The One who is characterized as Consciousness is residing in all the bodies; there is no differentiation in anything. Therefore, if a person realizes that everything is full of that very Consciousness, she conquers the world of becoming.

Vijñāna Bhairava 100

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

Abhishiktananda

Ascent to the Depth of the Heart, Diary, October 22, 1966
Editorial

The content of this issue may appear to be more directed to the past, to the history of Swami Abhishikthananda and his associates, instead of looking at the present day problems and unfolding a vision for the future. This reflects our responsibility towards an authentic understanding of Swamiji and his message. But at the same time we remain aware of the burning issues troubling our world, and of the need for a wider and deeper spiritual vision, not narrowed down by political, religious or social fragmentations. The very basis for such a vision is pure Consciousness — we may call it cit, samvit, the Divine Spirit or Śakti which has been realized and revealed by the Upanishadic seers, by the Tantric perfect beings, and by mystics of all religions. Our task consists in actualizing their insights, and to make these very insights the basis of a harmonious living together of people of different cultures and nations. This only will serve as a true alternative to tension and war.

Swami Abhishikthananda, along with other spiritual masters, can inspire us in this direction.

Bettina Bäumer

Micro-macrocosmic Correspondences in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad

by Bettina Bäumer

General Introduction

Swami Abhishikthananda's involvement with the Upaniṣads was both, spiritual and scholarly. The theme of the micro-macrocosmic correlations was for him an existential discovery and a mystical realization, as the following extracts from his letters show.

At the same time, the insights of the Upaniṣads which are expressed in an archaic language can well help us in our search for wholeness, integration and overcoming of the fragmentation of which we are suffering at all levels:

What is important in the Upaniṣads are the 'correlations', which go beyond all the words employed and pierce the living flesh like electric shocks. Neither books nor lectures convey this experience. You have to awaken to another level of awareness. The truth of the Upaniṣad is the awakening to the purusha that I am!

(Letter 28.5.72)

This morning, against a background of weariness the Upaniṣad's dance, ever new, ever the same! Beyond the nāma-rūpa (name and form) there is the 'correspondence' (= upaniṣad), which in a lighting-flash reveals being, the true, the beautiful. How true the Upaniṣads are! But to discover them is a mortal blow, because you only discover them in yourself, on the other side of death:

(Letter 30.5.72)

Swami Abhishikthananda, His life told through his letters, by James Stuart (Delhi, ISPCK, 1989, pp. 301-303)

The word upaniṣad which came to mean a class of texts at the end of the Veda, is often translated as "secret doctrine" or similar, but it came to assume this meaning because it originally meant "connection, correspondence, equivalence, homology."

Recent researches on the Upaniṣads by indologists such as Louis Renou; Paul Thieme, Harry Falk; up to Patrick Olivelle, have
discovered this original meaning and hence central theme of the Upaniṣads.

The Vedic seers were in search of the connection or bond, *bandha*, relating the ritual, cosmic and spiritual or human powers. Only a knowledge of the connections and relations within the universe could enable them to effectively perform their sacrifices. Basically there were three spheres, which were thus interrelated: the sphere of the cosmos (*adhibhūta*), the sphere of sacrifice (*adhibhūtiḥ*) and the sphere of the gods (*adhisthāna*), as well as the human/bodily sphere (*adhyātma*). Since the cosmic powers were governed by, if not identical with the gods, *adhibhūta* and *adhisthāna* would mostly coincide. *Adhyātma* which originally was related to the human body, only gradually assumed the meaning of spiritual sphere in the Upaniṣads, following the semantic development of *ātmā* which first meant the body, and later only the innermost core or Self of Man. These spheres were part of a whole web of interrelationships which made for an understanding of the universe and of Man in connection with the divine powers. Understanding these cosmic relations was part of a secret knowledge which also meant power, a power to deal with these cosmic realities in ritual.

On this general background we have to understand the Upaniṣads, and specially the early Upaniṣads such as the Chāndogya, which constitute a link between the Vedic ideas and the specific, so-called esoteric ideas of the Upaniṣads. Obviously, the link are the Brāhmaṇas (and Āraṇyakas), where we find usages of the word *upaniṣad* in the sense of "connection, equivalent, equation." For example in the Šatapatha-Brāhmaṇa there is a teaching of an *upaniṣad* which is summarized in the equations "Agni is Vāyu, Agni is the Sun, Agni is the year": (X.4.5.1). Wherever connections or equations are established, they are often called *upaniṣad*.1 Renou has shown that the word *nidāna* is also used in the Brāhmaṇas in the sense of "a connection on the basis of identity between two things belonging to different levels."²

To discover, know and establish connections and correspondences between different spheres is for the Vedic, Brāhmaṇic and Upaniṣadic ātman not only the content, but it is also a method of knowledge, which is used consciously and systematically. It proceeds from knowing these realities in their own sphere, e.g. in the cosmos, in the body, or in ritual, connecting them among each other, and finally discovering and hence realizing experientially their identity. The equation *ātman-brahman* is but the last step in this process of knowledge. But before reaching that point of identity, the Upaniṣads themselves go through a variety of interrelations and homologies. The micro-macrocosmic relations are the most common, but not the only kind of such connections.

Patrick Olivelle, following Renou, has equally emphasized the meaning of *upaniṣad* as "connection or equivalence", but he adds that "In addition, the term implies hierarchy; the Upaniṣadic connections are hierarchically arranged, and the quest is to discover the reality that stands at the summit of this hierarchically interconnected universe. It is, however, assumed that such connections are always hidden."³

Another linguistic indication of this tendency of the Upaniṣads to co-relate and connect different realities meditatively

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2 Ibid, p. 151.
is the frequent use of the verb upās-, which is mostly translated as "to venerate", to meditate upon something as something else. Such a meditation connects the person who thus meditates with the realities which he recognizes as correspondences or homologies. We shall see examples for all these usages and meanings in the Chāndogya.

There are several bases for establishing such equivalences. One of the strongest and most lasting influences on all later speculations on such correspondences is the Purusha Sūkta (Rgveda X.90). Some homologies are based on similarities (e.g., wind and breath), and another method to arrive at these equivalents are "etymological" connections and other connections based on language, as for example the number of syllables of a metre.

I may summarize this general introduction to our theme in the words of Brereton:4

Each Upanishadic teaching creates an integrative vision, a view of the whole which draws together the separate elements of the world and of human experience and compresses them into a single form. To one who has this larger vision of things, the world is not a set of diverse and disorganized objects and living beings, but rather forms a totality with a distinct shape and character.

Correspondences in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad

A clear indication of establishing correspondences is when the text itself declares:

\[ \text{ityadhyātmam ātadhyātmam} \]
\[ \text{ātadhyādīvam ādhyādīvam} \]
\[ \text{etc.} \]
This relates to the Self.
This relates to the Divinities, etc.

The first such equivalences are related to the Udgīthā the central chant of Śaṁaveda. The verb used to connect the Udgīthā with the human (adhyātmā) and cosmic (adhyātivaṁ) realities is obviously upās-, "to venerate, to meditate upon" the Udgīthā as:

Breath, speech, eye, ear, mind
at the human level
and sun, wind, fire etc. at the cosmic/divine level

Every connection is justified or explained also by means of "etymological" connections:

What follows is with respect to the divine sphere. One should venerate the High Chant as the sun up there that gives warmth. As it rises (udyan), it sings the High Chant (udghātati) for the creatures. As it rises, it dispels darkness and fear. Anyone who knows this is sure to become a man who dispels fear and darkness. As it rises, it dispels darkness.

This breath in here and that sun up there are exactly the same. This is warm, and so is that. People call this sound (svāra), and they call that shine (svāra) and shining back (pratyāśvāra). Therefore, one should venerate the High Chant as both this here and that up there.5

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5 Chānd. I.3.1-2.
Here it is clear that not only the meaning of the two realities is connected "etymologically", and they have an internal homology, but their qualities enter the person "who knows (it, i.e., the connection) thus", ya evam veda. Like in the case of the connection of the Udgātha with prāna and sūrya, their qualities of rising (ud) and dispelling darkness and fear are possessed by the person who knows.

The famous expression ya evam veda sa eva bhavati ("who knows thus becomes it") and similar clearly indicates that this knowledge of the connections is an effective, transforming knowledge. And for the Upaniṣads, any other knowledge would be futile.

Only what is performed with knowledge, with faith, and with an awareness of the hidden connections (upaniṣad) becomes truly potent.6

In connection with the Udgātha, the relationship between ṛk and sāman is expressed in cosmic as well as personal terms (I.6), from which we get the following correspondences:

- earth - fire
- atmosphere - wind
- heaven - sun
- lunar mansions - moon
- bright and dark sides of the sun

The cosmic realities correspond to:
- speech - breath
- eye - ātman
- ear - mind
- bright and dark parts of the eye

6 Ibid. I.1.10.

These correspondences are not yet systematic and fixed as in later texts. What is important is the relation/identity between the golden puruṣa in the sun (I.6.6) and the puruṣa seen in the eye (I.7.5): "This person down here has exactly the same appearance as that person up there in the sun..."

This early passage offers a clue to the identification of the dying man with the golden puruṣa in the sun of Isa 16, and the saying knowledge of the puruṣa of the colour of the sun in Śvetāsvatara III.8:

I know this mighty Person (Puruṣa)
Of the colour of the sun, beyond darkness.
Only by knowing Him does one pass over death.
There is no other path for going there.

The knowers of the identity of the two puruṣas in the Chāndogya "rule over the world, below the sun and over the desires of men..." (I.7.7). The "fruit" of this knowledge is still this-worldly: (in later terms: bhoga), whereas the same knowledge of the puruṣa leads beyond, to an overcoming of death (mokṣa) in the Isa and Śvetāsvatara.

As I have said in the introduction, the Rgvedic puruṣa is the key to most of these correspondences, but the Upaniṣadic puruṣa goes beyond the micro-macrocosmic relationships established by the puruṣa-cosmogony. If the Rgveda was concerned with the origins, the Upaniṣads are concerned with the final goal, liberating knowledge. In both, the puruṣa serves as the model. And the extreme expression of the end of the Isa Upaniṣad: yo'sau puruṣah so'ham asmi, is not only the key to the latter, but it has influenced all the later theistic spiritualities where the mantra so'ham plays a central role.7

7 Cp. SETU 22 (2001), art.
The symbolism of numbers plays an important role in these correspondences, as for example the number five which pervades all the different spheres. Ultimately these correspondences of groups of five lead to the system of the tattvas which consists mostly of groups of five (25 in Śaṅkhya, 36 in the Agamas).

The Śāman chant consists of five parts: hinkāra, prastāva, udgītha, pratihāra, and nidhana. These five are correlated to a number of the realities grouped into five, such as: the world (lokas, II.2.1), consisting of earth, fire, atmosphere, sun, and sky, the rain (II.3), the water (II.4), the seasons (II.5), five animals (II.6), the five prānas (II.7). Obviously, it is not only a question of establishing equivalents, but each such correlation yields a particular result, to mention only one example: If one venerates or meditates upon (upāśita) five types of water as the five parts of the Śāman chant: "He perishes not in water, he becomes rich in water, who knowing this thus, venerates a fivefold Śāman in all waters." (II.4.2, tr. Hume).

There are other correspondences with the sevenfold Śāman, as for example the seven divisions of the day or of the sun (II.9), where each division is connected with a class of beings. This sevenfold Śāman is to be meditated upon (upāśita) as leading beyond death (aśīmṛtyu, II.10.1), and this is precisely the final goal of all such meditations on the interrelatedness. Only a vision of the totality can lead beyond death.

Further analogies of the fivefold Śāman relate to: the senses (mind, speech, eye, ear, breath, II.11.1), the five phases of fire (II.12), sexual intercourse (II.13), the five divisions of the sun during the day (II.14), again rain (II.15), seasons (II.16); etc. The final conclusion of all these equivalences is the identification with the whole, the totality:

When in this manner a man knows this Śāman woven upon the Whole he becomes the Whole. There is nothing better, nothing higher than the fivefold set of threes. A man who knows that knows the Whole; all quarters bring tribute to him. He should venerate this Śāman with the thought, "I am the Whole!" that is his basic rule.

(Chānd. II 21.2-3)
(tr. P. Olivelle)

One symbol which has been used by both, the Brhadāranyaka and the Chāndogya to illustrate the sweet unity of all things is honey, madhu. The madhuvidyā of the Brhadāranyaka is well-known. To quote only one verse:

The earth is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this earth. The radiant and immortal person on the earth and, in the case of the ātman, the radiant and immortal person residing in the body—they are both one's self (ātman). It is the immortal, it is Brahma, it is the Whole.

(Br. Up. II.5.1)

In the Chāndogya we find the equivalences between the elements for making honey with the parts of the cosmic Sun and with the four Vedas and the Upaniṣads (III.1-5). Madhu is nectar (āmṛta) and it is the essence of the flower (rasa), hence:

These, clearly, are the very essence of the essences, for the essences are the Vedas, and these are their essence. These are, moreover, the immortal nectar of nectars, for the nectars are the Vedas, and these are their nectar.

(Chānd. III. 5.4)
The philosophical explanation of the honey symbolism is found in the famous teaching to Śvetaketu:

Now, I take the bees, son. They prepare the honey by gathering nectar from a variety of trees and by reducing that nectar to a homogeneous whole. In that state the nectar from each different tree is not able to differentiate: ‘I am the nectar of that tree’, and ‘I am the nectar of this tree’. In exactly the same way, son, when all these creatures merge into the existent, they are not aware that ‘We are merging into the existent’.

The finest essence here that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (ātman).

(Chānd. VI.9.1-2.4).

The symbolism of honey serves at least two meanings: one is the unity out of diversity. Many bees collect nectar from various flowers, but ultimately they are all collected into one honey. The second is the joyfulness, beauty and sweetness of that very unity. Similarly, the correspondences between various realities, disparate as they may appear, ultimately lead to a feeling of unity, of wholeness, of totality (sarvam). But it is not merely a matter of stating these relationships, but to relate them by creative meditation: upāsanā, which may correspond to bhāvanā in Tāntric spirituality, that is a meditation which produces the result, which leads to a transformation.

That the puruṣa serves as a model for all these relationships is confirmed by a quotation from the Puruṣasūkta (cf. CU III. 12.5) in the context of the following correspondences: 

Gāyatrī–earth–body-heart (III. 12.1-4). And these equivalences culminate in one of the most important meditations of the Chāndogya, what is called dāhāravidyā Its earlier version reads:

And take what people call "brahman" – clearly, it is nothing but this space here outside a person. And this space here outside a person – clearly, it is the same as this space here within a person. And this space here within a person – clearly, it is the same as this space here within the heart; it is full and non-depleting. Anyone who knows this obtains full and non-depleting prosperity.

(III. 12.7-9)
(tr. Olivelle)

The full form of this meditation is found in VIII.1:

1.1. Hari OM. In this city of Brahmā there is a dwelling in the form of a lotus flower, and within it there is an inner space. One should search for that which is within that inner space; it is that which should be sought, it is that which one should desire to know.

1.2. If anyone asks, "Please tell me concerning this dwelling within the city of Brahmā and the lotus flower and the space that is within it. What is there that we should seek? What is there that we should desire to know?" Then he should say: 

1.3. "As far, indeed, as the vast space outside extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth fire and wind, sun and moon, lightning and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess—all is contained within it."

(transl. R. Panikkar, The Vedic Experience)

If the Vedic ideal of wholeness which is reflected in the earlier section of the Chāndogya was more of a cosmic and human nature, here we find a step further to interiorisation: Brahmā is found in the space within the heart, and there alone is fullness
The system of correspondences does not end there, for
the heart has five openings for the deities (devasayah) which
are called the five brahma purusas, the doorkeepers of heaven
(svargasya lokasya dvārapālah). These are the relationships:

Eastern opening- prāya-eye-sun
Southern opening- vyāna-ear-moon
Western opening- apāna-speech-fire
Northern opening- samāna-mind-rain
Upper opening- udāna-wind-space (III.13.1-5)

Thus the openings of the heart are related to the five prānas,
indriyas and cosmic elements. The statement about the light that
shines above everything, in the highest of the high worlds, being
the same as the light within the human person (III.13.7) sounds
like a new, mystical discovery. It leads on to a meditation on the
ātman.

This self (ātman) of mine that lies deep within my
heart - it is made of mind; the vital functions (prāna)
are its physical form; luminous is its appearance; the
real is its intention; space is its essence (ātman); it
contains all actions, all desires, all smells and all
tastes; it has captured this whole world; it neither
speaks nor pays any heed.

This self (ātman) of mine that lies deep within my
heart - it is smaller than a grain of rice or barley,
smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a millet
grain or a millet kernel; but it is larger than the earth,
larger than the intermediate region, larger than the
sky, larger even than all these worlds put together.

(III.14.2-3)

Here all the correspondences are integrated in the interiorized
vision of the ātman, the smallest, most interior, as well as the
largest, of cosmic dimensions. Knowing that one becomes
Brahman after death.

As Patrick Olivelle remarked, there is a hierarchy in these
correspondences, and clearly the highest level is reached with
the inner space within the heart and the cosmic space outside.

The method of Chāndogya as contained in the instruction of
Nārada by Sanatkumāra is precisely one of a hierarchical ascent
(VII. 1.4-26), culminating in the ātman. And in the instruction of
Prajāpati to Indra (VIII.3-12) the hierarchical ascent is taught in
relation to the different identifications of the ātman. No doubt, the
ultimate correspondence is found in the identity of brahman with
ātman (VIII. 14).

Conclusion
To conclude, the aim of establishing relationships and
equivalences between cosmic, ritual, bodily and spiritual realities
is to attain a state of wholeness, of fullness and totality. The
method of the Chāndogya is an inclusive one, i.e. no aspect of life
and reality is excluded from the highest experience of unity,
everything is included by way of establishing and contemplating
upon all possible relationships, and ultimately to place them in a
hierarchical order of ascent. Apart from the basic concepts ātman
and brahman, the highest of such equivalences leading to identity
is that between inner and outer space - ākāśa.

I want to make another connection at the end of this reflection on
the Chāndogya: coming back to the Vedic and Upaniṣadic
concern to discover connections that bind together the cosmos,
man and the divine or spiritual world, I would like to extend this
general method and insight to two other influential schools of
Indian thought and spiritual practice: Buddhism and Hindu-Tantra.

Louis Renou has shown convincingly that the Buddhist idea of pratyayasamutpāda or "dependent origination" is but another way to see the interconnectedness of all things in this universe. This is used to demonstrate the relativity of everything, but the English word "relativity" derives from..."relation" and relatedness, and hence it is not to be understood as simply negative. Things are relative because they are related, interconnected. And this idea is not far from the Upaniṣadic interrelatedness of the micro- and macrocosm, leaving aside the philosophical interpretations attached to both schools, Buddhism and Vedāna, which move in opposite directions.

The second example where I see a deep correspondence is the idea of sarvam sarvātmekam, "everything is connected with everything else", or "everything is connected with the totality". What the Upaniṣadic interrelationships and the Tantric sarvātmakatva have in common is the notion of the interrelatedness of all things, from the earth to Śiva, speaking in terms of the Śaiva ātman. In Tantra, especially in Kashmir Śaivism, the basis is the nature of pure consciousness (saṃvit) which contains and reflects the entire reality. To quote from Abhinavagupta's Parātrīṣṭikā Vivaraṇa:

In the nature of consciousness, the omnifariousness of everything (sarvātmakāya) is always present. That highest Divinity, viz. parā, though consisting of the highest stage of non-differentiation is teeming with endless variety, containing within herself as she does the parāparā expansion of pañjânas...etc. The maxim 'that which is not there may be elsewhere' will not hold good in her case. Seize (mentally) that goddess, viz. consciousness, known as the initial ever-creative activity of I-feeling, void of even a trace of the foul stain of limitation.

Whatever mobile and immobile objects there are all these abide in the venerable, divine supreme consciousness of Bhairava. (tr. Jaideva Singh, p. 91)

The aim of the Upaniṣads as well as of Tantra is to attain a state of wholeness, of integration, of total being, even though their language may be different. But the difference has been mostly overemphasized, overlooking the striking similarities.

I may conclude by relating the insights of the Upaniṣads to our present time which is so much in need of a holistic vision and lifestyle, in need of an integration of the cosmic, the human and the divine. The Čhāndogya Upaniṣad, in spite of its archaic language, has a liberating message, if we can interpret it in our present day context.

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Publishing Event


The Abhiṣiktānanda Society was very happy to receive in July 2002 two copies of the recently published Italian translation of the Spiritual Diary of Swamiji. The first impression is one of

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8 Cp. op.cit. p. 152.
9 Yogasūtra Vyāsa Bhāṣya III.14.
admiration for the beautiful printing and elegant presentation of the book, hardbound in red plastic-coated paper. A careful look into the contents only deepens the impression that the publisher and translators have a great respect for the text and for the culture it represents. Just one detail: the diacritical marks on Sanskrit words are used much more consistently and correctly than in either the French or the English edition—even though Swamiji did not use them regularly. Let me go into some details.

The dust-jacket is very elegant: the front shows an oval window through which we see two praying hands doing the suryanamaskar; the back cover has a photo of Swamiji as background to a quotation on the relation between Hinduism and Christianity. The title page offers first the two names of Swamiji in separate lines: Henri Le Saux//Svāmī Abhīṣiktānanda; the latter with the accurate diacritical marks. The two names are in the same size. But on the dust-jacket the French name is embossed in colour and is five times bigger than the Indian name. Which is, I think, a pity, as Swamiji generally used his Indian name.

The title of the book is: DIARIO SPIRITUALE di un monaco cristiano-samnyasin hindu 1948-1973. A cura di Raimon Panikkar. The original French title, kept in the English version, is given in the obverse page, with acknowledgement of O.E.L.L. copyright, 1986. The translator is Claudio Lamparelli, with the collaboration of Milena Carrara Pavan. I am not competent to judge on the literary value of the translation, but it seems to me to be very faithful to the original.

In the title page the publisher is mentioned simply as MONDADORI, specified on the obverse page with mention of the copyright Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milano. The collection to which the book belongs is Uomini e Religioni (Men and Religions). The book has 509 pages.

Naturally the book follows the text of the French edition. But before the preface and as inspiration, so to say, for the whole book we have the following quotation in Italian from the Diary, 9 May 1970:

You have seen the lightning... keep your secret.
People would ask you to explain and they would be unable to understand you; they would condemn you.

They could not understand that heaven was rent open for you and that you are no longer beneath the firmament.
Live joyfully and smiling in this world, infinitely free.
Heaven was open for Jesus at his baptism and he heard the inner voice.
Only in the heaven torn open is true prayer.
So long as the heaven of your heart has not been torn open in the lightning of Sūnaj, the storm of Pentecost, you know nothing of God.
You call this firmament God, the limit of your thought.

After these inspiring lines begins R. Panikkar’s original Preface, here again headed by an apt quotation from Kaivalya Upaniṣad 10. ([Seeing] the atman in all beings and all beings in the atman, [one] attains the supreme brahman). This original Preface signed in Kodai, 1982/Tavertet 1985 is followed by a supplement of three and a half pages signed in Milan Pentecost 2002, where
Panikkar gives a bit of the further history of the Journal. He mentions the English edition which clarified some obscure passages of the French by a fresh look at the manuscripts and assures us that these changes have been incorporated in the Italian text. He makes a reference to the special preface of Sister Sara Grant included in the English edition and translates a few lines of her last paragraph. He also alludes to the history of the Ahbshiktaananda Society, conceived in the chaos of the Moghul Sarai railway station. He ends by commenting on the relevance of the Italian version.

The preface is followed by a chronology of Swami's life and a bibliography of his writings in French or English and the translations into Italian. Although the publication of his letters to Joseph Lemarie is mentioned, no mention is made of Swamiji's biography through his own letters prepared by James Stuart and published by ISPCK in 1989. The two maps of South India and North India are reproduced, together with the list of abbreviations. Between pages 304 and 305 there is an insert of eight pages in glossy paper with 19 good photos of Swami or his closest collaborators in black and white. There are no colour photos found in the French and English editions. The indices of names and subjects follows those of the English edition.

We can only end by congratulating the translators and publishing house Mondadori for meeting in this elegant away the challenge of publishing a classic of contemporary spirituality" (R. Panikkar, p. 38).

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.
Vidyajyoti, Delhi


This excellent biography retraces the personal odyssey of Fr Francis Mahieu Acharya (1912-2002) from early childhood, youth and the twenty years spent as a Trappist monk in the West. It then also embraces the complete history of Kurisumala Ashram, which became part and parcel of the Acharya's life since its foundation in 1958. It culminates in the ashram incorporation "as it is" into the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance in July 1998, with the status of Abbey.

Kurisumala can truly be depicted as a Christian, Syriac and Indian monastery. These three qualifications are indeed the three pillars that have made this ashram a unique experience of acculturation of Christian monasticism in India and a successful model of social and religious integration in Kerala:

1. The establishment in the fifties of this monastic community based primarily on Benedictine/Cistercian spirituality was an important contribution to the Church of India and especially to the Syriac Christianity which had lost touch with its own monastic roots in the Near East.

2. In the same perspective, the Acharya and the whole community worked hard for the rediscovery and the promotion of the liturgy, the literature and the spirituality of the Syriac Tradition. Selected Syriac prayers and hymns of the ancient Antiochian rite were translated by Fr. Francis Acharya and published in four volumes (2).

3. Indian culture and the Gandhian ashram way of life were two essential features that characterized Kurisumala since the beginning. This paved the way gradually to a genuine attempt of Indianization of their Christian worship. On the other hand,
the ashram contributed marvelously to the economical and social development of the surrounding area.

These important subjects are dealt with very well during the eventful story of Kurisumala, although this valuable biography is not a monograph as such. In this short review, it is not possible to elaborate on all of these points. However, for the reader of Setu we would like to focus upon the relationship between Fr. Francis Acharya and Swami Abhishiktananda, and to a lesser extent upon the relationship with Fr. Bede Griffiths.

As for Swami Abhishiktananda it appears to me that he is indelicately and unnecessarily treated with a hint of irony in several passages (see pp. 136, 137, 142, 187, etc). It is true that the two monks were not on the same wavelength right from the beginning when they met in Bombay at Fr Francis’ arrival from Southampton (12.7.1955). Not only were their temperaments unmatched but also their projects were quite different. Fr. J. Monchanin and Fr. H. Le Saux were both attracted by a semi-eremitical and contemplative life. They also wanted to experience within the depth of themselves the meeting between Christian mysticism and Hindu wisdom. Swami Abhishiktananda became quickly fascinated by the radicalness of Sannyāsa and the absolute call of the Upanishads. His meeting with Sri Ramana Maharshi and later with Swami Īñānanda Giri, as well as his experiences in the caves of Arunachala had taken him away from any project of monastic foundation. They showed him the way to the simple life of a sannyāsi and to the inner spiritual realization.

As for Fr. Francis Acharya Hindu spirituality didn’t really appeal to him. Hence he couldn’t be receptive enough to all the new ideas and insights that his fellow monk wanted passionately to share with him. A coolness ensued between them. At Shantivanam he found no prospects of future development. Indeed this was a constant subject of conversation after meals! Though he wanted to live permanently at Shantivanam in the company of Fr. J. Monchanin whom he held in very high esteem, his real and deep desire since the outset was to found a Cistercian abbey somewhere in India (see pp. 144-145). During his journey to Kerala, towards the end of 1955, the enthusiastic discovery of the Syriac Tradition and the concrete proposal of Mar Athanasios (see p. 149) came as a direct response to his eagerness. Fr. J. Monchanin himself encouraged him in this new direction. The principal aims of Kurisumala Ashram as they appear in the foundation charter (see p. 168) show clearly the difference in the orientation: liturgical life, Syriac rite, spirituality of the Eastern Fathers, and ecumenism.

Between 1962 and 1967 the two pioneers will meet a few times and work harmoniously together within the context of seminars. It is only during his sabbatical year (1967-1968) that Fr Francis Acharya profoundly discovered Swami Abhishiktananda. "It was a true encounter!" (3). It took place at Shantivanam, "I experienced in our meeting again after eleven years an unexpected and very deep joy, as I discovered how close we were at the deepest level." (4) His stay at Saccidananda Ashram and the following year, at Shivananda Ashram (Rishikesh), offered him the opportunity to deepen his understanding of Hindu spirituality. He then saw to a greater extent the convergence with Christian spirituality (e.g. between sannyāsa and Eastern Christian monasticism). This actually became the starting point of the introduction of new rites and Hindu monastic practices at Kurisumala (see p. 264). Above all the Acharya accepted the proposal of Swami ji to take over the Saccidananda Ashram as a new branch of Kurisumala.
Consequently on Aug 28, 1968, Fr. Francis arrived at Shantivanam to install Fr. Bede Griffiths as its new prior. It was in fact the ideal solution to put an end to the tensions that lasted for years between the two co-founder and leaders of Kurisumala (p. 310). Their disagreement would take a new turn as Fr. Bede would practically ignore the supervision of the motherhouse and will develop his ashram quite independently and according to a different style. The crisis will end in 1982 with the separation de jure and the joining by Saccidananda Ashram of the Benedictine Congregation of Camaldoli. The author gives a long account of the dispute between the two men (pp. 309-315). Again one can read between the lines the bitterness of the Acharya and the one-sidedness of the analysis presented to the reader. Why could not Fr. Francis recognize the peculiar charm of Fr. Bede, he who was previously against the monastic life being dominated by canon law and who was a fervent defender in the seventies of the free and non-institutional spirituality of Hindu sannyāsa (p. 272)? Why instead would he insist on the hierarchical relation and canonical depending (p. 312)? With all due respect one should have expected here an attitude of openness.

On another level we would like to draw the attention to a number of misunderstandings and mistakes contained in the book. For example, see on p. 214: "...the mendicancy practices of the Hindu eremitical Tradition...". The shade of meaning in the context of the sentence sounds pejorative and the comparison with the sons of St. Benedict and the ashrams of Mahatma Gandhi is quite superficial. Actually there is no question here of mendicancy as such (opposed as it were to the famous motto "ora et labora" of the Benedictine Rule) but of the venerable tradition of bhikṣa (aims given to a sādhu) which is the expression of the highest type of renunciation when one has completely surrendered to the Divine. The aim of bhikṣa is to put the ideal of absolute renunciation into practice by accepting the insecurity of depending entirely on the Supreme for one's food. This ideal is clearly emphasized in the Gospel (see Mt. 6:25-34).

On p. 255: "the white crest of the eternal snows [in Rishikesh] fascinates the glance...". These snows are never visible from Rishikesh itself (340 m.)! One has to go much higher in the Himalayas before enjoying such scenery.

On p. 257: (Fr. Francis Acharya and Swami Abhishiktananda were joined in Rishikesh by) "Odette Baumer, a Swiss indologist, admirer of Le Saux". It was actually Dr. Bettina Bäumer from Austria.

On p. 260: "'Bhakti' is mistaken for 'bhakta' (a devotee, a worshipper).

On p. 270 n. 7: Vrindavan is not the birthplace of Sri Kṛṣṇa but Mathura, according to the tradition.

On p. 281: "sannyāsī is mistaken for 'sannyāsa', the life of total renunciation (sannyāsa dīkṣā being the ceremony of initiation into the life of a sannyāsī, a renunciate).

In conclusion, the present work is a remarkable biography, well structured and captivating from beginning to end. Written in an extremely vivid style, it reads as a novel. The book is also invaluable on account of the rich documentation on which it is based: the Diaries of the Acharya, his letters and archives as well as the numerous personal interviews with the author. Moreover Fr. Francis himself re-read the whole draft systematically. Nevertheless there is a weakness that I found in the book. One can detect throughout the unconcealed admiration and feeling of the author towards the Acharya (who is actually her uncle). That may explain the relative absence of a critical approach, which makes the value of historical biographies. In this regard the biography of Fr. Bede written by Shirley du Boulay (5) seemed to be much more objective. I must also point out the very useful appendices: a
full chronology, an index of names and a bibliography. Strangely enough the very accurate and much praised biography of James Stuart (6) is not mentioned here though it contains several interesting passages with reference to the meetings of the Acharya with Swami ji and his stays at Shantivanam.

Despite of its limitations the book written by Marthe Mahieu will without doubt be a good contribution to the history of Christian monasticism in India and the Indian Christian ashram movement. We do hope it will soon be translated from French and published in India.

Swami Atmananda
Rishikesh

(1) Order address: Abbaye cistercienne Notre Dame de Scourmont, B- 6464 Forges, Belgium.


(4) See p. 247 and supra, p. 57.


Saccidanandaya namah, A Commemorative Volume, Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, Thaniripalli, Karur District, Tamil Nadu, South India, 2002 (185 pages). Copies available from the publisher.

The fifty years of the existence of Shantivanam, as the Saccidananda Ashram is called in brief, have found a deserving tribute in the above publication. As Fr. Dominic Ayyanikkatt says in his Introduction, "this volume is not and was not intended to be a souvenir published in connection with any glittering golden jubilee celebration. There were no such celebrations in Shantivanam during the fifty years of its existence. Nor is this primarily a collection of scholarly essays and scientific papers on ashrams or ashram spirituality. The reader will indeed find in this collection well written papers by persons who have not only theoretical knowledge but also practical experience of ashram life. There are also personal tributes to and studies on the three acharyas of Saccidananda Ashram by persons who had either known them personally or have come to know them through their writings." Since its foundation on 21st March 1950 by Jules Monchanin (Swami Parama Arubi Ananda) and Swami Abhishiktananda, with the blessings of their far sighted Bishop James Mendonca, Shantivanam has gone through many phases and transformations, as well as crises, but what is important is that its ideal has inspired many seekers, and has been a model for the Christian Ashram movement in India. This is reflected in the articles contained in this volume. To mention only some of the contributors: Sebastian Painadath, Ishanand Venmpany, Sr. Pascaline Coff, Francoise Jacquin, Sr. Marie-Louise Coutinha, Gaston Dayanand, Jyoti Sahi, A. Nambisaparambil, Cornelius S. Tholens, Upt Thomas Matus. The articles focus mainly on the ashram movement and spirituality, and on Jules Monchanin and Bede Griffiths. Abhishiktananda, the third of the "trinity", finds less mention, and this is justified because, in the words of Fr. Dominic, "he has written more than the other two and he is also the one who is written about the most" (p.4-5). But he also admits that "he had greater influence on the Indian Church than the other two." (p.5). Some of the memories of Abhishiktananda seem to be
inaccurate (e.g. in the "Testimony" by Sr. Claude de Sauvobien, p. 86-87). The critical observations by Gaston Dayanand (pp. 79-84) should be taken very seriously: That in the Shantivanam ashram one finds "next to nothing about Abhishrattana, not even the complete collection of his books universally read: Only his half empty tomb..." (p. 80). More than that, his admonishment that Shantivanam should preserve its interreligious and its prophetic spirit, rooted in the Indian spiritual tradition, and not become "another Christian institution... a simple extension of a western way of contemplation"; (p. 82-83).

The volume reflects the story, the personalities of the founders and acharyas, and the inspiration which many seekers derived from this place. The subtitle "a commemorative volume" seems to be too much oriented to the past, and one wishes Shantivanam a living future in the Spirit.

Bettina Baumé


The Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra, though a short text, belongs to the most important Hindu Tantras. Originated between 400 and 800 AD, it is part of the oldest Šaivāgamas and among the most revered texts especially of the so-called non-dualistic Šaivism of Kashmir. Abhinavagupta for example quotes it frequently in his different works with great respect. This Tantra is highly esteemed until the present day not only in this tradition but it is widely accepted because of its unique concentration on meditative practice and spiritual experience. The text describes 112 means (traditionally called dhāranās) or "methods of union" (yuktis, verse 148) with the Divine, called "undistracted instructions" (verse 139). All of them are directed to one goal: the attainment of pure "Consciousness" or the "knowledge of Bhairava" (vijñāna bhairava). Bhairava is in this tradition of Bhairavāgamas the name of the Ultimate Reality, which is both, transcendent (aspect of Bhairava) and immanent (aspect of the goddess or Bhairavi). The Tantra is presented in the form of a dialogue between Bhairava (Śiva) and Bhairavi (Śakti). The text makes it clear that the highest state aimed at consists in a suspension of difference between man and God, with the support of these means: "If one is established in only one of them, one becomes Bhairava himself". (v 140a) The non-dualistic schools of Šaivism representing Śivādhyāya (="non-dualistic doctrine of Šaivism") therefore refer repeatedly to this Tantra as authority. Each human experience, situation, each aspect of human life can be a starting point for this realization – it may be the body, mind, breath, the senses, or the empty sky, the intense experience of joy, sexuality, music, etc., but also of fear, sorrow, pain. Every extraordinary, even ordinary experience can become a passage to Reality itself.

The Sanskrit text was published for the first time in 1918 in Bombay. A French translation with commentary by Lilian Silburn was published in 1961, the first English translation by Jaideva Singh in 1979, and a German translation by Bettina Baumé is coming out in 2003. All three authors have been disciples of Swami Lakshman Joo, the last master of non-dualistic Šaivism of Kashmir (1907-1991) who has taught the text several times and in different languages in Srinagar. Their translations and interpretations are therefore based on his teaching. The significance of this book is that it allows us now to study the direct commentary of Swami Lakshman Joo. It is based on the transcript of an oral teaching which was edited with a preface by Prabhia Devi and an introduction by Bettina Baumé who has also provided literal translations of the verses. Giving the Sanskrit text in Nagari and transliteration, followed by the English translation and Commentary, including a Glossary and
Bibliography, this is an exemplary edition, fruit of years of work of Dr. Bettina Bäumer and Dr. Sara Kumar. The theological and spiritual precision and depth of the commentary is impressive, especially if one compares it with the very general treatment of the text by Rajneesh ("Book of Secrets"). This precision is based on the immediacy of his own experience, who was at the same time a yogin and an initiated pandit well-versed in the whole tradition of Trika.

For anybody who wants to deepen his/her spiritual path this book is precious. It offers a view of life which suspends the border between the sacred and the profane, and a way to realize this integration. For Christians the text can be an opportunity to rediscover the motif of transfiguration (gr. theosis) – not as a mere theological speculation but as a concrete practice of imitation of the transfigured Jesus who has asked us to be perfect, as he is perfect.

Ernst Fürlinger

OBITUARIES

by Bettina Bäumer

Sr. Marie-Thérèse Le Saux OSB
8.2.1930 - 7.8.2002

Swami Abhishiktananda's youngest sister Marie-Thérèse was one of his most faithful correspondents and followers. She had a peaceful end in her monastery St. Michel de Kergonan on 7th August, 2002. Marie-Thérèse was born in 1930, after six other brothers and sisters of Henri, the eldest son, when he was already a monk in St. Anne de Kergonan. Although they never lived together in the family, Henri had a deep influence on her life. She not only admired him but was guided by him spiritually. She had

an early desire to devote herself to a religious life, and in 1952 she entered the Benedictine monastery of St. Michel de Kergonan, when her brother was already in India. Although she was very intelligent and loved reading books, also about India, her duty in the monastery was in the kitchen, which she fulfilled joyously and in great simplicity. Her spiritual life was greatly hidden, but the radiance of her smile and her readiness for service expressed something of her inner life, which she revealed to her brother in her letters. Out of love for him she was always ready to meet visitors who were his admirers or who studied his thought and life, and to answer letters.

The Abhishiktananda Society is grateful to her for putting the letters of Swami at our disposal for his biography (by James Stuart). All the friends of Abhishiktananda will feel the loss, because in spite of their difference in age and external distance, she was a witness to the spiritual greatness and influence of her elder brother.

* * *

Odette Bäumer-Despeigne
17.1.1913 - 28.9.2002

Odette Bäumer-Despeigne, one of the most faithful friends and admirers of Swami Abhishiktananda, reached the end of her earthly pilgrimage, "the further shore beyond darkness" and suffering, on 28th September 2002. During our last meeting in 2001 she read the obituary for Sr. Sara Grant in SETU, and she asked me: "Are you going to write my obituary too? which I promised her, without softening out of politeness, considering her age and her weak condition. In Varanasi, the city of death, there is a celebration if a person dies in mature old age, after a fulfilled life.
Many who have known Odette during the last few decades, in the context of Abhishiktananda, did not know anything about her earlier life. Odette was born to French parents in Brussels on 17th January 1913. Her parents died when she was 21 respectively 23 of age, and she was left completely to herself. After attending some courses on religion and philosophy at the University of Louvain, she did a diploma in social work. For almost ten years, she worked in the field of social service, mainly with children, in the context of Pro Juventute of Belgium. She was in charge of establishing refugee homes in Finland during the war between Russia and Finland, from 1939 to 1942, when she could return to Belgium, during World War II. During the war she was looking after weak and TB affected children. When the war ended in 1945, she was assigned the important and difficult task of repatriating deported persons from Germany to their home countries, under the United Nations (UNRRA). She had to enter concentration camps immediately after the war to search for deported inmates, which must have been a horrifying experience. She was given a special military honour for the work she was doing of repatriating hundreds of thousands of prisoners of Nazi Germany.

When she needed a holiday in 1946, she came to Switzerland where she met her future husband, Werner Baumer. They got married in 1947, and she moved to Frauenfeld in Switzerland. In 1952 their son Christophe was born.

But apart from her family duties, Odette was a seeker, and she was attracted by Indian religions, mainly Hinduism but also Buddhism. She studied a lot and practised meditation. She felt a certain conflict between her Christian faith and her interest in Hindu spirituality, and that is how in the sixties she came in contact with Swami Abhishiktananda and started corresponding with him. Their correspondence was more intense since they did not meet, till almost the end of his life, and he gave her much spiritual support and clarification. It was only after his heart attack that she could come to meet him in Indore together with her son Christophe, in October 1973, just two months before his death. In spite of his weakness, this meeting marked an important event in Odette's life. Since Abhishiktananda knew that his end was not far, and he was concerned what would happen to his papers and unpublished manuscripts, he thought it safe to hand some over to Odette (his spiritual diary first went to Fr. Dominique who later gave it to Odette to preserve it and copy it). After Abhishiktananda's Samādhi in December 1973, she kept up an intense contact with his closest disciple, Marc Chaduc (then Swami Ajatananda). She came several times to meet him in Rishikesh, before his mysterious disappearance in 1977. It would not be wrong to say that Marc fulfilled the role of a guru for her in the absence of Abhishiktananda. She recognized Ajatananda's spiritual greatness.

Since Abhishiktananda's spiritual diary had come into her hands, she worked very hard in deciphering and copying it by typing, and making a preliminary selection of the over 1000 pages of manuscript in a handwriting difficult to decipher.

This painstaking work served as a basis for the later selection, editing and publication of the diary, which is no doubt a spiritual document of great importance for the encounter between Christian and Indian spirituality. Besides, since she got to know the thought of Abhishiktananda very well, she started giving lectures on him in different contexts, in the French speaking countries, also in monasteries. In 1980 she was appointed as adviser to the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, in USA (MID), and also in Europe (DIM), whose meetings and workshops she used to attend.

Besides, together with her husband Werner she organized a series of lectures on spirituality, east and west, in their own house in
I cannot forget my last meeting with her, in June 2001, when she handed over all the documents and manuscripts of Abhishkitananda to the Society. She still had the strength to come up to her small meditation room under the roof and it was her desire to sit in meditation with me in the morning. It was a radiant experience, as she herself said, and it gave her inner joy in her weakness. It was also as if tensions were dissolved which may have lingered in her mind. I am very grateful for this peaceful conclusion of a long relationship. And the Abhishkitananda Society will remain grateful for her unique contribution.

* * *

Fr. Francis Mahieu Acharya:
17.1.1912–31.1.2002

With Fr. Francis Acharya the fourth great father of an Indian monasticism in the 20th century has left us. The four of them were great, each in his own way, they followed a sincere vocation, inspired in different degrees by Indian spirituality and sannyāsā: Jules Monchanin, Abhishkitananda, Fr. Bede Griffiths and, lastly, Fr. Francis Acharya. To them I would like to add Fr. Dominique Van Rollenhom, OSB, who was more hidden and eremitic, who was neither a founder nor an author, but whose saintly life left traces in the lives of many. The four founders, who are also important as forerunners in an Inter-religious Monastic Dialogue, had a common vision, and yet they went different ways and there were tensions between any two of them. Any hagiography should not try to deny such tensions.

Fr. Francis Acharya was born as Jean Mahieu in Ypres, Belgium, on 17th January 1912. After his studies, which included also economics and polytechnic, he worked in a factory. He had an early attraction to a spiritual life, and when he was studying in London in 1931, at the age of 19, he was fortunate to meet
Mahatma Gandhi. This meeting left an indelible impression on his mind, and it aroused his interest in India and a desire to go to India to fulfill a vocation. In 1935 he entered the Trappist monastery of Notre Dame of Sceurmont in Belgium. After his studies of theology in Rome he was ordained priest in 1941. He served as novice master, but his intense desire to proceed to India had to be tested, and he had to wait for 20 years until he got the permission to sail to India in 1955. In his own words: "Before that I always felt dissatisfied with myself. Only when I stepped on Indian soil did I, at last, find peace."

His first destination was Shantivanam, where he joined J. Monchanin and Abhishiktinanda in their ashram life. But soon he was drawn to another monastic lifestyle, and after one year he went to Kerala and got in touch with the Syro-Malankara church. Their bishop offered him land for a monastic foundation on Kurisumala, the "hill of the cross". After starting a small community with Fr. Bede Griffiths at Pushpagiri in 1958, they could found their new monastery in the Syrian tradition on Kurisumala. It was a pioneering work to build the monastery and to cultivate the land. In 1960 Fr. Francis started a model farm with Swiss aid (and Swiss cows!). He received the title Acharya ("Master") as founder and abbot of the Kurisumala monastery. The young monks came all from Kerala. Their life was an integration of the Syrian church tradition and their liturgy with Indian spirituality and ashram service in the field of agriculture.

After 10 years of establishing the Community, Fr. Francis took a sabbatical year in 1967-68 to immerse himself more in the Hindu spiritual world. This brought him back to Shantivanam, where he met again Swami Abhishikthinanda, after years of misunderstanding between them. He himself writes about this meeting:

"To go back to Shantivanam was for me a return to the sources where in 1955 I had drawn my first inspiration. With deep emotion I saw again the little chapel and my little hut where I had spent so many radiant days and luminous nights. Above all I met again Swami Abhishiktinanda, and this for me was a real meeting. We conversed a lot and we were both conscious that our respective monastic ways had led us in different directions, where God wanted us. Le Saux had found his true vocation as a Sannyasi; myself in the work on the land and the building up of a monastic community. In our exchange of views and ideas we realised how close at heart we were after all to one another."

(Francis Acharya, Kurisumala Ashram, Chronique de douze années, AIM; 1970)

In 1968 Fr. Francis Acharya obtained Indian citizenship, to his great joy. In the same year Fr. Bede Griffiths left Kurisumala to take over Shantivanam, since Abhishiktinanda was called to live a more solitary life in the Himalayas.

In the late seventies he came to Europe several times to teach "Christian Yoga". In 1980 Fr. Francis published the volumes "Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit", in the Syrian tradition. His great contribution all these years was the training of monks.

In 1988 he suffered a heart attack and took a long time of convalescence. Although he returned to his monastic routine, he suffered another heart attack in 1990.

In 1998 his efforts to get his foundation recognized by the Cistercian Order bore fruit: Kurisumala was affiliated to the Cistercians and was declared abbey and blessed in October 1999. Thus he saw the fruits of his life's work, and on 31st January 2002 he passed away peacefully.
Personal Memories:
My personal memories of Fr. Francis can be focused on three moments, three places and three aspects of his life and of my contact with him: The first (not chronologically) was meeting him in his own monastery in Kurusuma in 1969, in his Karmaksetra, as it were. Here he was the founder of the Acharya, and the organizer. The second was our meeting in Rishikesh together with Swami Abhishikatananda in 1968 (in the book I am mixed up with Odette Baumer, who met Abhishikatananda only in 1973, two months before his death). Fr. Francis was on sabbatical and in a way imbibing the spiritual atmosphere of Rishikesh, especially Sivananda Ashram. It was a historical meeting between the two monks, since there had been tension between them for some years. I witnessed a wonderful meeting and moment of reconciliation. Maybe the atmosphere of Rishikesh, but also his freedom from his monastic responsibilities, made Fr. Francis understand Abhishikatananda better and helped him to respect his lonely way as a true sannyasi. We also had some wonderful meetings in Dehra Dun, establishing friendships for life. The third meeting took place in a completely different context: Fr. Francis had come to Austria in 1977 to teach “Christian Yoga”, and he gave several week-ends in different catholic centres. Since I was then teaching indology at Vienna University I was very happy to have the opportunity to meet him again, to share our views and ideals, to learn from him. I attended one of these week-ends and the personal meeting was very warm. But I was surprised by the way he conducted these courses on “Christian Yoga” for, how can one go through all the eight limbs of Patañjali’s Yoga, practice a number of hathayogic āsanas, and conclude everything with an Indian Liturgy, in just two and a half days?
It was probably his sincere wish to share some of the spiritual treasures which he found in India, and to show that they are not incompatible with Christian faith and spirituality. But it appeared to me that an integration called “Christian Yoga” was not possible in this way.
In spite of this difference of opinion, I keep a warm spiritual memory of the Acharya.

N.B.: See also Book Reviews.

NEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

Swami Atmananda has been elected Secretary of the Abhishikatananda Society at the Annual Meeting of the Executive Committee (October 22, 2002). The outgoing Secretary, Fr. Dr. George Gispert-Sauch SJ was thanked for his services and for looking after the Archives of Abhishikatananda in the Vidyajyoti College.

Dr. Bettina Baumer, President of the Society, has been awarded an honorary Doctorate in Theology from the University of Salzburg, Austria, on October 17, 2002. She is the first woman to be awarded this honorary degree since the foundation of the University about 400 years ago. This was in recognition of her contribution to interreligious understanding and intercultural theology, especially in the field of a dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity.

Theses on Swami Abhishikatananda:
The Abhishikatananda Society has gratefully received a copy of the following thesis by John Glenn Friesen: “Abhishikatananda’s Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience”, submitted at the University of South Africa (2 volumes, total xiv+560 pages). A review will follow in the next issue of SETU.
Jean Noel Ithier has submitted his thesis titled: Henri Le Saux – Swami Abhishiktananda et le mystère de la présence: L'expérience advaline de la conscience du Soi et de la contemplation de la Trinité comme fondement de la rencontre et du dialogue entre l'hindouisme et le christianisme. Université Saint-Paul, Faculté de théologie, 223, rue Main, Ottawa, ONT. Canada (June 2001). The thesis is available at the University Library for consultation.

A new project is now envisaged under the auspices of the Society, the Abhishiktananda Shanti Kutir. It will be a small monastic and interreligious ashram, located in the Himalayan foothills. The project will be in line with Swami Abhishiktananda's life and writings, and will be a contribution to the interfaith dialogue of spiritual experience. It will also be a living center and a dynamic expression of the aims of the Abhishiktananda Society. For any information in this regard, please contact Swami Atmananda who is responsible for this project. (See address below).

Video on the interreligious seminar on: Śūnyā-Pārṇā-Plerōma, Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions.

The Interreligious Retreat Seminar on Śūnyā-Pārṇā-Plerōma (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 (Alois Haas, Raimon Panikkar, Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche, Swami Nityananda Giri, Nirmala Deshpande, Bettina Bäumer).

VHS, 1,40 hours, prize: Rs 500,- (India), US $ 25,- (foreign countries)
Order address: Secretary, Abhishiktananda Society
c/o Vidya Jyoti College, 23 Raj Niwas Marg., Delhi -110 054;
Tel. +11/ 2947 609; Fax: 2943556 or 2943478; e-mail: vjcoldel@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 2003. The volume is going to be a significant contribution to interreligious dialogue. (The publisher will most probably be D.K. Printworld in New Delhi.)

Fr. Dr. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, acharya of Thanth Sadan has given many lectures and satsangs on Swami Abhishiktananda. He has started a fellowship of Meditation and Divine Consciousness in his ashram, in which members of different religions take part. Anybody interested in his ashram and activities can contact him at his ashram: Avolichal, Neriamangalam P.O. 686693, Kerala.

Dr. Judson Trappey who has delivered several lectures on Abhishiktananda in England and the US, is at present working on a project studying Swamiji's poems. His e-mail is: jtrappey@earthlink.com.
The books by Abhishiktananda in English are available at:
ISPCK, Post Box 1585,
1654 Madarsa Road, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006
Tel: 2966323, Fax: 91-11-2965490.
E-mail: ispck@nde.vsnl.net.in; Publishing@ispck.org.
Internet: www.ispck.org.

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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Printed by Mahavir Press, Varanasi, Ph. 0542/2276214