

The Golden String

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PURUSHA AND GURU: IDENTITY AND COMMUNION FOR BEDE GRIFFITHS & ABHISHIKTANANDA (Part I) Cyprian Consiglio

Presented at the Centenary Celebration of the Life of Swami Abhishiktananda, Shantivanam, 9-16 January, 2010

In studying the lives and thought of both Bede Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, it is difficult to compare them, *per se*, but one has to point out each of their particular approaches, often to the same topic. A helpful distinction I have found is this: Abhishiktananda often leans on the idea of union by identity; whereas Fr. Bede tends to speak of union by communion. This is evidenced, for example, in Abhishiktananda's great love for the Upanishads and his introduction to them that accompanies *The Further Shore*; on the other hand, Fr. Bede had a great love for the Bhagavad Gita, so much so that he produced a Christian commentary on it, *The River of Compassion*. When speaking of Jesus, to show another example, for Abhishiktananda the pivotal moment is Jesus' Baptism when he discovered that the *I AM* of God belonged to himself, or to put it the other way around, when "in the brilliant light of his own *I AM* he discovered the true meaning, total and unimaginable," of the name of God.¹ This is how Abhishiktananda interprets Jesus' saying, "The Father and I are one." Fr. Bede instead laid more stress on recognizing that there are distinctions in the Godhead and distinctions between God and creation that do not negate the underlying unity of all reality. The example that he used very often was the same one, that Jesus says "the Father and I are one," but he never says, "I am the Father." In terms of *advaita*—non-duality, Abhishiktananda was a faithful disciple of Ramana

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DIVERSITY, UNIQUENESS AND UNITY

John Martin Sahajananda

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (Truth)", said Jesus. Purity of heart and mind are essential conditions for those who are on the path of Truth. We all believe that there can be only one God or one Source. We all come from that one Source and we all return to that one Source. All the great sages or masters drink from the same Source and bring water from the same Source. They all speak from that same Foundation. All religions come from the same Source. Different religions give different names to it and describe it in a unique way. Each great sage has a unique understanding of that Source and unique expression of that Source. It appears as if they are different from each other and these differences cannot be reconciled. So far re-

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THIS IS THE FINAL ISSUE OF THE PAPER EDITION OF *THE GOLDEN STRING*

For some time the Board of the Bede Griffiths Trust has been considering the advisability of discontinuing the distribution of paper copies of *The Golden String*, since each issue is now available in full on the Bede Griffiths website, at www.bedegriffiths.com. After this present issue, paper copies will no longer be mailed. Rising costs — especially for overseas mailing — have made distribution of the paper edition more and more expensive. Until now the regular deficit has been covered by New Camaldoli Hermitage, but this support can no longer be expected. We have been unwilling to require paid subscription to the Bulletin, with the additional administrative work that would involve.

Online publication of *The Golden String* will continue twice a year, around the middle of January and the middle of July. The format is .pdf, which requires that Adobe Reader be installed on your computer. This program is available free at www.adobe.com — a link to this site will be found on the Bede Griffiths website. If you wish to receive an e-mail notification when each new issue is posted on the website, please send a message to the editor at bruno@contemplation.com, with your e-mail address. We hope that you will continue to look forward to reading each issue of *The Golden String*. ■

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Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity (Continued from page 1)

ligions have lived apart, each one enclosing itself in its own boundary and often trying to expand into other boundaries and thus becoming the source of conflict and violence. Today, thanks be to God, we are in a world of inter-religious dialogue where serious efforts are being made to reconcile religions. Though these efforts have not yet produced concrete results yet it is an admirable call.

In this article an attempt is made to show the common spiritual journey in three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. It wants to show that: 1) The starting conditions of each of these spiritual traditions are different. 2) Each of these spiritual traditions had a unique experience of that Source 3) At the Source of each of these three spiritual traditions there is an essential unity. I do not attempt an elaborate scientific explanation but an intuitive synthetic presentation. Though these three religions are different from each other yet we can see common elements in them. Today I divide religious traditions into two categories: Wisdom Tradition and Prophetic Tradition. Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism belong to Wisdom tradition and religions like Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam and Bahai belong to Prophetic Tradition. Each tradition has its unique approach to the Truth. This division helps us to understand the uniqueness of each spiritual tradition and also the differences between the spiritual traditions. The future of humanity depends on the marriage these two traditions.

The Upanishad Sages and Hinduism

I would like to take the teaching of the Mandukya Upanishad and Chandogya Upanishad of Hinduism in order to present the common spiritual growth in the above said three religions. (Each Upanishad has a unique approach to the Truth even though the essential Truth of all Upanishads is the same: the identity of Atman with Brahman). These two Upanishads present the nature of truth or reality in four levels of consciousness. The first level is called waking consciousness, the second level is called dreaming consciousness, the third level is called deep sleep consciousness and the fourth can be described as awakened consciousness. The first three levels have both physical and spiritual aspects.

1. The Waking consciousness, physically, means to be in a state of physical wakefulness. It is the state of consciousness from the time we get up from bed and to the time we go to sleep. Here our senses are awake. As a way of living, waking consciousness means a state of life in which we identify with our physical body and live to satisfy only our physical desires and ambitions. Everything that we do is motivated to satisfy the needs of our body and the senses. We can say that in waking consciousness our senses are awake and indulge in their satisfaction. Here our identity is with the body: I am my body. We can describe this level as *individual* mind or consciousness.

2. The Dreaming consciousness, physically, means the time when we go to bed and enter into a state of dreams and to

the time when the dreams come to an end. Spiritually it means living our life according to dreams, *ideals*. In this consciousness we have ideals to follow and ideal persons to imitate. In general these ideals and ideal persons are taken from the past. We are inspired by the great personalities and their ideals and wish to imitate them. We place our body and senses under the guidance of these ideals and ideal persons. Here the past enters into the present and goes to the future. The present is just a vehicle for the past to go to the future. The present does not have its own life but allows the past to live in and through it. Here the present is at the service of the past even though some changes can be made now and then as reformation. The present is not free. The present receives its identity from the past. All the religious ideals belong to the dreaming consciousness. Here our identity would be: I am a Hindu, I am a Buddhist, I am a Jew, I am a Christian, I am a Muslim, I am Bahai, etc. We can call this consciousness *collective* mind or collective consciousness. This collective consciousness unites us with some and divides us with the others. This consciousness has a boundary to protect and also a possible mission to expand. Here a person's life is guided by the moral code of that particular religion.

3. The deep sleep consciousness, physically, means a dreamless sleep state. It is a state from the time when the dreams stop to the time when the dreams begin. Spiritually it means a state in which the dreams come to an end, dreams in the sense of ideals and ideal persons. It means the past comes to an end. When the past comes to an end the future also comes to an end, as the future is nothing but the continuity of the past. In this freedom from the past and the future, the present becomes original and creative. It connects itself to the eternal present and manifests eternity in the present. Here one's identity is not with the body or with the ideals but with the eternity. A person will say: "I am" (not the divine "I AM"). We can describe this level as *universal* mind or consciousness. Universal consciousness is that in which a person is identifies with all and lives for all. In this consciousness there are no ideological boundaries. This "I am" transcends all the boundaries. It has no boundary to protect and so no mission to expand. It invites people to transcend the collective consciousness and enter into universal consciousness. It is all embracing consciousness. In this consciousness a person is not guided by the external moral code but by inner realization. Whatever this person does to the others he or she does to himself or herself.

4. The Awakened Consciousness is a consciousness where a person realizes being one with the Brahman or Atman or God. A person declares: I am Brahman (*aham brahma asmi*). We can call this level *unitary* consciousness or non-dual consciousness (*advaita*). Here one's identity is: "I AM" (the "I AM WHO I AM" of the Bible). This "I AM" is real and eternal and the other three are described as unreal or non-eternal. Our call is to go from the unreal to the real. We

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Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity (Continued from page 2)

have the famous prayer in the Upanishads, which says: Lead me from the unreal to the Real,

from darkness to Light
from death to Eternal Life.

According to these two Upanishads a person begins with the first level of consciousness and then slowly has to move into the fourth level of consciousness. It is a long journey. In the Chandogya Upanishad, Prajapathi, the spiritual teacher or guru, guides his disciple Indra to realize this truth. For Indra it takes a total of 101 years. The first stage takes 32 years, the second stage 32 years, the third stage 32 years and the fourth takes 5 years. These are symbolic numbers to show that the journey is hard and long. One needs to have strong determination, dedication, self-enquiry and devotion to the master and to the truth. One should not settle down on the way like Virochana, who was satisfied with the first stage. Hence everyone has four bodies: the physical, the ideological, the universal and the unitary. Sacred scriptures belong to the second level. A person who moves into universal consciousness is greater than the scriptures. The Mundaka Upanishad speaks of two types of wisdom; *Paravidhya* (higher wisdom) and *Aparavidhya* (lower wisdom). *Paravidhya* is the direct experience of Truth and *Aparavidhya* is indirect understanding of the Truth. Even the four Vedas (the revealed truth) belong to the lower wisdom. *Paravidhya* is non-dualistic experience (*advaita*) and *aparavidhya* is dualistic experience. We begin with *aparavidhya* and move into *paravidhya*. The Upanishad sages were universal spirits. They cannot be put into any label like Hinduism. Hinduism is a system of beliefs. But the sages were beyond beliefs.

Buddha and Buddhism

I shall take the analogy of the four levels of consciousness in the Upanishads and interpret the spiritual journey of Buddha and different bodies of Buddha in Buddhism. Hinduism and Buddhism are like sister religions. There are some concepts like *Karma*, *Reincarnation*, *Dharma*, *Sannyasa*, which are common to both Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddha rejected the over-intellectualism of the Upanishads, the violent animal sacrifices of Vedic rituals, the social caste system which gave dominant place to the Brahmin caste. He opened the possibility of spiritual life to everyone including women. He rejected the authority of the Vedas and rejected the division of life into four stages like *brahmacharya* (spiritual student) *grhastha* (family life), *vanaprasta* (hermetical life) and *sannyasa* (wandering life). He advocated immediate renunciation to everyone who is ready to renounce the world at any time. But there are also many similarities between them. We can see four important stages in the life of Buddha.

1. Siddhartha, the man: Buddha began his life as Siddhartha. Siddhartha was the son of a local king. Siddhartha was the individual consciousness of Buddha. It was his waking consciousness. He tried to find fulfillment in his physical

desires and ambitions. But he was not satisfied. He felt something was missing. He left his wife, his son, his parents and his kingdom and went on in search of freedom.

2. Siddhartha, the seeker: After leaving his wife, child and home, Siddhartha became a seeker. He tried to follow different types of spiritual path which existed at that time to find what he was looking for: inner freedom and peace. We can say that he was living in the dreaming consciousness, pursuing ideals and ideal persons. He was not yet original as he was imitating others. But he was disillusioned by these practices, which brought him even to the point of physical death. We can call this the dreaming consciousness of Buddha.

3. Siddhartha becomes Buddha, the awakened: Disappointed with his practices he sat under the Bodhi tree in deep meditation, which opened him to the universal mind or consciousness. He moved beyond the past and the future. He moved into eternity and tasted the timeless reality. From that eternity he saw the passing moment of time, which is the product of desire. He achieved freedom, *nirvana*. He became awakened, the Buddha. This universal consciousness was attained before Siddhartha. Buddhism says that Siddhartha was not the first one to realize this truth. Before him there were many others who realized it. Siddhartha was not the only Buddha he is one of the Buddhas. In this level Siddhartha entered into the Deep Sleep Consciousness and became an original person who proposed his own original way to the Truth. He did not repeat some one's discovery or truth. He became an original teacher and spoke from his own inner authority.

4. Siddhartha established in Wisdom, Buddha: Siddhartha was not only awakened (Buddha) but he was also established permanently in that awakened consciousness. He was ever wakeful. He was in the permanent state of unity. This experience of Buddha we can call unitary consciousness or non-dual consciousness or *advaita*.

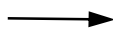
So we have Siddhartha the man, individual consciousness, Siddhartha the ideal-pursuer, the collective consciousness, Siddhartha the Buddha, the awakened, deep sleep consciousness, and Siddhartha the Buddha established in wisdom, unitary consciousness.

Buddhism speaks of three bodies (*Kayas*) of Buddha: the *Nirmanakaya* (physical), the *Sambhogakaya* (universal) and *Dharmakaya* or *Dharma Kaya* (the Ground). We can also add one more body, which is the body of his teachings. We can call it *dharmakaya*, with small 'd'. Hence Buddha has four bodies or four levels of consciousness.

1. *Nirmanakaya* is the physical body of Buddha, Siddhartha. But Buddha's body also extends to the whole physical universe. The whole universe is the physical body of Buddha.

2. *Dharmakaya* is the teachings of Buddha. It is the spoken words of Buddha and recorded in history. It becomes the source and authority of Buddhism.

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3. **Sambogya Kaya** is the universal body of Buddha. It is beyond time and space. It is the universal consciousness of Buddha. Universal consciousness is the bridge between *Dhamma Kaya* and the *dharmakaya* and *Nirmana Kaya*. *Samboghya Kaya* is not limited by the teachings. It is the Word from which all the words or teachings come. This Word cannot be put into words. The Word is like infinite space and the words (teachings) are like space enclosed by four walls.

4. **Dhamma Kaya** is the eternal aspect of Buddha. It is greater than *Samboghya Kaya*. *Dhamma Kaya* is like the hub of a wheel. It is the foundation of all the bodies. It holds all the other bodies and transcends them. We can call this unitary consciousness or non-dualistic consciousness.

If we take the symbol of a tree, the leaves represent *Nirmana Kaya*, the branches represent *dharmakaya*, the trunk represents *Sambogya Kaya* and the roots represent *Dhamma Kaya*. There is only one tree, but manifested on four levels. While *dhamma kaya* (the branch) is greater than *Nirmana Kaya* (Siddhartha, the leaf) as it lives longer than physical Siddhartha, *Samboghya Kaya* (the trunk) is greater than *dharmakaya* as it supports the teachings (branches) but is not conditioned by them. *Samboghya Kaya* can modify the expressions of *dharmakaya*. *Dhamma Kaya* (the roots) is greater than *Samboghya Kaya*, as *Samboghya Kaya* is manifested body and *Dhamma Kaya* is unmanifested body. Hence Buddha cannot be limited to his physical body and to his teachings. He is not confined to his teachings. He is greater than his teachings and he has power even to change them. The primary mission of Buddha was to invite people to grow into *Dhamma Kaya*, not just to establish *dharmakaya* (a body of teachings). The body of his teachings is like a boat that one uses to go beyond the river of *samsara* into *nirvana*. (To be concluded) ■

BEDE GRIFFITHS ON REINCARNATION

The problem with reincarnation is that for a Christian death is essentially passing out of our present mode of being and consciousness into the presence of God — not going on to another life in this world. There may well be an intermediate state when those who are not yet ready to face the reality of God's love have to undergo a purification. This can be interpreted in terms of "purgatory" and possibly some form of reincarnation could be accepted, but it is essentially an intermediate state before one enters finally into the presence of God. (From a letter to Tina Goodchild, March 14, 1988) ■

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the Bede Griffiths Website:
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NEW: PRAYER IN THE CAVE OF THE HEART: The Universal Call to Contemplation, by Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam

Liturgical Press, January 2010, \$14.95

Prayer is an art that cannot just be taught. It must be experienced, lived, and practiced. In **Prayer in the Cave of the Heart**, Cyprian Consiglio draws on his experience as a Camaldolese monk to give readers an accessible reflection on prayer that is based on Bede Griffiths' "universal call to contemplation." In this book, the contemplative traditions of East and West intersect to invite readers into prayer that makes them "present to the Spirit who is already present to us."

"It's not easy to talk about the Christian mystical tradition in universal terms without resorting to syncretism, but in Prayer in the Cave of the Heart, Camaldolese monk Cyprian Consiglio takes on the challenge with great love and abiding integrity. Prayer in the Cave of the Heart is clearly the fruit of serious scholarly inquiry, courageous pilgrimage, and a humble, disciplined life of unceasing prayer. In this invitingly simple but richly packed guide to the Christian via negativa, Consiglio holds out the hope that we, too, can find our way through the narrow gate that leads to contemplation."

Paula Huston,

Author of *Forgiveness: Following Jesus into radical loving*.

Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam, is a monk, musician and spiritual teacher. An internationally known performer, recording artist, and composer, he has numerous collections of original sacred, world and liturgical music to his credit. A student of the world's spiritual traditions, Consiglio has offered retreats and conferences around the world and authored articles for several books and periodicals. He is a frequent contributor to *The Golden String*, and the first installment of his *Purusha and Guru: Bede Griffiths and Abhishiktananda on Identity and Communion* appears in this issue.

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A Correction to the Last Issue of *The Golden String*

Bede Griffiths' 'Letter to South Africa', on page 2 of the Summer 2009 issue was originally addressed not to Tina Goodchild, as stated there, but to Maarten Turkstra, in Johannesburg, who in turn sent it to the friends of Fr. Bede in South Africa. ■

MULTICULTURALISM AND THE CHRIST EVENT

Matthew Cobb

When Alan Griffiths explored the simple and idyllic life with his two mates in his early twenties, there was a quest for life begun. Thirty years later that quest led eastward to India and Bede Griffiths discovered Tamil Nadu and the mouth of the holy Cavery River. It was there under the shade of tropical plant life that Bedeji crossed cultures and began a work that continues today in many contemplative hearts around the world. One such place that Bedeji visited many times in the U.S. was Osage Monastery in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. It was at Osage under the shade of the tall thin deciduous plant life that he said, "this is the Shantivanam of the West." During one visit to the Forest of Peace of the West, Bedeji spent some time with the Osage Chief Tinker. It was after that visit that Bedeji was clear and adamant that the quest for life in the West, especially the U.S. and Oklahoma, must fully include the wisdom council of American Indigenous Elders. Bedeji went so far as to insist that listening to what they say and teach is crucial for the spiritual life of all Americans. And, as America is still the only "superpower" it would directly benefit the whole planet if the U.S. were to suddenly be spiritually well.

It is within the context of how the quest came to be known in the West at Osage that I begin to share my entrance into that same quest. At the age of thirty I learned that my great grandmother was likely a Chickasaw girl living in poverty when she gave birth to my paternal grandmother at the age of 14. As new knowledge often does, I was led to deeper questions about identity. As most identity questions affect our human desire to know, these questions evolved into a quest for life itself. Paying close attention to dreams for several years I was led to several American Indian Elders. Relatively, soon after being "checked out" and "tested" I was invited to pray in a purification lodge ceremony. During that first sweat lodge I accepted the Red Road (Wisdom Tradition of American Indians, a way of nonduality) as a unique and mystical path to receive. Since that acceptance of the Red Road as a way, I have deepened my understanding of who I am as a [non-indigenous] indigenous person. Directly related to this new creation within is a fuller reception of early formative experiences as a Christian.

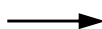
Without the sacred rites and ceremonies that I have shared with "all my relations" on the Red Road, both indigenous and non-indigenous, I would not have the devotion I have today for the Christian faith that I inherited as a child and adolescent. My own quest for life has demonstrated that there is a multiplicity and complexity to identity formation and transformation. Yet, it is the latter that is most inviting to explore as it is my identity in the Christ event that propels me to journey from the objective and static identity of a

fixed substance or self-concept to subjective and dynamic relatedness to the possibility of all things. To illustrate the transformation or contemplative shift from identity to relationship as a way of being and participating in the life of Christ, I will recall my first spiritual awakening to transcendence.

Growing up in a Presbyterian family there was an emphasis on church attendance and memorization of Bible verses. At the age of fifteen, I was introduced to a form of Bible study in which you were to engage the stories that had been memorized. It was a version of *lectio divina*. The scripture was alive during my high school years, which led to an adult affirmation of faith that surprisingly reflects much of what I continue to hold as truth. After my first year of college my parents divorced and I went soul-searching at a Jesuit college in Kansas City. Soon I came face-to-face with elaborate rituals and sacraments. At my first Mass I encountered the mystery of Holy Communion. I studied philosophy and theology and was invited to participate in a retreat on contemplative living at Assumption Abbey in Ava, Missouri. It was at that retreat on my twenty-first birthday that I met a hermit named Wally who provided an affirmation and induction into holy silence and the possibility of a life of solitude and simplicity. When I returned home I noticed a difference in my outlook on life. A deep and abiding light within compelled me to turn my quest within.

For the last twenty years I have practiced contemplative living in various forms. Currently, I am a householder raising a teenage boy and girl. Now I am fulfilling the role of introducing and affirming my children as active participants or agents in the Christ event. They have heard experiences that I have had on Vision Quest and at Sun Dance, but they have yet to cross cultures and attend any of these sacred ceremonies. Moreover, they have grown up in the Episcopal Church attending Sunday school and Holy Eucharist most Sundays. The wonderful possibilities that are within their quest for life will one day induct them into a way of living life as an active agent of the Christ event.

It is in future generations' quests that I wonder how my grandchildren and great grandchildren will be able to receive their introduction, affirmation and induction as active agents in the Christ event. Doubtless, these active agents will be able to cross cultures and attain total acceptance of the universality of relationship to one another in the Christ event. There will be no perceived need or inner desire to convert anyone as all relations will be free to express the multiplicity and complexity of being in communion with all of life. As many expressions of life appear in the Christ event, even greater possibilities await the seventh generation from now. It is for the seventh generation that we are all active agents in the Christ event. Contemplative living allows for the sacred time and space to receive the gifts being given to us by the seventh generation and by ancestors who have held a way of life that is beautiful and harmonious. ■



**HERMITAGE REFLECTIONS:
DESERT DAY**

Elbina Rafizadeh

Today is the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Eucharist was celebrated with Lauds and Fr. Isaiah was the celebrant. He spoke of reclaiming our innocence within, which too often has been buried by the Herod that also resides within us. Let us pray, he said, to recover our innocence and protect it. He also acknowledged the innocent victims who have died because of wars, injustice, and abuse. Afterwards, I thought of Fr. Isaiah's homily as I slowly walked down the hill to the trailer/hermitage where I am staying. His words resonate with the justice work of the nuns and peace workers I have met this past year, working against the trafficking of children and women, for the purpose of forced prostitution, war, and labor. How will the women and children ever recover their innocence? Will God be merciful to salvage their innocent souls that have been robbed?

Sadness encompasses me, until I encounter three deer behind a trailer, near the bottom of the hill. They acknowledge my presence and we gaze at one another, just as before. They have returned for their morning meal. These creatures of God have always been signs of reassurance that calm me when I am troubled. A blue jay rests on the back of one, and again, the eternal moment. The misty morning and fog lining on the Pacific Ocean offers no hint of the spattering rainfall, with thunder and lightning from two nights before. The drama of the weather patterns from day to day is one reason I return here month after month.

When I come to the Hermitage, I must leave behind the telephone, television, and e-mail. There is also letting go of chocolate, mascarpone cheese, and halvah. I used to carry the latter three with me, but lately, I do not carry items that represent signs of comfort and privilege. In the trunk of my car I carry a sleeping bag, three changes of clothing, indoor slippers, and a sturdy pair of shoes for the outdoors. Of course, there is a Bible, a journal, and a few books for spiritual reading. For the third time, I am reading Thomas Matus' *Ashram Diary*, a personal account of Fr. Thomas' experiences in Saccidananda Ashram in India, the home of Bede Griffiths, Abhishiktananda, and Jules Monchanin. Perhaps I savor the descriptions of the nearby villages, ashram life, and daily prayers in Sanskrit. Having a romanticized memory of the two times I visited, I enjoy reading about the ashram from a different perspective.

Despite the memories, I choose to let go of the physical, if not mental, challenges of enduring overbearing heat, mosquito bites, and other bugs that harbored in the corners of the hut's ceilings and floors. The simple huts with cement floors were furnished with a cot mattress bed covered with a mosquito netting, table and chair. Simple, indeed, in comparison to Western standards, and yet, as a result of this ascetic experience, I always returned to California, renewed

and more grateful for all the aspects of my life that I have taken so much for granted. My challenge when I retreat at the Hermitage is to re-create an ascetic experience. Needless to say, the Western version is not as extreme as that of Saccidananda ashram, but nevertheless, this version of my fasting is one that offers a path to find God in the everyday. The daily "luxury" I have allowed, however, is the one hot meal prepared by one of the monks, served at lunchtime. Of course, there is heat in the winter and a fan in the summer, a comfortable bed and shelter, whether in a trailer or in one of the retreat rooms.

During these times, when I am in retreat, while fasting and in prayer, sometimes negative emotions rise to the surface, such as anger, anxiety, fear, or depression. This unresolved inner turmoil demands attention, when distractions are limited. I choose to confront the unrest through prayer, meditation and faith. Eventually this leads to inner peace. The process is cleansing and purifying so that when I return to the world of responsibilities and work, I am renewed in mind, body, and spirit. Patience in faith promises light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

This afternoon a glimmer of light reveals a gift of reassurance and hope. While glancing through the Bible to decide which book to read, I come across God's definition of true fasting — words of consolation for peace and justice workers, for all seekers of Truth,

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

Isaiah 58: 6-11 ■



Purusha and Guru (Continued from page 1)

Maharshi and Gnanananda, both proponents of pure *advaita*. Fr. Bede on the other hand was a great admirer of the contemporary philosopher Sri Aurobindo and like him often pointed out that *advaita* was not the only interpretation of the Vedic revelation. There is also *visist-advaita*, for example, the qualified non-duality of the 11th century philosopher-theologian Ramanuja that drew its language from the philosophical school of *samkhya*. One other practical example drawn from their lives: Abhishiktananda lived out his *sannyasa* life as a wandering hermit; Fr. Bede, on the other hand, remained nestled in the community life of the ashram.

In this article I'd like to explore two other areas where this dynamic between union by identity and union by communion are at play, *purusha* and *guru*. I will do so by means of two famous Indian chants, both of which I first encountered through Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda. We shall see here how they each understood these concepts.

the purusha

The first chant is taken from the Svetasvatara Upanishad. (There is also an allusion to it in the Bhagavad Gita 8:9.)

*Vedahametam Purusham mahantam
Aditya varnam Tamasaparastat
Tameva viditratrmrytymeti
Nanya pantha vita tayanaya.*

I know the Great Person
of the color of the sun beyond darkness.
Only by knowing that one do we overcome death.
There is no other way to go.

This hymn to the Purusha was very important to both Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda. There is a beautiful postcard with Fr. Bede's image on it, and on the back of it, in Fr. Bede's own handwriting, are the words of this hymn along with a citation from the canticle in the letter to the Colossians, "He is the image the unseen God, the first born of all creation," obviously referring to Jesus. And the beautiful movie of Abhishiktananda's life, "An Interior Journey," ends with the voiceover reciting this very hymn in that long still shot of the waters of the Ganges. That is where I first encountered it.

Perhaps its main significance is that it is also part of the *sannyasa diksha*, the initiation into the life of renunciation. As Abhishiktananda describes it in *The Further Shore*,

The new sannyasi plunges into the water. Then the guru raises him like the Purusha of the Aitareya Upanishad:

Arise, O Man! Arise, wake up, you who have received the boons; keep awake!

Both of them then face the rising sun and sing the song

to the [Purusha] From the Uttara-Nârâyana:

I know him, that supreme [Purusha], sun-coloured, beyond all darkness; only in knowing him one overcomes death; no other way exists.

They then go on to recite the mantra (partially adapted from the Chândogya Upanishad)—

He is the supreme [Purusha], he is Atman, he is Brahman, he is the All, he is the Truth, he is beyond fear, beyond death, he is unborn. And I myself am He.

And then all one's clothes are untied and allowed to float away in the stream, before one is clothed in the fire-colored robes of the renunciant.

As I understand it, there are several uses and nuances of the term "purusha." Let me say at the outset, I am approaching all this not as a scholar proving a thesis, but as a singer and a songwriter with an ear for the poetry of it all. For me, language is a mysterious thing; words are dense and pregnant with meaning. Words may mean one thing or another, and sometimes words can have several meanings all at once.

The first use of purusha I want to mention is from Samkhya philosophy, about which Fr. Bede wrote a considerable amount. Samkhya is also the philosophy underlying the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. In Samkhya and classical Yoga usage, "purusha is the soul, the Self, pure consciousness, and the only source of consciousness;" purusha is "pure and distant, beyond subject and object."² Purusha is "the first principle, pure content-less consciousness, passive, unchanging."³ (Note: there is not necessarily any notion of a creator god in Samkhya or classical Yoga.) Most importantly purusha is the witness to the unconscious principle called *prakriti*, which is primordial materiality. And purusha, this principle of pure consciousness, gets so attracted to materiality—*prakriti*—as a man is drawn to a beautiful woman (so the image goes), that it eventually gets trapped in *prakriti*. Salvation then consists in being able to discriminate between the two and freeing purusha from its unfortunate marriage to *prakriti*. Because, as I heard one guru explain it, purusha has nothing to do with *prakriti*, or at least should not have, just as "the lotus has nothing to do with the water" (once again, so the image goes). Bernie Clark says for this reason both Samkhya and classical Yoga are actually dualistic philosophies, in the sense that even though they focus on the identity or non-duality of the individual self with the ultimate Self, they are not about union of purusha and prakriti, the created and the uncreated, but about their separation.⁴

A second use of the term purusha is the Cosmic Person, the Great Person, the original self from which all comes. Abhishiktananda especially sings great hymns to this

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Purusha in his diary and letters. The Purusha in this understanding is the archetypal person who contains the whole universe and all humanity, the Cosmic Person who is recognized as the Lord of Creation, in whom are contained all archetypes.

Fr. Bede liked to point out that this is similar to a concept that emerges in traditions other than Hinduism as well. It is at least interesting to note, for example, that the Kabbala develops the doctrine of Adam Kadmon as the Original Person, similar to Ibn al Arabi's notion of *al Insan al Kamil*—the Perfect or Universal One of the Sufi tradition. This is also perhaps what is being pointed to in the notion of the *tathagata* of Buddhism or the supreme *dharmakaya* of the Buddha, as well as the *purushottaman* or the *paramatman* in Hinduism.⁵ And of course why this notion had such resonance with Abhishiktananda, and why Bede would have written the Colossians canticle together with the Vedahametam hymn, is that according to the Christian understanding this is the archetypal meaning of the Son of Man, a title Jesus uses to refer to himself. The Son of Man is the supreme Person who took flesh and was manifested in Jesus, the one who “holds all creation together in himself,” as Paul sings in his canticle. The Christian understanding is that from the Source, whatever we may call it—the Ground, the Father, the One, the Absolute, the abyss of the godhead—there springs a Word, a wisdom, an image of the Godhead that contains all archetypes and unites the whole creation in one.

Abhishiktananda in his spiritual diary writes in a similar vein: “God is invisible, non-manifested, *a-vyakta*. This God is the Father, the Source, the First [*Prathama*].” But God manifests himself, and when manifested God is Person in the Purusha.⁶ Conversely, this Purusha, the Cosmic Person, then, in turn also reveals the Source. When the abyss of the Godhead becomes a person—that is Purusha.

And in that Cosmic Person, in the Word or Son as Christians would have it, “all the archetypes of all created beings are contained. And “of all these archetypes which are in an integrated order,” Bede writes, “the supreme is the archetypal [human person], whom we have seen in Hinduism, in Buddhism, in Islam and in Christianity.”⁷ This is a third nuance drawing on the preceding, the Purusha as specifically the archetype of humanity. As one strain of Sufi thought also teaches, every created being has its archetype, its “idea,” if you will, in the all-creating mind; this Great Person is the being in whom the form and nature of humanity is revealed.⁸

For a fourth use of the term purusha, I turn to Fr. Bede's love for, and thus his commentary on, the Bhagavad Gita, that great paean to Krishna as a personal god. In the Gita, that Great Person is also someone to be adored in *bhakti* yoga as contrasted to the *jnana* yoga of knowledge of the Upanishads. Even though the epic *Mahabharata* dates back to 400 BCE, the section of it known as the Bhagavad

Gita only seems to have risen to ascendancy much later, perhaps not long before the birth of Jesus. There are various interesting speculations about why it rose up at that time—perhaps as a reaction against Samkhya philosophy that seemed to make God unnecessary, or as a reaction to the excesses of Brahmanical ritualism, or as a response to the growing popularity of Buddhism. Whatever the case may be, the Gita, which as we noted does not necessarily have a notion of personal creator God, folds all the disciplines and doctrines of Samkhya and Yoga back into relationship with a personal God, the *Purushottama*, beyond *atman* and *brahman*. The Gita teaches (we are referring here to Chapter 15) that there are two purushas in the universe: there is first of all the perishable, the *kshara*, and then there is the imperishable, the *akshara*. But beyond these two is the *Purushottaman*, the Supreme Person, who is manifest in these different levels.

Yet, the Supreme Person is other than these,
who, having encompassed all three worlds,
upholds and maintains all,
and has been spoken of as the imperishable Lord and the
Supreme Spirit.

I am wholly beyond the perishable world of matter
(*kshetra*),
and am superior even to the imperishable soul (*jivatma*).
Hence, I am known as the Purushottama, the Supreme
Self,
in the world as well as in the Vedas.

In other words, Bede writes in *The River of Compassion* that he was convinced that the Gita established beyond doubt that “that which is known in the Upanishads as Brahman and atman is also Purusha, the personal God.” So the Bhagavad Gita chapter 8 also quotes the Svetasvatara Upanishad about “the ageless Being, Ruler of all... a form beyond human conception, effulgent like the sun and far beyond the darkness of ignorance.”

This notion of the purusha as personal god is not entirely missing in the Upanishads either, a topic we will not go further into here except to say that Fr. Bede, following Zaehner, cites examples in the Bridharanyaka, Isha and Svetasvatara Upanishads.

For yet another meaning, the term purusha in the sacred literature of India can also simply refer to the human person him/herself, one's own spirit or psychic essence, one's immortal Self. This is a use found in both the Bhagavad Gita and the early Upanishads. This has a certain resonance with the third meaning I mentioned, the Great Person as the archetype of humanity. As Valerie Roebuck explains it, sometimes rather than *atman*, the inner part of a human being is called *purusha*. (She usually translates it as ‘person’ instead of ‘man’ to avoid implying that it is exclusive to the

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male.) She says, in the introduction to her translation of the Upanishads:

Here the inner reality is pictured in almost physical form as a tiny being moving inside the body, a ‘dwarf’, ‘a thumb in length’, ‘like a rice-grain or a barleycorn’, yet mysteriously as large as space. Some of the texts envisage a series of [*purushas*] or *âtman*s, of increasingly subtle form, from the physical body to the inmost self.⁹

In some way we have now also circled back to the idea of *purusha* in Samkhya philosophy because according to Samkhya, “there are countless individual *purushas*, each one infinite, eternal, omniscient, unchanging, and unchangeable.”¹⁰ But we don’t necessarily leave these other meanings behind. Sri Aurobindo ties them together, for instance, when he explains the famous legend of Krishna visiting each of the *gopis* in their separate dwellings. Krishna takes on a different form for each, because, “He is *sarva*, everyone, each *purusha* with [its] apparently different *prakriti* is he, and yet at the same time he is *purushotama*.”¹¹

Bede offers one final nuance: he suggests that *purusha* can also be understood as the image of God in the human person. This is a notion dear to Christianity, but it also has some resonances in the Kabbala and Sufism. The *purusha* as the image of God in us is the divine who/that we discover in/as the depth of our own consciousness, as laid out, for example, in the Katha Upanishad with its marvelous map of the spectrum of consciousness: that beyond the senses and their objects is the *manas*—the rational mind, and then the *buddhi*—the intuitive mind, and then there is the *mahat*—the Great Self. Beyond the *mahat* is the *avyakta*—the Unmanifest; but beyond the unmanifest is the *Purusha*. “And beyond the *Purusha*, there is nothing, there is nowhere else to go.”

Abhishiktananda writes in this vein that the “*Purusha* is at once multiple and unique,” because “Being manifests itself in every consciousness of being,” and “every consciousness of being [then] tends to the fullness of Being, and is it already, fundamentally.” At the same time these *purushas* are also not separate because “No person is human except in the archetypal Human Person, Christ. Each one is perfect, full, *pûrna*, with the sole perfection and fullness of the *âdi-purusha*”—the eternal *Purusha*, the original Person. Abhishiktananda does not cite it here, but it is hard not to remember Paul in Colossians, right after the “*Purusha* Canticle,” first declaring that in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,” and then in the next breath adding “and you have come to fullness in him”! Each one is perfect with the sole perfection and fullness of the eternal *Purusha*.

Two more images from Abhishiktananda to close this section. There is the well known image in both the Svetasvatara and Mundaka Upanishad of the two birds on the tree.

Two birds, companions and friends,
Cling to the same tree.
One of them eats the sweet pippala-berry:
The other looks on, without eating.

Generally understood, the first bird symbolizes the *jivatman*—the individual self; the other, uninvolved, is the *paramatman*. Abhishiktananda, commenting on this same passage from the Mundaka Upanishad remembers the next verse of it too, that

In the same tree a person is plunged.
Deluded, grieving from powerlessness:
When seeing the other, powerful one, content,
He sees his greatness, he is freed from sorrow.

When the seer sees the gold-coloured Maker,
powerful one, person, source of *Brahman*,
knowing him, he shakes off good and evil:
Stainless, he reaches supreme equality.

And he says of this passage that Christ himself is “the *Purusha* who looks on, while the ‘other’ *purusha* enjoys the world and lives in anxiety.”¹²

In another place, Abhishiktananda images Christ here as a “ferryman, who brings us to the ‘further shore’ of the heart.” But not only is Christ himself “the *Purusha* who looks on, while the ‘other’ *purusha* enjoys the world and lives in anxiety”; the sight of that “true *Purusha* guides the other *purusha* to *samyama*”—as the sight of Christ guides us to identity with him.¹³ And so St. John says in his first letter, “When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is!”

When I sing this chant, I do not choose between one or the other meaning. Somehow they all ring at the same time, like the overtones of a bell struck just right.

Notes:

1. Swami Abhishiktananda: *his life told through his letters*, ed. James Stuart, 282-283.
2. Bernie Clark, *Yinsights*, 150-151.
3. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, 780.
4. *Yinsights*, 150.
5. Bede Griffiths, *The Universal Wisdom*, 33.
6. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depths of the Heart*, 284.
7. *Universal Wisdom*, 463.
8. *Universal Wisdom*, 32.
9. Valerie Roebuck, Introduction to *The Upanishads*, xviii.
10. *Yinsights*, 151.
11. *Penguin Pocket Aurobindo*, 165.
12. *Ascent*, 284.
13. *Ascent*, 284.

(to be concluded) ■



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SPIRITUAL EVENTS CONTINUE AT OSAGE FOREST OF PEACE

- **Fr. George Eber**, of St. Antony Orthodox Christian Church in Tulsa, will offer his weekly class, *Silence and the Art of Prayer in the Christian Orthodox Tradition*, on Wednesdays (from Jan 27), 1:30 to 3:00 pm. This year we shall explore with Fr. George *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way*, by Matthew the Poor.
- On the second Saturday of each month, beginning on February 13, from 8:30 to noon, **Barbara Schneeberg** will lead *A Morning in the Forest*, a morning of centering prayer and praying Scripture. Newcomer orientation at 8:00 am.
- **Helen Cortes**, of the Maria Kannon Zen Center in Dallas, will offer two days of *Zen meditation*, dharma talks and silence from Friday to Sunday, February 19-21. contact: Paula Day at pday@cbtulsa.com or call her at (918) 798-1297.
- **Sharon Malie Montgomery** will offer, on Saturday, Feb 13, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, *Healing Your Heart, Finding Love Within*, a day of self-care, honoring oneself through movement, journaling, listening to the body and connecting to nature. On Saturday, Feb 27, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Ms Montgomery will offer *Circles of Healing Movements*, exploring techniques that be-

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www.BedeGriffiths.com ■

long to the ancient healing art of Hawaiian Lomilomi. Contact her at (918) 645-7090.

- **Ivy Norris**, from the School and College of Metaphysics, will offer *Divine Friendship with Self, Others and the Divine* on Sat Jan 30, from 1:30-3:30 pm, and *The Value of Dreams* on Sat April 10 from 2:00-4:00 pm.
- **Ruben Habito** will be at the Forest from April 21-25 for an *“Encounters of the Heart” Retreat* — an intensive Zen meditation retreat from Wednesday evening to Sunday noon. To register, contact Helen Cortes at hacortes@gmail.com

Osage Contact: Mardana, osageforest@gmail.com; phone (918) 245-2734 or 640-4838. ■

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