

# DOM BEDE GRIFFITHS

## COSMIC PERSON COSMIC LORD

*Dom Bede Griffiths addressed the largest audience ever to gather at the Monday night Alternatives Programme at St. James's, Piccadilly, an audience of about 700 body-psyche-spirits*

### RELIGION – RELINKING

I would like to begin this talk with a Sanskrit chant if you don't mind. In India we normally begin any religious talk or serious talk with this chant and it puts us in touch with ancient India, ancient humanity. And I think we want to tune ourselves in with the past where we are one with humanity through the ages. Sanskrit has the power to open up that whole horizon. Roughly the translation is: "Let us share together. Let us enjoy together. Let us strive together. Let us shine together. Let there be no quarreling among us."

He chants: "Om Sana . . . Om Shanti, shanti, shanti etc."

I think it's appropriate to begin with this chant to link us up with ancient India because today we live in one world where we are aware, as we were not before, that we have an inheritance from the past – the ancient world of India, the world of China, of the East – it's no longer strange to us – there's Hindu's, Buddhists, Muslims living among us and we're all beginning to realize that we share, and we can't stand isolated any longer. And this is particularly meaningful for Christians (most of us have a Christian background of some kind) and, you see, our churches all derive from the 2nd Century. The 1st century the church grew up in Palestine and then in the 2nd Century it was moving out all the time and got established in the Roman Empire, and we developed all these Greco-Roman western structures, and our religion is a Greco-Roman western structure of religion. And many times we forget that. And in Asia, and in a great part of Africa also, and elsewhere, it has very little meaning. And today we must go

beyond these limited cultural structures which limit our religion, and become aware of its relationship with other religious traditions. And that I think is urgent for all of us. Some, I know, resist it very strongly, but I see no other way, because, you see, we live in this fragmented universe with these terrible divisions among us. Christians are divided into innumerable churches and sects, and they all quarrel with one another. And again, Christians are divided from other religions. And then, beyond religion, differences of race, differences of economic and political structures, and so on. We live in a divided world, and I think today we're being challenged and we're learning how to get beyond these divisions. And the divisions ultimately go back to the fact that we are centred on a separated self. We all believe in a separated self – I am separate from you, you from the other, and so on. That is an illusion. There are no separated selves. We create this image of a separate self and then we begin to quarrel and to fight with one another. Behind all these separated selves there is a transcendent self. And in India, from the earliest times, they have always recognised that there is a transcendent self.

### BODY AND PSYCHE (SOUL)

We distinguish three levels, you see. There is the *physical level*, and today we realise that we are all united on the physical level. Modern science is showing us that we are all members, parts of the cosmic whole. And we're all united in this basic, physical universe for which we are responsible and of course which we are destroying with our technology and so on. So we are faced with this danger of destroying our environment which should be sustaining us. And we are all separated *psychologically*. We are all separated *selves*. Behind the separated selves is the common psychic unity. Jung talks of the collective unconscious behind these

conscious minds, these individual conscious minds, the racial mind, and we go right back to the beginning of humanity. All of us have the past of humanity within us. It's part of our inheritance. That's why, as I say, I like to do a Sanskrit chant, because it's in all of us. It's not something foreign to us here. We belong to one race, one people. So behind the separated selves we have a psychological unity.

### SPIRIT

But now beyond the physical and the psychological there is a third dimension, and for many people that scarcely exists. The problem of our whole civilisation is that we've almost eliminated this third dimension of the *Spirit*, the *Pneuma*, or the *Atman*. And in the Hindu tradition, the Indian tradition, there was a breakthrough, you know. In the 5th century before Christ, people were living, until that time, in this kind of mythological universe – a deep psychic unity. People felt a deep psychic unity, the tribal unity, the blood unity with the ancestors and so on. There was a wonderful sort of tribal unity but it was still immanent in matter, in life, in imagery. They hadn't come to full consciousness. In the first millennium before Christ, mainly 500-600 BC in India, a breakthrough took place, and beyond the physical world, beyond the psychological world, they opened themselves to this mystery of the *Atman* – the *Spirit*, the *Brahmin*, the *One Reality*. And that one reality unites the whole creation, unites every level of being.

They are not really independent. There is no physical world out there at all. That is an illusion that, you see (he laughs) that was created in the 17th century by Descartes and others. There is no physical world outside us. The physical world is inside us. I always like to quote the wonderful saying of the Chandogya Upanishad. It's very famous: *In this castle of the body there is a little shrine. And in that*

*shrine, there is a lotus. And in that lotus there is a little space. What is that which lives in that little space in the heart of the lotus. That is what we have to find.*

(He laughs). And then they say the whole universe is in that little space because the Creator, the Source of all, is in the heart of each one of us – beyond our body with all its limitations, beyond our psyche with all its limitations, each one of us is in the depth of our being one with this transcendent mystery from which the whole universe comes. That was a breakthrough in the Upanishads in the 5th-6th century. That is what we have to recover. I don't think that anyone today who is seriously searching for truth and reality can ignore the Upanishads. They are very easily available. We have a beautiful translation by Juan Mascaro in the Penguin classics. I think we all need some measure of those insights.

And then of course the Buddha took a step further and he gave another profound insight. And it's very significant today – Buddhism is spreading all over the world – I am sure all of you know. Buddhism has got something to give to us, you see. The Buddha broke through Whereas the Upanishads and the Hindus discovered the *Brahmin*, the *Atman*, Supreme Reality, and opened themselves to that, the Buddha took the negative course, simply dismissing the whole universe – he said: the whole universe is *Anicca* – impermanent. It has no constancy in it. It is passing away. And scientifically of course, the whole physical universe is passing away, of course the whole time. And then he said it is *Duka* – unsatisfactory, sorrow. You don't get any final satisfaction from the world of the senses. And thirdly it has no substance. It has nothing behind it.

And this is a profound scientific insight, you see, that the world is simply, as we understand today, .

field of energies, energies working at different frequencies, and we're all parts of this vibrating universe, always changing, everything is changing at every moment. The Buddha said it's totally impermanent. Nothing is permanent, you see, and he saw through all this changing universe, its impermanence, to the reality behind it. He called it Nirvana, and when you have broken through the outer universe, the outer appearances, (and it's all appearances) you go behind the appearances, and you discover this hidden mystery. And he wouldn't give it a name. We won't call it God, or even a Soul, he said. He simply called it Nirvana, the going out, the end of becoming and change, which is bliss. Many of you know the Dhammapada the great Buddhist classic, and again and again it says "in joy we live, in bliss we live". When you've got over all this terrible conflict on the surface of life which engages us all, you get beyond it you will find this inner joy, this inner peace, inner grace. It's a wonderful breakthrough that took place with the Buddha. And don't forget it spread from India all over Asia, for over 2000 years. And so we inherit this past of Asia, you see. Today we know that Europe is simply a part of the world and Asia is simply another part of the same world. We belong to one another. We cannot ignore the Hindu, and the Buddhist, and the Asian world as a whole, or of course, the African world. It is so important that we realise that we've all lived on an island, and (he laughs) particularly in Britain, and we think we are a little world in ourselves, we have our own little religion which we think is the religion of everybody, and we cling to this little world, this little religion. And I'm sorry, you know, but if you look at Christianity, if you look at the history of the world, the Australian Aborigines have been in Australia for 40,000 years. And where was Christianity then? They hadn't heard of Jesus Christ till 1900. And God was there among the Australians. It was wonderful, you know. They found God there in the earth, in the trees, in the ancestors. It was a wonderful cosmic religion they had. So that is our inheritance, this cosmic religion. And you find it also among the native Americans, much studied today. And it is a wonderful religion - this sense of the spirit of the universe. I am sure you all know the wonderful talk of Chief Seattle, how the American government wanted them to sell the land, to buy their land, and Chief Seattle says: "This land is sacred to us, we don't own the land. The land owns us."

It's a beautiful world that we inherit, you see, and we cherish that world of our inheritance. If you're going to care for this land and cherish it,

then you can share it with us, but one cannot sell the land. It's not yours to sell! It's the universal gift which we all share.

So the native Americans, the Australian Aborigines, African tribal people, everywhere there is this sense of a divine power and presence in the whole creation - in all matter, in all life, in all human beings they recognise this hidden power. And that's the source of all religion, practically. And we have to recognise the depth of these ancient religions, which are still alive today, of course. It's wonderful, what they have discovered.

And I call this the cosmic revelation. It's the presence of God, of Truth, of Reality, whatever name we give it, which permeates the universe, what Matthew Fox calls *Pan-en-theism*, God in everything. The ancient religion, really. And that is what, of course, came into, and still remains the background in India today. In India, the world is still sacred. The earth is still sacred. And the water is sacred. To take a bath in the morning they go down to the river and sprinkle the water and consciously think the water comes down from heaven, and Shiva, the god, receives it on his head and distributes it through



**Dom Bede Griffiths will be talking at the Schumacher Lectures in Bristol, weekend of 9-11 October on "Ecology & Human Responsibility." And at Oxford University, Dept. of Divinity, on the 13th October, on "Advaita & Trinity"**

all the rivers of India. So you are receiving this water from heaven, you are washing yourself in this heavenly water. It's a wonderful ritual, and many Brahmins still do it today, you know.

And also, very interestingly, when you eat food, it's something sacred, you know. For us, it's very profane. You just take it and cook it and eat it. For them, it's always a sacred ritual. And normally the correct ritual is, you take a banana leaf, (you don't take a tin plate or anything like that) and you put your rice and your vegetables on it, sprinkle water round it, making a sacred space. This food is taken out of nature, and it's God's gift to you, and it's something sacred, and you have to offer it to God. So you make the offering of your food, and the Lord consumes it in the stomach. In the Ashram we always chant the verse from the Bhagavad Ghita ... which means "I, the Lord, seated in the body, consume the four kinds of food". God himself is immanent, present in the whole creation, present in all matter, present in this food, and you take that food, and in the stomach, you offer the food to the Lord, and it's consecrated. It becomes something sacred. So your daily food is a sacrament, really. It's wonderful. Mind you, India's losing this all the time, just as we are. We are all becoming secularised, and so on, and as profane as can be. But the ancient tradition is still there. The earth is sacred, the water, the food, and the body is sacred.

That's another thing, you see. We tend to think of the body as a chemical substance, and you put medicines into it and you operate on it, and it's a mechanism to us. For the Indian, for the ancient tradition, the body is a manifestation of the divine. It's the old Christian tradition. We are made in the image of God. The body is something sacred, you see. And, you know, they say all the senses are God's. The part that sees, the part that hears, the part that

touches - it's a divine power by which we see, and hear, and touch. There is a sacredness of the body - always made sacred because it is the dwelling place of the divine mystery of Brahmin.

#### **SACRIFICE**

Brahmin is a word you cannot translate, it simply signifies the divine power present in the whole creation, present in all humanity and present particularly in the sacrifice. . . . now that's another thing we've lost. You see, in the ancient world, whenever you took food, or whenever you did anything of importance you offered it in sacrifice. Sacrifice - *sacrum facere*, is to make a thing sacred. You surrender it to the Lord, you see. And, it's very interesting in India today, when we plant a paddy field, or start building a house, the workmen will come along and will ask me to come along, and consecrate the first seeds you plant their or the first bricks you put there. Every action has to be consecrated, - it's not simply a human thing that you do on your own, you are part of a cosmic whole, and you are offering this to the source of all, the cosmic source, so it becomes again something sacred.

Well, I think we have to try to recover this sacred world and we can do it in our own lives, you know, if we begin to see the sacredness of our bodies, and the sacredness of the water and the food, and so on. We needn't treat it all as profane. Now we come to the scientific aspect of it. One of the greatest revelations today is that western science, having built up this terrible mechanistic universe, that human beings are neatly separated from the external world, has moved beyond that, the whole universe of Descartes and Newton, and discovered that the whole physical universe is a field of energy, a vibrating field of energy, and it's totally interdependent. Fritjof Capra said the universe is a complicated web of interdependent relationships. That's how we see the universe today. And so we are all part of this. And there is no part of the world which is not in touch with every other part. There is a poem, I think it's by Francis Thompson, I'm not sure,

*Move but a wing,  
and disturb a star*

So that each time a butterfly moves it's wings here, it disturbs a star. Nothing is unconnected. It's all interrelated. It's a wonderful universe, and western science has come round to this now. And we are discovering you see, it is a total unity. Behind all the physical phenomena, and the differences, is this unity. The person who I think has brought this fully into consciousness is David Bohm. I am sure you know his "Wholeness and the Implicate Order". It's a wonderful discovery he's made. He says what we perceive, the whole world around us, is explicated, unfolded. But it's all unfolding from an original unity, and

out of that unity come the galaxies, come the stars, the sun and the moon and the planets, the earth, and all of us, we all come, unfolding from this unity but the unity remains behind all the unfolding, the implicate behind the explicate, the unfolded from the enfolded. So the whole divine reality is present, here and now, in you and me, everywhere, and in every place. And don't forget this is very traditional Catholic doctrine. Saint Thomas Aquinas asked the question, in what way is God in everything? And he says, first of all, God is in everything, by his power. Without the power of God, the source of all, nothing would exist. That power sustains the universe. Then he says that God is not exercising that power at a distance, because there is no distance in God. He is in everything by his presence. God is present in everything by his power sustaining the universe. Then Aquinas says He is not present by part of himself because there are no parts in God—the divine essence is totally present in every particle of matter in the whole universe—the Divine Essence itself, the Holy Trinity (if you believe in the Christian tradition) is wholly present in everybody and in everything. It's wonderful, you know, when you begin to realize what a world we live in, and it all gets covered up by the daily routine and managing of practical affairs, and getting caught up in the whole system and you lose sight of the reality. In a real sense you know all the outer world is ... a kind of illusion, it's a projection. You see, we know now that the universe is this field of energies. We construct, within that field of energies, these separate bodies, separate elements, separate existence. We form these systems. And it's perfectly valid. It's a way of perceiving the universe but it's terribly inadequate, and it's really ultimately illusory. There is no world outside us, as I said. The whole universe, we project outside through our senses, through our instruments, through our minds. You see our minds project this universe, we see space and time and cause and effect and all the rest of it, we construct this universe, but we know behind all our constructions, behind all this explicate order, is the hidden presence, the divine mystery. There is a nice story in the Upanishads where the teacher tells the pupil "go and get a fruit from that tree" and the pupil brings the fruit and the teacher says "break it open, what do you see" and he says "I see a lot of seeds" and the teacher says "break open one of the seeds and tell me what you see". "I see nothing" replies the pupil. He says: "It is from that nothing which you cannot see that the whole of this tree comes into being." There is a hidden source behind the tree and the fruit and the seed and it's marvellous when you think of it. In India, you plant a coconut, and this marvellous

tree comes up with the branches and the coconuts on top, and so on. It's a miracle really, isn't it, that this little seed has this power in it. And that power, of course, is that power which is the power which is behind the universe. And the culmination of that story is ... it's one of the great sayings from the Upanishads, that the same power that brings that seed to birth and brings forth the tree is in you and is bringing you to birth and is bringing your mind to consciousness. Your consciousness is one with that power. The Brahmin and the Atman are one. Brahmin is the reality in the universe, Atman is the power in the human being, in human consciousness. So, Beyond our bodies, and our psyche with all it's differences, is the Pneuma, the Atman, and there we enjoy already this unity. If we can learn how to calm our minds and get beyond all this multiple ideas in our heads and open ourselves to the inner mystery, we discover this unity.

And we use meditation. I expect many of you do too. I have now been into it for many years. We use meditation with a mantra. There are different ways. Buddhists use, rather, observing the breath simply, and that's a very effective way. Others use a mantra together with the breath. The whole point is how to stop the mind. You see, particularly with us in the west, our minds are trained from the age of 3 or 4, to think and think and think, and dividing the world into all these multiple particles and so on. And we have to learn to stop the mind. And the way is to sit first of all, relax—we're all in tension, you see, and you must learn to relax. And when the muscles are relaxed, and the body is relaxed, then you breathe quietly and regularly, let the breath flow. They say the breath is the link between the body and the mind. When your breath is flowing evenly and calmly, your mind begins to become calm and so you open yourself to the mind, you begin to observe your thoughts, and this observing the thoughts is very important and not only your thoughts, but your sensations, your feelings, you learn to observe yourself. You see, most of all, we take for granted our breathing or our thinking, but sit still, relax, breathe, and *observe* your breathing, *observe* your sensations, *observe* the thoughts as they come and go, and you gain control over them. You can control the breathing, control your thoughts and you can control your sensations. And so, you become integrated. You see, we're all disintegrated, living from different parts of our being, and when we sit and meditate, we gradually bring it all together and centre ourselves—they call it 'centering prayers'. And then, in the silence, in the stillness, when you have brought yourself to the still point you become aware of the transcendent, of that which is beyond.

The difficulty, you know, is that you can't name that which is beyond. Some people call it God, but God is only a name for some people for this divine mystery. And there's no name for it. And again, the tradition is as strong as can be. I always like to quote St. Thomas Aquinas, who said God has no name. No one can say "Quid est Deus?" (What is God?). He is totally beyond every name, every word and thought, the transcendent mystery, and we're all in the presence of that mystery. It is always there, but we simply don't know it, we are so occupied with our senses, above all with our minds, and all our projects and thoughts and desires, that we simply ignore the presence of the mystery. And honestly, I think that this is what everyone of us today has to strive to do, to become aware of the presence of the mystery. At our Ashram we have people coming from all over the world. It's fascinating, from all five continents, and almost without exception they are seeking to discover this inner centre, the centre of the divine, of the transcendent which sets them free from all this complication of life and all the pressures around. It sets you free and you become aware in the depths of your own being of the hidden mystery itself, the divine mystery present in every human being, without any exception. Some may ignore it and know nothing about it, but, it's there. You know, when you die, what happens? Well first of all the body begins to disintegrate, to separate from the soul. And then the psyche or soul goes on for a time ... there are many who have had this after-death experience, where people go into a subtle body, as they call it, and they had this experience of being drawn towards the light. There are many evidences today of this subtle body. And in India, from ancient times, they always thought of a gross body and a subtle body or psychic body. But that is only a secondary stage. That also disintegrates, has no permanence. There is no permanence in the body, no permanence in the psyche. You then pass into your Atman, your spirit, the eternal reality which is in you all the time. Beyond the body and the soul, the eternal reality, the divine, God, whatever name you like to give it, is always present. We can only gain this control over our senses, over our minds, become still, become aware of that presence. So I recommend everybody to do half an hour meditation morning and evening. There are simple practical methods that anybody can follow—transcendental meditation (Mahesh Yogi) is a very good method. But all the methods really are intended to bring you to that point of stillness, to that inner centre, so that you can become aware of the deeper reality of life behind all this. I mean, many people today feel totally frustrated with all the tragedies which are happening—you had this bomb going off in the city of London a day or two ago, and children being killed like that. It's horrible, you see, and it's happening all over the world, this killing and destroying. It's all going on. And people can despair. And if you are going to live on that level you will despair in the end. But behind all this conflict, this violence, and all these changes, is the presence of a hidden mystery. When you become aware of that you don't lose the tragedies that are there, but you are no longer affected in the same way, you know. You see, when you lose a child, or a wife,

I'll tell you the wonderful story of Raman Mahashi (?) - he was a holy man, who lived at an Ashram about a hundred miles from us. He was a boy in a city in south India, in about 1880, I think, he was born. And he was a Brahmin boy, quite normal, intelligent, devout, but nothing special. And when he was about 17 he suddenly had an overwhelming conviction that he was going to die. It was quite irrational from an ordinary point of view. But it was so powerful, he surrendered to death. And he lay down on the floor (he lived in a house near the temple, I visited it once) and let his body become stiff, and stop breathing, and he said to himself "now this body is dead. Am I dead?" And at that moment he underwent a mystical death. He realised totally and completely, "I am not this body. I am an eternal spirit". And from that moment, he never lost the sense of "I am not this body. I am an eternal spirit". And he was a most holy man. We regard him as the greatest saint and seer in India. He died in 1950. Of cancer. He had cancer in the arm, and he was completely detached from it. But he suffered, and he used to groan at night, and they used to commiserate with him "sorry you're suffering" and he would say "I am not suffering. My body is suffering. " You can learn to detach from the body, detach from the senses, detach from the mind, above all. You become aware that there is something within you that is not disturbed by all that. You suffer, you feel it, and so on, and you can be confused in many ways. But you always have a centre of inner peace, of inner unity, of inner bliss. In Sanskrit they call it *sat-chit-ananda*, you know - being-consciousness-and-bliss. At the heart of the universe is this *sat*, this being, this source of all. And this being is consciousness. There is a great controversy going on amongst scientists - I was talking to Rupert Sheldrake this afternoon, and many scientists are still clinging to a materialistic philosophy, and trying to prove that the universe is not conscious, that consciousness is an accident of the brain or something like that. Of course it's nonsense. The whole physical universe is pervaded by consciousness, by intelligence, you see, and in us, that consciousness which was latent in matter, latent in life and animals, is coming into actual consciousness. It's latent in all, and is coming actual in us. And our challenge today is to allow that consciousness to grow so that we are no longer confined to the physical consciousness or psychological consciousness and become aware of the transcendent consciousness which is always there, from which the whole universe comes. And that's what happened in India in the 5th-6th century B.C. and it's gone on ever since.

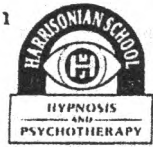
You see, you discover that you are living in the outer world, and you are living a life of illusion, and you feel you must get away from it and go to the Himalayas to discover the reality. Well, you don't have to go to the Himalayas. You can break through in so many ways. I like to tell the story, you know, of myself. I had a stroke in 1989, three years ago, and it was a wonderful event - I was 'hit on the head' (presumably referring to Zen Buddhism. The audience laugh) like a sledgehammer and I was absolutely knocked out, and crawled onto the bed, and everybody thought I was dying - I think I was, and I didn't speak for a week apparently. After the week I began to come round, and a complete change had taken place. And this rational, analytical, scientific, logical mind had been knocked down, and the deeper, intuitive, creative, 'inner' mind began to emerge. And it still keeps coming up all the time. It's there in all of us. We all have this conscious,

tools and colleges but behind it all is the deeper, intuitive and feminine. And that was one of my overeries, you know, the masculine mind was dominating, and the feminine, as with most of us, been suppressed. Knocking down the rational opened up the feminine, and there was a tremendous wave of love, actually, a sort of feminine love, I don't know how to describe it, it simply came over me. I think this is in everybody. We've got this rational mind controlling everything, dominating our society. When we let go of it discover the depths of love, intimacy, and joy and peace - all the opposite. It's all there, in all of us, if we can find it, you see. But you have to go through it, you have to let go at some time. It can happen anytime. I always think now, when people have cancer, or aids, or something, when you lose a child or a wife or you have an accident, these are times for a breakthrough, again and again it's just the moment when you get beyond your ego consciousness, and discover something beyond, the deeper meaning of life. You don't ever think these accidents and so on are really negative. They always have a positive element. And I am told by people in the hospice movement helping people to die... that it's a crucial thing that at first you get very angry and resentful "why does God permit this?" and "What did I do to deserve this?" and so on, and you feel very miserable and full of self-pity. And the moment you let go of all that, let go of your ego, surrender, a wonderful peace comes. You discover there is something deep in you which can sustain you and give you a deep inner peace. So it's in us all. Everybody has within them this deep source of joy, of inner peace and love. And you know, reading the Dharmapadda (?) it's wonderful what they feel, what peace has come to them. It's a real experience. And we can all experience it. We're conditioned by our science and technology, engineering, the whole of our social and political system, we are conditioned by that and I'm afraid that we're conditioned by our religious systems. And this is a big problem.

#### FURN TO PARADISE

Second, the Hebrew tradition of the Bible is dualistic. God is separate from the world. God is separate from humanity and beings are separate from God, from one another, from the world. Everything is separate. And separation means conflict. So you're in conflict with God, you're in conflict with the world around. And that is the present state of man, if you like. Now within the Hebrew tradition, there is a constant movement to beyond this duality - the idea of return to paradise. You see, paradise is the time when we were all once in total oneness. In the mother's womb, we were all one with nature, one with life, one with the whole creation, you know. Floating in the amniotic fluid was bliss, and we all come out of that bliss, and then we come into the world, there's the pain and struggle, and we begin to think and consciousness comes, and then all the divisions come and we get divided and in conflict, we have the memory of this unity. We all come from this unity, and we long to return, to return to paradise. You see in the Israeli tradition, this return to oneness beyond all the conflicts. And that's the idea of the new law. The law was given to Moses - don't do this, don't do that, and we are under the law, the moral law putting you down here and there. And that, as St. Paul recognised, is the state of misery, this moral law all the time, frustrating you. But you have to go through it. You have to go through the law, but you must go beyond

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it. It's no good stopping there. You have to become conscious. And you mustn't stop at the state of the moral law or the rational mind. You've got to get beyond it. The biblical tradition is taking you to the new covenant, the new creation, and I think Jesus in the New Testament is taking humanity out of this dualistic universe and He does it, you know, by going beyond the law all the time, beyond the teaching on the Sabbath and calling people sinners, and wonderfully, working with women. Jesus' relation with women was extraor-dinary, you know. Freely associating, he had deep friendships with women, talking to this Samaritan woman - she was a heretic, an outcast, and He should have nothing to do with her. And He talks to her in public, and reveals Himself to her, you see. Jesus was breaking through the whole of this moral, legal tradition. And Paul himself, realised that you've got to get beyond the law. We are under the law still, and we've got to get beyond the law. Jesus, at the end surrenders everything on the cross, and makes a total self-surrender, and when you totally surrender your ego, your self, your whole being, you open up to the infinite, eternal reality, which is eternal love. And so He's taking humanity beyond all the conflict and the law into this eternal reality, where we should be moving. But the Christian churches tend to get stuck with the law again. It's difficult, because you can't do without the law. You've got to have some law - laws of traffic and so on. Society has to have its laws. But it's no good trying to live by the law. The laws are necessary as a stage and a means, but you have to go beyond the law to the mystery of love.

**GRACE**

Love is beyond the law. And St. Paul, you know (he's very wonderful in this) realised he had been a Pharisee and living under the law and it stunted his growth, you see, and he was able to break away from the law, and to realise the mystery of grace. And grace is simply pure gift. You are not saved by being good, and being charitable and all that (even though it's very good to be good and charitable), but it doesn't save you. You are saved by the pure gift of love, a transcendent, unconditional love, which opens itself to you when you open yourself to it. And so, that's the challenge, to get beyond the ego, beyond the limitation of the rational mind, and be open to this hidden mystery which is calling all of us. Behind all the limitations of our human life is this call to the beyond, to the divine mystery which is calling us there. And, as I say, when you die, your body and your soul both disintegrate, and the eternal spirit in you returns to the Eternal spirit. You are one with that Eternal Spirit. You realize who you are. In India they say "Who am I? Am I this body sitting here, and you sitting there? Am I this psyche, this soul, thinking, talking, (as I am doing now, you see)?" They are both limited expressions of myself but beyond my body and my soul is my Atman, my inner spirit, and there I am one with God. In the depths of my being I am one with the Eternal, the Infinite, the One Reality. And that discovery has been made again and again in history, and I think today ordinary people are making this discovery. Wherever you go, people discovering there's something beyond all this conflict we're living in there is an eternal reality. Many do it through meditation, there are other methods also, but an awakening is taking place. I believe all over the world, and I think all you, gathering here tonight, are examples of this search to get beyond our conflict and confusion of the present life, to discover the hidden mystery. And, of course, it's not easy. There are many snags on the way. It's a very painful and difficult journey, but

Allow it to take over - you can't do it yourself, you see, and the ego gets in and you want to get God, get spiritual experience. All that has to go. And then the divine mystery itself takes over and transforms you? And I think it's the hope of the future of the world. If we go on as we are now, in conflict and violence, we are going to destroy ourselves and the planet. But if, and I believe it's happening, we learn to go beyond this dualism, this state of conflict, and this egoism, and open ourselves to the hidden mystery in whatever way it comes to us, and it comes in different ways to different people. When we open our selves to that then this transformation takes place and it goes from one individual to another and spreads like waves - it's marvellous how it can spread, and it can change the world, you see. Let's say, if you all gathered here this evening, if you're all on this path and all in search of that deeper reality and you're really open to the divine mystery, allowing it to enter your life, you can change the world. You're 700 people here, is it. Well, 700 people can change the world. Because you each one of course has innumerable contact with others, and have that possibility. I am very grateful for your attending here, and listening to me, but the message really is that you have it in your own power to transcend the suffering and the frustration of your lives, and of the present world, and discover this hidden mystery which is there, everywhere. It's in all religions, and it's outside all religions. You don't have to have a religion - people who are atheists or agnostic can make this discovery. Religions help us, no doubt and Christianity has a unique message to give in that and does open us up in a wonderful way to the ultimate truth, but it's open to every-body. But it does demand something. You have to give up the ego, your separated self. When that goes, then everything can change. But as long as your ego is active and it can be very active in the spiritual life. I remember one Hindu, saying of another, "he's ego from top to toe" (laughter) and it can happen, you know. It's a difficulty. But if we can let go the ego and gain this inner freedom it spreads to others you see. It becomes a ferment that can change the world. So that's my message to you this evening, that you all of you have it in your power to change yourselves and to change the world and that is the hope of the future. And I hope that God will help you all to find that way.

Dom. Bede Griffiths was born in 1906, and has lived in India since 1955. Spiritual pilgrims come from all over the world to visit his ashram at Shantivanam in South India. Among his many books are *Return to the Centre*, *The Marriage of East and West*, *River of Compassion* (a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita) and *A New Vision of Reality*. His latest book is an anthology entitled *Divine Wisdom of the World - Contemplation and Spirituality*.

Two tapes by him which are available from the Scientific and Medical Network are entitled: *The Evolution of Consciousness and the Transcendence of the Ego and The Vision of Non-Duality in World Religions*.

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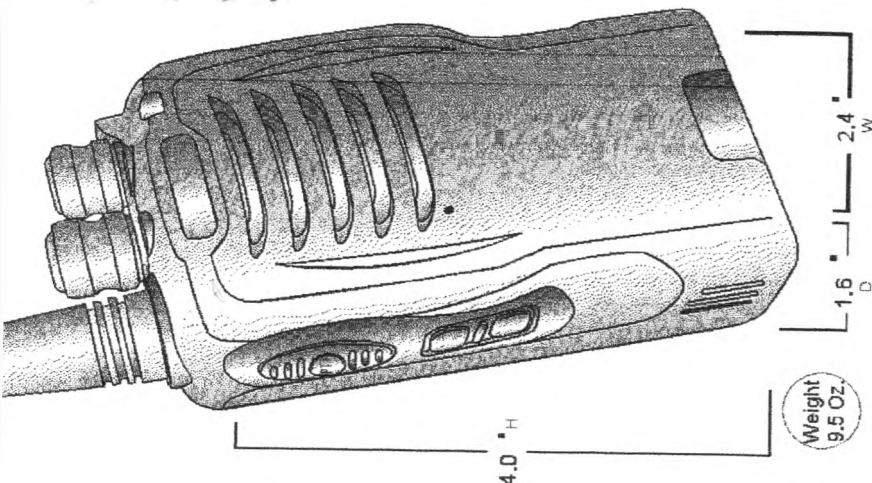
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## QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE TO DOM BEDE GRIFFITHS

**Do you believe in Reincarnation?**

**Bede Griffiths:** Many ask that question? I don't think it's very important, you know. You see, to me reincarnation belongs to the sphere of the psyche — you get the body (the soma) and then you have the psyche (the soul). And what exactly happens to the psyche after death, I don't know. I think reincarnation may be one way of explaining it. In Catholic tradition we have *purgatory* — a world of uncertainty. And it doesn't really matter, you see, what happens to the psyche, because you are not your body, and you are not your soul, (psyche). You are an eternal spirit, and you must get beyond all these reincarnations and find your eternal reality. And Ramana Maharshi would have said exactly the same thing. He would say it's your spiritual reality, that is what matters. Don't get occupied with the adventures of the psyche in the past or the present, that's what I would say.

**What then is the purpose of having a body and psyche?**

**Bede Griffiths:** This is very important, but I think should have made it clear. I have given the impression that there are three things, the body, the psyche and the spirit. And that is illusion, of course. You see the spirit integrates, unifies the whole personality of course, the body and the soul. And actually, at death you go beyond your present body and your present psyche but you integrate all your experiences in the body and the soul which are taken up into the life of the spirit. So the *spirit* is the principle which integrates the whole physical universe and the whole psychological universe and brings them all to unity. We have this terrible habit of separating everything. You see we must separate the soul and our selves from others but that is a disease of dualism — separating — which we have to overcome. And this is very important, you see. In a non-duality we don't lose the reality of this world, we don't lose our individual personality. The whole of the Samsara, as they call it, the passing world, is taken up into the divine world, and transfigured. It's very clear in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly the Tibetan. There is a form that says you let go the body, or let go the soul, and you become pure spirit, but that is a very limited form. And in the deeper vision they say Nirvana and Samsara are the same. You see Samsara is the changing world, of body, soul, and nirvana is the passing beyond. But they say that ultimately all the experiences of the present world are taken up into that transcendent world and transfigured. There is a transformation. And that is resurrection. You don't lose your body-soul. You lose the present, limited condition of the body-soul, and they are discovered in their integrity in the spiritual body and the spiritual soul. The whole thing is transformed. And that's what happened to Jesus at the resurrection. His body and his soul were taken up into the life of the spirit, and totally transformed. So they are no longer visible, you see. They don't belong to this world of matter and so on. But they are eternally present in the divine reality. And that is our destiny — our body-soul taken up into the life of the spirit, not lost, but transcended, and sharing the divine life itself.

**What then is the point of trying to relieve suffering, if it doesn't really matter?**

**Bede Griffiths:** It's a good point. You see, I think we do have to help out one another on this level of the body and

the soul. And when people suffer, we have to try and relieve their suffering. But it's a mistake to think that this is all-important. This person is suffering and by all means I must relieve their suffering. The suffering can be a great blessing, you see, and so you have to discern always. There is suffering which can be removed and which can help the person. But there is also suffering which is necessary. I remember Jung said once that of all the people who came to him in the 40's with a breakdown, a very large percentage were suffering now because they refused to suffer in the past. You keep avoiding suffering, putting it away, and then it becomes too much for you.

Everybody has to learn to suffer, you know, but we should relieve suffering, but we shouldn't think we must abolish it. It's part of our human existence, really, and suffering is a blessing. As I say, I thank God for the stroke I had. It's the best thing that has ever happened to me, I think (he laughs).

**What do you think about the fact that so many children suffer world-wide, especially in India?**

**Bede Griffiths:** You see, I think if we take individuals, there is no real answer to why the child is suffering and so on. We always have to remember we're *not* isolated individuals. Particularly children. They have not yet acquired this separate individuality. We are members of one another. And I think we all sustain one another. And we also do the opposite. We can destroy one another, but if we have a deep sympathy and understanding in our hearts, we sustain one another and, I think, the whole universe is sustained by a power of love. I really believe that Jesus on the cross released a tremendous power of love in the whole creation. If we allow ourselves to be aware of it we don't see these children suffering as isolated individuals but as part of a whole cosmic process. We can't understand it at the time, but we can see that it can be understood as part of a whole which is beyond our comprehension. The universe, you see, is a mystery, how it all works, what is behind it? and so on. You know Adam is 'humanity' (Adam is the Hebrew for 'man' or 'mankind', i.e. humankind). When Adam sins, he falls from that unity, he falls into disintegration and division, and that's where we all are. But, behind all the division, there is a unity of humanity. Jesus assumed that broken humanity and reunited it, and united it with God, and therefore that compassion and love is present in the whole. And when children suffer and so on, they are not isolated. There is a divine compassion which is at work behind it. But I firmly believe that the power of redemptive love is present behind the universe and behind every human being.

**The Upanishads seem to indicate that there is only the self. And the separated self is an illusion. An intellectual question that always trips me up is: What gain is there to the Self when an illusory ego disperses into the Self. It's a very complicated question. i.e. Only the Self exists. The ego is illusory. . .**

**Bede Griffiths:** I wouldn't say that. You see the ego is necessary. The Child must develop an ego. It's got to become a separate person, develop his individuality. But then it has to transcend it. It's when you stick with your separated ego, that is when all the trouble begins. If you allow the ego to grow, it transcends its limits, and then it unites with the supreme, you see.

**You have said that modern humans think too much, are too much "Cogito, ergo sum" (Descartes). Don't you think there is also a danger of receding too far into the spiritual and contemplative life. Someone who**

**spends 50 years on the Himalayas is really of no use to anyone except themselves. Is such a person not just narcissistic and useless?**

**Bede Griffiths:** Quite true. There is an equal danger, really. You can get centred on your ego. I think the other problem is a real problem in India. Many people give up their jobs, give up the world, their riches and so on and go to the Himalayas and they may get some profound experience but they have not integrated their personality. And many who go to a guru, who surrender to a guru, become immature. They don't mature as persons. It's quite true. You have to learn to integrate your personal being, your ego, your self, into the divine being and this idea comes out in Ken Wilber's writings. He makes it very clear, that as you go beyond one level of consciousness, you must integrate the other. When you go beyond sense consciousness to the mental, . . . it's no good becoming purely mental, you see. You've got to integrate your sense experience in your mind. And then the mental experience must be integrated into the spiritual. You must integrate the mental experience and scientific knowledge with the divine. So it's integration of the whole person in the divine, you see. That's the goal.

**Do you see sin largely as egotism then?**

**Bede Griffiths:** Yes. Very much. In fact, sin is the fall from the spirit into the psyche. If we remain in the spirit, the body and the soul are guided by the spirit and they keep open to God and the whole human person grows. But if we fall from the centre in the spirit to centre in the psyche and the ego, then we create this tremendous conflict in ourselves and around. So, for me, original sin is this fall from the spirit into the ego consciousness, and the ego consciousness is the essence of sin. I like to quote a Muslim saying "Your own existence is your greatest sin". It means your separate existence is your greatest sin. That you separate yourself from God and others. When you realize your unity, you have freed yourself from your sin.

**Would you say something more about sacrifice?**

**Bede Griffiths:** As I said, sacrifice, *sacrum facere*, is to make a thing over to God. Everything in the universe is interdependent, interrelated, and when we discover this cosmic unity, this cosmic harmony, we realise that all individuals in nature, and all individual human beings, are interrelated. And when they surrender their separate selves, and open to the supreme self, this reconciliation, this forgiveness takes place.

I think really the death of Jesus was a tremendous power. You see, he really made total surrender, body and soul, into the life of the spirit, on behalf of all humanity, and through that we also can sacrifice ourselves, surrender our ego particularly, to God. He takes us through death, to the resurrection, to the new life. Jesus really went to the depths of human suffering, and I think to the depths of the unconscious, you know. He descended into hell, and I interpret that he descended into the depths of the unconscious, and all those conflicting forces in nature, in the unconscious — He faced them all, and then, by facing them, accepted them all, all the suffering of humanity which He took into himself, surrendered it to God, and then redeems it. And when we surrender what we are to God, *that is sacrifice*. That is giving ourselves. It's not a negative thing really. It's love. It's simply surrender in love. So I think Jesus is the model for us all.

**Note: A few of the questions and answers have been omitted from this transcript.**