

THE PURUSHA AND THE GURU: IDENTITY AND COMMUNION
FOR BEDE GRIFFITHS AND ABHISHIKTANANDA

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 their distinct different 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 Gîtâ, 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 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 *sâmkhya*. 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.²

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, in the concepts of the

¹ *Swami Abhishiktananda: His life told through his letters*, ed. James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 282-283.

² My confrere Fr. Bruno resolves some of the tension between the two approaches by seeing them as the two poles of the Christian trajectory, Baptism and Eucharist: "I believe that the models of Christian non-duality proposed by Abhishiktananda and by Bede Griffiths are both valid. The basic Christian experience of baptismal initiation or "illumination" ... is an experience of divine-human identity, of the non-duality at the core of the person. The experience of a new *koinonia* among Christians is also an experience of divine non-duality; this communion is a participation in the divine communion or unity." Bruno Barnhart, *The Future of Wisdom* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 63-64.

purusha and the *guru*. I will do so by means of two famous Indian chants, both which I first encountered through Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda. We will see these concepts through their eyes, in a sense, exploring how they each understood these concepts.

the purusha

The first chant is taken from the Svetâshvatara Upanishad (3:8). (There is also an allusion to it in the Bhagavad Gîtâ 8:9.)

*Vedâhametam purusam mahântam
âditya varnam tamasah parastât.
Tameva viditoâti mrityumeti
nânyah pantha vidyate ayanâya.*

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 (1:15), "He is the image of 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 sannyasa plunges into the water. Then the guru raises him like the [Purusha³] of the Aitareya Upanishad:

Arise, O Man! Arise, wake up, you who have received the boons; keep awake!⁴

³ There are various transliterations of this Sanskrit term; for the sake of consistency I will always use this spelling. Where otherwise spelled in works cited I will place the word in brackets.

⁴ cp. Katha Up. 3:14.

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 Âtman, 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 the initiates clothes are untied and allowed to float away in the
stream, before one is clothed in the fire-colored robes of the renunciate.

As I understand it that are several uses and nuances of the term “purusha.” Let
me say at the outset, I am approaching this all 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 Sâmkhya philosophy, about
which Fr. Bede wrote a considerable amount. Sâmkhya is also the philosophy
underlying the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. In Sâmkhya 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.”⁵
Purusha is “the first principle, pure content-less consciousness, passive,
unchanging.”⁶ (Note: there is not necessarily any notion of a creator god in
Sâmkhya 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

⁵ Bernie Clark, *Yinsights: A Journey into the Philosophy & Practice of Yin Yoga* (self-published ISBN 978-0-9687665-1-4, 2007), 150-151.

⁶ *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 780.

do with the water” (once again, so the image goes). Bernie Clark says for this reason both Sâmkhya 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.⁷

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 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 *paramâtman* in Hinduism.⁸ And of course why this notion had such resonance with Abhishiktananda, and why Bede would have cited the Colossians canticle together with the Vedahametam chant, 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.

Thus Abhishiktananda writes in his spiritual diary: “God is invisible, non-manifested, *a-vyakta*. This God is the Father, the Source, the First [*Prathamā*].” But God manifests himself, and when manifested God is Person in the Purusha.⁹ Conversely, this Purusha, the Cosmic Person, then, in turn also reveals the Source.

⁷ *Yinsights*, 150.

⁸ *Universal Wisdom: A Journey through the Sacred Wisdom of the World*, Selected and Introduced by Bede Griffiths (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 33.

⁹ *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spirit Diary of Abhishiktananda (1948-1973)*, Selected and Introduced by Raimon Panikkar, trans. David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 284.

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.”¹⁰ 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; and in this Great Person the form and nature of humanity is revealed.¹¹

For a fourth use of the term *purusha*, I turn to Fr. Bede’s love for, and thus his commentary on, the Bhagavad Gîtâ, that great paean to Krishna as a personal god. In the Gîtâ, 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 *Mahâbhârata* dates back to 400 BCE, the section of it known as the Bhagavad Gîtâ 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 Sâmkhya philosophy, which 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 Gîtâ folds all the disciplines and doctrines of Sâmkhya and Yoga, which as we noted do not necessarily have a notion of personal creator God, back into relationship with a personal God, the *Purushottama*, beyond *âtman* and *brahman*. The Gîtâ teaches (we are referring here to Chapter 15) that there are two *purushas* in the universe: there is first of all the perishable, the *kshetra*, and then there is the imperishable, the *akshetra*.¹² 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 (*jivâtma*).
Hence, I am known as the Purushottama, the Supreme Self,

¹⁰ *Universal Wisdom*, 463.

¹¹ *Universal Wisdom*, 32.

¹² “The perishable and the imperishable too—these are the two kinds of *purushas* in this world. Of these, the bodies of all beings are spoken of as perishable; while the embodied souls (*jivâtma*) are called the imperishable.” (BG 15:16)

in the world as well as in the Vedas.¹³

Bede writes in *The River of Compassion* that he was convinced that thus the Gîtâ establishes beyond doubt that “that which is known in the Upanishads as Brahman and Âtman is also Purusha, the personal God.”¹⁴ So the Bhagavad Gîtâ chapter 8:9 also quotes the Svetâshvatara 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 Brihadâranyaka, Îsha and Svetâshvatara Upanishads.¹⁵

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 Gîtâ 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 *âtman*, 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 male.) She writes, 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 *âtmans*, of increasingly subtle form, from the physical body to the inmost self.¹⁶

¹³ BG 15:17-18.

¹⁴ “The Gita is saying that there are two purushas, persons, the perishable which is the world of nature, of becoming, and the imperishable, which is the world of spirit, the unchanging, the intelligible world. But beyond these the Gita recognizes another, the highest Spirit, beyond the imperishable. It is the Purushottaman, the Supreme Person, the highest Self who pervades and sustains all, the changeless Lord.” *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita*, Bede Griffiths (New York: Continuum, 1995), 271-272.

¹⁵ Fr. Bede often pointed out how the Upanishads begin with Brahman, the mystery of being; and then they come to the realization that this mystery of being is not different from *âtman*, the inner Self, and that the human self is one with the Supreme Self, the Being of the whole creation. But then, as thought develops further in Upanishads, this *âtman*, this Brahman, comes to be seen as Purusha, who is not, however, an impersonal ground of being nor an impersonal ground of consciousness, pure and distant, beyond subject and object, but Purusha as personal God again, the Lord, who is an object of worship.

¹⁶ Valerie Roebuck, introduction to *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Books India, 2000), xviii.

In some way we have now also circled back to the idea of purusha in Sâmkhya philosophy because according to Sâmkhya, “there are countless individual purushas, each one infinite, eternal, omniscient, unchanging, and unchangeable.”¹⁷ But we don’t necessarily leave the 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 *purushottama*.”¹⁸

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.”¹⁹

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 (2:9-10), 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 Svetâshvatara and Mundaka Upanishad of the two

¹⁷ *Yinsights*, 151.

¹⁸ *Penguin Pocket Aurobindo*, ed. Makarand Paranjape (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999), 165.

¹⁹ Katha Up., 3:10-11. Roebuck points out in her notes that the terminology here is similar to Sâmkhya, except that here in the Upanishad Purusha is regarded as higher than *avyakta*, which she associates with *prakriti* of Sâmkhya philosophy. So by implication purusha is also “the source of it and all other levels of existence”; whereas in classical Sâmkhya, purusha and *prakriti* are autonomous and have an equal part in creation. (*The Upanishads*, 325, n. 31)

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.²⁰

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

In the same tree the individual soul is plunged,
deluded, grieving from powerlessness:
When it sees thus the other, the powerful one,
content, then it becomes liberated from sorrow.

When the seer sees the gold-coloured Maker,
powerful one, person, source of *brahman*,
the illumined one shakes off good and evil,
becomes stainless, and reaches supreme equality.²¹

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.”²² 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.²³ And so St. John says in his first letter (1 Jn 3:2), “...when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is!”

So we see several complementary nuances and images of this weighty term “*purusha*.” As I mentioned at the beginning, when I sing this chant, I do not necessarily choose between one or the other meaning. Somehow they all ring at the same time, like the overtones of a bell struck just right.

guru

²⁰ Mu. Up. 3.III.1; Sv. Up. 4:6.

²¹ Mu. Up., 3.III:2-3.

²² *Ascent*, 284.

²³ *Ascent*, 284.

The second verse I'd like to comment on here is usually associated with the Sri Guru Gîtâ.

*Tvameva mâtâ cha pitâ tvameva,
tvameva bandhuscha sakhâ tvameva
tvameva vidyâ dravinam tvameva
tvameva sarvam mama devadeva*

The first time I encountered it was in Abhishiktananda's *Secret of Arunachala*:

Ramana laid a fatherly hand on her, and she, absolutely beside herself, looked into his eyes and sang the famous Sanskrit verse: *Tvam eva mata...*

You are my mother, my father, my brother,
You are my whole family, all my wealth,
You are my all, absolutely all, O my Lord!"²⁴

The other time I encountered this beautiful little hymn was on the recording of a talk that Fr. Bede's gave, where he noted this hymn in relation to the fact of how Western religion must come to recognize the feminine aspect of God.

The Sri Guru Gîtâ is a beautiful poetic text addressed by Lord Shiva to his consort Parvati. It contains elements from two different sources, Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism. From the Tantric scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism it gets its *via positiva* and its devotional elements; and so references to the guru-mandala and the five functions of the guru, descriptions of the guru's feet, instructions about seats, places and directions, etc. But from Vedanta it gets the notion that the guru is actually Absolute Brahman, its apophatic strain, if you will, its *via negativa*.

When we are speaking about a human guru, as I understand it, first of all, we initially venerate the outward form of the one we consider to be our guru. And so the other famous song to come from the Sri Guru Gîtâ:

*Dhyâna mûlam gururmurtih
Pûja mûlam guroh padam
mantra mûlam guror vâkyam
moksha mûlam guroh kripâ*

The root of meditation is the image of the guru;
the root of worship is the feet of the guru;
the root of mantra is the word of the guru;

²⁴ Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 99.

the root of salvation the grace of the guru.

But this is only the beginning of the understanding; we soon realize that what we are venerating is not the outward form at all, not him or her at all, but the shakti that dwells inside that outward form, in that body. The guru is not a person with a physical body; the guru is Shakti--the Divine Power, Spiritual Energy. The true guru is the "awakened spiritual power that is established in the physical body of the guru." The physical body is merely the means for the manifestation of Shakti."²⁵

But there is of course a further step yet: venerating that outward form of the Shakti that is the guru's body and recognizing the indwelling Shakti that is actually the guru awakens that same Shakti in the disciple. The Divine Shakti that is manifest in the physical body is engaged in the welfare of the disciples. "By the path of the Guru knowledge of one's Self arises (v. 110)" That is when we discover the guru in the cave of the heart. At first we apprehend this guru too in a form of some sort. Here is a sample from verse 91, with an obvious influence from Kashmir Shaivism:

One should meditate on the divine form of the guru
seated on the throne situated at the center of the pericarp of the heart
lotus,
shining like the crescent moon,
holding the book of knowledge and bestowing the desired boon.

But this devotion to the Guru in the cave of the heart is then meant to give way to non-duality and non-discriminative vision. Then *Gurureva jagat sarvaan*: "the entire universe appears to be filled with the guru..." It is realized that the form of the guru is the infinite reality that encompasses the entire sentient and insentient creation. Not only is the Guru the revered master of the Universe, but the Guru is my very *Âtman*, self-soul is the *Âtman* of all creatures.²⁶ There is of course the famous saying that when the disciple is ready the Guru will appear; a corollary to that follows on it: when the disciple is ready the Guru is everywhere. This is a marvelous teaching. Yes, *gururbrahma, gururoishnur, gurur devo maheshvarah*--"the Guru is Brahma, Vishnu, Lord Shiva"; but ultimately *gurur eva parabrahma*--"Indeed the Guru is supreme Brahman." The guru is the ground of being, the guru is the ground of consciousness. Or, to put it conversely: the ground of being itself is the guru, the ground of consciousness is the guru. The guru is the pure blissful consciousness that permeates the entire universe. Dare we say, *sat-chit-*

²⁵ Swami Shivom Tirth, *The Divine Song of the Guru: Shri Guru Gîtâ, Meaning and Commentary* (New York: Swami Shivom Tirth Ashram, Inc.: 2005), 6.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 11.

ananda--the very nature of being is this bliss consciousness so ultimately, it is *this* form of the guru that is the foundation of meditation, worship, the word from which comes mantra and whose grace is the root of *moksha*--salvation.

Abhishiktananda writes at length about the concept of "guru" especially in his book *Guru and Disciple*. There he explains that the guru is most certainly not simply a master or professor or preacher nor even a spiritual guide or a director of souls "who has learned from books or from others what in turn is passed on to others." The guru is one "who has first attained the Real", and the guru is one who knows from personal experience the way that leads to the Real. The guru is one who is capable of initiating the disciple and of making well up from within the heart of the disciple the immediate ineffable experience which is the guru's own -- "the utterly transparent knowledge, so limpid and pure, that one quite simply is--the mystery of I AM." The mystery of the guru is the mystery of the depth of the heart. The experience of being face to face with the guru is that of "being face to face with oneself in the most secret corner, with all pretence gone..."²⁷ Certainly the meeting with the guru is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in one's life, but it is a meeting that can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. "It happens in the beyond, in the fine point of the soul as the mystics say." What the guru says actually springs from the very heart of the disciple. "It is not that another person is speaking to one. It is not a question of receiving from outside oneself new thoughts which are transmitted through the senses." What the guru says springs from the very heart of the disciple.²⁸

In that context we understand the full weight of what he wrote about Gnanananda, that he "was the first man before whom I have been willing to prostrate." Then on March 10th--after he went back to stay with Gnanananda again in Tapovan in early 1956 for two weeks of immersion in Hinduism--he wrote: "I would in all simplicity die in the arms of my guru, trusting in my guru."²⁹

The other important element to add is here is how essential the role of the disciple is. It's interesting to read this, written so many years before that monumental day of Marc-Ajatananda's diksha, in the light of that event. First of all Abhishiktananda insists that one should not even use the word "guru" let alone even call someone one's guru unless one has the heart and soul of a disciple. "Only those who are not yet worthy spend their time running after gurus." Again, as the famous adage says, when the disciple is ready the guru will

²⁷ *Ascent*, 147.

²⁸ *Guru and Disciple*, 29.

²⁹ *Ascent*, 147.

appear. Then the guru and the disciple form a pair, two elements that attract one another. Normal human encounters always have some element of duality about them, even though in the deepest of encounters there is a kind of fusion in which the two become one in love and desire. But there is something different in the meeting of the guru and disciple: there is no longer even fusion, for we are on the plane of the original non-duality! In other words, there are not two to fuse or, better put, there are not two at all--which of course is the literal meaning of *advaita*--"not two." As a matter of fact, Abhishiktananda says that this is the way *advaita* becomes comprehensible, by having first lived it with another human being; identity comes from having experienced communion existentially in the meeting with the guru.³⁰ And of course he felt that he had finally become a guru himself in his relationship with Marc-Ajatananda.

Bede didn't write often about guru except in *Universal Wisdom*.³¹ There he wrote about the Medieval Sant movement in India that grew out of the *bhakti* tradition, which in turn had grown up out of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and inspired a monotheistic devotion to a personal creator God. Whereas the typical Hindu normally conceived of God descending as an *avatara* in the form of Krishna or Ram etc., the Sant movement conceived of God as totally without form, totally transcending the universe and yet immanent, especially revealed as an immanent presence in the heart. The greatest exponent of this was Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. For Nanak, God expresses himself in the Word (*Sabad* or *Sabda* in Sanskrit), a Word that is both revealed in creation and makes itself known in the heart. But this Word is *anahat*--unstruck or unheard; in other words it is an interior word. (As a matter of fact in the Yoga tradition the heart *chakra* is the *anahata chakra*, the place of the unstruck sound.) When the Word is expressed it is referred to as the *Nam*--the name," which bears the content of God's revelation both in creation and in the human heart; and both this Word and this Name are what are revealed by the Guru. Consequently this principle of the "Guru" is the key concept for the Sikhs, but primarily understood as an inner guide, and any external Guru "exists only to awaken the disciple-*sikh* to this Guru within, the inner light and truth." The Guru reveals the will of God, the *hukam*, which is the divine order in nature that can be discerned beneath all the violence and conflict around us, "the truth, the reality behind all appearances." This discernment of the divine comes through the guidance of the Guru,

³⁰ *Guru and Disciple*, 28-29.

³¹ An interesting side note: having attended both centenaries celebrations of Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda, I noted how many people referred to Fr. Bede as her or his "guru." On the other hand, outside of the relationship with Marc-Ajatananda, that was rarely said of Abhishiktananda, who was usually referred to as "swamiji." One can only speculate as to the why of this (and some did). I want to suggest that this may too be the result of Fr. Bede's penchant for communion and community relationships that was much stronger than Abhishiktananda with his passionate independence.

whoever he or she may be, “who awakens us to the inner light, the word of truth within, and enables us to know the Name, the character, the person of the indwelling spirit, and all this comes to us by the ‘grace’ of God. This contact with the supreme mystery guides and directs our life, if we empty ourselves, surrender our ego and allow the divine truth to take possession of our being.”³²

I have a beautiful batik of Jesus as *satguru* over the altar in my hermitage that I am fortunate to gaze at each day. And when I sing this chant, *Tvameva mata...* to Jesus as my guru, all of this awakens in me: there is Jesus adored in the outer form of his body, Jesus who pours forth the Spirit from his own wounded side on the cross into the cave my heart. I begin gazing at Jesus but, as St. John teaches, “we shall be like him when we see him as he is” until, as St. Paul writes, “it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”

the purusha and the guru

I want to give Abhishiktananda the word here, in a way that ties both these themes--purusha and guru--together. First from *The Further Shore*, where he writes that the “initial call is the testimony of the scriptures and the guru”:

But the day comes when the faith is direct, when faith has reached its fullness in experience... The eyes of the soul are now wide open: they contemplate the great light, which has taken over the darkness.

... and then he quotes again the “purusha hymn” from Svetâshvatara Upanishad: “I know the great Purusha” but then he adds in parentheses, “that is finally myself in very truth.”

Finally, in his diary (April, 1973) Abhishiktananda was writing about the idea of God as Father, and he stated that God’s “paternity” probably implies likeness more than origin. And then he says again that it is specifically the concept of the guru that can help us grasp this, because--and let this luminous section be our conclusion:

The guru is the one in whom I see myself.
God is myself in what is most beautiful,
most true, deepest in me.
When I look down to the bottom of the abyss, of the GUHÂ,
it is my very own image that is reflected back to me--
that is why I say ABBA, *Pîta*--
but an image that is so beautiful,

³² *Universal Wisdom*, 28-30.

so beautiful,
completely radiant with glory,
a glory that has no beginning or end--
beyond all birth and equally beyond all death.
The *tejomaya* Purusha, the self-luminous light--*svayam jyoti*,
the supreme light--*param jyoti*,
And it is to this Purusha who is myself
--*so'ham asmi*--
sun-colored beyond the darkness--
that I reach out, fervently, irresistibly,
with a view to our coming together, our *advaita*.
This call of myself to myself,
of myself as human to myself as God.

I had lost God,
and in my search for him
it is I myself I have recovered,
but myself, what a myself!
I have disappeared from my sight
into my *tejas*, my radiance.³³

³³ *Ascent*, 378-379.