



*Only a perfect One
who is always
laughing at the word
two
can make you know
of love.
~Hafiz*

Beingness-in-the-One: Father Bede Griffiths' Contemplation

A Reflection by Sister Judith Thackray, OSAh

During the month of February 2017, I continued to prepare for my oblate commitment in Shantivanam. In the month preceding, I had begun the oblation preparation by viewing two movies of Father Bede Griffiths—I wanted him to “speak” to me, and to get a sense, a feeling of the essence of his contemplative being. For I felt more than anything, that it was this pure essence of contemplation, which he had lovingly nurtured in Shantivanam, and which he had inspired in everyone he touched, or who had encountered him in his writings.

I believe that contemplation is somewhat different from meditation, although the two flow easily one into the other. More commonly, the state or experience of contemplation will arise following meditation; however, a natural contemplative mood can also lead one into deep meditation. So the two are complementary. But whereas meditation is an essential and necessary training of the mind— something which can be taught and learned, contemplation, as Father Bede himself has said, is a gift of pure grace. It is wholesome and effortless, a timeless, flowing absorption

—arising both from our allowance of, and entry into the action of this absorption, as well as from its unique and singular truth and profundity, directly experienced as a *natural* beingness-in-the-one.

We have only to allow contemplation to enfold us into its flow, for it is the *Mystery of the Divine Moment* or the holy movement, within our own human being. It is the mystery of each of our own intimate relationships with and in the whole, leading us to discover that we are both one and the many, both singular and plural. Father Bede describes this knowingness in these words: "Contemplation is the awakening to the presence of God in the human heart and in the universe which is around us. Contemplation is knowledge by love." (Bede Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom*, 558)

Contemplation is a *loving* experience; it is a feeling of being embraced—and of being totally acceptable, and therefore it is an experience of being completely welcomed into the arms of the loving Mother-Father ground of all beingness. It is a trusting relaxation of the conditioned self, into the unconditioned Source of its own existence and of all existence. It is the sacred reunion we seek, the remembering we long for: to feel again, the bliss and joy of being rejoined to the All—and to know finally, the end of our mistake of thinking of ourselves as *ever* being separate from the All.

In contemplation, the surrounding environment becomes part of the contemplation, joining in the flow of knowing oneself a part of the whole. Nothing remains separate; everything seen, felt, thought, all body sensations—everything is experienced as belonging to the whole. Everything belongs to us, and we belong to everything. Nothing is left out; no one is outside this wholeness. In the larger society, a contemplative, absorbed in contemplation, helps reintegrate and restore things back to this pristine unity of the innate wholeness of life, again and again. Society needs its contemplatives very much to help heal it, and to help return it to the knowledge of its own intrinsic wholeness and sacredness.

In his writings, Father Bede Griffiths leads us to understand that it is this contemplative dimension of spiritual life, which is the commonality shared by all the different paths, and which then allows them all to journey both separately and together—in the knowing of this unitive experience of Spirit, as that which brings *all* together, in an *inclusive* covenant of loving union.

His contemplative presence and dedicated service in Shantivanam, was a participation in the healing presence so much needed by our world. In his spiritual

and personal life, he cultivated an *equanimous* heart. In the midst of the endless changes of a constantly changing human world of thoughts, actions and emotions, he maintained equanimity, by transcending the separation of heart which humans can experience when they feel or find themselves challenged or conflicted. He did this by an unswerving reliance on the Supreme as *Unconditioned Love*.

This treasure of unconditioned love is not easily won; one has to keep spiritual love alive; one must keep it renewed and real every day—in a world which both neglects it and casts it aside. The loving heart can become totally broken open by an apparently unloving world. Eventually, the heart learns to rest in its own love; it finds this abidance in and as love, to be its truest nature—and it learns to be true to this, its own deepest nature, throughout all extremities of life.

It is this resting in love, this remaining one's truest self, which even now, many years after his passing, continues to be the beneficence of Father Bede Griffiths' contemplation to our world today. Our human world desperately needs to move beyond all sense of competition, opposition or duality, and find the way of harmony mind and loving, harmonious living. Father Bede was a true interfaith person, and a pioneer of humanity's ultimate meaning, as well as a loving advocate for its ultimate welfare.