tales of Awe and Wonder is an ideal Christmas present for the young and not so young.

Kim Nataraja

The Sangha in Northern Ireland

Some reflections on Br Martin's trip to Belfast

It is said that nothing occurs by chance. On a recent visit to the local library I saw on display a biography of Fr Bede Griffiths. As a yoga teacher I had heard of him, but that was about all. I was curious to find out more about this remarkable man whose life experience bridged East and West, but did not take the book out as I was busy at the time marking exam papers (I have a part-time teaching post at the local university). A couple of weeks later when I heard 'by chance' that Brother Martin was visiting Belfast, I knew I wanted to hear him speak. Sighle (Sheila) Mary O'Donoghue, a local powerhouse of energy and Christian charity, has been hosting his visits to Belfast for some years, but I was amazed at the number of people that even she managed to pack into her sitting room – well over thirty! I saw a couple of people I know, but even if I hadn't it would not have mattered, because I was made to feel instantly at home. The others present were all whom I would describe as 'enquiring people' a mixture of clergy and laity who were seeking a way through the morass of doctrine and custom that makes up much of the Church today.

Brother Martin did not lecture, rather he spoke to the thirty of us in such an informal and friendly way that I, for one, felt that he was addressing me and my concerns and interests alone. He began by asking us what kind of being a human being was. We amassed a number of answers – a sentient being, a sexual being, a social being, a thinking being, a being linked with the divine and so on. He then addressed each facet of human personality in turn, showing how it formed an essential element of the human condition. To be completely human we had to acknowledge and nurture all

those component parts – to ignore any one would lead to an imbalance which was other than God's intended destiny for us.

After the main part of his talk, the question session included discussion of many issues affecting people trying to follow the Christian path today. Those who had heard Brother Martin before confirmed that he had been as illuminating as ever, while those, like myself, who were newcomers, were deeply impressed by his learning, his humour and self-effacement. I went home, went to the library and took out the book! My 'chance' encounter with Father Bede, Brother Martin and Shantivanam has opened up a new chapter form, linking my yoga interests with practical western spirituality. I'm curious to see where it will take me next.

Ruth Gilmore

Now my question to Brother Martin was this: 'What is the meaning of this saying, "Christ will be King until He hands over his Kingdom to God, who will be all in all", or words that effect. Brother Martin said, 'So what do you think it means'? This took me deeply into my inner awareness, at the level of one-ness, where it came to me:

Since God (Tao) is the essence of my being, if I allow that unity to take possession of me, so that God's role is no different to all I think and feel and say and so, then God is all in all.

Now the expression of the essence of our being, in the forms of our existence, if we let it express itself, freely and openly, in all our words, without concealment, no editing, blame or self-justification, will reveal itself to us, so that the essence of being will reveal itself to us, individually, in whatever form of expression we use to represent reality to ourselves. In other words, this essential unity, being the ground of our existence, cannot hide itself from us if only we are totally open and honest. For this reason every form of existence, if we can enter fully into it, will also be a revelation of our own essence, which is God.

For this reason we can also say that every form of existence, if penetrated by the spirit of God's love in our

love, reveals itself to us as an expression of God's being. Essentially he is all-in all. Therefore every form of existence is a representation of his essence.

Stan Papienus

In recent years Brother Martin has visited Belfast every summer, and every year he has enlivened his listeners with his fresh and liberating spiritual insights.

Regrettably our religion, as it is understood by many Northern Ireland folk, does not unite us as a Christian community. On the contrary it separates us from ourselves and from each other, and every July the peace of the province is disrupted by sectarian strife and intolerance.

I feel that we could garner much healing wisdom from the understanding which Brother Martin offers, with his benign equanimity when challenged, his invitation to reconsider, and with his quiet acceptance of the way we are.

Personally I do appreciate the help that he has given me, and I know that others have also been relieved of much confusion and self-condemnation.

Brian Torrens Spence

His help and guidance during these times of transition is truly of the Holy Spirit. People lose heart during all the confusion and we need an authentic Christianity that fulfils our spiritual hunger. Many have felt it is an either-or situation—go back to a comfortable medieval past or retire to plough a lonely furrow.

A social movement of seeking for God's will is the seed of the new Pentecost. Sharing and growing together—a family of Easter Hope.

Clára Ní Ghiolla

Brother Martin will again be visiting the UK this June and July—details in the next newsletter.

Reflections on the Prinknash Abbey retreat

David Patterson & Karen Sussmann

We came to the Autumn Retreat from backgrounds which very much reflected the developing philosophy of Fr. Bede – a mixture of both Eastern ‘spiritual’ and Western ‘rational’ life experiences. The retreat was held in St. Peter’s Grange – which was the monastery itself when I last went there many years ago as an altar boy, attending the bishop, on a pilgrimage from the Clifton Diocese!! It was very much an ideal location naturally creating an atmosphere for self-reflection as well as being surrounded by the beautiful Cotswolds and not least the inspiration of Fr. Bede who was himself a monk at Prinknash for many years.

The retreat began with supper on the Friday evening and this was followed by introductions and then a period of meditation. From the introductions it became very clear that there was no specific prototype for being an attendee – there was the full range of spiritual experiences and religious development as well as the mixture of careers, backgrounds and reasons for being on the retreat. For some retreats were an important part of their calendar and had been for many years, for some it was their first Sangha retreat and for yet others it was their first retreat experience of any kind. The diversity and openness felt very encouraging for the sharing of this small part of our spiritual journeys.

From Friday night through to Sunday lunchtime the silence was to be maintained. During this period the programme included times when we came together for meditation and chanting following the traditions of Shantivanam; there was a spiritually centred Yoga session – introduced to the programme only on the first evening by

the democratic wishes of the whole group – and a Mass on the Sunday morning led by a monk from the Abbey. Of great value for us was the inspirational, if indirect, contact with Fr. Bede through videos of him developing his ideas, philosophies and teachings (we would recommend anyone to make use of this medium).

As newcomers to these retreats we feel that it may have been helpful to have a theme or focus for the weekend. Whilst we appreciate that some may have come to spend their time primarily engaged in personal reflection we feel that spiritual growth also requires communication with others and opportunities for this were limited. This led me to disengage myself to some extent and I regret that and hope that others did not find this disruptive. Perhaps more specific periods of silence together with short discussion periods could bring about a clearer focus, togetherness and opportunity for supporting individual growth. Having watched the videos of Fr. Bede and read his books and daily meditations it would seem to be a very natural part of the weekend to discuss and then contemplate in silence issues he raises as they apply to us, our spirit and our faith and the practical implications for our daily lives. There is a wealth of inspirational texts and lectures capable of opening up a new and constantly developing understanding within ourselves and being surrounded by friends of presumably similar persuasion is so rare an opportunity that it is sad not to make the most of it.

Finally we would like to thank Adrian and Jill for facilitating the weekend which offered a wonderful opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. It was presented with great care and love and enabled all to partake at a level which was comfortable for themselves. We would very much like to continue to be part of and contribute to the work and ideas of the Bede Griffiths Sangha.

On a more local note we would like to ask if anyone in the South West (Bristol and westwards) would be interested to get together for discussions and to look at ways in which we, as a local group, can contribute to the development of the work and messages of Fr. Bede. Phone us on 01823 444779

SANGHA SPRING RETREAT May 4 - 7 2001

For the third year we are holding a 'long weekend' silent retreat at our spiritual home, The Skreen, near Builth Wells in mid-Wales.

The retreat runs from Friday evening until Monday lunch, over the May Bank Holiday weekend. The inclusive cost, with vegetarian meals, and twin-roomed accommodation, is £85. (Some assisted places are available for those on low income.)

The retreat follows the usual pattern of Sangha events: the rhythm of the day is based on the monastic timetable of Shantivanam, Father Bede's ashram in South India. This includes sitting & walking meditation, community prayer (which involves chanting, and readings from the sacred scriptures of all traditions) and time to be with yourself, to read, rest or go for walks.

The beautiful surroundings lend themselves to this experience of contemplative living, in keeping with Father Bede's vision.

Please contact John Careswell immediately, as it is nearly fully booked. Write to: 70 Weymouth Road, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1HJ or phone 01373 471317.

Caroline Mackenzie has an exhibition of watercolours at the museum, Brecon, until 10th March.. As the catalogue says, "In these lyrical paintings she moves freely between the worlds of East and West...they are a text that are at once personal and universal".

INDIA VILLAGE TOUR 2002/3

Would you be interested in joining a South India tour in 2002 or 2003 which would visit charitable projects working in village development or with street children, as well as a retreat at Shantivanam or Kurisumala?

We need to know soon what sort of appeal this has. We have floated the idea with Adrian and Jill and also with 'Soul of India' who would sort out the logistics. The theme would reflect the involvement of Shantivanam in its local community.

Our idea comes from our own experience. In our last two visits to India and its soul, we have found ourselves spending less and less time touring temple sites. Instead, we have been seeing at first hand how poor villages are transforming their lives through self help and street children growing in happiness, skill and love. Looking back, we found our tours had become pilgrimages and we ourselves had become transformed, challenged and enriched.

Of course, this kind of tour requires great delicacy lest the real people we visit become objects of curiosity. A dozen people can seem like an invasion to them. Then, there is the issue of contrast between our life style and theirs. But all this is part of the learning exercise before and during the time.

At this stage, please merely register an interest with us by 'phone or fax on 01252 843133 or bernardkilroy@uk2.net write to us at 10 Hunts Common, Hartley Wintney, near Hook, Hampshire RG27 8NT. Then we would get in touch to try to ensure our plans reflect your interest and the time you have.

There is neither monetary interest nor kudos in this for us. Indeed, if you think you could lead such a tour, we would be very happy to pass this responsibility over to you.

Bernard and Janine Kilroy

Father Bede on meditation

During a visit to Osage Monastery in the USA

Father Bede was asked to comment on meditation as a point where East and West can meet. How can the Western tradition learn a little more from the Eastern tradition of meditation?

“We have a very fine, what we call contemplative tradition in the West. It stems from the New Testament in St. John and St. Paul, especially in the St. John’s Gospel, but it was developed among the Greeks, particularly St. Gregory of Nyssa – a great Father of the 4th Century, who had absorbed the Greek tradition. He and his brother St. Basil went to the University at Athens, a pagan university, and they learned the whole Greek tradition there, particularly Platonism. And they brought that into their Christian understanding and then developed a wonderful mystical tradition. So Gregory of Nyssa has three paths: the first is the *Purgative* way – freeing yourself from sin and attachment to the self; then the *Illuminative* way – where you open yourself to divine revelation – to the revelation of God and to the world; and thirdly, the *Unitive* way where you pass beyond all word and concept into the divine darkness. That is the Christian mystical tradition which was carried on right to the Middle Ages. There is a wonderful little book called *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an English medieval treatise which is totally centered on this cloud where, beyond your mind you encounter God in unknowing. You don’t know mentally, you go beyond to the unknowing and discover God.

And so we have developed a very traditional meditation, trying to go beyond the senses and the mind, to be open to the divine darkness beyond. In our Ashram we use the Jesus Prayer as the mantra. In most traditions you try to focus your mind by repeating some word which has a vital power in it. The name of Jesus is believed to have this power, so you sit and breathe

and calm yourself. Then you repeat the mantra and that focuses the mind and opens you onto the Beyond. That is a method of meditation of the West.

What we find today is that people are looking for a method and many Christian Churches do not have a method of meditation. We have the Ignatian method in the Catholic Church which is excellent as a beginning. Ignatius intended it to go beyond to contemplation, but normally it was stopped at that point. But it can be used to begin meditation on a Gospel passage and then go to a deeper level of communion with God and Christ and then you must go beyond to the Ultimate, beyond words, beyond thought, beyond image, beyond every created thing to the Ultimate. So there is a Christian tradition, but I do feel we need to contact the Oriental tradition to renew our own tradition. This is a vital need”.

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2001

Saturday Retreats at Valerie Cherry’s

6th Jan, 17th March, 19th May
14th July, 1st Sept, 6th Oct

These are held in a beautiful riverside house and garden in a group of not more than 12 people.

Most of the day takes place in silence. The day will be informed by diverse faiths, ancient and newer, beginning with a short period of silent worship, in the manner of the Quakers.

Opportunities may include healing, one-to-one talking, foot massage, and meditative yoga.

There are aids to focusing and a programme is offered which includes a guided meditation or journey. It is a day for yourself, for re-assessing, finding your way, contemplating, regenerating, touching in to the Divine.

Drinks, buffet lunch and supper are included. Food is vegetarian.

Cost £15 (concessions) Phone or write for details and bookings.

Reeds, The Retreat, Topsham, Exeter EX3 0LS
(01392 873367)

Poetry Corner

She's up before the sun
colours the clouds
over the mountain.
spectres of pine
from the waist up
rise out of the valley mist.

It's the she-fox
her long silhouette
weaves across and across.
of necessity she squats
melting the cold turf
in the monochrome half-light.
No dog-fox this
staking out its boundaries.

Four pads chilled by the dew
pattern the lawn.
One ear cocks
to the waking creak of the house.
The other listens for the soft rustle
of surfacing earthworms.
These are her salad days,
no cubs to nip her soft underside
tugging on swollen dugs.

September noon
lights white his hair
in the meadow below a farmer treads tall and straight
as his thumbstick.
He signals and whistles to his Welsh colly dogs
working the flock,
calming the jet-startled sheep.

From my eyrie above
I see the subtle signals,
note economy of movement,
the ancient ties
between man and beast.
Sheep flow through a gateway
like wooly-coated mercury
marked by a lad on a quad-bike.

As for me I cannot
hold in my happiness
here in this green place.
It spills out of every cell,
lights my way.
Can't you see it
sparking my crown?

And though I am as lowly
as a blade of grass
the vixen paces over,
yet I have an eagle's head,
so when I dare fly high, high,
pulled like Icarus to the sun,
why should I care
when my wings burn,
if I melt in the singleness
of your Holy Eye.

Valerie Cherry

Written at the Skreen retreat September 2000

Reflections on the Sangha Forest Retreat held at the Skreen in September 2000

Joan Walters

This was a very special week gently led by Kim assisted by Meister Eckhart and the Desert Fathers. Geoff with his own unique style led us daily in what can only be called "Contemplative" yoga. The spirit of contemplation was enhanced by the bhajan singing and circle dances on alternate evenings. The Welsh setting gave the bhajans that special "heol".

The group gelled together beautifully and love flourished in the silence. It was a delight to see Susanna's health improve with each day as she went about radiating love in all directions. We were so privileged to have this time with her. Carol, the new cook was really helpful and accommodating. Quaker made sure we were all properly fed and looked after, and mealtimes never ran more smoothly.

Mary's celebration of the Indian Eucharist has really given this week in Wales a very beautiful dimension, Father Bede would have approved.

IF not delivered please return to:

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

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Again we have news of members and friends who are ill. You may like to remember, Jeanette Seagar, Babs Tibbles, Winifred Dearden, Ann O'Donoghue, David Caudwell and Ken Knight. We are putting you all in the light. Please let us know if there is anyone you would like to add.

Future Sangha Events

Spring Retreat 2001, The Rowan Tree

Centre, The Skreen, Bulth Wells, Powys.

4th—7th May 2001. Please see notice on Page 9

Summer Seminar with Br Martin Sahajanda at Park Place Pastoral Centre, Wickham, Hants. July 13th—15th 2001. **BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED**

The annual silent 'desert' retreat at The Skreen will take place 2nd—8th September 2001. Booking form will be sent out with the next newsletter

The Sangha Winter Retreat, St Peters Grange, Prinknash Abbey Nov 2nd—4th 2001 Booking form will be sent out with the July newsletter.

Regional Contacts

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Overseas

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The next Council meeting is being held on 10th March at Tuesley Manor Retreat Centre near Guildford. Please phone Adrian and Jill if you would like to attend.