In the highest golden sheath is the Godhead, 

Unfailing, indivisible, pure it is, 
The Light of lights, He who knows the Self knows it. 
Neither sun nor moon nor stars shine there, 
Neither lightning nor fire finds there a place. 
With the radiance of that Light alone all things shine. 
That radiance illumines all this world.

Mundaka Upanishad 2.10.11
(transl: R. Panikkar)

Why want it all costs to name the mystery that is within me? Under the name of Jesus. I entered marvellously into it, and this heart of Jesus, my heart, has returned to me as the Father's bosom. Under the name of Arinshada, it next entered into it and then the light was so great that it dazzled me, and all the names, all the forms that until then I had distinguished, within it, under the guidance of my previous masters vanished in this full sunlight. But when the sun has appeared, have the
The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda
Chapter Four: Another irresistible vocation

"I have been completely taken over by it!"

1946, 1947

Despite his voluminous correspondence, bursting with vitality and the need to communicate, Henri's inner life as a monk at Kergonan, his secret longings, for years remained largely unknown to his friends and family. There is no doubting his faith, but it was much a part of him as his heart and his lungs – an unquestioned dimension of himself as natural as breathing. It was in a way a simple faith, owing much to his upbringing, especially to his mother, and redolent of the austerity that was typical of the Catholicism of his youth – an austerity seen in the way he reminds his beloved sister Louise of the example that Maman gave us: "That one is not on earth to enjoy oneself. We are on earth to love the Good Lord, to respond a little to the love that He has offered us..." (Louise, 1931, 1943).

Throughout his life he was grateful for that deep ground in faith that he was later to say was essential if the mind was to 'launch out on its own without too great a risk'... 

At this time, his only thoughts, put on paper, apart from correspondence, was a long typescript, written at his mother's request, in 1942, and called Amour et Sagesse (Love and Wisdom). James Stuart notes that though its three chapters speak of the deification and the mystery of the divine, the whole is a loving hermeneutics of the working life.

Editor's Note: We present here one chapter of the forthcoming biography of Abhishiktananda by Shirley du Boulay, expected to be published in 2004 by Orbis Books. We have chosen a chapter on his early life, just before his departure for India, because it presents many lesser known facts about his call to India. His time in India is well known because of his Diary and the biography by James Stuart.
from an entirely traditional viewpoint, they already display the characteristic features of his later writing. (Life, p.8) Indeed this is immediately clear in the author's stated aim to avoid theological speculations and to rely on personal experience. I have set down nothing here except what is my own. I have judged it unnecessary to reproduce what can be found elsewhere which explains the fragmentary nature of this essay. (typescript, p.4, quoted in Life, p.8). Yet despite its traditional framework, in this early manuscript lies the essence of his life-long search, a search which was to put him at the cutting edge of 20th century spirituality. Not only are there already traces of a reading broader than purely Christian, but on the penultimate page comes the ringing cry: ‘Beyond, always beyond! It is not your gift, Lord, that I desire, but yourself’ (TS p.108, quoted in Life, p.9). This yearning was to inform the rest of his life, and his sense of being inextricably entwined with a call that had beckoned him for over a decade. For years he kept his secret from everyone, even his family, but as early as 1934, just before he was ordained, he was filled with a passionate desire to go to India. (This date can be determined with accuracy from later references in letters and in his Spiritual Diary.)

How had he acquired this wish? How, living inside the high walls of an enclosed order, had he learnt anything about India or Indian thought? What did he come across that fired his imagination and that he acquired an intense wish not just to read Hindu scriptures, but to live in the land of their origin? Opinions are divided. The obvious assumption is that, given his role as Librarian, he would have had ready access to Indian texts such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and that is the view that some of his contemporaries put forward. But Father Lemarié, who was at Kergonan from 1936 and who became so close a friend that

Fathers Le Saux wrote to him regularly for the rest of his life, is not one of them; in fact the question of the origins of his interest in India still puzzles him: ‘It remains a mystery. There was absolutely nothing on the subject in the library at Kergonan (neither Upanishads, nor Bhagavad Gita) at most a few reviews of the missions in the East. It is certain that he had an inner call very soon after entering the monastery. If I questioned him on this subject before he told me of his intention to go to India (in 1946) I do not remember his reply. Neither have I any memory of discussions about India before the announcement of his departure.’ (E-mail to author 26.12.2001)

Were these few reviews the sole source of his interest? Though there is a reference in Le Saux’s correspondence to all the books on India that are lying about in my room (22.8.1947) that was much later and the memory of the story of a friend as Father Lemarié cannot be discounted. Maybe those reviews contained something of sufficient power to make an indelible influence. But another dimension must be added, and that was the influence of Henri’s Uncle Henri. Henri Sonnefroid, who was a member of the Foreign Missionary Society of Paris and who was sent to China in 1933, then to India in 1938 with the Communist resistance groups. This ‘old’ ‘Uncle Henri’, the brother of Henri’s mother, was much admired by the Le Saux family, partly for his work as a missionary and his courage in travelling so far, but most of all because after his death at Wajchow in 1949 they were told by a bishop that Uncle Henri was put to death from hatred of his religion and that we can think of him as a martyr. It’s a joy and a privilege to be his nephew. It is a sign of his spiritual stature to have been described in such a way by someone who knew him so well.'
glory for us to know that the Good Lord has chosen one of ours for such an honour." (Family, 21 July 1946.) On a visit to Europe in the early 1930s Henri Sonnefraud came to visit his nephew at Kerzogna, and apparently the two disagreed strongly, the older man wondering how the young Henri could shut himself up in a monastery when there was a whole world to explore. Eventually, and certainly before he returned to China, the two were reconciled, such a clash with a revered relation leaving a profound mark on Henri.

It says much for Henri's self-control and discretion that though he was only 24 years old when this desire came over him, he said nothing to anyone for years. It was just a dream and one he would not even consider pursuing while his mother was alive. He knew his time, reading anything about India, he could lay hands on, studying English and reading Conan Doyle and Kipling in the evening, but not saying a word to anyone, as he was instructed to.

Eventually, after a decade of silence and some six months after his mother's death in 1944, he wrote to his sister Annette, probably confiding first in her as she herself was, at the time, considering the religious life. Annette promptly told Louise, who of course immediately wrote to Henri, who had arrived in India. Henri's reply was swift, though he made no excuses for not writing first to Louise; the sister to whom in most ways he was closest. He admits that he has dreamed for years of going to India, though he does not explain what he wants to do there, simply telling her to ask Annette to fill her in with these details of a task which he admits is quite a daunting prospect.

"I would like to have what it takes, and likewise the skill and moral strength to bring off this particular work. But I am much afraid that it is beyond my capability, and above all I am so committed to Kerzogna. I know certainly that I have my place there, that I fulfil my role there, and that my departure will create real difficulties, for if the monastery still has some chance of surviving, I don't know that it would be right to leave it." (Louise, 27 December 1944)

So, loyalty to his mother had been replaced by loyalty to his monastery. But this loyalty was complex and contradictory. On the one hand he had taken a vow of stability, requiring him to remain in his monastery for the rest of his life: he loved Kerzogna; only weeks before his death admitting that Kerzogna had been the background of all that he had been able to do here." (Letter to J. Levarlet, 22/9/1973) On the other hand there were times when the negative side could not be contained and he admitted to a "disaster for the monastery" (Diary, 5/2/1956) and conceded that life in the monastery did not suit him; indeed that "it was in my deep dissatisfaction that my desire to come to India was born." (L. 15/3/1967, quoted in Life p.13)

Soon after he had written to his sisters, Henri went to see his Abbot, explaining his intention, more fully, than he had to Louise; he wanted to establish the contemplative monastic life there in a completely Indian form. On failing that, to live a contemplative life in India as a hermit. The Abbot gave him permission to approach various authorities and for the next four years Henri was to endure vacillations, hesitancy and the changing of ecclesiastical minds. The only one to stay constant in his desire was Henri himself. He wrote, first to the Abbot of Bruges, Dom Névé, and matters were proceeding quite well until Henri made it clear that his aim was an essentially contemplative life, and not half-contemplative, half-apostolic. (LeSaux to Monchanin, 13/8/1947) it says something for the spiritual climate of the 1940s that the Abbot was immediately put off by this, replying that it would be better if they pursued their separate
paths. There was then an exchange of letters with the Bishop of Pondicherry and the Bishop of Salem, the latter, responding enthusiastically, but saying his diocese was too poor and too small to help. Henri, however, decided to take on the responsibility of a new foundation. A moment's cheer came when one of his brothers at Kergonan, with whom he was in total accord, said that he would like to accompany Henri, only to be demanaged as the Abbot put his foot down at the thought of losing two of his monks.

The only encouragement he received was from some French monks in Salem, in Tamil Nadu, who responded by saying they had spoken to their Vicar General and: 'We very much welcome you with open arms, so come when you can. The sooner you come the better.' (L. 11.10.1945) Over the moon with joy, Henri's practical side leapt into action and he started planning, how to save money on the journey, how to set up his new community, what to take in the way of altar cloths, albs and altar linen, how he should tell his father. He waited for confirmation, watching the post as impatiently as a teenager waiting to hear from her boyfriend; now he would allow or refuse a girl's name, and even come to India. He himself admitted that the enterprise was unpredictable and was 'uncertain enough to want assurance that there must be some possibility of returning here. If we do not succeed, I hope to return to France.' (L. 28.5.1947)

The very suggestion shows something of his state of mind. How he developed such an overwhelming desire to go to India may not be entirely clear; the fact that his longing to go there had completely taken him over is not in doubt. It was strong and hard to resist, though of course it was not entirely his own fault. He was in the grip of a force that had swept him up, and he was only just now beginning to realize its power.

There was a second letter from Salem. 'His enthusiasm completely discourages the French monks. Does not understand the hesitancy of the French monks.' (L. 24-9.1946) Henri was shattered. So shattered that he suggested to the Abbot that he should go alone, with nowhere to go: when he arrived in India and leaving the Abbot or a Bishop to take the material and moral risk of the foundation. It was typical of his character, his sense of responsibility. (L. 24.9.1946) He must have known that it was unlikely that the Abbot could agree to such terms, especially as the very idea of going alone was anathema to him.

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response. Even by the time the two weddings took place in the winter of 1946/7, the whole question of India was still unresolved, and he was in turmoil.

Mothers and mothers-in-law are expected to cry at weddings, but what about the tears of the celibate priest, celebrating for others a state to which he can never aspire? A letter to Louise, written just after the two marriages had taken place, shows that overtook him as such a loving family. It shows that he had never before what he was giving up. How lovely the family is he writes, "My little Louise, how well we understand each other without having to say so. I, of whom the Good Lord has asked that I should not seek it, and you who the Good Lord has deprived of it." (Louise, 3-1, 1947)

Though there is never a mention of sexuality and indeed had been unlikely in a monk at that time, especially one from his particular background. He is thus finding celibacy a hard cross to bear. His intellectual and his nature were at war as he tried to defend both. "Virginity is beautiful, but so is human love." (Louisette, 3-1, 1947)

But sometimes he lost his sense of identity, unsure how to find his own place in this world of families. He truly was not a man, still less a monk. I am only just recovering, first from sleep, then all the emotions that took me over completely during that week. And there was so much, at once, so many things. (Family, 17, 1947)

Not only was he being forced to face the deprivation, for life of any gratification of his natural instincts, but there was a sense in which he was inhibited by the high standards of his upbringing.

7 See Chapter 3. No more demands on duties of your profession.

8 Louise's first husband Marcel had been killed in 1944 and she didn't not re-marry until 1948.

It is only really in a friend's house, that the priestly and religious vocation can flower. It is too lovely and at the same time too beautiful. Maman set us an example in marriage, which is the ideal and such a high standard that her children and grandchildren, priests and nuns, can only with difficulty live up to. (Louisette, 3-1, 1947)

Slowly he absorbed the emotions that had been so violently stirred, and he was forced to face what he had given up and to remember how he had felt when he had left home to become a monk. But he was still unable to teach himself to age Saint Brieuc like Flaxwell, yes, it is too charged with emotion. There is so very, very much. Mutual looking often across each other up over so many years. When I see myself, the monk, frank and sincere, as soon as I am home, I am so much in my element again. So tender. It's the result of having been raised in such a lovely nest. (Family, 4-2, 1947)

It was a time of great anguish, a crisis in which he had finally to let go of swathes of his instinctive nature in order to be true to the life to which he knew he was called. For instance there are hints of a romantic side to his character, seen in the way he fantasized about his sister, Louise, and how her little brother, seeing her, would lift through the woods.

Rite demands that it is Henri who carries the bag on his shoulders. He must go on the right and once out of view of the castle offer his arm. At a certain turn in the path, they must stop to pick bilberries. When at last we get to the roadway, the chapel there is a tree trunk on which we have to sit. Henri on the left this time, to get away more quickly. For when it gets to
But the heart suffers: "I see so well in my case, and certainly I don't regret anything that I have done." (Louiseet 12.13.1947) He still carries on, but because his spirits are still high, he now visits the monasteries in the town and goes to the gymnasium. He is and has always been a leader in the gymnasium. But the empty years of the war have made it difficult for him to get his spirit up. By early summer of 1947 after years of failed negotiations, it was beginning to look as if his dream would never be realised. At Easter, he was writing to his family once again, "From India, nothing nothing nothing. It is almost making me ill." (Easter Tuesday 1947). He sent an SOS to India. A Father Abbot he met suggested that he just go and see what to do when he got there. His own Father (Abbot) took pity on him and wrote to the Department of Propaganda at the Vatican, which Henri explained to his family was a sort of Ministry of Missions. That reply came quickly—permission for new foundations could only be given where there is property and means to live and all the dioceses in the East had been ruined by the war. Henri had to find an estate and a place to live. He took refuge, in seeking the publication of a book on Gregorian Chant being published by the monastery and at one point was happily submerged in work and proofs. (Family 4.2.1947). Knee deep in paper and prospectus he wondered whether one day he would write a book and whether he would be able to give an oriental presentation of Christianity. He wondered from time to time if he still had a "passion" for the world and of God. "I have thought so much from an 'oriental' angle." (Family 4.2.1947) And still he waited and watched for the phone to ring. At one point, the Abbot seemed to shift, from unwilling encouragement to downright discouragement. He would not hear of Henri's suggestion that he take another monk with him, and even seems to have changed his mind about allowing Henri to go at all. (May 1947) "If you tell your family, his advice to me was clear, you must remain here." (Family 28.3.1947) An prayer, poetry and devotion, beauty in nature...

twenty in nine. I just have to rush back through the wood as fast as possible to be in time for my begging of supper, but Father Abbot doesn't understand. The practical side of Henri's nature was always to be used as it had already been used in his key role when the monastery were evaluated to Chartreuse du Morvan and Néolumières, and back to Kergonan. But a long letter telling of his gastronomic plans for the wedding of his brother.

Hyacinth gives a wistful glimpse of the family man hiding behind the monk. Though he admits that the negotiations have meant he has had to 'overcome my timidity and blushes'. (Family 4.9.1945) "It was just after the end of the war when food was scarce and he could only find it by trawling in the farms around Néolumières - the genial host can be seen smiling through his pants! He tells of the purchase of at least two kegs, three ducklings to be made into salami, several chickens and for his wife he does not say 12 lbs of beetroot, he will bring his charcuterie and gateaux. He is arranging for the birds to be killed and plucked and inquires whether the family want to keep the foxes? He calculates the price and even involves himself in the preparation of the dishes. The final piece of startling efficiency is when he informs his family that he will be at St Male at midday with two suitcases, each weighing 10/12 kg, so they will need the大纲...
even more depressing letter came from Solemnity the Mother House of the Sisters in England. "I have heard from Father Morice," she said, "that you will be arriving in India soon."

"A lovely homily telling me that I had entered the monastic life without noticing it, and that it was no small dream of going far away, that by the grace of the monastic life here I would be doing just as much for India, and so on and so forth. It will need a team to go and there is neither the personnel nor the resources to make up that team."

In a word, freezing shower. It will take several days to recover. (Undated, probably May 1947)

At that time he was under no illusion about the possibility of receiving moral, spiritual, or material help from the congregation of the congregation, he knew that given the expenses needed to repair the war damage to the monastery they could not afford anything. But he was having to face the vows he had taken in all their solemnity, and the habit of writing had started.

And what is terrible is that if I go, I will be told that by doing so I am outside obedience! It could be that I am not forbidden but I will be told that I am creating my own movement, which is serious in the religious life. However, I am not going to stay in Kergonan now that it has become an issue. (Ind.)

He tried to come to terms with the possibility of his dream never being fulfilled, even though he still had as many lines out as a hungry fisherman, including one to the Apostolic Delegate. He was clearly having a struggle with contradictions within himself when he managed to write:

"Of course if I have to stay here I shall make the best of it and I will try to love the Good Lord just as much as I can. But I feel so much that I really cannot hope to achieve my full development here, even spiritually. I am too personal and too quick to become troublesome... rather like a rat in the cheese. It's not to get away from Kergonan that I want to go to India; it's for India itself that I want to go." (Sisters 26 May 1947)

Yet as he wrote these lines one of his letters, addressed to the Bishop of Tindirappalli, Monseigneur Mendonça, was starting its long journey to India. He had written it on the Feast of the Ascension and placed it in the altar of the Tabernacle while he held his nightly vigil before posting it the next day. This was the letter that was eventually to bring him the invitation he sought.

The Bishop received the letter at the beginning of August and, his French not being very good, he passed it to a visiting French priest who was working in the diocese and happened to be visiting him that day. For the priest, Father Jules Monchin, this letter was an answer to a prayer he had been wanting to live precisely the sort of life of which Henri Le Saux wrote; he too needed a companion to fulfill his ambition.

Father Jules Monchin was a remarkable man, born in 1895 in the midst of the vineyards of Beaujolais and ordained in Lyons in 1922. He was that rare combination, a man of exceptional intellectual gifts, able to move easily in the highest philosophical realms, yet who chose to work as a parish priest and spiritual director. One of his friends wrote of how his intellectual and spiritual gifts expressed themselves in his wonderful gift for the written word, for an understanding of ideas and even more for the understanding of souls.

He had the opportunity to make intimate contacts at once with the most learned as with the humblest, to assimilate with extraordinary rapidity the philosophical and the scientific works of the specialists and to share the artistic emotion of painters, poets and musicians. Finally, to receive
with full love those who wanted to make him the confidant of their personal fears and difficulties. He went to India in 1939, again, though, he recognized his need for rest, and he preferred to do apostolic work with the Tamil people, in the diocese of Trichinopoly, under its new Indian Bishop Dr. James Mendonca. While loving and serving this people in Trichinopoly and the neighboring villages where he was excused as a priest, he learned to talk and move in Tamil and devoted any spare time he had to the world of ideas, particularly to the study of Indian culture and philosophy. He was years ahead of his time, seeking to embody a meeting between Hinduism and Christianity while firmly rooted in the culture of India, and he became an "inculturated" man that has now been fully accepted by the Church.

This then, was the man to whom Henri’s letter passed, a priest who dreams of a life of solitude and contemplation and whose ambition was to establish Christian spirituality in an Indian form. No wonder Father Monchanin responded with such enthusiasm. "Your letter came to me as a ray of light from God. I am expecting you. India expects you. (Monchanin to Lt. Col. Henri, 7/8/1947)"

Henri had then given up hope of recovering his sight, and he felt his time was running short. He was writing letters to his family, telling them about his situation, and in one letter he wrote:

There is nothing like an answer from heaven in this whole busyness of circumstances. It seems to me, I certainly could not have written this letter had I not been in the presence of God. In spite of all, I am filled with joy and gratitude to God for this new opportunity to serve Him, and I am determined to use every moment to the fullest. I am doing my utmost to prepare myself for the task ahead. I am taking advantage of every opportunity to study and to do what I can to be of service to God and His people.

He was introduced to Father Monchanin’s warning, that there could be disappointments ahead—"he was by then something of an expert in disappointments. Will they find others who will respond to their unusual-monastic ideals? He has heard of similar foundations in Travancon and Jaffna but there must be another? And he must never forget his duty as a member of his monastery at Kergonan. But most importantly he sets out the lines on which he is thinking, qualifying everything with the important statement: for me a short period of魔鬼 is better than a long period of despair. (Monchanin to Henri, 8/12/1947)"

fundamental rule is adaptation to circumstances and submission to reality. (Ibid.)

He sees an ashram where Hindus and Christians come together for nourishment, and in 1923 the big man, Father Monchanin, will be in complete agreement that there should be a total 'Indianization' in little more, tentatively, he suggests, that their starting point should be the Rule of St. Benedict. While it might seem presumptuous to insist on his own monastic rule to which he was strangely attached, on someone who was not a monk and whose work had been mostly, as a parish priest, he puts forward some convincing arguments. He contends that the Benedictine Rule, with its depth and stability, its flexibility and universal spirit, would reflect them from the need to launch into the unknown, then, little by little, specifically, Hindu customs could be grafted onto it. He emphasizes his wish to preserve the non-clerical character of the primitive Rule, throwing wide open to Hindus the gates of a fully monastic life to open them to all the people in India who seem to be touched by the call of mysticism; (Ibid.) Thus the 'tree of monasticism' could flourish in its infinite variety, with hermits, solitary mendicants, the spiritual climate sanctified by the contemplative force of India. They would have no ambitions to start an agricultural venture, a publishing house or a university. "We are monks seeking to enter even in this life the Kingdom of God." (Ibid.)

He takes for granted that their life-style will be austere, that they will pray in Tamil, and perhaps use Hindu mystical works, that they will work hard, both intellectually and manually, and, what attracts him most, that they will work at. a 'rethinking of Christian dogma in Hindu terms, a Christian reinterpretation of Hindu thought.' (Ibid.) He frequently referred to 'my beloved Tamils' - though he had not yet met one - and dreams of the day when they will be fully Tamilian. In dress, life and customs,

Sitting in the lotus position and taking the meals on banana leaves, sitting on the ground. He loves India with a passion that seems born into his soul, making the heart ache. (Ibid.) This was his dream in 1923 after 18 years in a Benedictine monastery, and at a time when Indians were locked firmly into their own faith and their own denominations, rarely considering, let alone honouring, other faiths; it was nearly 20 years before the Second Vatican Council began to let some air into the thinking of the Catholic Church. Like Father Monchanin he was years in advance of his time, and like him he was strictly and totally Christian. Much though he already loved India, so far unseen, deeply though he admires such Hindu scriptures that he has managed to read, in those early days he was thinking in terms of the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. He wanted to fashion a Christian India, as all other Christians had fashioned a Christian Europe. His wish to use Indian prayers and writings was in line with St. Gregory the Great, who told the Augustines of Canterbury to reserve for Christ the beautiful temples of idol worship and to put into them our Latin hymns, our psalms, so that what were the temples of the idols became temples of Christ. He himself, in his contemplation of India, saw it 'firmly bedded at mid-time,' his early ideas matched those of Father Monchanin, who responded warmly, writing now from Kollam, where he was soon to be appointed parish priest, and taking the idea of basing their foundation on the Benedictine Rule in his stride."

"Now I am waiting for you to come, because you have really decided, haven't you, to respond to that call you heard fifteen years ago, to become an Indian in India?" We shall start
Henri's dream was very nearly reality. He had the permission of his Abbé, a place to go and most important, a companion who shared his ideal, with whom to live and work. By Christmas he was still worrying whether Solomons, the Mother House would give their permission and whether Rome would give him an indulgence of exclamation. He knew that the visa would take long time to come through and he had already set the wheels in motion to obtain one. He was split in two, both longing and fearful: One part of him wanted everything to get out there and see it through to the end without hesitating; the other was afraid of the unknown, of the totally incapable. (Family, 27.12.1947)

There was also the need for money. He looked into the possibility of a free ticket to Marseilles, he discovered that a reduction on the ticket was automatically given to missionaries, and he was not too proud to accept gifts from friends and relations. He had much to learn and many mistakes to make about the climate of South India – would it last him a lifetime at this? What was the exchange rate of the franc to the rupees? What should he take with him in the way of luggage? Until it was possible to dress as a Hindu (even if only in the mind), he would have to a Benedictine habit but in white cotton rather than black wool. (Family, 3.3.1948)

There remained the task of telling his brethren at the monastery that he was leaving them. He had been quite extraordinarily discreet, for even his great friend Father Lémaré did not know he was going until he actually announced his departure. One young monk, however, did come to know, purely because of a chance happening. The monk, now Father Robert Williamson, was in the postulant in 1947, one of his jobs being to feed the chickens twice a day. One day, the monk was outside the monastery and he happened to see Father Lémaré giving a talk to some of the children. The monk approached him and asked if he knew the reason for his leaving. The monk replied that he didn't know, but that he had heard that Father Lémaré was going to the East. The monk then asked if he could come with him. Father Lémaré hesitated for a moment and then shook his head. The monk then asked if he could come with him as a companion. Father Lémaré again hesitated but then agreed. (Family, 3.3.1948)
a day and collect the eggs. The chicken house was in the wood
surrounding the monastery and one day he was surprised to see a
monk wandering around talking aloud to himself in a strange
language. Later, when he questioned Henri about it, he learnt that
the wandering monk was practising them in what he thought was
the privacy of the wood. (This chance encounter had a fruitful
outcome for Henri, as Brother Robert had an English father who
at this time was British Vice Consul at La Rochelle. It was able
to help Henri obtain his visa and his passport.

Finally, the day came. On Sunday, July 26, 1948, the Father
Abbot asked Henri to celebrate High Mass and after Vespers that
day, all the monks gathered around him off as Father Robert's
father drove him to Aurray to catch the train to Marseille, where he
would board the ship for India. He was much loved and there was
great sadness at his going. He was to leave the next day, coming back
at Father Robert's request. For Henri Le Saux, it was the fulfillment
of a dream which he had held on his journey for fourteen years.

Henri told interviewer that when his ship sank, he had this in
mind: "Life stands for James Stour, Swami Abhishiktananda. His life
was told through his words. Read..."

Was Swami an authentic Sanyasa?

A comment. On Klaus Klostermaier

In an article in the "Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin" 1 Klaus
Klostermaier responds to the criticism of Christian writers about
Hindus, more particularly, referring to the three, namely, of
Shantivanam, Ashram, Jules Monchalin and Abhishiktananda, and

1 Klaus Klostermaier, "Hindu-Christian Dialogues: Revisiting the Tamil

for Abdul Khan

Bede Griffiths, and to the book by Sir Ram Gopal, "Catholic
Ashrams: Santhiyas or Swadhis?" The criticism reproaches
Christians or appropriating Hindu ideas, texts, traditions and
lifestyles with an ulterior, i.e. missionary motive.

While many of his observations are very pertinent, especially
regarding the dramatic changes in India in the last two decades,
apprenticeship, the relationship between Hindus and followers of
other religions. (p.8), I feel it necessary to add a rejoinder as far
as Swami Abhishiktananda is concerned.

I agree with the Hindu criticism of Christians who "appropriate" Hindu
tradition without proper authorization, and initiation. This
practice applies especially to the life of a Sanyasa, which cannot be
practised lightly as if changing the colour of religious robes: from
white to black; or orange would mean becoming a Sanyasi (emphasis
Indian) Christian religious. In this case, Sanyasa means a rigorous
ascetic lifestyle with a particular Hindu sahajprana, and it is
usually received in a ritual initiation (sanyasa dikshâ) from a guru of
the tradition, to whom one has surrendered, in search of a liberating
growth towards the divine. Without entering into the case of either
Monchalin or Bede Griffiths, who, in fact, did not accept any Hindu gurush or spiritual
master and who criticizes the traditional tradition, some modification is necessary with regard

First of all, one has to recognize the fact that the two founders of
the Shantivanam, Ashram were not fully aware of what they were
doing on 21 March 1950, when they accepted the sanyasi robes and
Indian names, as would require at proper initiation Henri Le Saux
was new in India and at that moment he relied on his elder and
more experienced companion, Monchalin. But it did not take

him very long to discover his mistake, specially since he was living more in Hindu milieu than Mochani. There are many reasons in his diary that he realized fully later the serious implications of sannyasa. His meeting with Sri Ramana Maharshi was brief but left an indelible impression on him for the rest of his life. But Sri Ramana considered himself as maha-atman. Beyond the ritual stages of life of a Hindu, hence also beyond institutional sannyasa. However, after the visit of Sri Ramana and Abhishiktananda had the fortune of meeting Sri Gnanananda Giri whom he accepted fully as his guru, as testified in his book 'Guru and Disciple'. Sri Gnanananda did not bestow on him any formal sannyasa diksha, but a spiritual initiation Abhishiktananda's account of his meeting with the guru was found so authentic that the Hindu sannyasa discipline have taken it as an important document translated it into Tamil and quote it in all publications relating to their guru (e.g. Sadguru Gnanananda). An eminent Hindu spiritual author Sr. M.I. Pandit writes about the book: 'It personally consider the book Guru and Disciple to be one of the major spiritual documents of the present century. Far the superior to many books from the West that have appeared of late. Swami Abhishiktananda gives a vivid and moving account of his first meeting with Sri Gnanananda, whom he recognized as his guru. He tells him not to think about teaching but to take out the lota and holy water and reflects on the mystery of the mind. The Guru is one who himself first attained the Real and who knows the only path experience in a way that leads there; He is capable of initiating the disciple, and of making the well-up from within the heart of his disciple the immediate, ineffable experience which is own all the utterly transparent knowledge, so luminous and pure, that quite simply, he is. When the vibrations of the Master’s voice reach the disciple, the Master’s eyes look deeply into his then from the very depths of his being, from the newly discovered ocean of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself.

Another disciple of Sri Gnanananda, Swami Nityananda Giri considers Abhishiktananda an authentic sannyasa and disciple of his guru and quotes him on every occasion. Klostermaier seems to consider only one type of initiation as authentic, namely the formal ritual sannyasa diksha. Here, two corrections seem to be necessary.

1. According to a historical study of sannyasa, the earliest form of entering a way of total renunciation was not a diksha performed by a guru on the disciple but the person who felt an inner urge to enter a life of renunciation could do so himself by uttering the so-called pratha formula:

    Om bhur bhuvah svah
    sannyastam maya

    "I have renounced"

In this light Swamiji’s own decision to become a sannyasi is valid.

2. In almost all the Hindu sannyasi, but especially in those who follow authentic initiation by a spiritual master does not necessarily mean an elaborate ritual, or even ritual at all. As many sacred texts declare, a spiritual initiation can happen by a powerful look or even in a dream. By all these means, depending on the spiritual power of the guru and the receptivity of the disciple, the same transmission can occur which is otherwise performed in an elaborate ritual, and this every transmission bestows the authority (adikara) and authenticity on the disciple that he belongs with full right to the spiritual tradition or sannyasi. Abhishiktananda fulfilled both these requirements.


Cp. the studies by Patrick Olivelle on the Sannyasa Upanisads.

The fact that he became more and more conscious also of the formal requirements to enter the state of sannyas and was finally demonstrated in the initiation which he bestowed together with Swami Chidananda on his disciple Marc (Asatananda), who thus entered with full right into the tradition of the Shankarinsamsyad. The detailed chapter in his book, "The Further Shore," discloses this interregnum event in all frankness and sincerity.

It is also the matter of chance that Swami's satsang on "Sannyas" was first published as a serial in the Divine Life in Rishikesh and was hailed by many sannyasins and authenticity accorded their ideal.

But, apart from the formal initiation of Abhishtananda's sannyasins, Klostermaier's book also describes his living contact with fellow sannyasins as well as his profound inner experience on Aroonacela about which he writes with great eloquence but which did not make him an "initiated" sannyasin in many Hindu samspradayas. In Uttarkashi, in his own kuthi, Abhishtananda lived very much for himself and his observations and not socializing in any significant way with the local sannyasin community (Klostermaier). But, it is the life of a sannyasin who takes his vocation seriously but not to "socialize" but to live within in a search of the Absolute and adorably his inner experience so that it can be recognized spontaneously by those who are "initiated" it. (Swami's favorite expression) I may add that only a few sannyasins did I was myself often a witness to such spontaneous meetings where Hindus recognized Swami's spiritual experience and showed their reverence (which he always refused to accept). Besides, he cultivated some intense contacts with Hindu spiritual personalities - not only formal sannyasins, such as Dr. D.K. Mehta and Sri

Poonia, and maintained dialogue, as for example, with Prof. K. Sivaraman in Varanasi.

I think the only point where a criticism of the type of Sita Ram Oberoi is fully justified is when a Christian takes official practices of Hinduism with an interior mood, without a true understanding and acceptance of the implications. This could have been the case with the founders of Shantivanam only at the very beginning. Later on, and the more Abhishtananda lived in Hindu milieu, there was no other purpose for him but the same search for the Absolute which inspires the best of Hindu sannyasins. It should be mentioned here also (a fact which Klostermaier acknowledges) that many Hindu sannyasins who are duly initiated in a particular samspradaya do not live up to their ideals. They travel in planes, air-conditioned trains, and cars and build luxurious five-star ashrams. Abhishtananda always lived a strictly ascetic life, not only in anything but also in glass trains and ordinary buses (damaging his health, in his way) and often when he was suffering after his heart attack, he would refuse an air ticket offered him to move to Bangalore leaving alone his refusal to travel to Europe or Canada by air, even for a "spiritual purpose." The reason he gave for refusing all these offers was always his abidance by the rules and the spirit of sannyasins. The only criticism which fell to his sannyasin expressed concern for his possession of books, which is a little exaggerated.

But, I object to another criticism of Klostermaier which concerns Abhishtananda's knowledge and interpretation of Hindu texts: "He built his (Christian) theology on an eclectic and idiosyncratic (sic!) interpretation of the Upanisads, and although calling it Advaita, he did not connect with any orthodox Hindu darshana." (Klostermaier p.71) This is, however, very unfair because Abhishtananda studied the Upanishads in detail in the original Sanskrit and meditated upon them. He was also aware of the
indological interpretations for example by the great French scholar Louis Renou. On the basis, both, of indological research as well as spiritual and philosophical insights he purposely studied the Upanishads free from their Vedantic context which he was aware. He was aware that Advaita Vedantins had interpreted the Upanishads in a one-sided way, whereas they contain a much wider perspective of spiritual and philosophical insights. He was perfectly right to go back to the source, which is a great Hindu scholar like Gopinath Kaviraj emphasized, since Hindu philosophy had been identified with Vedanta in a one-sided way, neglecting the richness of other approaches.

While I agree with Klotzmaier that Christians should take seriously the objections of Hindus; this should not lead us to reject all authentic ways of entering into a dialogue. Above all, the question is to be considered: which type of Hinduism one takes as the norm this living tradition without political implications, or the politicalized Hinduism version which lays down the norms for unifying the rich multiplicity of ancient and medieval traditions, on the model of a fundamentalist monothemonism.

Thus, in spite of human and historical limitations which are unavoidable, Abhishiktananda was rather a pioneer for a Hindu-Christian dialogue which takes the other tradition seriously, but contributes also to innovation and enrichment, the true fruit of dialogue, an authentic spiritual encounter.

Betula Baumer

BOOK REVIEWS

Abhishiktananda in Asian Theology

The Theological Publications in India (B.P.O. 5553, Bengaluru 560055) has published the first book of a series of textbooks aimed at helping students of theology in Indian seminaries but also more general readers. The series is prepared under the auspices of the CBC Inter-Ritual Committee for Text Books in Theology. The first number in the series Introduction to Theology by Kucherla Pathil, CMI and Dominic Veliah, SPB. It is not the purpose of this note to write a review of this book, which I did in the September 2003 issue of the Vidyavinoda Journal, but to inform our readers that Abhishiktananda figures rather prominently in chapter 4, which deals with "Selected Models of Theology." Seven models are offered: 1. The Syrian model around the figure of St. Ephraem; 2. The Liturgical model as articulated by Alexander Schmemann; 3. The Scholastic Model, St. Thomas Aquinas; 4. The Ketogenic Approach of Karl Barth; 5. Theological Anthropology as developed by Karl Rahner; 6. The Theological Reflection on Christian Praxis as shown in Liberation Theology; 7. The third model is the Contemplative Approach of Christian Theology and here the person studied is Swami Abhishiktananda (pp. 155-162). Like the whole book the chapter is introductory and does not go deep into a study of the method of Swamiji but it is interesting to note that in a series sponsored by the Bishops of India and meant to introduce students to theology Swamiji should have such a prominent place.

Another recent book to have recourse to Swamiji comes from the contemplative section of the Church in the Philippines. In a study of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, OCD, the Carmelite mystic of Dijon (1880-1906), oddly entitled Adoration or Nuclear Suicide, the author Sr. Teresa Joseph (or Susana Jose) OCD devotes most of her book to the model of Eucharistic love and hill of the Ανθρώπινος χρτιος.
of the section on "Elizabeth and Asian Interiority and the Spirituality of "Fr Henri Le Saux, O.S.B." (pp. 32-77). The book was originally printed in 1984, written in a hurry as a thanks giving the beatification of Elizabeth of the Trinity on November 25, 1984. It has been reprinted in November 2002 and published by the Carmelite Monastery of St. Therese of Guadalupe, Mexico. The book is a collection of essays on the spirituality of Elizabeth of the Trinity by various authors. It includes material from various sources, including letters, sermons, and personal experiences.


The above thesis by Christian Hackforth-Johnson has been reviewed in SETU 22 (2001), by Ernst Fuhringer; but has now come out in book form. This is the first book on Abhishiktananda with a well-researched and detailed biographical part in German, with German translations of many passages from the Dzogchen and other texts. The author has done a painstaking work and added much material on the life of the Hindu-Catholic monk, drawn from his research in France and in India. The detailed appendix is very useful for further research on Abhishiktananda. Agree with the earlier review regarding the weakness of the book in a philosophical-theological perspective, but one has to congratulate the author for providing source material for a reflection on "interreligious existence as exemplified in the life of Abhishiktananda, and its historical implications."

The photos at the end of the book contain some new and hitherto unknown material — for example the child Henri dressed up as John the Baptist, a processional character image. The photos are such small size that details are hardly visible. The same criticism applies to the small font size of the appendixes. Hitting mistakes seem to be unavoidable, in such a voluminous work containing quotations in several languages (especially in French). Some translations would need a revision.

In spite of these criticisms, the work deserves appreciation and readership by all who are interested in the ideals personified by Abhishiktananda. His influence on contemporary spirituality and in the East-Indian context ofset a milestone in 1991 in India. Bettina Bäumer has recently published a much appreciated new biography.

OBITUARY:


Dr. James Stuart left us on 15th October 2003 for the "great Awakening" to the "Beyond," leaving behind many friends in Abhishiktananda, with a sense of vacuum. Since he went to England on holiday in May 2002, he could not return to India because his condition worsened and death was soon a liberation. James Stuart was an amateur linguist who translated many spiritual works into English. He wrote extensively on the life and teachings of Abhishiktananda, and was the founder of the Abhishiktananda Society, which he served for many years, but he was always modest and unassuming. Many know James Stuart as the man who continued to be his pillar of support as long as his physical and mental condition allowed him to work. Many know James Stuart as the man who was not only as Abhishiktananda's biographer, but he was a self-effacing and unassuming man who worked hard to promote the teachings of Abhishiktananda to the Western world. He was a friend to many, and his work remains anonymous, yet his contributions cannot be overlooked.

"Born on September 1st, 1915 in Brighton, England, Stuart was educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford. He was
ordained and appointed Chaplain and Fellow of Keble College, Oxford in 1939, later from 1948 he was an Examining Chaplain to the Archbishop of York. However, in 1949 Stuart resigned from these appointments and left for Delhi to join the Brotherhood of the Ascended Christ, also becoming Editorial Secretary for the ISPCK, an English equivalent name. (Hindi: इस्पिक)

His quiet life as an Anglican monk in Delhi was changed and spiritually enriched since then. Swami Abhishiktananda. The group photo of the Ecumenical Meeting with the Swiss ambassador in 1961 shows already a close contact between the two monks, which would continue deepening, and finally absorbing his whole life. It was mainly the work on the English version of "Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience" during the last years of Swami's life (1971-1973) that brought them closer and that initiated Fr. James into his thought at the crossroads between Hindu spirituality, or rather advaitic and the Christian experience (and theology) of the Trinity. After Abhishiktananda's death, this interest also took him to Arunachala, to Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram, where he could discover the roots of the advaitic experience, but also had no chance of meeting directly Abhishiktananda or any of the other spiritual masters.

Even before the official registration of the Society in 1978 Fr. James enjoyed himself in translating some Selections from the Diary into French, with the permission of a professional editor who had also been Abhishiktananda's disciple. Most of the books he translated did not even bear his name, and he had to insist that he should overcome his self-effacing nature. The result was a series of publications that covered the complete three-volume "Biography" ("His life told through his letters") also bears the stamp of his precision, and we owe him an immense debt of gratitude for this work. Once, after working hard on some text of Swami, he exclaimed in his soft, yet desperate voice: "I am his slave!"

He was not only Swami's "slave," translator, biographer, bibliographer, but he was also inspired by him. He wrote several articles on Swami's spiritual journey and delivered the prestigious Hajós Lectures at Cambridge on Swami Abhishiktananda. A Study in Hindu-Christian understanding, in 1976 (which are unfortunately not published). He was moved by the recognition of his great service to the Church in India and the Senate of the Serampore College awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1996, which he received with his habitual humility. This was published in 1998, but it also gave him a sense of fulfillment of a dream: His Francisian spirit was evident, for example, when he called the bugs and fleas attacking us in the pilgrim rest houses as "brothers and sisters." Apart from his editing activities for Abhishiktananda, he also published ISPCK land for the liturgical texts of the C.N.F. James was also involved in social service. He was chaplain to St. Stephen's Hospital in Delhi and volunteered as "visiting barber" to elderly residents in a Mother Theresa Home for the dying. He often had him administering bachelors for marriages and funerals, or just attending staff or labourers. Whatever he did was invariably in a gentle way, unassuming and with his usual soft voice.

From the Obituary by Rev. Ian Weatherswell
His last literary work was the translation of Swamiji's theological essays collected in "Interiority in Revelation", which will be published posthumously... The Abhishekatananda Society without James Stuart is almost unthinkable, and yet we have to continue and follow his spirit of selfless dedication. In this sense his expression in the preface to Swamiji's Biography is significant for his own life. We believe, by writing the Biography, simply follow as closely as possible his long pilgrimage which is also that of Everman, towards all lasting in Christ. It is not to avoid the profession of faith, but to avoid the profession of faith in the faith of Christ.


by Ramam Padmanaban

A Christian Affirmation is not possible without a Christian nation. The nation, the body of the church, must be Protestant. For some people, the spiritual encounter of Christianity and Hinduism, calls them to an eremitic life, like that of Swami Abhishekatananda. There are, however, other manner including one that discovers this inner life of spiritual encounter revealed in a shared pilgrimage. N. Shanta was following this path.

Some 60 years ago a young Little Sister of Jesus came to India to live but her life with the people of this country. At first, she and a few companions stayed in Delhi where they lived in a most humble way working as chodhi. Finally, they grew exhausted and the community decided to return to Varanasi. There they started a small cart in the bazaar of the Ganges at Varanasi, and then moved to Varanasi where they started a small ashram. After all the Ganges at Varanasi, they started a small ashram fifty years ago where I went once a week to celebrate the liturgy.

After some years, Shanta felt herself pulled in another yet parallel direction. One reason was that the orientation of the Little Sisters at that time was actually directed much more towards Islam. Another Shanta felt the urge to address the Hindu world around them with the same spirit. So, she left the congregation, and began to pursue the same ideal in a more independent manner. This led her along the path she continued to follow until the end of her life. She offered her moral support from the very start, and later, she offered her moral support from the very start, and later, she helped me in the publication of a thousand-page book including translations of the Vedas, in which Bettina Bamber was also active. This was a huge undertaking, and I remember Shanta working hard to coordinate everything with two typists coming, one in the morning and one in the evening. It was a plunge into the sources of the Hindu world.

After completing this project, Shanta began her own magnum opus on the Jain nuns which was published first in French ("La voie Jain") and afterwards in English. During that time, she identified herself with the Jain dharma, following its practices and establishing a deep relationship with the sarvastis. Once that work was finished, she began a similar work with the Tibetan nuns who live a precarious life in exile in India. Her method was one of a deep participation in the life of these communities.

Her health was deteriorating in spite of having left Varanasi for the mountains of Kodaikanal. She came to Spain in order to continue her work and assist me in some other writings. But after 15 years, she could not adjust herself to the West and returned to India, her spiritual home. This time, it was not for long. She fell sick and returned to Spain just to die a few months later. Her work on the chodsha remains unfinished, but her life was a fullone and reached its completion.

Egos: Shanta was close to us, in the Society, and she knew Abhishekatananda well. With Shanta from Lyon and Swamiji from Britain. It was a delightful scene to witness his laughter, with tact and humor - she would tease him about details of his life.
Shanta had an independent spirit full of both common and critical sense, which was often in conflict with what she felt was her mission. Although different from the gurus who have come to India from abroad, Shanta's presence was more feminine and discreet, yet she left a lasting impact in the hearts of those who met her, and with whom she was in spiritual communion. The encounter of spiritualities is itself a spiritual path, offering a new arena for the synthesis of world religions. Shanta lived up to the ideal of being incarnate in India and of deepening her calling through the encounter of spiritualities.

She did not write anything about herself. The impact of her life was not on the field of ideas but on the heart, and in the heart of life itself. She succeeded in integrating in her life the ideas of Christ, Hindu, and Tibetan spiritualities, without losing the harmony of the synthesis, without superficial eclecticism. She provided an example of the possible and harmonious coexistence of religious traditions which could be overcome (not denied) the mental levels of the mind.

Not many may know of her passing, yet her presence in the hearts of those who knew her will be remembered as the mystical body of reality. One of the great challenges of our times is to let the synthesis of religions and spiritualities permeate into our hearts. She left a legacy of making a difference in the different levels of the human, and this is what we all share. In this sense, the life of Shanta is a call to a greater openness and to a more deep experience of the essence of cultures. She lived it until the very end. I will miss her very much. May her soul rest in peace. lpm shanathilanka

Dr. Judson Trapnell died tragically on August 3, 2003. He was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion at Hamline, Sydney, from 1997 to 2000. His main publication was the recent biography of Bede Griffiths, Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue (New York, SUNY Press, 2001). His article on "Abhishiktananda's Contemplative Vocation and Contemporary India" was published in the Mkyajeya Journal of Theological Reflection, 67 (2003), pp. 161-179. His last project was to write a book commenting on Abhishiktananda's poems. He intended to write another book on the life and thought of Henri Le Saux in the form of an intellectual and spiritual biography. We deeply regret his untimely death.

NEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

New website: www.abhishiktananda.org

The main purpose of the Society is to care for the spiritual and theological heritage of New Abhishiktananda, and to make it known in India and abroad. The Society decided in 2002 to use its facilities of the World Wide Web for this and to create a website on Abhishiktananda. The main focus of this new website therefore is to introduce the life and work of Abhishiktananda, and secondary to present the Society.

The main guidelines for creating the website have been:

a) It should be fitting to Abhishiktananda, i.e., the style should be simple, the content substantial.

b) It should make basic information about him available for those who don't know him, who want to get a glimpse of his ideas and approach - in the form of brief biographical information, extracts from his books etc.

c) At the same time we wanted to provide some facilities for research scholars and students interested in him - in the form of a bibliography in English, as complete as possible, containing the bibliographical information in "Swami Abhishiktananda, His Life Told Through His Letters" by James Stuart (till 1995), supplemented by Internet resources.
These ideas result in the following structure and content:

1. **Homepage**
2. **Biography**, with photos, and Internet links to important personalities in his life, like Ramana Maharshi. In the case of Raimon Panikkar and Marc Chadou, we created more extended sections.
3. **Text**: Short extracts from some of his main books, like the Spiritual Diary, Saccidananda, The Further Shore etc., with brief introductions to the books.
4. **Photo gallery**: covering the time as a young monk in France till his death, including some rare photos from his parents, etc., placed at our disposal by B. Baumer, C. Baumer, M. Hackbart-Johnson, M. Rogers, and R. Panikkar.
5. **Bibliography**: It contains primary and secondary sources in English, the latter divided into monographs, articles, and works on Hindu-Christian dialogue in general.
6. **Abhishiktananda Society**, arranged in the following way:
   - Founders
   - Achievements
   - Service
   - Present office holders
   - Close associates in the past (O. Baumer, C. Conic, M. Davy, S. Grant)
   - Related organizations (centres in Italy and France, Shantivanam, MID)
   - Other pioneers of the transmissive encounter of religions (T. Merton, B. Griffiths, D. van Rollenghem, H. E. M. Lassalle)

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New (Video of the seminar in Samath, 1999 (with order form)
7) Bulletin SBTU: It can be ordered directly by e-mail (interactive order form); the next issues will be available on the website.
8) Contact

The main elements, which connect all the sites graphically, are a late photo portrait of Abhishiktananda (by C. Baumer) on the signature and "OM" in his own handwriting and the colour orange of his sannyasa robe.

The plan for the website and its content was created by Ernst Fuerlinger, member of the Executive Committee, in summer 2003. He did it in close cooperation with Dr. Bettina Baumer, who wrote the biographical information and collected the photos, and the secretary Swami Atmananda, who wrote the text on Marc Chadou. Both have been very helpful with the final proof-reading.

The website was designed by Kudri Krammer, M. A. (Vienna). You are invited to visit the new website:

http://www.abhishiktananda.org

We are looking for forward to your response. You can reach us by e-mail: ernst.fuerlinger@web.de

Membership of the Abhishiktananda Society:

Any person who is interested in Abhishiktananda and who agrees with the aims of the Abhishiktananda Society is welcome to become a member of the General Body of the Society and to support its activities by paying a membership fee. His/her application should be addressed to either the Secretary or the President, and endorsed by any member of the Executive Board.
The Abhishiktananda Shanti Kuti: an interreligious ashram in the Himalayan foothills

The decision to sponsor the founding of an interreligious ashram in line with Swami Abhishiktananda’s life and writings, was taken by the Executive Committee of the Abhishiktananda Society during the Annual General Meeting of October 2002. The ashram will be a living centre and a dynamic expression of the aims of the Society. The idea of setting up such an interreligious project in the name of Swami Abhishiktananda was actually conceived by Prof. R. R. Faini, (first President of the Society) with Dr. Bettina Bäumer (present President of the Society) and became a reality with the help of Swami Atmasthananda, chairman of the ashram. In August 2003, a property suitable for this project was found in village Tapovan (Uttaranchal) and was purchased in the name of the Society a few months later. It is located on a hill, overlooking the Holy Ganges, near the sacred pilgrimage place of Lakshman Jhula, and 4 kms upstream from Rishikesh town. The beauty of the surrounding scenery with the vibrations of the Holy Ganges makes this a truly unique and inspiring location. Indeed, the ashram is in a very silent, unpolluted and natural environment which is most suitable for spiritual practices.

The Shanti Kuti will essentially be a small monastic ashram whose members are animated by a common search for the Ultimate while belonging to different religious denominations.

Deeply convinced that spirituality is one and transcends the framework of any particular religion, the ashramswāsités will try to contribute modestly to the interfaith dialogue of spiritual experience. In fact, monks/nuns and samnyāsīs of all religions share the same intense quest for God and the Absolute. They live the same life of silent contemplation and radical renunciation and recognize each other as co-pilgrims on the same spiritual journey. One of the main features of this community will be precisely its interreligious dimension (esp. Hindu, Buddhist and Christian), which will make it a rare experience beyond barriers. Yet, each ashram member will maintain his own particular religious status and practices.

All the ashramswāsités will commit themselves to intensify sadhānā and will adopt a semi-cremetical type of life. They will live together in harmony, bonded by spiritual and silent communion, through loving service and deep respect of each other’s dharma and faith. Moreover, the purpose of this ashram-project is not to build a complete community life such as (with a common rule and timetable), and the programme of sadhānā may thus differ considerably from one to another. However, all the sadhākas will meet together to meditate (dhāyaṇa), to pray (prārthana), and to study spiritual writings (vadhyāya). The ashramswāsités will share also in common the long tradition of hospitality and spiritual guidance. Therefore, sincere seekers of all religious backgrounds, who wish to spend some time in spiritual, retreat and semi-seclusion, will be welcome to stay in the ashram.

Contributions to the ashram are most welcome. For any information, please write to Swami Atmasthananda who is responsible for this project. Abhishiktananda Shanti Kuti, P.O.Box 45, Rishikesh 249201 (Uttaranchal). India, or e-mail to sw_atmananda@rediffmail.com.

* * *
Fr. Dr. Anand Amaladass of Satya Nilayam, Chennai, informed us that Swamiji's book *The Further Shore in Tamil translation has been selected by the Government of Tamil Nadu for their Government Libraries.*

**Video on the interreligious seminar on: Śāṅkara-Pāṇḍita: Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions:**

The Interreligious Retreat Seminar on Śāṅkara-Pāṇḍita: Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions: (Sarnath, December 1999) organized by the Abhishiktananda Society, is available documented on video. It includes the final speech of His Holiness The Dalai Lama on main aspects of interreligious dialogue and the subject of the seminar in full length, a part of the introduction by Raimon Panikkar and the final panel discussion (Alpíns, Haas, Raimon Panikkar, Ven. Sanghong, Rinpoche, Swami Nityananda Giri, Nirmala Deshpande, Bettina Räumer).

VHS: 1.40 hours, price Rs. 500/- (India), US $ 25/-(foreign countries).

Order address: Abhishiktananda Society

Quot: Vidyajyoti College, 23 Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi - 110 054; Tel: 011/2945609; fax: 2943556 or 2943478; e-mail: vjcolde@del3.vsnl.net.in

Payment: by cheque in advance in the name of Abhishiktananda Society, Delhi.

The papers of the Sarnath Seminar are expected to come out in 2004. The volume is going to be a significant contribution to interreligious dialogue. (It will be published by D.K. Printworld in New Delhi.)
Abhishiktananda Archives of the Society are preserved in the Library of Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi. They are accessible to scholars who ask permission in advance from the Secretary.

Any information concerning books, articles or research theses which refer to Swami Abhishiktananda will be received with gratitude.

Donations and contributions towards the cost of printing and postage of SETU are welcome. Cheques and drafts should be issued in the name of Abhishiktananda Society, Delhi.

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