

The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter

December 2003 Volume 6 Issue 4



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

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Father Bede's letters

Ten years after Father Bede's death, many people are finding his wisdom and vision for the first time through his books. It is for this reason that we are so pleased that the new editions have been made available this year by Medio Media.

But Father Bede was also a prolific letter writer, and I am now collecting and transcribing as many of his letters as possible so that they can be available for publication in the future. It would be good to have a volume of letters available for 2006, the 100th Anniversary of his birth.

At the moment I am transcribing several hundred letters he wrote to his friend Mary Allen. These are full of fascinating insights of philosophy, theology and spiritual advice, as well as personal details of his life as a monk, how he became interested in Indian philosophy and eventually how he came to fall in love with India. I already know of hundreds of other letters which I will be working on over the next few months (or years!).

Books are written with publication in mind, so they have a different flavour to letters, which have immediacy and directness flowing from their being addressed to one, special, person. As many people

who met him will attest, Father Bede had a gift of understanding just what it was that each person wanted or needed, and this comes through in his letters.

If any Sangha members have letters, or know of letters, that they would like to be transcribed and included in this collection, and possibly included for publication, please do let me know.

Another project in hand is the transcription of audio tapes of commentaries he gave on the bible in the temple at Shantivanam. These would probably also make a wonderful volume in the future. If anyone would like to transcribe some of these tapes, again, please do be in contact.

Jill and I are off to India in December and January. We will visit Shantivanam and take the good wishes of Sangha members to Brother Martin and the Community.

What a joyous Advent retreat we had at Prinknash with 40 people coming together. With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to you all

Namaste

Adrian

Sangha visit to Shantivanam

How would you like to spend next Christmas at Shantivanam Ashram?

We are thinking about the possibility of a Sangha Christmas at the ashram and wonder if there are any members who would be interested in coming along.

No detailed plans have been made at the moment, but it could be a lovely opportunity to experience the life of the ashram, to hear Brother Martin teach and to visit the social work projects that Sangha members support so generously.

Contact Adrian and Jill if you are interested - even if only slightly!

At vaere I harmoni med Guds vilje I nu'et

Translating the Danish into English the heading reads, *To be in Harmony with God's will in the present moment*.

This was the reply that Father Bede gave to our Danish friend Vicky Lasheras asked him, 'What makes you happy?' The occasion was when she and her husband had a whole hour with Father Bede just before a talk he gave in Copenhagen in 1984.

It was Vicky who organised the visit and the talk and it was to be a major event in her life. Recently a

Danish newspaper featured an article about her work as a radio presenter and the inspiration she drew from Father Bede.

Vicky has been presenting programmes for over five years and she regularly uses the opportunity to tell people about Father Bede and the teachings of Brother Martin.

Recently, Vicky sent us a copy of the newspaper article - and if any Sangha member would be willing to translate from the Danish then we will be very happy to let you have it so that we can publish it in a future newsletter.

Sangha silent retreats

Plans are underway to re-instate the Sangha silent retreats which, for many members, have been the spiritual core of Sangha life and activity.

The first Sangha gatherings were silent retreats at The Rowan Tree Centre, a wonderful retreat house run by Mary Lewis near Builth Wells in central Wales.

Since the closure of the Rowan Tree Centre, feelers have been out to find a suitable venue.

St Non's is a retreat house perched on the top of the dramatic cliffs to the south of St David's in West Wales. Sangha member Joan Walters will be organising a week long

retreat here in October 2004.

The Stanton Guildhouse is a beautiful house nestled in the Cotswold Hills just above the village of Stanton and with panoramic views over the Vale of Evesham. This will be the setting for a weekend silent retreat in April led by our Sangha member Jane Saunderson, who has sought out this venue; she feels that it will just fit the needs of the Sangha.

Both of these retreats will be in silence and will be limited to a small group - possibly no more than fifteen people at each. Booking details will be announced in due course.

A woodland in memory of Father Bede

Sangha member Rosemary Fitzpatrick writes:

I am concerned at all the air travelling and want to help the planet to continue as a habitation for all our current species.

My idea is that we start a fund to purchase woodland in memory of Father Bede. Every time we fly - and so add to the carbon in the atmosphere of the planet - we could contribute a sum of money to this fund, which would have the effect of offsetting the pollution we have caused, by planting an appropriate number of trees.

Not only would this raise

awareness of the issue, but it would also help restore the beauty of the countryside that Father Bede (and surely all those who have been inspired by him) so loved.

I belong to the Small Woods Association and I am sure that this organisation would be a great help in implementing this idea.

So what do you think. Please contact me and we will see if such a project could be made possible.

*Rosemary Fitzpatrick, Waen Ffynnon, Pentre Coch, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 2YF
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News from Australia

I am writing this primarily on the request of Fr Michael Mifsud who is the Prior and Chaplain of the Camaldolese Benedictines in Australia. I am also an Oblate of the Camaldolese Benedictines and we are affiliated with the new Camaldolese Community in Big Sur, California. As you know, Shantivanam has close ties with the Camaldolese.

Michael is seeking some 'association' with the Bede Griffiths Sangha in the UK via the Montserrat Ashram at Millgrove in Victoria, Australia. He thought you would be interested in Fr Bede's connection with Montserrat.

In 1989, Fr Roger McGinley (from Montserrat) spent 6 weeks at Shantivanam and received sanyassa from Fr Bede. Fr Michael also went to Shantivanam in 1992 for 6 weeks and also received sanyassa from Bede...and was also received by him as an Oblate of the Camaldolese Benedictines.

Also in 1992, Fr Bede visited Montserrat on May 13...one year exactly before his death. Together with Fr Roger and Fr Doug Conlan (who brought Bede to Australia), Fr Bede officially blessed Montserrat and affiliated it with Shantivanam.

Roger and Michael begin as co-directors of Montserrat and are visited by Fr Christodas. Along with other retreats throughout the year concentrating on an East/West focus, Montserrat celebrates a yearly 'Bede Griffiths day'. Just last month, Fr Michael gave a retreat on the 'River of Compassion'.

With Love and Peace,

Andrew Howie

iona@netspace.net.au

**"Do Not Move in Order to touch me"
21st February 2004**

Sangha member Ken Knight, is offering a day on Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), head of the Platonic Academy in Florence, who re-introduced non-dual teaching into the Christian path. The day is at the Fintry Trust, Fintry, Brook, Nr Godalming. Tel 01428 682621

Events in Scotland 2004 - advance notification

Dear Sangha

This is just an advanced notice so you can publicise it in the newsletter. We have booked Scottish Churches House in Dunblane for weekend (from 4pm on the Friday) 18th/20th of June 2004 for a retreat with Br Martin.

Cost to include 2 nights bed plus light breakfast, lunch, and evening dinner will be £95.00 per person sharing a twin room. About 7 single rooms are available at a supplement of £25.00.


If anyone is interested please initially book by sending £20.00 deposit to either myself or Mary Laidlaw or by contacting either of us to find out more.

Namaste and Merry Christmas.

Steve.Woodward

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mary.laidlaw@btpenworld.com



Holy Week Sadhana 2004
... extends the liturgies with optional 'open door' meditations, alongside Indian Christian spirituality - with Pam Lee, Caroline Mackenzie, Bernard Kilroy. Those of any faith or none welcome. Liturgies with the Indian Franciscan Sisters and Fr Andrew McMahan OFM (Hampshire entry).

www.parkplacepastoralcentre.co.uk
Bookings: 01329 833043 (fax 832226) Details: 01252 843133 (fax too)

Ashram Retreat: south INDIA?

If your search is this way and budget modest, we may be able to advise, eg for Shantivanam (Bede Griffiths), Kurisumala or ... Otherwise perhaps alongside a 2005 programme in Bangalore for 2-3 weeks, + inter-faith dialogue, yoga, temple visits, maybe beach. Various options but enquire soon.



www.SOVLutions.co.uk/InscapeRetreats
Bernard & Janine Kilroy tel/ fax 01252 843133

MARRIAGE: A Divine or a Human Institution?

John Martin Sahajananda



Dear Jill and Adrian, I consider it as a great privilege and honour to be the part of your wedding celebration.

You have fixed the date of your marriage in such a way that I can come and participate in it. I would like to thank you also for giving me the honour of sharing a few words to those we have gathered here on this auspicious occasion.

This occasion is quite strange for me because it is not usual in India that older people get married

while their children and grand children are present. It is amazing for me to see, Jim, a grown up son, inviting people for the celebration of his mother's marriage. I cannot imagine anything like that happening in India. It is like a cultural shock to me but of course I am getting used to it.

My serious reflection on the theme of marriage began during my studies in Rome six years ago. I used to live in our monastery where people would come to the mass on Sunday. One Sunday the gospel reading was on divorce, where Jesus says, 'Let no one put asunder what God has joined together'. The priest had great difficulty in giving a homily on this subject because majority of

the people who attended the church were people who were separated from their husbands and wives and living with their partners. They wanted to be the part of the Church but their life journey had brought them to the situation where there were not able to fulfil the demands of the Church and they were not allowed to receive the communion. It caused a deep wound and pain in their hearts, and the priest did not really know what to say; if he stuck to the official teaching of the Church he may not see them next week in the church.

Though I am a monk this situation made me reflect seriously on the nature of marriage and on Jesus' statement on marriage and

This article on marriage is based on a homily given at the marriage of Jill and Adrian in June 2003. The photo shows Br Martin on this occasion

divorce.

The first question that arose in my mind was whether marriage is a divine institution or human institution. If it is a divine institution then is it possible for marriages to break? We see that divorce is a daily phenomenon; I do not know the rate of divorce but it seems that one out three marriages ends in divorce, and the marriages of divorced persons are quite common, although these people have difficulties in getting married in the established institutional Churches. Our friends Jill and Adrian are both divorced and would have loved to get married in a church but they cannot have a Church marriage because of their divorce. A sympathetic vicar might be willing to give them a blessing but cannot solemnise their marriage. There are many Catholics in the same situation who go to the mass but they cannot receive communion because of their marital status but they can go for a blessing. They feel treated like second class Christians, a kind of spiritual apartheid. It causes tremendous pain and suffering in their hearts.

If any person has deep love and compassion for his/her brothers and sisters he or she has no other choice but to think seriously about the nature of marriage and divorce. Did Jesus really meant the way his statement has been interpreted that once a man and woman are validly married their marriage cannot be annulled, and that divorce is not possible? Every statement of Jesus or any holy person should be

interpreted according to the cultural, social and spiritual situation in which the statement has been made. Jesus was speaking to the male dominated patriarchal society in which men had the right to marry many wives and had the power to divorce them at will. Jesus might have been speaking against this male dominated social structure and defending the equal rights and the dignity of woman. Women cannot be treated like

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things or objects. The relationship between a man and a woman was like a subject and object. In this sort of relationship there is no marriage. Jesus wanted it be a relationship between a subject and subject, which is a real marriage.

It seems to me that one has to distinguish between marriage as an institution and marriage as an inner state. Marriage is not only human but also divine. We are ultimately called to our marriage with the divine, union with God. Jesus said, 'First of all seek you the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all things will be given unto you'. This kingdom of God is our marriage with God, our union with God. We read in the scripture that a man leaves his father and

mother and clings to his wife and they are no longer two but become one. This also applies to a woman. A woman leaves her father and mother clings to her husband and they are no longer two but become one. This also applies to our spiritual journey. We have to renounce God as our father and mother and cling to him/her as our beloved. Father and mother represent authority. In authority there is hierarchy, there is

no equality; in authority marriage is not possible.

But this marriage with God is not something we are going to achieve. It is already there. It is like a treasure hidden in the field, in our hearts. We have to find it; we have to discover it. We are united with God from all eternity; we can say that we are all married with God from all eternity, and that nobody can separate us from this marriage, from this union. No divorce is possible from this marriage. It is an act of unconditional love of God and what God has joined together no human being or human institution can put asunder. Jesus told his listeners that in heaven there will be no marriage and no one will be given in marriage because they will be like

angels. The angels are the union of masculine and feminine, so in the realm of the kingdom of God there will no marriage and so there will be no divorce. The reason is that there is already unity.

If we are all married with God from all eternity and if we are all united with God and with one another from all eternity then what is the purpose of our human marriage? It seems to me that the purpose of our human marriages is to help us to discover the real marriage already existing in our hearts and then bear witness to that marriage in our earthly existence. In this sense marriages are only a preparation for the discovery of the real marriage. We can say that our marriages are only betrothals until we discover our eternal marriage with God.

Is marriage a divine institution or a human institution? When we say 'marriage' we have to distinguish between the marriage, which is a spiritual reality and the marriage, which is celebrated in time and space. Marriage as a spiritual reality is a divine institution, but the marriage celebrated in time and space cannot be called a divine institution in view of the fact that it is breaking. If it is really a divine institution then it cannot break.

Is marriage then only a human or social institution invented by the human mind according to its need? We cannot say that is it a purely human or social institution. There is something more than the human and social elements in it. I would like to say that marriage celebrated

in time and space is a human institution, which is born out of human need, but which has divine approval.

Institutions belong to the level of the evolutionary process of the human ego. In this process of human evolution there are many systems that have come into being. But no system is absolute. In the evolution of human consciousness there have been institutions like tribalism, theocracy, dictatorships, monarchy, democracy and other forms. Today many developed countries or developing countries are run by democracy. Democracy is an accepted form of political institution. Other institutions like monarchy, dictatorship are disappearing or having only a symbolic value. Can we say that Monarchy was only a human institution? I would say that monarchy was a need at that stage of human evolution and has divine approval but today it is no longer a need in the present consciousness of the people. Today democracy is the need of the hour. Can we say that democracy is only a human institution? I would say that it is a human institution formed according to the present human need but has a divine approval (To say God approves it does not mean to say that God positively proposes it. It only is to say that God sees that it is a stage in the evolutionary process of the human consciousness. There was a time when the Popes crowned the emperors). But still it belongs to the evolutionary process of the human consciousness. We cannot say that it is perfect

system. I would say that democracy is the dictatorship of majority. Truth is not necessarily in the democracy. There was a time when everyone believed that the sun went around the earth but one person, Galileo, said that it is the earth, which went around the Sun. So majority opinion need not be the Truth, and democracy is not the last word; it has its own limitations; but it is the accepted system for the present development of the human consciousness. The last word could be 'Unanimity' or Unity, towards which humanity is moving. 'Unanimity' or 'Unity' is Love. So Love is the ultimate destiny of our human evolution. We come from Love and we return to Love.

Institutions (whether religious or secular) belong to the realm of human evolution. In this sense they have their own value and place but they cannot be absolutised. They are like tents, which we build on our journey towards the Truth. So also the institution of marriage belongs to the level of human evolution. It is a fact that different cultures and religions have different understandings of marriage. For some it is only a contract, which can be broken at any time, and for others it is a sacrament, which cannot be broken as long as the partner lives: one is free after the death of the partner; death puts asunder what God has joined together.

The essence of God or Truth is Love. We cannot love; love comes from God. It is God who loves in and through us. Human love is conditional love - divine

love is unconditional love. However great human love might be, still it is imperfect. Only God's love is perfect. Love begins when 'I' dies. Love cannot break. Love is not like a well into which we fall and from which we fall out. Falling in love also can be a kind of dependence on the other. Where there is dependency, there is no love. Love is possible only between two persons who are emotionally and psychologically independent. Ultimate love is the realisation of our oneness with God and with one another. We cannot begin with love; we have to grow into it. Love cannot be institutionalised; institutions are meant to help human beings to grow into Love.

But some times institutions can become obstacles. Jesus said that the Sabbath is made for human beings and not human beings for the Sabbath. This means that institutions, either political or religious, are meant to be at the service of human beings and not human beings at the service of these institutions. Jesus emphasised the centrality of human beings and not of institutions whether political or religious. If the institutions become absolute, then they become oppressive and evil. Marriage is also an institution that should serve human beings and it is not for human beings to serve the ideal of marriage.

The institution of marriage is a preparatory ground for the real marriage, which is the union of the hearts. There are many young people today who would not like to marry, probably after seeing so many

marriages (including the marriages of their parents) breaking up, but like to live together. The essence of marriage is love. If two persons *really* love each other then marriage is not an absolute necessary. If there is an external marriage it is only a sign of expressing the inner marriage, which has already taken place. But if two persons are externally married but have no love for each other then marriage is not a guarantee. Of course there is always possible danger that people do not want to take the responsibility of marriage and use the other as an object.

External marriage can really help people to grow into internal marriage. More than ninety percent of marriages in India are arranged marriages. And they are working well though they have their own negative aspects. Husband and wife learn to love each other and they find profound fulfilment in it. Two new persons are brought together and tied with a rope of marriage. Slowly they know each other and learn to live together. Arranged marriages have their own value. There are many people who find great fulfilment in their marriages, so one should not find fault with the institution of marriage: but it should not be absolutised; it has its role to play. In western society love marriages are normal practice. A boy and a girl come together and live together without the rope of marriage. When they think they can live together, they tie the rope of marriage. After some years they discover that they cannot live together and they break the rope.

So not all love marriages are working.

To day in the western world the religious institutions are going through a great crisis so also the institution of marriage. It has tremendous negative consequences on the individuals, on the families, on the children and on the society as a whole. At the same time one should not take it as something negative: every crisis has its possibilities for growth. Every crisis implies that the foundation on which we have built the house of marriage is not strong enough. We have to look for stronger foundations. This crisis also means that today the human consciousness is outgrowing the old foundations and it needs new foundations for the human relationships. The crisis of marriage is the crisis of human relationship, the relationship between two persons created in the image and likeness of God.

Human beings are threefold. They are body, soul and the spirit; physical, psychological and spiritual. Marriage has both external and internal aspects: internally it is establishing the harmony between the body, soul and

the spirit; externally it is entering into a relationship with the body, the soul and the spirit of the other. Possibly a relationship might begin with the body, grow into the soul and finally enter into the spirit. Some may find fulfilment at the physical level, some might find both at the physical and psychological level and some might go deeper into the spiritual. It is a growth, and real fulfilment comes only when we are united in the spirit. The spirit is the image and likeness of God; it is beyond time and space.

It is only in the spirit that we discover our eternal oneness with one another and with God; the marriage already existing in us. It is the marriage that God has joined and that nobody can separate it. In the spirit divorce is impossible. It is here that we experience God's unconditional love. What is a marriage from the human point of view may not be a marriage from the divine point of view. What is a divorce from the human point of view may not be a divorce from the divine point of view.

What we think of as marriages are only engagements from the point of view of God.

These engagements are not meant for the purpose of marriage in the future, but to discover the marriage *already* solemnized by God from all eternity. There may be many divorces from the human point of view but from the divine point of view they are only breaking of engagements. They are failed attempts to discover our original marriage through a particular person. The real marriages are the marriages of love in which the human spirits are united with one another and with the divine spirit, in which divorce is impossible.

All our attractions in relationships are in fact attractions to our spirit and ultimately to God but we may be caught up at the physical and psychological level and forget the spirit. That is why the call of Jesus to humanity is to search for the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all things will be given to us. This search for the kingdom is through relationships because human life is relationships and only in relationships we know who we are. Marriages could be understood as genuine attempts or help to rediscover our real and

eternal marriage with one another and with the divine.

Our friends, Jill and Adrian, are already married with children. They have seen the joys and sorrows of physical marriage. They have seen the joys and the sorrows of the psychological marriage. They have not found their ultimate fulfilment in them. They are divorced. Their new life of love began while they were searching for the ultimate meaning of their life, the kingdom of God. What they are today is the gift of their past; their past is not a waste; It is a ladder that brought them to their present position. I have known them for 11 years and I can say that their marriage is not just for the sake of physical fulfilment or psychological fulfilment but also for the sake of spiritual fulfilment in which they can use their bodies and the souls and to discover their spiritual marriage and ultimately their marriage with the divine. I wish and pray that the Loving God guides them on this path, to their ultimate goal.

sahajananda@hotmail.com



Prinknash Retreat Dec 2003

Graham Skilling writes: "So many thanks for the Sangha weekend. It was an experience I shall never forget. It really was so memorable I can't express it but I am truly so grateful and hope I can take the benefits I've gained to give to others. Thank you, Graham"

Photo of the shrine in the meditation room together with some Sangha members. Courtesy of Chris Parker

SANSKRIT CORNER

Ashram

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 starts with an explanation of the word ashram.

This is such a commonly used word that we all know what it means. Or do we?

Each of us will have our own intention when attending an ashram but we will be entering one of the most ancient traditions in human society: seeking out the company of the wise.

Four thousand years ago the RgVedic rishis were forest dwellers with their families. Disciples would arrive and there developed an educational system based in wisdom from spiritual insight. These were known as ashrams.

Although an ashram has a structure and requires ashramites to enter fully into the routine and to make efforts, we have a paradox: One central meaning of the word is 'no striving'. 'Shram' can mean 'tired, exhausted' or 'labour, exertion'; the 'a-' meaning 'no'. Or it could be based in 'shramana' meaning to 'wander' hence 'not wandering'.

Once in the physical space of the ashram we seek this art of effortless effort in the inner space. It is the gift of an ashram, through the work of all those in the past, that enables us to imbibe in the nectar of the Spirit in the place of 'no wandering'.

Hence Father Bede writes:

'An ashram is not so much an exterior place as an interior space. It is this space of the heart - what the Upanishads call *the space in the heart of the lotus* - that an ashram has to provide. People today all over the world are in search of this inner space, this point of communion with God. Only where people are continually living in search of God, seeking him with all their hearts, can this space be found. That is the responsibility of an ashram, to provide this space of the heart, where each person can find the inner space, the ashram, in their own heart and the world can find a peace in the midst of confusion.'

hilken_98@yahoo.com

TOMORROW'S CHRISTIAN

A five day seminar led by Adrian Smith, Sangha member and author of 'A New Framework for Christian Belief'.

The seminar will explore ways in which we can feel comfortable with and express Christian beliefs in a modern world.

It will take place at The Ammerdown Centre, south of Radstock, Somerset. February 15th - 20th 2004.

Cost is £190 (extra charge of £10 for en-suite rooms).

To book send your details with a £50 deposit (non-refundable) to The Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, BA3 5SW. Cheques should be made out to The Ammerdown Centre Ltd.

Art and Holy Ground 30 January - 1 February 2004 United College of the Ascension Selly Oak, Birmingham

This weekend with the artist Jyoti Sahi will focus on the sacred nature of the world in which we live. It will develop an appreciation of this sanctity and our ability to express it and share it with others. Jyoti Sahi's presentations will show how people of different faiths, including tribal religions, express their appreciation of the environment.

Jyoti Sahi is an Indian Christian artist and theologian, who works from his art ashram in Silvapuram, near Bangalore. He was a friend of Father Bede and currently is spending a term at the United College of the Ascension as the William Paton Visiting Fellow. The cost is £90 (residential) £50 (non-residential)

CONTACT: Ruth Tetlow (Tutor for External Programmes) on 0121 415 6828 (6810)

Memories of Father Bede Rupert Sheldrake

I have been asked to speak on how Father Bede influenced my life.

This means that I am going to have to speak personally and I am not used to that, rather I am used to speaking about scientific ideas, experiments and so on, so this is quite a new thing for me.

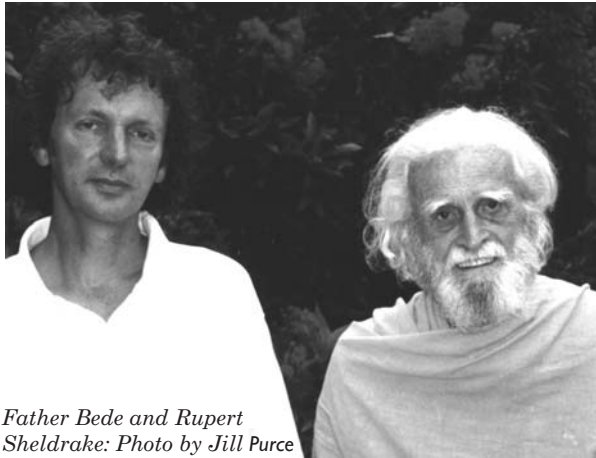
I have been involved in a dialogue between science and religion since I was a child. My father was an amateur scientist, herbalist, pharmacist and amateur microscopist. His laboratory was next to my bedroom at home and it was full of microscopes and big glass domes and cabinets of curiosities including bees tongues, scales from butterfly wings, sections of plants and even a radioactive slide that glowed in the dark.

I was brought up on a somewhat old-fashioned view of science, science as natural history. My father knew all about plants, he knew the names of animals and I kept a lot of pets. So I was very interested in biology and life. My mother was a very devout Methodist; she was a very fervent believer, and it was a very important part of her life. I was sent to an Anglican boarding school, where I got a very different kind of religion incense and a ritualistic, catholic type of religion.

When I was at school I was

converted to a kind of scientific rationalism by my biology teacher, and other science teachers. They filled me up with the standard rationalist view that religion is backward looking, holding people back, science is about liberating people and leading them forward.

I soon became rather disillusioned with the kind of biology that I was studying. I was doing it because I liked animals and plants but the first



Father Bede and Rupert Sheldrake: Photo by Jill Purce

thing you do at school and at university with the animals and plants you are studying is to kill them, and then you cut them up. And I was doing biochemistry so you don't just cut them up, you *grind* them up - you get little bits of them in test tubes and then you look at the molecules. The living organism disappears long before you get to do your experiments there are just little isolated bits of organisms.

When I got to Cambridge I felt that this approach of trying to understand living organisms just in terms of molecules was really not going to work. This was in the early sixties which was a very heady period in molecular biology. I was having tutorials from Francis Crick who said,

'with molecular biology we will prove that God does not exist and we will prove that we understand the very basis of all reality and life'. He was filled with this messianic zeal.

I still felt the need to get back to whole plants and in 1968 I got a scholarship from the Royal Society to go and work in the University of Malaya and I spent a year working on tropical ferns in the rain forest. On the way there I travelled through India and that was a very important experience. I suddenly found a culture that completely fascinated me. For some people the minute they get off the plane in India they feel as if they have come home in some way, and I felt like that. By chance I met an old Cambridge friend, an anthropologist, and with him went to visit a really remote

village. He had been living there for a couple of years, he knew the language and he was staying with a family and I was plunged into the heart of village India. It was the most wonderful experience for me and when we left the wife of the Brahmin whose house we had been staying in did a little ceremony; she put a garland around me gave me some rose petals, she said a prayer and she said that she prayed that I would be blessed by being in India and that I would come back. This was a wonderful initiation into India.

Then I got the opportunity to go and work in India at a new international institute being set up in Hyderabad where I had been appointed Principal Plant

This is an edited transcript of a talk on Father Bede which was given at the Sangha celebration at Gaunts House this summer. Rupert Sheldrake, scientist and writer, is a Sangha member from London

Physiologist. For me this was the perfect solution; I could live in India, I could do science, I could do holistic science working in a field and I could continue exploring Indian life. At that stage I was really drawn to Hindu temples, Hindu pilgrimage places, I went to various gurus including the local guru, Sai Baba whom I went to several times, and was duly presented with miraculously materialised ash, vibuthi. In the course of this I felt myself being strangely drawn back to the Christian tradition. I loved Hinduism but I realised that I could not become Hindu as I was not Indian, and more and more I realised that my roots were in the western tradition, and I was confirmed in the Church of South India in 1976.

At that stage I had a friend visit me in Hyderabad where I lived in the wing of a crumbling palace that I rented from a family of rajas; He had been in India for six or seven years and had been to more ashrams than anyone else I had ever encountered, and rather to my surprise a few weeks after he had been staying with me I got a postcard from him saying that he had found the best ashram ever. 'I strongly advise you come, come as soon as possible'. He gave me the instructions on the card, and it was Shantivanam.

I trusted his judgement because he was a gourmet ashram visitor so I took a couple of days off work and took the night train to Madras and the next train on to Trichy. When I arrived it was something completely off the edge of my imagination. I had never heard of Christian

ashrams and did not know that such things existed. I had certainly never come across anyone quite like Father Bede, who was a mixture of an English gentleman and Gandalf, or Merlin and Hindu sannyasi, a kind of enlightened sage. And all this in this totally enchanting environment that was exactly to my taste. This was a

Father Bede was a mixture of an English gentleman and Gandalf, Merlin and Hindu Sannyasi, a kind of enlightened sage

wonderful encounter.

I talked to Father Bede about what I was doing, and told him that I was thinking about writing a book about a holistic approach to biology and had been thinking about it for years. I said I had nearly reached the point where I thought I could actually do it. He invited me to come and do it at Shantivanam. So a year later I went to live there and started work on the book, *A New Science of Life*.

One of the things that Father Bede did was to show that this tension between Hinduism and Christianity that I was experiencing on a daily basis need not be a conflict. One of his great gifts was that whenever there was a

conflict he could see it from a higher point of view; the two parts of the conflict were included in something larger. When I talked to him about the attraction of Hinduism and how I could not see this as compatible with the Catholic Church, he said, "If the Catholic Church is to be catholic it has to be universal and that means that it must not exclude

anything'. I suddenly saw a vision of Catholicism, which was far beyond anything that I had encountered before. It was this inclusivism that I found in everything that he did. In philosophy Father Bede was extraordinarily inclusive. I was very interested in philosophy but during the seven years I was a don in Cambridge, conversation at high table and in the Combination Room seemed to have as its chief aim the use of the intellect to criticise; it seemed as if the highest goal was doubt. Whereas for Father Bede the highest goal was truth, but he didn't think that truth could be encompassed by words, it lay beyond words. It was a completely different attitude, and for him

philosophy was a path to truth and not just a means of doubt.

It was surprisingly helpful to talk to Father Bede about science. He had very little scientific background but by the time I was living there in 1978-9 he had developed an interest in science. He had been influenced by Fritjof Capra's book the Tao of Physics and he had seen that science as well as being narrowly and dogmatically reductionist had a holistic and deeper side that was beginning to open up. He often talked to me about science, and when I was writing my book, he would read each chapter as I wrote it, using a fountain pen and exercise books. It was interesting talking to Father Bede about science because within about two minutes he could get through the surface issues to the really deep questions underlying them, which scientists would not bring up. But when you do bring them up take you to the core of what science is about, which is where we reach the point where we don't know.

Father Bede was very keen on emphasising that you can't see things as *just* scientific. I remember talking with him about light, and said it is not *just* light, *just* wavelengths, it must be the light of God and spiritual light as well. Father Bede refused to separate physical light as dealt with by physicists and the light of the mind and the light of God, as if these were in some sort of metaphysical realm separated from the physical. He was also very

keen on quoting St Thomas Aquinas who, following Aristotle, said the soul is not in the body, the body is in the soul. The soul is more inclusive than the body, it is what shapes the body and gives it its form.

The twin themes of light and the soul are the main theme of my most recent book *The Sense of Being Stared At*. I think our minds are much more extensive than our brains, and I can briefly explain why. The question is how do you see? What is happening when you see me standing here now? The normal scientific view is that light is reflected off me, the electromagnetic field enters your eyes, forms images on your retinas, changes in the cone cells, impulses up the optic nerve, leading to chemical and electrical changes in your brain. There is good evidence that this does happen, but then comes the mystery where science can't go very much further. How is it that you consciously form an image? There is nothing in neurophysiology that explains consciousness at all. There is no reason in science why you should form a conscious image. Then there is the problem as to why you experience that conscious image as being located out here when it is supposed to be inside your brain.

What I am suggesting is a theory that is so simple that it is hard to understand which is that your image of whatever you are looking at is located right where it seems to be: it is in your mind but not in your brain. In every act of perception your mind is stretched out into the world around you. Vision is a two way process

light comes in and images are projected out. If that sounds implausible, the alternative view, the standard view says that it is all inside your brain, a sort of virtual reality display inside your head, that is, the whole experience of the world is inside your head. If you think about it that leads to extraordinary implications; it means that if you look at the sky in the day, or the stars at night, it is all inside your head. Your skull must be beyond the sky!

The view I am putting forward is actually simpler; your skull is where it seems to be and images are where they seem to be, outside and not inside you. Our minds reach out to touch what we are looking at. This means that we should be able to affect things by looking at them, and at first that seems absurd, but it turns out that it is testable. For if we look at another person there is a sense of being stared at. And that is of course what traditions in the rest of the world say. It is what Tibetan lamas teach and it is what children under ten in our own culture believe. It is children over ten who are taught to believe that images are invisible things outside your head.

The main thing about Father Bede was his example. There were many things I learnt by talking with him, books he showed me, but it was his example that was the most striking. Of course his life was based on prayer and meditation. This was not something he just talked about. At one stage I had a hut near his at Shantivanam. I would get up in the mornings to go

and meditate by the river, and there was Father Bede sitting outside his hut meditating. And when I came back he was still there meditating. It was something he actually lived and something you could see in his life. He was kind and luminous, he had this light, a happiness and joy that shone forth practically all the time. He led a life of extreme simplicity and Shantivanam was based on the principle of simplicity. I once asked how much it cost for the food and for me to stay there, to find out how much I should contribute to cover my costs, and I discovered that the year and a half that I spent at the ashram, including the money I spent on sandals and clothes, exercise books and ink, and on postage for the books I had sent from Bombay, from the British Council library, the entire year cost me about £200. I realised that I had enough in the bank to live there for the rest of my life.

Everything at Shantivanam was to do with living simply, lightly, not consuming more than you need to, respecting the ecology and the environment. He didn't put it in the language of environmentalism; he just lived it and the whole way the ashram reflected these principles. It is a green eco-ashram although Fr Bede would never have used such words. We used to eat off banana leaves in the traditional south Indian way. When you had eaten your meal you would pick the leaf up afterwards and as you went out of the dining hall there was the cow and you just fed the leaf to the cow, which would produce the milk for the next day.

Father Bede's simplicity was really striking and I once remember seeing him off on a trip to America. I walked with him from the ashram to the bus stop where he would catch the local crowded bus to go into Trichy, and over his shoulder was a shoulder bag. I asked him where his luggage was and he replied, 'It's here...I have got a spare cloth, a toothbrush, and a book. That is all I need'. This was all he had for a month in America.

Father Bede was very good at bringing out the best in everybody. In the 1970s, every visitor would spend half an hour with Father Bede, and people would come out glowing because he brought out the best in them.

He had a dry wit. Some of the things he did in his life I don't think were meant to be humorous, but I found them funny, as when I said to him, 'Buses and trains are so crowded, don't you ever find it difficult travelling around?' and he said, 'Oh no. I always look up in the Hindu calendar when it is an inauspicious day and travel then; there is plenty of room on those days'.

He was surprisingly unafraid of death and, indeed, I think rather tempted by it. One of the moments I saw Father Bede in what might have been a moment of temptation for him was when we had gone on an excursion to some Jain caves that he wanted to visit in some rocky hills in Tamil Nadu, around 1979. I went to these caves with Father Bede and Christodas; we walked along a path and up the hill, and we got to the hollow caves that were

beneath some overhanging rocks. It was beautiful with the plains set out below. In these caves there were human shaped recesses, little hollowed out spaces on the cave floor, like beds. Father Bede lay down in one of them, and he said, "Do you know what these are for? When the Jains felt that the time had come they would just come and lie here; they wouldn't eat or drink and they would just gradually fade away. I think that is such a wonderful idea". It was hard to get Father Bede to move, he really liked being there!

Three of my books are dedicated to Father Bede: the book I wrote at the ashram, *A New Science of Life*; a book I wrote with Matthew Fox, *Natural Grace: Dialogues on Science and Spirituality*; and one written with Terence McKenna and Ralph Abraham.

We initially wrote a book called *Dialogues at the Edge of the West*. I sent a copy of *Dialogues* to Father Bede and he wrote a letter about it. He never said anything was bad. What he said was 'it is good as far as it goes', which is what he said about our book. He wrote a letter that the three of us discussed together and the next book we did together, the *Evolutionary Mind* was dedicated to his memory. This is what he wrote:

'My dear Rupert, I have just finished reading your dialogues...it is as near a map to the future as I have ever encountered embracing every aspect of life as it is understood today. The only thing I find lacking in it is a sense of the mystical, of the unity which transcends all

dualities. As consciousness emerges from the primal unity the different forms of being are gradually explicated. You can think of it as the emergence of form from the original chaos or the descent of form from the original spirit. Matter is form emerging from chaos spirit is form in its original unity. Spirit is form communicating itself to matter. Matter is the mother, the receptive principle, the yin. Form is the father, the active principle, the yang. But all these principles are expressions of the differentiating consciousness which is itself beyond differentiation. From an undifferentiated consciousness we pass to a differentiated consciousness. Consciousness divides but only to reunite. The danger is we get stuck in the differentiated consciousness which is where we are now. But all differentiation leads back to a unity which transcends differences'

This is one of his great themes, always pointing back to that unity.

This is the final state of nirvana, sunyata or nirguna Brahma, Brahma without qualities. In the Trinity everything comes from its original source in the Father beyond differentiation and comes forth in the son in all the multiplicity of the universe and returns in the spirit to the original transcendent unity. but now in full consciousness. That is how I see it but you bring in an abundance of insights from science that are new to me.

The story of Father Bede's inspiration for me and for others is not over, but on-going. I feel his vision is highly relevant for the

modern world, more so than ever. In many ways, he was years ahead of his time. But then, in other ways he was not really concerned with time or passing fashions, but rather with that which is both beyond time, and present now. Rupert Sheldrake can be contacted at www.sheldrake.org

Postcard of Father Bede Now Available



In response to requests for a photograph of Fr Bede, the Sangha has published a colour postcard of Fr Bede saying mass at Shantivanam - courtesy of our Australian Sangha friend Doug Conlan.

These are available in packs of 10 for £3 inc p & p in the UK

from

Timothy Glazier

2 Tynings, Nailsworth, Glos, GL6 0EJ.

(01453 839488)

TimothyGlazier@aol.com

River of No Return

By

Winifred Dearden

Winifred Dearden, a Sangha member from Hove, Sussex, writes

After enjoying the article on his dreams by Fritz Kortler in the September issue of the Newsletter, I wondered whether my dream which I have called River of No Return might be of interest to members?

For many years it has haunted me and has remained as vivid and thought provoking as a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. I realised that the wheel probably represent the cycle of birth and death, but what does the river symbolise?; and also the rushes by which I hope to pull myself towards some mysterious destination? And what is the destination?

In a slowly flowing river stood a huge water wheel and fastened to each of the paddles were men and women secured by their clothing and unable to move, rotating endlessly round and round; I was one of these prisoners.

Suddenly I realised that there might be a way of escaping. I waited until my paddle had almost reached the high point and after an awful moment of indecision, almost panic, I tore my arms out of coat sleeves nailed the wheel and jumped...truly a Leap of Faith!

But instead of a terrifying plunge into oblivion I felt myself floating into the waiting waters below. Behind me I could sense the awful wheel and hear it creaking and grinding, also the cries of despair coming from the people with whom I had shared my fate a few seconds before. But the waters were not helping my progress and I found myself drifting backwards towards the side of the river upon which grew reeds and bull-rushes. These I grasped and began to laboriously pull myself slowly against the current and away from the great wheel.

This has always seemed important to me & I feel better for having given it recognition by writing it down...perhaps someone would interpret?

As Above - So Below

by

Jennifer Dunkley

Thoughts and ideas mostly precede actions (deductive reasons). Before we get up in the morning, we first have the thought that it is time to arise or not as the case may be. Likewise, before we create a garden, paint a picture or bake a cake, the idea in our mind (cause), precedes the effect - the physical act of dressing etc. Therefore, we are mini-creators, using what we have in the world around us. Sometimes in solving a crime, for instance, the facts are already presented and the detectives seek the causes (inductive reasoning). Human ideas are subject to change. Laws change to suit the particular times in which we live. But what about Divine ideas? Behind the visible and changeable is the changeless Reality, the

Eternal One, working in time and space. Divine ideas stand at the 'back' of human thought. In charge is the changeless. Perhaps an easy way to understand this is as follows: - Even though we age and most of the cells in our bodies right now will be replaced by new ones in the future, are we not the same person throughout our life? Our body is subject to time. We can roughly guess the age of a person by looking at him or her. What about the ideas? They are not subject to time; we have memories and can reminisce. We also do most of our planning ahead of time; what are we going to wear to that party next week? We must buy our theatre tickets for the forthcoming show. We are constantly ahead of time in our

thinking. Our ideas are not limited by space; how much space does a thought take up? It is also interesting how often in our speech we link ideas to Light. Everyone has heard of these expressions, 'He's a bright spark', or 'I've just had a flash of inspiration, or 'I wish you could enlighten me'. On the other side of the coin we speak of the 'dark ages' and say things such as, 'Don't keep me in the dark'. Although it is difficult to have a complete understanding of infinity, we must be able to comprehend something of it, or our minds themselves would be limited and the idea would not exist...are we not wonderfully made?

Jennifer Dunkley is a Sangha member who lives at St Margaret at Cliffe, Kent

Action Enquiry & the Sangha

Harry Underhill

At our lovely Gaunts House celebration, during a meeting of my small group we talked about whether there was a danger of the Sangha becoming a cult. This was in the garden on a warm afternoon, and I have to admit that I was not fully attentive (in fact, half asleep). I was not in full possession of my wits so asked to be excused further comment. However it set me thinking and this note is the result.

It seems to me that the energy of any group that is founded on the life of some extra-ordinary person will initially continue to draw on the memory and inspiration of that person after they have gone. The important question is; what will continue to hold the group together when the memories start to fade? Will it be backward looking or based in the present moment? If the former, the retelling of old stories will keep the group alive for a time, but unless a cult or 'in' group is formed with boundaries and rituals, the energy will diminish as memories fade.

During his life Fr Bede was always so open to new insights and new adventures that I believed the memorial which would please him

most would be for us to be so captured by his zest and wisdom that we continue actively, with new insights and wisdom, along the spiritual path that was so dear to him. He might even chuckle to observe that we intend to 'go beyond', further than he took us in his lifetime. To coin a phrase, 'that was very good, so far as it went'; now we set ourselves to go further. This I think, would also reduce the temptation to become a backward looking cult, feeding off remembrance of the past.

I have in mind that we take some of the great themes of Fr Bede's life and teaching, and devote one issue of the Newsletter to each. The leading article in each issue would outline Fr Bede's exposition of the chosen theme, together with interpretation of its relevance in today's fast changing world. Subsequent issues could include discussion and further contributions.

For myself the four key themes are *non-duality*, *meditation*, *'Go Beyond'* and *the new consciousness*.

I sense that Fr Bede has passed on to us some of the energy, wisdom and compassion that illuminated his life, and the challenge (and enjoyment) that lie before

us are to be open to yet greater things, in private and public life. The Sangha can provide the support and stimulus that we need. We might also like to consider the ideas and practices of the new leadership movement in spirituality and the workplace, based on personal awareness through Action Enquiry. This is a way of combining theory and practice, observation and learning, in a cyclical feedback loop, and is already being introduced into business and the civil service. Perhaps mammon is once again ahead of us!

Not everyone may be taken with this idea, but if only a few would like to experiment, we could start an Action-Enquiry group and see where it leads.

Harry Underhill is a Sangha member who lives in Hastings. If anyone is interested in taking this idea forward do write to him at

*73 Winchelsea Lane,
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812938*

The goal of the universe is consciousness of being, the final unveiling of the intuition that constitutes the human being. There were sages, there were seers, there were prophets and each of them grasped something of the mystery within, the mystery within every being. And their intuitions are stars, beacons for their brothers. From the shore they send a signal, and on the rock they have lighted a flame. And this flame is a call.

Abishiktananda

Reflections on Brother Martin's visit to Northern Ireland

I was lucky to be back in Belfast to learn again from Brother Martin in Sighle Mary's lovely hospitable house. Inner peace and serenity are the great needs of this fretful, anxious generation.

Brother Martin's teaching of the various religions providing the nest, the school, the care we need so much in growing up. But the day comes when each one has to take responsibility and not seek to shelter behind dogmas and customs. We met so many thinking people at the meeting. Was impressed by the Japanese student who came from such a different culture and interpretation of religion.

During Lent, at the Clonond Redemptorist Monastery, various religious teachers explained their own beliefs to us. Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Bahai and Chinese faiths. It was revealing that all taught love for God and love for each other. Words like harmony, love, and justice were used to summarise different religions. Sectarianism, bigotry, pride are condemned by each religion and we heard many beautiful and inspiring prayers and teachings from those who taught us with sensitivity and gentleness.

Where did all the conflicts come from?

The pride and power to dominate others. We Christians should especially listen to Christ and his emphasis on people above the law.

Brother Martin's books are very helpful and I send them to my bother, a missionary priest in Tanzania. We are all learning to be quiet and listen to strangers who are sent to help us along the way to truth and fulfilment of each soul, and to recognise, and pass by, the negative shadows that confuse us.

Thank you Brother Martin, again.

Clára hí Ghiolla lives in Belfast

I have only experienced Brother Martin's world over approximately three hours in, what is for him, the alien world of Northern Ireland. This being the case I would not consider myself an expert as yet on his teachings. However, being a physician of the old school, I am astute enough to recognise a thoughtful, sincere teacher, when I experience one. His approach, quiet, but with the weight of one who feels what he says, is reminiscent of my memories of the best Buddhist masters I

have encountered. I would assess his belief system to be very close to the 'modern' gnostic tradition of men like Shakespeare and William Blake.

Brother Martin, in my opinion, pierces the 'Cloud of the Unknowing' generated by the years of dogma in both the Catholic and Protestant approach to the Judaic/Christian faith. In this sense, whilst staying within the Catholic fold, he is a true Ecumenist and his vision of Jesus would sit easily with, what I consider to be, the best representatives of either faith.

Turning to his style of teaching, I found that this suited my mind in that he never forced a message home. He often, using pararelevant answers to questions, left the listener open to embrace and explore the relationship between God, Jesus and other mortals. This is his strength, but I fear, like myself, he will find that in today's world most people want encapsulated bite sized answers to the vast questions of mystery. We live, at least in this culture, in a time where the 'easy' option of fast food, mind altering drugs, plastic cards and the products of mass production seem to free us.

Gone are the days

where the mystery of the seasons, each with their own pace and influence on life, caused wonder. Gone even are the days when people pondered on how to make clothes, mend a coat, fix mechanical devices and even wonder how to make ends meet. Replacing this interest, with its opening effect on the mind, is the interest on the loan and how we can use it to stay within the best brand name so that we can affirm our position. Without these mere distractions which now consume society, Brother Martin would be persecuted as a heretic. As it is, the truth of his message will appeal only to those who thirst, while the merely hungry for the gluttony of modern life will shun him as a harmless eccentric.

Carry on Brother Martin, your yoke is light.

Ken McMullen lives in Newcastle, Co Down

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We're on the Web
 www.bede Griffiths.com
 and

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

Sangha Events

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

**Summer Seminar with Brother
 Martin Park Place Pastoral
 Centre ,Fareham 16th - 18th July
 2004. (Booking form in March
 newsletter)**

**Silent retreat, St Non's Retreat
 Centre, St David's, Wales. 9 - 16th
 October 2004. (Booking form in
 the summer newsletter)**

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

**Brother Martin's visit to Britain
 and Ireland.**

**Plans are now finalised for the
 visit which will include retreats
 and seminars in new areas of
 England and Scotland. Details
 will be published in the March
 2004 newsletter. For information
 phone Jill on 01227 752871**

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

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 1st
 Friday of each month at 2.00 p.m.*

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

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West Wales: Joan Walters 01646 692496

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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*