

# The Golden String

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## THE SOUND, THE WORD AND THE SILENCE Cyprian Consiglio

### I The Sound

Sound has many levels of meaning in Hindu philosophy. The broadest term in Sanskrit is *shabda*. *Shabda* is never simply noise; Hindus believe that *shabda*-sound has power. Especially powerful are sounds created by human beings because they are intentionally focused releases of energy, whether in music or in speech, above all in mantras. It is believed, for example, that the spoken word when properly controlled can reconnect one with the source of creation, and lead to direct illumination. Thus arises devotion to the folk goddess *Vac*, who is considered the mother of all mantras in the Tantric tradition, who channels sound into speech. Hence, too, the importance placed upon the chanting of the Vedas, which when sung properly are believed literally to release the wisdom they contain as real sacred energy that can “create the spiritual states of mind and of life which the words describe,”<sup>1</sup> and influence the course of human destiny and even the order of the Universe. The sadhus who wander the land chanting the sacred mantras and singing bhajans are doing so not only for their own spiritual attainments, but for maintaining the equilibrium of the world as well.

*Sphota* is the word used to name both the capacity that is in *shabda* to burst forth<sup>2</sup> and manifest its source—and the source of all *shabda* is ultimately none other than Brahman who is the essence of all speech—and the eternal word itself that arises from the unmoving principle with the illumina-

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## ISLAM’S RESPONSIBILITY TO ITSELF AND THE WORLD Wayne Teasdale

Every religion has engaged in war, and other forms of violence, at some junctures of its history, with the notable exception of Jainism, a tradition that has never had a war in its 2,500 year history, and that has consistently practiced nonviolence. Another exception might be Buddhism to a large extent. As a Christian, I am painfully aware of the bloody history of my tradition as a war-maker, or supporter of conflict, especially of the interreligious kind. A new dimension has emerged in our times with the attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, new in terms of terrorism happening in America itself. The shockingly tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the cynical appeal to Islam to justify such barbarism, occasions reflection in us all about the uses of religion in the past, and in the present. I want to take this opportunity to reflect on Islam’s moral responsibility in the face of “Islamic” terrorism, and the future of humanity.

At the outset I wish to make clear a longstanding respect I have personally for Islam as a great world religion that I’ve come to know through study, and especially through outstanding representatives of this faith in the inter-faith movement, and more precisely in the context of the Parliament of the World’s Religions. It is through these associations, and through my travels abroad, that a number of friendships with Muslims have developed. I have always experienced Muslims as peaceful, insightful, and effective members of the larger world community.

For generations Christians, Muslims and Jews have lived in peace, and even friendship, in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. In virtually every state where Islamic rule obtained, Jews and Christians were treated well. With the rise of Israel as a state in 1948 that peace was shattered.

Ferment has existed ever since between Arabs and Jews. Even in Egypt, a traditionally tolerant, broad-minded Islamic culture, the seventeen million Coptic Christians are under duress, and tensions are mounting.

Islam today has great difficulty adjusting to modernity. Many Muslims see their quranic values being eroded by the powerfully seductive, though spiritually superficial culture of America with its emphasis on corporate greed, entertainment and consumerism, backed up by military power to protect its sources of energy and other resources. U.S. policy towards Israel, its overwhelming presence in the

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## The Golden String

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### Sound, Word and Silence (Continued from page 1)

nating power of *sakti*. The *Sarvadarsana-samgraha* teaches that this “eternal word, called *sphota*” is actually the cause of the world, and is in truth identical with Brahman: “It shines out in the meaning of all things, and it is the source of the whole world.”<sup>3</sup>

Another broad term for sound in Sanskrit is *nada*, and there are two types of *nada*. There is *ahata nada*, which is struck sound, sound that is produced, sound that gives an immediate, usually pleasurable impact, sound of all kinds whether a human being can hear it or not. This, of course, is the same as the western understanding of sound as always coming from movement, from something having been struck, either the wind through the vocal cords or through a reed, or the percussive sound of the plucking of strings or the beating of a membrane. But according to Indian philosophy there is yet another type of sound which is the source of the first, *anahata nada*, cosmic sound. This is sound that is potential, thought but not expressed. This cosmic sound is perceptible only to the poet or the *rishi*; the unstruck sound which vibrates in space without a cause. The *anahata nada* is also the sound of devotion and concentration, the sound that the yogi hears in deep meditation whose function is to liberate the soul. There is no sound in the external world that corresponds to this internal one, but it is said that all other sound comes out of this, the unstruck sound.

We might say that the most primal reality of *shabda* is *Nada Brahma*, the sound of God, or God-as-Sound, the form of the formless.<sup>4</sup> And that sound, the sound of *Nada-Brahman*, the sound of the *sphota*, the God-sound is OM.

God's manifesting symbol

Is the word of glory OM.<sup>5</sup>

And the first and last sound heard by the enlightened is OM.

When you worship God with form, you must have a name for Him. The last word the yogi hears before passing into the final condition of illumination is OM; when he passes out of it and comes to his senses again, the first word he hears is OM. Call Him what you please, but OM is His universal name.<sup>6</sup>

All *ahata nada*, struck sound, is a manifestation of the unstruck sound, the *anahata nada*, that is to say of the OM. OM is the symbol of *sphota*, God as eternal Word. And since a symbol can never be separated from the thing signified, as both Western and Indian philosophy teach, so OM and *sphota* (God as Word) are one. Sonically, the mantra OM—and it actually is a mantra, the shortest of mantras—is made up of three sounds, A—U—M, and is thought to be the generalized symbol of all possible sounds, representing the whole phenomenon of sound production.

So when Hindus begin and end every prayer with OM, they are beginning and ending with the *Nada-Brahman*, the God sound, or God-as-Sound.

### II The Word

What do Christians mean when and if they chant the

OM? Many, certainly Fr. Bede, and Le Saux (Abhishik-tananda) and Monchanin before him, saw a foreshadowing of the Trinity in these three syllables. But it is not a very far stretch to see specifically the Christ as the Word hidden here; one can hardly avoid the similarity between the OM and the Word of Christianity, especially since both are associated with Creation.

As Gerhard von Rad points out, the Hebrews, too, like the Greeks, regarded language, composed of sounds, as possessing a creative power of its own. Language does not just convey meaning for the Hebrew; the very melodiousness and rhythm of the sound of language physically affect human beings. The spoken word, then, operates not only as a language but as a rhythmic and musical force. Israel was convinced that the word possessed creative power — and the word of YHWH even more so, since it towers incomparably high above mere mortal words.<sup>8</sup> Isaiah, like Moses before him, insists that the people should not think of the Lord's word as empty:

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;

it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.<sup>9</sup>

And the psalmist proclaims,

By God's word the heavens were made;

by a breath of his mouth all the stars. . . .

For God spoke it came to be;

God commanded and it stood forth.<sup>10</sup>

The divine word is an *event*.

Just as *sphota* is the eternal Word without division, the cause of the world, the essential and eternal material of all names and ideas, the power through which the Lord creates the Universe, and is in truth itself Brahman, so in the Christian tradition we speak of Jesus as that Word that God speaks, the *Logos*, and John begins his Gospel,

In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him,

and without him not one thing came into being.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Could we justifiably translate John's Prologue, “In the beginning was the *sphota*”? Le Saux translates the Prologue into Sanskrit:

In the beginning was the OM,

and OM was in Brahman,

and the OM was Brahman.

All things were made through him and for him . . .

OM was made flesh...<sup>12</sup>

He continues to speak of the OM resounding everywhere, not only in the Upanishads and Shaivite ritual, but in Christian liturgies and in the Bible — especially in the psalms, where he says it is “the groan of the afflicted, the

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*Sound, Word and Silence* (Continued from page 2)

song of the contented, anger at evil, the fervent appeal, the act of trust, of love."

Christ is the Word, the *sphota*, made flesh, the Word that was made flesh to dwell among us, with the power to burst forth and manifest the source, the Father. "Through the vibratory power of the OM, God created and sustains the entire universe"<sup>13</sup> and Paul sings in the canticle from the letter to the Colossians, "Through him all things were made; he holds all creation together in himself."<sup>14</sup> The Western monastic saint Hildegard of Bingen writes: "The Son is in the Father that same way that a word is in a sound,"<sup>15</sup> and the second Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation of the Roman Rite affirms, "Christ is the Word through whom you made the Universe." So OM, for the Christian, is the sound of the Word becoming manifest, the song of Jesus, the mantra of Christ who is the Word made flesh, the sound of the Word creating the universe through, with and in Christ, or, dare we say, the Word as the Christ creating the Universe.<sup>16</sup>

### III The Silence

Abhishiktananda writes,

But even in a Christian interpretation of OM, it is always in the first place a symbol of God's ineffability, the very last step in our ascent towards him that is capable of outward expression.<sup>17</sup>

The Maitri Upanishad [6,22] teaches,

There are two ways of knowing reality:  
one is through sound and the other is through silence.  
It is through sound that we arrive at silence.<sup>18</sup>

So, just as the sound comes from the silence, who is God, it is meant to return to the silence who is God. Silence is the source and summit of all sound, speech and music. The Upanishads teach that we can simply take the path of silence, hoping to attain the state wherein we, like the rishis, can hear the *anahata nada*, the cosmic, unstruck sound. Or, as is so clear in this Indian view, sound itself is capable of leading us to the silence — especially bhajans, mantras, the chanting of the sacred texts.

This idea, though not articulated often in the west, is not completely unknown to our great musicians. This is evident from a few of the quotes regarding music that I have collected over the years: from Josef Lhevine, the pianist: "Music is painted upon a canvas of silence"; from Marcel Marceau, the French mime: "Music and silence combine strongly because music is done with silence, and silence is full of music." My favorite is this from the great late pianist Arthur Schnabel speaking of himself: "The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes — ah, that is where the art resides!"

This is a very particular concept to the Hindu, "the space between the notes." It is called *sandhya*. What I found fascinating is the double meaning of the word *sandhya*. First of all it is the space between the sounds, notes or words. But the three threshold moments of the day when the devout stop for prayer — dawn, midday and sun-

set — are also called *sandhya*.

What can we gather from this for ourselves? First, that this is what our liturgies, our prayer times, are meant to be — *sandhya*, threshold moments, times in between. Further, that our music, especially our sacred music (as if there were any other kind!) is meant to come out of the silence, to emerge from our listening, and should lead us back there as well, to the place or state in which we can await the sound of God creating the cosmos through the OM, the Word.

I think especially (no doubt with some personal monastic bias) of the Christian chant tradition (including but not only Gregorian) and the so-called monastic style of liturgy in general (which seems simply a contemplative approach to ritual), with its intentionality, its obligatory pauses, its focus on the Word, and its attention to pace and flow. All of this has been designed in view of the power of those sounds that we human beings create — powerful because they are intentionally focused releases of energy. This is true both of music and of speech, but especially of music which carries a sacred text.

Finally, what might this wisdom of India, as well as the monastic/contemplative style of liturgy, have to offer to western popular religiosity? At least a reminder that our music at its best is meant to be the Word Itself again made flesh, thanks to our lips and strings and tongues and fingers.

*This article is based on a retreat conference Fr. Cyprian prepared for the musicians of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, in which he shared some of what he has learned so far from his study of Indian music.*

### Notes:

1. David Tame, *The Secret Power of Music* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1984), p. 175.
2. Indeed, *sphota* comes from the Sanskrit for 'a boil,' hence the ability to 'burst forth' like a lanced boil.
3. *Sarvadarasana-samgraha* 13.6, as quoted in the Oxford Dictionary of World Religions.
4. Russell Paul D'Silva, *The Other Half of My Soul* (Wheaton IL, Quest Books, 1996), p. 65.
5. Aphorisms of Patanjali, 1:27, trans. Herbert Slade in *Exploration into Contemplative Prayer* (New York, Paulist 1975), p. 213.
6. Commentary on no. 27, Aphorisms of Yoga by Bhagwan Shree Patanjali, trans. With commentary by Shree Purohit Swami (London, Faber & Faber, 1938), p. 38.
7. Psalm 33:6
8. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, transl. D.M.G. Stalker (New York, Harper & Row, 1962), p. 64-65.
9. Is 55:11, cf. Dt. 32:47
10. Ps 33:6,9
11. John 1:1-3, 14
12. *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary of Abhishiktananda*, ed. R. Panikkar, English trans. David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), p. 166.
13. *The Secret Power of Music*, p. 171.
14. Col 1:16-17
15. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, Vol. I, trans. J.L. Baird & R.K. Ehrman (New York: Oxford, 1994), p. 97
16. See *The Secret Power of Music*, especially ch. 6.
17. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer* (Delhi, ISPCK, 1999), p. 112.
18. according to Russell Paul D'Silva in the notes accompanying his CD *Shabda Yoga*, in his collection *The Yoga of Sound* (New York: The Relaxation Company, 2000), p. 8. ■



***Islam's Responsibility***

*(Continued from page 1)*

Persian Gulf in the wake of the war there a decade ago, the impoverishment of Iraq through punitive sanctions, and America's failure to meet its responsibility in Afghanistan after the Afghan Muhajadeen were used to defeat the Soviets, have come back to haunt this nation. Of course the terrorists, who are essentially Pan-Islamic opportunists, are cynically exploiting these grievances in order to gather support for their power drive to take control of Islam, so that they can use it as a weapon against the rest of the world, with the aim of bringing the entire planet under the hegemony of a global Islamic caliphate ruled by Osama bin Laden as the caliph. America stands in the way, and so is the focus of attack. If there is any doubt about the ultimate ambitions of this twisted minority, just consider what they did in Bamiyam province of Afghanistan when they destroyed those ancient images of the Buddha! That was an ominous signal of ultimate intentions, and especially their lack of tolerance for a diversity of faith.

What Al Qaeda and its Taliban confederates have done is thoroughly condemned by the Quran. They have been killing the innocent for years, which is strictly forbidden by Islam even in times of war. Numerous Islamic spiritual leaders and organizations everywhere have spoken out against the attacks of September 11th. An important example is that of Dr. Malik S. Khan, the Permanent U.N. Representative of the World Muslim Congress, who speaking in the name of this international body, proclaimed: "According to the Quran, those who kill innocent people are doomed to eternal punishment (25: 68-69), and Whosoever slays an innocent person...it is as if he had slain humankind altogether"(5:32). Dr. Irfan Khan, renowned quranic scholar and member of the board of directors of the Parliament of the World's Religions, has been working tirelessly behind the scenes to awaken Muslim leaders to their moral responsibility to stand up and be counted. Another important local voice is that of Kareem Irfan, a lawyer, who is chairman of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. Both of these figures are eloquent in their protest against the unislamic nature of the terrorists and their acts.

**What Is to Be Done?**

How do we extricate humanity from this dangerous moment in history we find ourselves suddenly confronting? It is important to realize, firstly, that this is a significant and urgent moment of truth for Islam itself. Which way will it go? It has an absolute responsibility to the world and its own reputation to seize the initiative in history away from the terrorists, who are trying to entrap its soul in their insidious plans. What this hour needs more than anything else is moral clarity from Islam's spiritual leaders, who are the only figures in that tradition who have the authority to override and cancel out the horrendously calculated manipulations of the minds, hearts and emotions of Muslims everywhere. The world needs to hear from these leaders now! The Muslim faithful wherever they are desperately require their guidance.

Here the interfaith movement can be enormously helpful by contributing its good offices to facilitate the leadership of Islam's guidance to their constituents.

The forum for such guidance should be historically dramatic. It has to be a world historical event that the whole world will be watching. In the midst of this event, perhaps in Mecca or Medina, and all the symbolism it conveys from association with a sacred site, a powerful document would proclaim for all time how Islam views violence and terrorism against the innocent. Islamic spiritual leaders should acknowledge that this phenomenon of Muslim terror has grown out of Islam itself, albeit a rather perverse form of the Islamic faith, one distorted by an arrogant drive for power by a few. It represents the shadow side of Islam, just as in Christianity, the Holocaust is the dark aspect of this faith. It's no good denying it, or maintaining that Osama bin Laden isn't really a Muslim. He believes he is. He identifies totally with this faith, and tries to justify his actions and those of his organization, in terms of Islam.

All the more need for moral clarity from Islamic spiritual leaders. The masses of faithful within Islam need to be guided by an authority who has real credibility, and who can truly speak for Islam because of the goodness of his life, or by a group of such figures. Again, there are so many who have spoken up in recent days, and the U.S. is making progress in Afghanistan itself.

Secondly, the U.N. must proceed with relative haste to offer a treaty on terrorism that all nations would be obliged to sign and adhere to, with consequences for violator states that the international community would have the authority to pursue through every legal and moral means. Already there is movement at the U.N. in precisely this direction, and something concrete should happen fairly soon.

Thirdly, as the U.S. completes its mission in Afghanistan, it should commit with the U.N. to nation building in Afghanistan and eventually in Iraq as well. We owe these two nations the fruit of our compassion. They are desperately needy nations, and they have few willing to help them in the ways they most require: rebuilding, education, medical assistance, food, shelter, clothing, and other resources. I think it's equally necessary to assist Pakistan, especially in the economic sphere.

On the cultural level, and in tandem with its educational efforts *vis-a-vis* the Muslim world, America has to communicate the deeper nature of this society, the spirit of our culture, and the values that animate us as Americans. We saw this spirit and those values incarnated in the extraordinary response of all those incredible New Yorkers. That's what we are really about as a people.

Let me close by sharing a story. I was part of a small monastic community for some ten years in New Hampshire. In 1989, the State Department brought over to America a number of Muhajadeen from Afghanistan who had been wounded in the war against the Soviets. Five of them came

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## THE ISA UPANISHAD: AN INTER- PRETATIVE TRANSLATION

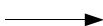
**John Martin Sahajananda**

Isa (God), the Divine Intelligence, permeates or envelops the whole of universe and everything that is living and moving in it. (In fact God and Creation are like water and ice. Just as the ice moves and lives in the water so also the whole of the Universe moves and lives in God and they are not two independent realities but two aspects of the same reality: one is the manifested state and the other is unmanifested state. But they are essentially one.) Therefore renounce the ignorance that you are ontologically different from God or separate from God or independent of God then your life in this world will be a life of joy in the Truth. Just as the nature of God is unfolding so also your nature consists in unfolding. (Unfolding is an activity which comes out of fullness of being, by which one does not get anything and does not lose anything. It is the opposite of becoming, in which one tries to become something which one is not.) Live the life of unfolding and do not fall into the snare of spiritual or psychological becoming or acquiring (not functionally becoming or acquiring). The life of unfolding is the action of God in and through you and is free from the bondage of action (karma). Since you are the unique manifestation of God just as other human beings are, do not compare yourself with the others, and do not have a relationship of infatuation, dependency and possessiveness but relate to others with equality, freedom, independency and love. (For comparing oneself with the others is the source of misery and suffering.)

If you live the life of unfolding, as God's essence is unfolding, then each moment your life is eternal life and you live eternally, though your physical body may appear and disappear. The actions of becoming and acquiring bind you as they are against your nature and make you feel that you are nothing, and need to be filled with the acquired things and find security in them. But the life of unfolding makes you realize that you are a fullness of being and frees you from the bondage of action, which is rebirth.

There is a region of unfulfilled desires (demons), born of ignorance, which plunges one into the region of darkness, creating clouds around oneself, thus separating oneself from the light of the Sun of Truth. Those who deny the life of unfolding and take up the life of becoming may fall into that region which makes one circle in the darkness without seeing the light.

The nature of God or Reality does not move but travels swifter than the mind. One cannot reach God through the senses and the mind, since they move in time and space and God is beyond time and space. For this reason God is always beyond the senses and the mind. Without effort God wins those who make efforts. God cannot be attained through efforts. Only in the silence of all the efforts of the senses and



the mind, God's indwelling and the universal presence is realized. Only an action that comes out of silence is effortless and motiveless and is free from the bondage of action.

The mind can speak of the Spirit or God only in the language of paradox. The mind can only say that God moves and does not move; God is far and God is near; it is within all and outside all; it is personal and impersonal. But God transcends the categories of the mind. When the mind realizes its incapacity to define God and stops its projections onto God, then it becomes silent, a sage. Only in that silence it receives intimations from God. (All our mental concepts of God are like pebbles that we throw into the sky. They come down and fall on our heads.)

God and Creation are not two independent realities. God is the only Absolute Reality and Creation is only the manifested aspect of God. Thus Creation is neither Real as God nor Illusion as a barren woman's child. It is Maya or Unreal. God and Creation are one in essence but two in appearance. (Water and ice are not two independent realities, yet they are not one in appearance. Ice is solid and has a beginning and an end while water is liquid and has no beginning or end; but they are essentially one. The sea and the wave are another example. Since the Creation has a beginning and an end, appearance and disappearance, it is called Maya (not illusion). Maya is that which can be measured. Since it is essentially one with God in the unmanifested state we can also say that it is also eternal).

He who sees all beings as various manifestations of the same one Reality sees oneself in all and all in oneself

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### ***Islam's Responsibility***

*(Continued from page 4)*

to our monastery, and stayed for six months. They were all gentle souls, and they participated in all our community activities, including our daily mass. They were reverent, kind, and sensitive, very likable. We were the first group of Christians they had ever met. We grew to love one another, and they returned to Afghanistan with a life-changing experience of a people not that different from themselves. We need more of this type of person-to-person encounter with Muslims all around the world. In this way we can dispel misunderstanding; create bonds that will last, and transform the global society, the human community into a universal family, rather than continue in the dangerous situation of being cultures of isolation, competing and in conflict. The aftermath of 9/11 is an opportunity to change, to grow, and realize the promise of American pluralism.

The way in which American Muslims are being embraced in our society bodes well for the future, for they are discovering bonds of connection with this land and its people. They are becoming ambassadors of American culture abroad in their relations with Muslim communities in the Middle East and elsewhere. A new moment has dawned, a turning point has been traversed, a movement in our culture from adolescence to the first stirrings of adulthood. ■

***Isa Upanishad***

*(Continued from page 5)*

and thus frees oneself from the ignorance of ontological duality (not functional duality). Duality creates separation and separation creates fear. Non-duality removes separation and frees one from fear.

A sage is one who has this universal vision of all beings in oneself and one self in all beings. Thus freed from duality one becomes free from delusion and sorrow. A sage does not hurt himself / herself by hurting others. To hurt others is to hurt himself / herself as he/she is in all.

God fills all created beings with his radiance. God is formless, invulnerable, pure and absolute Good beyond relative good and evil. It is the supreme seer and universal Man, immanent and transcendent (Immanent as creation and transcendent as God). It is fully present in every created manifestation; thus every created manifestation is a pathless path to eternity as eternity is everywhere. Only those who renounce all paths (religions or psychological time) find eternity in time and time in eternity. (For paths or ways imply distance between God and human beings but there is no distance between God and human beings. God is everywhere like an infinite ocean and human beings are like fish in the ocean, living and moving in God. Religions create this distance and promise people that they take them to God.)

Those who try to attain God through the path of ritualistic action fall into deep darkness or ignorance. (For rituals imply distance between God and human beings and distance implies time, but eternity or the timeless cannot be reached through time. Rituals can establish a certain relationship with God but they always keep people separate from God as a yoke keeps the bulls apart. Meanwhile rituals are performed with motives and the motives bind the persons to their actions). And those who follow the path of intellectual knowledge of God fall into deeper darkness or ignorance. (For the idealization of God creates a gulf between God and human beings. It creates philosophical or theological systems of Truth which become like clouds and separate people from the light of the Sun. They establish a certain relationship with God but they also keep people separate from God as a yoke keeps the bulls apart. This gulf creates ways and means to reach the ideal; the ways create time and time, cut off from eternity, creates suffering. People are attached to the ideas of God rather than to God. Thus the knowledge of God is as much an obstacle as are the rituals to union with God). But those who follow the path of wisdom and the motiveless action, with wisdom (realization that ultimately I and God are one) remove the gulf and the duality between the subject (oneself) and the object (God) and are freed from the burden of knowledge and time. And the ritualistic action that comes out of wisdom is motiveless and free and liberates one from the bondage of action (rebirth).

Those who follow the manifested or revealed aspect of God (immanent) fall into deep darkness or ignorance (for they say that they know the Truth and limit God to their particular scriptures and want to give continuity to the past, to

the God of the memory or scriptures. They live a mechanical life.) And those who follow the un-manifested aspect of God (transcendent) fall into deeper darkness (for they say that they cannot know the Truth and fall into agnosticism). But those who follow the revealed aspect of God and at the same time acknowledge that God is greater than what is revealed in the scriptures, know the Eternal who has manifested in human history (as immanent) and at the same time remains unknown (as transcendent). (Only in the state of known-unknown, the nature of Truth is perceived. We know how Truth has manifested so far, as the scriptures bear witness, but we do not know how it will manifest in the future for Truth is not static but dynamic. It is this known-unknown state which frees one from religious dogmatism, fundamentalism, fanaticism and also from agnosticism.)

The whole of the universe is the manifestation of God. The substratum of the universe is God. God is hidden in the appearance of creation. Since the Creation is the manifestation of God, it is a golden veil (Maya or ignorance), which hides God. In order to realize that God and Creation are two aspects of the same Reality one has to remove this golden veil of ignorance. But no one can remove this golden veil by one's own effort. It is only the grace of God that comes as the light of wisdom and frees one from the darkness of ignorance. In order to receive this grace one has to surrender to God. This surrender is possible only when one first explores with the intellect until one realizes its incapacity to unite one with God and comes to the heart and surrenders it to God, asking for the grace to remove this veil of ignorance. Just as a boat brings one from one shore to the other so also the intellect brings one to the end of the mind. But it is the heart that comes out of the boat and enters the land. For the intellect brings one to the understanding of non-duality but it is the heart that enters the heart of God. Just as the attendants of a bride can accompany her only up to the door of the bridal chamber but it is only the bride that enters the inner chamber of the beloved so also the intellect can bring the lover of God only up to the door of the beloved but it is the heart that enters the inner chamber of the beloved. ■

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**[www.bede.griffiths.com](http://www.bede.griffiths.com)**

## B G TRUST BOARD MEETING

The Bede Griffiths Trust Board conducted its first electronic meeting during October and November, 2001. A brief first session was devoted to organizational and other "business" matters. Two new members were elected to the board, Shirley Du Boulay and Bruno Barnhart, to bring it back to its original number of eleven.

It was decided to establish a nonprofit corporation to transact the formal business of the Trust initiated by Fr. Bede. **The Bede Griffiths Association** has been incorporated in the State of Texas, with the declared purpose of aiding in the renewal of contemplative life. The Association will be a 501-c-3 corporation, eligible to receive tax-exempt donations according to federal law.

Elected as officers of the Association were Fr. Robert Hale (President), Wayne Teasdale (Vice President for the U.S.), Adrian Rance (V.P. for the U.K.), Fr. Douglas Conlan (V.P. for Australia), Br. John Martin (V.P. for India), Judson B. Trapnell (V.P. for Academic Affairs), John Douglas (Treasurer) and Sr. Pascaline Coff (Secretary).

Sr. Pascaline and Shirley Du Boulay were approved as contact persons for literary permissions in the U.S. and the U.K., respectively. Asha and Russill D'Silva will serve as Publications Committee to develop the means and necessary documents to promote the works of Fr. Bede.

During the second, longer, email session of the Board meeting in November, views on the scope and strategies of the organization were exchanged. ■

## PUBLICATIONS

- *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*, edited and with Commentary by Bruno Barnhart, Springfield Illinois, Templegate publishers, 495 pp., paper, \$29.95.
- *Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions*, edited by Bruno Barnhart and Joseph Wong, New York, Continuum, 364 pp., hardbound, \$35.00. This book contains the eighteen presentations at the New Camaldoli East-West Symposium in June, 2000, with a foreword by Fr. Tom Hand, S.J., and a preface by Bro. David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B. Hindu, Buddhist (both Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen), Taoist and Confucian traditions, as well as Christianity, are represented.
- *Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) As Seen from East and West, Acts of the Colloquium held in Lyon-Fleurie, France and in Shantivanam-Tannirpalli, India, April-July 1995., Vol. I: Lyon-Fleurie, 200 pp., and Vol. II: Shantivanam-Tannirpalli, 153 pp.* These two volumes present the many and varied contributions to the conferences organized in France and in India on the hundredth anniversary of Monchanin's birth. The Acts of the Colloquium appeared originally in French in 1997. The pieces range from scholarly studies to the reminis-

cences (in the second volume) of those who knew Monchanin personally. The publications will be welcome to anyone who wants to learn more about this saintly and brilliant leading figure among the triad of pioneers (Monchanin, Abhishiktananda, Griffiths) in the Indian-Christian experience, who remains almost unknown to English-language readers. Along with numerous academic scholars, authors include Raimon Panikkar, Thomas Matus, Marie-Louise Coutinha, Sten Rodhe, Odette Baumer-Despeigne and Michael Amaladoss. Vols I and II are available from the New Camaldoli Bookstore at \$15.00 and \$15.95 plus shipping. ■

## BEDE GRIFFITHS CONTEMPLATIVE GROUPS

Bede Griffiths contemplative prayer groups are now being created in the United States and in other countries. The groups will study the spiritual teachings of Bede Griffiths and other masters and will emphasize meditation and related contemplative practices. Rather than instruction in a particular method of meditation, however, various resources will be made available to participants. Further information will appear in future issues of The Golden String and on the Bede Griffiths website.

Bede Griffiths Contemplative Prayer groups are being organized at present in the following places. A contact person is listed for each location, with email address or telephone number.

<i>Dallas, Texas</i>	Ann Johnson <a href="mailto:annathome@netzero.net">annathome@netzero.net</a>
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<i>Coconut Grove, Florida</i>	Rev. Greta Reed <a href="mailto:gretareed@earthlink.com">gretareed@earthlink.com</a>
<i>Notre Dame, Indiana</i>	Sheila Provencher <a href="mailto:provencher.l@notredame">provencher.l@notredame</a>
<i>Newbury Pk., California</i>	Carol Brannan (805) 375-3047
<i>Stillwater, Oklahoma</i>	Rev. Mary E. Hileman (405) 372-4563
<i>St. Louis, Missouri</i>	Sr. Linda Straub, CSJ <a href="mailto:Straub@washucsc.org">Straub@washucsc.org</a> (636) 717-1711 (res)
<i>Czech Republic*</i>	Bob Francis <a href="mailto:bob.francis@pandora.be">bob.francis@pandora.be</a> phone: 0032-3-722-00-58 fax: 0032-3-722-08-20
<i>Oxford, England</i>	Shirley Harriott <a href="mailto:ydl97@dial.pipex.com">ydl97@dial.pipex.com</a>

\*Bob Francis is working with two local priests and others to establish a meditation center in an old presbytery in Nacerate, a small Moravian village near the Austrian border. Much work must be done to restore the old building, and financial help will be gratefully accepted. Personal address: Bob Francis, Belseledorp 118, 9111 Belgium. ■

## BEDE GRIFFITHS AND THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY

Gloria Germani

*The following article is extracted and translated from Gloria Germani's "The Thought of Teresa of Calcutta: A Mystic Between East and West" (Il pensiero di Teresa di Calcutta. Una mistica tra Oriente e Occidente. Edizioni Paoline, Milano, 2000, pp. 185-196). In studying the thought of Mother Teresa, Germani discovers some "incontrovertible biographical data" that reveal how the thought of Mother Teresa is the expression of a "fertile synthesis between the Christian and Hindu traditions," specifically through the influence of Bede Griffiths. Cyprian Consiglio*

Mother Teresa received her "call within a call" on September 10, 1946. That was the day that her never easy religious path — to follow the command of God and serve the poor, sharing their total poverty — had its beginning. So she asked for exclaustation from the Congregation of Loretto and left the convent, while still remaining within the Roman Catholic Church. The Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity was approved and instituted in 1950, but only obtained pontifical approbation in 1965.... In the same year, on the request of the local archbishop, Mother Teresa opened the first house outside of India, in Venezuela. Ten years follow in which the congregation expanded also to the western industrial world, with houses in London, New York, Belfast and Rome.

In 1976, in the outlying suburbs of the Bronx (New York), Mother Teresa founded the new branch of the Contemplative Missionaries of Charity, in a first moment called the Sisters of the Word. The superior was Sister Nirmala Joshi, Nepalese in origin, coming from a family of Hindu Brahmins. The following year the male contemplative branch was instituted, taking the name Brothers of the Word; the servant-leader was Angelo Devananda Scolozzi.

Since 1965, Mother Teresa had come in contact with the western industrialized world and become conscious of a type of poverty — spiritual poverty — even more difficult to relieve. We see how Mother Teresa expresses herself concerning this new form of poverty: "You in the west, you find yourself having to deal with those who are the spiritually poorest among the poor, rather than with people who are poor in the physical sense. Rather often among the rich there are people spiritually very, very poor. I find that it is not difficult to give a plate of rice to a starving person, or provide a bed to someone who has no bed, but to console or eliminate a certain type of bitterness, to suppress that anger, to remove that solitude, requires much time.

For us [active] Sisters, that hunger is more in the material sense and for you [contemplative] Brothers it

is instead the spiritual hunger, a person spiritually naked, spiritually without a dwelling. Believe me, Brothers, I find it very difficult to work with people who experience this type of bitterness that tells of this type of anguish of heart, rejected, unloved, neglected.

Without doubt, for Mother Teresa all work of service for our neighbor is founded on contemplation, so that it flows from recognizing God in every neighbor. But she will accentuate more and more the importance of the contemplative aspect.

"You can touch the sick, you can touch the leper and believe that it is the Body of Christ that you are touching, but it is much more difficult when these persons are drunk or cursing to think that the heavenly Jesus is behind the semblances of sorrow. How clean and loving must our hands be, so they will know how to offer compassion even to these people!"

The contemplative branch responds exactly to this need to serve and alleviate spiritual poverty which shows itself to be more and more fundamental. The active branch and the contemplative branch are undoubtedly two aspects of the same work of love and compassion. Mother Teresa claims often that the two branches are not two different things: it is simply that in one, faith is put in action through service; in the other, faith is put in action through prayer and contemplation. The mission of the active branch is evident in their incessant activity of service to the most poor, while the contemplative branch provides that the major part of the day be dedicated to prayer, adoration and contemplation, which translates itself only for a few hours into individual encounters, personal contact, so to be able to carry the Word of God to those who are spiritually poor.

This carrying of the Word of God certainly does not imply a consciousness and a theology that is incapable of illuminating peoples' hearts.

Otherwise we would be able to rattle off a bunch of things and to learn even more by memory so as to be masters of all possible consciousness, of all things regarding God, yet incapable of lighting that fire in the heart of people. We would pronounce only words, but we would not live those words. This is why it is necessary that our words be the fruit of our life, the fruit of our prayers, the fruit of our mortifications and the fruit of our adoration.

The contemplative branch represents therefore the effort to confront spiritual poverty, that abandonment and desperation of contemporary people that constitutes the greatest poverty. Mother Teresa had made this need known in a much deeper way by naming it "a further call within the call."

It is significant that the servant-guide of the Brothers of the Word, Angelo Devananda Scolozzi — in a beautiful booklet written in 1985, but out of print and not reissued — described the beginnings of the institution of the

*(Continued on page 9)*



*Missionaries of Charity* (Continued from page 8)

contemplative branch of the Missionaries of Charity with these words:

The foundation of contemplatives comes as a response to a precise interior need, but it began with an accident that Mother had — a fall from her bed!... She started to consider the inevitability of sickness and advanced age, when she and the sisters would not be able physically to carry out their service to the poor. This accident and the influence of Sister Nirmala, a Nepalese converted from Hinduism and gifted with a profound contemplative charism, were the circumstances that gave rise to her response.

The influence of Sister slowly made its way into the thought of Mother, until after much interior travail and a little perplexity, she decided that the specific contemplative vocation of Sister Nirmala would become an official part of the life of the Missionary Sisters of Charity. As a first step, Mother decided to send Sister Nirmala Joshi to spend some time with Father Bede Griffiths in his hermitage in Tamil Nadu, in South India. Father Bede, a Camaldolese monk, is a noted scholar and a very wise man, a profound writer on Hindu-Christian dialogue. He lives at Shantivanam, a Benedictine Hermitage founded by Father Jules Monchanin and Father Henri Le Saux, OSB, pioneers of the liturgical and monastic renewal in India.

The experience of these religious (Monchanin, Le Saux and Griffiths), who lived with the habits of the Hindu *sannyasin* and of the mendicant monks of India, represents the first and most important example of dialogue between the two religions, free from any view toward either evangelization or religious or cultural colonialism.

Monchanin was a scholar of mysticism, in particular the Rhineland and Flemish Masters, who found himself in India from 1939 as a missionary. Together with Le Saux, who joined him in 1948, he founded the ashram of Saccidananda where the Christian monastic tradition joined itself to that of the Hindu ascetics. The same Sanskrit name of the hermitage makes one recall the Trinity understood in the terms of Indian philosophy as "being" (*sat*), "pure intelligence" (*cit*), and at the same time "bliss" (*ananda*). Besides the Bible and the texts of the Fathers of the Church they were studying the Upanishads and the texts of the Vedanta, practicing Hindu methods of prayer and meditation, but above all, wearing only a strip of cloth, sitting on the ground, eating with their hands, trying to practice daily that absolute simplification of life and detachment from every worldly preoccupation that is at the same time supreme liberty and that has always characterized the life choice of the Hindu *sannyasin*.

Both of these two were prepared to penetrate that mystery of contemplation that is at the origin of the most basic Indian institutions, whether on the philosophical plane or the religious: the mystical center

from which flows the entire Indian civilization.

So wrote Caterina Conio, who personally knew these *sannyasin* monks and to whose scholarly work we owe in great part the diffusion of their thought in Italian circles.

After the premature death of Monchanin and the departure of Le Saux, who preferred to live out his strong spiritual tension as a hermit in the foothills of the Himalayas, from 1968 onward the direction of Saccidananda Ashram was entrusted to Fr. Griffiths.

The entire experience of Shantivanam carries with it an openness for an encounter between Christian and Hindu religiosity that is not based on a conceptual comparison but lived in the depth of self. And it is exactly this research into the inner depths of self that constitutes the center of the inspiration that the pioneers of Saccidananda have drawn from the Hindu spirituality.

The grace of India is essentially a grace of interiorization. Only in the measure in which one lives inside of oneself, is one able to understand India, but also to be listened to and understood by her,

wrote Henri Le Saux, and in another volume,

It always seems that India, moved by the Spirit, invites Christianity to search for the mystery of God, Creator and Savior, no longer outside or next to itself, but in the depth of the heart.

The experience of non-duality that marks the history of Hinduism for at least two and a half millennia represents for Le Saux and Griffiths an indispensable way to reach a more authentic interpretation of Christianity. They try to live the presence of God here and now, not separated from our most profound self and from that of all other beings.

Sin or, as the Indians say, *maya*, "is our fall into the present state of consciousness, where all is separated, divided, centered on itself and in conflict with others."

Griffiths would say that to access this Vedantic experience of non-duality it is necessary to reach the most radical detachment — detachment from the self.

The whole question is, what is the true Self? What is the true Centre of (our) being? Is it the ego, making itself independent, seeking to be master of the world, or is there an 'I' beyond this, a deeper Centre of personal being which is grounded in the Truth, which is one with the universal Self, the Law of the universe? This is the great discovery of Indian thought, the discovery of the Self, the Atman, the Ground of personal being, which is one with Brahman, the Ground of universal being.

For Le Saux, the great teaching of Indian wisdom and the *Upanishads* does not reside in formulations, in notions or propositions that can be transmitted and received as such. The formulations of the *Upanishads* do not have any other function than to lead to a lived experience in one's own life. Nevertheless this passage from intellectual consciousness to experience is certainly not easy, but bristling with torments and painful travail. He will note in his diary,

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## The Golden String

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### *Missionaries of Charity* (Continued from page 9)

Yesterday finally I understood the Buddhist position on the *atman* (there is not an 'I' per se). It is no longer I who reaches the real in the depth of me. My senses, just as my thought, are powerless. And it is only in the eclipse of the consciousness that I have of myself that the pure consciousness of Self appears. It is not I who grasp the depth, it is the depth that reveals itself in the dissolving of this I. That which is essential for the human being is to re-enter the depth of the soul, to re-discover his depth.

This reference to Sister Nirmala and to the contacts with Shantivanam — not carried by many biographical books on Mother Teresa, although undoubtedly from an authoritative source — acquires even more importance for us, from the moment in 1997 that Sister Nirmala was appointed Superior General of the congregation, on the instruction of Mother Teresa. The testimony of Scolozzi, therefore, regards an important and lasting direction in the history of the Missionaries of Charity. It is valid to think, in fact, that the need of an ever deeper interiorization, made known by Mother Teresa and supported by Sister Nirmala, found a fertile ground in the way mapped out by Le Saux, Monchanin, and Griffiths in the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism. ■

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