

[Report of the first lived interreligious Dialog at Altenhof near Eckernförde  
from 1<sup>st</sup> August to approximate 30<sup>th</sup> September 1980.

Written - sometimes with very private notes - and typewritten by Govind Bharathan; digitalized and a little bit corrected by Michael Möbius]

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1980.**

The Rev. Bhante Kasapa started the day's programme with a class in Meditation. At about 8.30 P.M., we assembled in the yellow room and after instructing us on the art of correct posture required for meditation, Bhante instructed us as follows: Our mind is like a monkey which jumps from tree to tree and is difficult to control. Unless we control the mind, there is little hope for peace. The method is simple, and lies in meditation. There are many systems of meditation, of which the easiest is to sit in a comfortable posture on a comfortable seat and silently contemplate one's breath going in and out of the nostrils. Do not force the breath, nor should you breathe too deeply, just breathe normally, but contemplate the place where the breath enters the nostrils with the eyes closed and sitting motionlessly. After a while a deep feeling of peace will slowly settle on you. The mind will try to wander, but bring it back to contemplating the breath entering the nostrils above the slits.

We then sat in meditation on these lines for about 30 minutes. It was gloriously peaceful in the Yellow Room with our little group following Bhante's system of meditation. When we broke up at about 10 A.M., we had the feeling that Bhante had thrown an entirely new light on meditation, and that we were the richer for it.

The noon session started at 3.45P.M. in the Living room with a cheer - ful fire burning in the fireplace. We continued reading my book "A Drop of the Ganga", on the chapter on Bhakti Yoga. This was a new concept to Christian Theology, felt Rev. Kirchbach. The discussion revolved round the aspect of the seemingly irreconcilable difference between Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga and how in Christian thought and culture, Bhakti had never predominated. Reinhart felt that this was as a result of the fact that Christianity was indeed a young religion unlike Hinduism which was ancient and thus had greatly evolved in the course of time. But I thought the reason was different. Though the birth of Christianity was in the Middle East, it had its field of development and growth predominantly in the West, where, the dominant traits were aggressively intellectual and tirelessly work oriented. Thus the development of the Religion was also along the lines of intellectual pursuit and service. We in the East being more emotional, developed the concept of Bhakti.

The last session of the day was in the Yellow room, where we sat in meditation for 15 minutes. The theme was from the Bhaja Govindam, where Shankara prays for release from the ceaseless round of birth and death, by invoking the boundless grace of the Lord.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Monday. 4. August. 1980.**

"Therefore we must come closer together....with our hearts,  
in mutual understanding, esteem, and love. We must meet not merely as tourists, but as pilgrims  
who wet out to find God not in buildings of stone, but in human hearts."

Holy Father Paul.VI.

We congregated in the Sun Room, as Isa calls it, for the morning meditation session led by Bhante Kassapa. Breathing is something that we do unconsciously, from the moment we are born till the moment of our death. The breath is Prana, the very sustained of this body. Contemplation on the breath at the point of its entry into the body, at the tip of the nostrils, with the eyes closed thus consciously restrains the mind which under normal circumstances would tend to wander far and near to one point, and would restrict it to the most important function of the body, that of sustaining itself with the process of breathing. The mind thus restrained and channelled to this one function gradually becomes quiet and tranquility prevails.

The mind is a wonderful thing indeed. It is composed of thoughts. No thought--No mind. There is nothing like a mind without thoughts. If the meditator experiences a gap between two thoughts, he verily experiences his true self.

The noon session was held under the trees in the lap of Nature. The sun was shining bright and warm and we were uplifted. The reading from "A drop of the Ganga" continued with the Chapter on Karma Yoga. The Hindu concept that all Karma binds, and that the Yogi attempts to rise over the bondage of both good and bad karma by total self abnegation and attributing everything to the Larger Self, eradicating his ego and his little self, and by serving through Love, was discussed in the light of the other systems of Philosophy. Bhante explained the Buddhist concept which was akin to the Hindu concept of self surrender, emphasizing that the superficialities of the mind's concepts of good and bad would be submerged while the Powers of the mind which were latent emerged while in meditation, revealing reality. When I cited the examples of Mother Theresa and Albert Schweitzer who were Karma Yogis, since they had showed the wonderful path of loving Christ through the path of service of the sick and the poor and the unwanted, Reinhart asked whether there was any significance in me citing these two names in this context. There was, I replied, since, in my entire search, I had not found in Islam, Hinduism or for that matter in any religion counterparts of these Saints who had accomplished the search for God through service with such magnificent self abnegation and such total self surrender. In India, the search has been particularly frustrating for the reason that spiritual advancement seemed to bring with it withdrawal into oneself, till the final stage of total loss of body consciousness.

But Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's revolution inside Hinduism was that this aspect of sadhana has now been emphasized for perhaps the first time in more than a century. The concept of Seva Sadhana, or the path of service to one's fellowman being the best and easiest path to God was one of Baba's primary exhortations, Madhava seva or service to God, Baba says is easiest achieved through Manava Seva, service to Man,

I explained how thousands of young men and women were being trained in the art of service through the corps called the Seva Dal. These were taught the basic principle that service to the poor, the needy, the sick and the unwanted was indeed service to the Sai in them, and that one was in reality worshipping Baba when one served them.

When Mother Theresa was asked about her Sadhana, she is said to have replied that it was strange that people should praise her for serving the poor, and that indeed it would be more appropriate for her to be thankful for the opportunity given to her to serve Christ in the form of the leper, the destitute and the dying. What a sublime concept of Karma Yoga!

A walk through the black forests to the Baltic sea brought the evening to a close. The last session was in the Sun Room, and the theme of the meditation was from the sloka attributed to the Baba of Shiridi which said: "I am Vishnu, Brahma and Shanker, Dattatreya, the Messiah, Mohamed the Prophet, Rama, Krishna and Jesus. I look to you, You too should look to me."

**Tuesday 5 August. 1980.**

Under the great trees, the discussion was on Japa Yoga, the path of chanting the name of God, Chanting is different from prayer in as much as it is repetition of the name which in its turn conjures the form of the deity [deity?] of the manthra, which in its turn makes the mind single pointed.

Reinhart said that the closest one could come to the concept of japa yoga in Christianity was in the repetition of the "Jesus Prayer" by some communities, especially at places like Tazé, where his daughter was a nun in a nunnery. The Jesus prayer was a short invocation meaning Oh Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.

But the concept of a manthra, made vibrant by the successive chanting of a series of Gurus, each of whom handed it down to his disciples, who would in their turn render the manthra more and more effective and powerful by chanting it during their lifetimes, was absent from Christianity. Indeed, the concept of a Guru/Disciple relationship was absent in Christianity.

Bhante explained that there was use of chanting in the Buddhist faith also. The Mahayana Buddhist Monks used the prayer wheel which was more or less like use of the Japa Mala, the prayer chain by the Hindus.

We also discussed the concept peculiar to Hinduism that the name was indeed more powerful than God himself. The story of Krishna being weighed against the treasures of Dwaraka, and how a single Tulasi leaf with the name Hari written on it weighed down the scales was read from The Drop of the Ganga.

I set up my little shrine in the Yellow room just after supper.

Along with the Divine Mother Kali, in her fiercest and most awe inspiring form, and a bronze Nataraja performing the Samhara Thandava, there were pictures of Christ with a look of sublime compassion on his ravaged face, Buddha with all the tranquility of the knowledge of the Absolute embodied in his peaceful eyes and the Divine Mother of Kanyakumari, Mayee Maa, standing against the background of the seas and the Vivekananda Rock.

Just before the evening meditation session, Bhante suggested that we should light three wicks in the great bronze lamp. Reinhart lit the first wick, Bhante the second and I lit the third, symbolizing the three flames of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism burning from the common oil of faith and casting their illumination together in harmony in the atmosphere.

The theme of the meditation was: "Oh Lord, who by sitting under the bitter neem tree turned its bitter leaves to sweet nectar, sit in my heart and destroy the bitterness therein and fill me with the sweetness of love."

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

- Om Sairam -

**Wednesday. 6 August. 1980**

"Om Poornamadah Poornamidam  
Poornath poornamudachyathe  
Poomasya pooma madaya  
poornamevavasishyathae."

Isavasya Upanishad.

Meditation on the breath continues in the morning in the Yellow Room under the guidance of Bhante Kassapa. The mind which is being brought under control by this process of contemplation on the breath at the point of it entering the nostrils, sometimes brings out some of its latent memories, even visions. These are to be acknowledged, never discussed, or unraveled or analyses, merely acknowledged, and they will in course of time fade away. The mind is to be kept at the contemplation of the breath only it then becomes calmer and calmer....

The noon session was from the sub-chapter on 'Om! the pranava manthra. The inert actionless Brahman, vibrated by the Pranava Manthra OM manifests the entire Universe of name and form. The technique of chanting the Omkar was also briefly indicated, with the A sound origination from the region of the stomach surrounding the navel, the U sound bringing the tongue and the roof of the mouth and the M sound merging in the region of the lips.

The concept of the plurality of this manifested world being a super imposition on the Self which is all pervading and eternal, and which on being perceived without the delusion created by the mind-intellect conditioned ego, merges back into that Absolute Truth was explained in relation with the first stanza of the Isavasya Upanishad.(see above).

The traveler misunderstands the wayside post to be a ghost and in this misunderstanding trembles with fear. But when on a closer examination with the light of discrimination, he realizes that it is only a post, the ghost vanishes into the post and is no more. In short, the ghost was not when the post was not. It rose out of the post, it remained in the post, and when discrimination arrived in the form of the light, the ghost vanished into the post. In the same way, This world of phenomena cannot have existence but in the Ultimate All pervading, Absolute TRUTH. This plurality of the manifested world arises only from this TRUTH and is seen as such only as a result of the ignorance of the mind intellect conditioned ego of the perceiver. When the perceiver arises above the delusion of this ego, through meditation or through any of the paths of the Yogi, he then perceives the ultimate Truth, and the manifested world merges back into the TRUTH from where it emerged in the first place.

In the evening, we attended the Organ concert at the Cathedral at Schleswig. There, within those hallowed ancient walls, we floated on the waves of Sound. Nada Brahma...and for a moment felt the timeless, changeless experience which perhaps we were in search of. The Buddhist, the Hindu and the Christian vanished, leaving only the harmony of thoughts and feelings, of Love which is beyond the mundane world of words.

We did not meditate at night, as we agreed that the magic of the Ancient Cathedral had wafted us to magic shores on wings of Music.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Thursday 7 August 1980**

Thursday is a sacred day throughout India, for it is considered to be the day of the GURU. By sheer coincidence, we read and discussed today about the concept of the GURU from A Drop of the Ganga. Or is it that the higher force which has brought us together is subtly guiding us and this is not a coincidence? THINK!

We discussed the concept of the Guru in Indian Philosophy starting from the actual word meaning. The word Gu stands for Darkness, and the word Ru stands for to dispel. He who dispels the darkness of ignorance is the GURU.

A true guru should be one who has himself had the Ultimate experience of God Realization. Only such a pure perfect one can transmit the experience to a disciple. A tortoise does not hatch its eggs by physical contact. It sits on the other bank of the river and by its loving looks, and its unwavering attention and pure love and care hatches its eggs. Likewise, the True Guru lovingly guides and unceasingly watches the disciple, till he flowers into realization. Constant physical association with a Guru is not always necessary for this. The Guru by his nature is all pervasive. He is the indweller in the heart of the true disciple, and from there, he gives the guidance and the constant care which nurtures the seed planted in the heart of the disciple, till it bears the fruit of realization.

The "GURU GITA", from the Skanda Purana gives the most sublime exposition of the true nature of the Guru and his relationship to and with the disciple. In this text, Lord Shiva who is considered to be the original Guru instructs his consort Parvathi about all aspects of the Guru-Sishya relationship, including the final merging of the disciple with the Guru, when he attains the Ultimate Realization.

The transmission of the Guru's grace, his divine power and his knowledge of the divine in the form of the Ultimate Experience to the disciple is known as Shaktipat. This is done by a touch, a look, or sometimes by the mere will of the Guru. The disciple receiving this experience then truly experiences the essence of the Truth, and of Universal Consciousness.

The Guru is indeed God himself. He is Brahma in the aspect of creation, Vishnu in the aspect of sustenance of the created phenomena, and when he destroys, he is Shiva, as Rudhra. Indeed, he is the power beyond form and name, which manifests itself in these three forms for their respective functions.

See the Guru as your indweller. Then this knowledge will lead you to see him in everyone, indeed in all forms and in all names of the manifested Universe. This is the yoga of Jnana. Then love of the Guru becomes Bhakti Yoga, and all service performed and work done will become Karma Yoga. With this attitude, life itself becomes Worship.

May the Guru's sacred feet guide you across the stormy ocean of Life.....

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

- Om Sairam -

### **Friday 8. August. 1980**

With His infinite grace, I am able to finish my daily pooja at the little shrine in the Yellow Room early in the morning.

I do Abhishekam, with water, then offer Sandal paste and Kum Kum, and Fresh flowers (Flamboyant red roses from the garden), and Naivedhya (fresh milk with sugar) and after the adoration with lights, I offer Mangala Arathi, with Camphor. The little shrine looks beautiful with the flowers and the lamps and the atmosphere is fragrant with incense and vibrant with spirituality.

The meditation session progresses marvelously with Bhante Kassapa guiding us through the difficult initial stages of calming the turbulent mind. We continue to contemplate on the breath, and the time for mediation is slowly increased day by day. Thoughts and images come to the mind so controlled in meditation, like uninvited guests, who depart when they find that they are merely acknowledged, never entertained or accepted. The technique is simple and wonderful.

The noon discussion is on the chapter relating to the concept of the Kundalini, the sleeping Serpent Power, residing in the form of a coiled serpent at the base of the spine, and which when awakened through any of the ordained paths of Yoga, pierces the six chakras to unite with the sahasrar at the top of the skull. This union of the Kundalini with the Sadasiva, the inert actionless aspect of the Absolute situated at the cerebrum and represented as a thousand petalled lotus with its petals pointing downwards confers on the Yogi the ultimate knowledge of the Divine in the form of God Realization.

The mystic chakras situated in the astral space within and along the Sushumna Nadi were discussed and we referred to the illustration in the book where these chakras were graphically illustrated. Isa then referred to the Enzyklopädie and informed us that in the diagram showing the nervous system, there were corresponding paths and centers in the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. As an example she pointed out that the solar plexus was one such centre. For me it was a revelation especially when the corresponding chakra in the path of the Kundalini was the Manipura Chakra, the Bhija of which was the word 'RAM', and this was the Bhija of Fire. Solar stood for the Sun. This is truly amazing. The ancient Seers in their wisdom were able to fathom these aspects and concepts, which modern science has revealed as startlingly correct, assisted with the scalpel and the probe.

The concluding meditation session was on the theme of the Devi in her aspect as the originator of the Universe, and who is an ocean of compassion and Love. The words were:

"Akhilandeswari, Rajerajeswari,  
Daya sagari, parama kripakari,  
Samba Vinodhini,  
Siva Sai Shankari."

"Oh Mother, creator of the  
Universe, Queen of Queens,  
Ocean of Compassion, and  
Love, Consort of Samba Shiva"

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Saturday. 9 August. 1980**

The Hindu offers the five elements which constitute all matter, including his body, his mind and intellect, to the deity when he performs pooja. The final burning of the camphor indicates his total merging with the Supreme self and his total self abnegation. The pooja performed externally, without the internal understanding of what it signifies becomes an empty ritual. Performed with total understanding and faith, it becomes total self surrender and supreme veneration. In essence, this is the total surrender of the little self to the Ultimate Self which is Truth itself, without a second, and All pervading.

In meditation, we progress slowly but surely. The Buddhist concept of meditation is to still the mind and make it steady so that Wisdom of Reality arises, which eradicates all defilements from the mind, and ultimately confers Nirvana, after accumulation which one is freed from the of Karma, and is thus beyond the Ceaseless chain of birth and death.

The afternoon discussion is on Raja Yoga, and the turning of the mind inwards, single pointed, and steady, till it cognizes its innermost recesses and discovers the true nature of the Self, untrammled by bodily or mental distractions or disturbances. The discussion veered around to the topic of Karma and its power of bondage. In the Bhagavad-Geetha, Krishna tells Arjuna

"Your duty is to work, not to reap the fruits of work. Do not go for the rewards of what you do, but neither be fond of laziness....

Steady in Yoga, do whatever you must do....

With this mental poise, you will release yourself from evil and good deeds....."

Selections from Chapter III.

The concept of Karma Yoga, the yoga of Action is strikingly different in the three faiths of Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. It is the basis of our experiment in Inter Religious Harmony through living together to make these different faiths and beliefs flow together in harmony, not mingling or merging or changing, but each retaining its basic structure, but without conflict. This is our greatest test, whether we will let these differences divide us, or whether we will recognize these differences, and learn to live with them in harmony with each other.

Each one of us said a small prayer during the evening meditation session. The theme was similar. Let us see your Grace Oh Lord, in all its diversity, but with its intrinsic harmony and Love.

The Seers of yore said:

"If all the mountains in the world were to be written on, and all the oceans turned to ink, and the goddess Saraswathi wrote throughout the ages, the majesty and glory of the Lord could not be described."

It is thus not surprising that there are so many paths to reach Him. Each path will ultimately lead to him. The seeker chooses the path ordained to him, either by birth or by choice. These paths should run in harmony, never clashing. That is our first little step.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

REINHARD'S DREAM.

**Sunday. 10th August 1980**

I [Reinhard] read the first little notice from my project paper:

"I beg you to be with me in the place where the Fire can dwell.  
I beg you not to retreat when the fire is burning us.  
I beg you to wait for me in the fire for one another."

First I will explain what I mean with "The Fire". I mean the last check point or the source to which a man or a group of men are orientated, and from which they live. For me, it means a life in connection with the Lord, out of the Lord. And at the same time, it is like a prayer from my heart.

The fire is in this sense a word which means the glory of the Lord, at this very moment, in the past and the future, and for all time. It is a revelation of His Self to me in which he let shine His light to us where ever we are, whoever we are. From the Christian point of view, it is a life in the presence of His Kingdom which is without limitations. The modern scientific research seems to me trying to find the laws and rules of our Universe surrounded and filled with limitless power glory and work. So these lines mean: To be with me a place in which the Lord can dwell in the form in which His Grace wants to dwell in each of us. I cannot see, and it is unnecessary and will be never possible for me to see in which form in which figure and in which kind he dwells for example in your Hindu people or in the Buddhist people. Therefore, I had been searching for a word which can have a meaning for the last source of each of us. You can put for the word Fire: Shiva or Buddha or whatever is for you the source. That is the first thing I have to say about my project. This is a dream which is hidden in our world today and we are grasping at it.

The second point I would stress about this Fire is for my Christian belief and my personal experience: The Life out of the Light of the Passion of Christ. These two are one for me, the Light and Christ with his Passions, The crucified Christ but at the same time the living Christ, a life also above the world of different forms. I don't know how he is present beyond the world. Govind, you told us about the Avathars. It is not allowed for each of us to mix this up:

The Buddha is the Buddha, Krishna is Krishna, Christ is Christ.

But in my seeing blindness I believe in the mystery of God that these are not mixed up, but inseparable, although these revelations are different. I will explain a bit more : The light of the Passions of Christ. You know that the Eucharist is the central mystery of the Christian faith and it is a place where Christ feeds us with His passions and with His Light. In doing this to us, He takes away all hindrances. Although I cannot free myself from my own bondage, I am free in the word of Christ: Given for you. This is my blood. This is My Body. From such beliefs rise in me a great joy, joy which is freedom.

My third point is perhaps the most difficult task. When the life in Christ is not merely a theoretical concept, but a living faith, then I have to tell this to others what is happening to me in my life. This can be called: To be a Witness. A witness together with other witnesses, not against each other, but WITH another. To practice this is very difficult, because a witness can sometimes be an aggressive person. When I speak of Christ, or the Father, or The Holy Cross, other people including the Jew or the Muslim may be hurt by such a name. To learn to be a witness, who is at the same time prepared to suffer from the consequences of being such a witness, but who is not ready to part from the others: this is the task. One of the biggest dangers I think in the world now is that we have all these concepts of brotherhood and freedom and solidarity, but scarcely one person puts this into practice. To try to go little steps in this direction: I am a witness from my place to the fire which reveals itself to me, to be with you as a witness to your revelation and so to all around the world. That is a little bit of my dream.

GOVIND BHARATHAN:

"The Self is Eternal, Indestructible, Incomprehensible,"

Bhagawad-Geetha Ch.II.18

This is the Hindu concept of the Supreme Reality, The Truth. Elsewhere in the Bhagawad Geetha, this Reality has been defined as Indefinable, and beyond the conception of the Mind. This Reality is All

Pervasive, Eternal, and Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient. It is not surprising that this Ultimate Truth has been viewed and interpreted by man in different and often seemingly diverse ways, which seem to bear no relation or resemblance with each other.

But The Lord says:

"Whatsoever form any devotee desires to worship with faith, that same faith of his I make firm and unflinching"

Bhagawad-Geetha Ch.VII.21.

All men cannot worship at the same altar. Each one approaches the same Truth by his own path, and this path is conditioned by his place of birth, his mental and intellectual capacities, his abilities or lack of abilities, and to a million other considerations, important or trivial. These various paths all lead to the same goal, and this being so, they should never clash with each other.

But in reality, it is otherwise. Man has used Religion to divide and to separate, to create disharmony and discord and some of the worst of human conflicts have been in the name of Religion. This is the greatest danger facing Mankind today, the danger of Religion being interpreted to promote sectarianism and intolerance.

Harmony among the various faiths cannot be fostered by learned debates or by theoretical exercises aimed at solutions which make impressive reading. Perhaps the only answer lies in living in harmony. For indeed, what loftier message can each one of give, but our lives? Each one of us, firmly rooted in his own faith, without in any way sacrificing any of the basic tenets of his faith, without even attempting to absorb mix or blend the tenets and canons of the other faiths, attempts to live in harmony with others following their own faiths. This concept of living together with other faiths involves something more than mere tolerance, it involves a sustained and deliberate attempt to LIVE TOGETHER IN HARMONY, while actively practicing religion. It involves a deep rooted and sincere belief in each participant that the source of all Glory, Power, Love, Grace, Wisdom, Truth, (or whatever one may call it) is the same, though the paths may differ« To me it appears that it would also involve a lot of patience, insight, and understanding, and a genuine love towards the Truth, which goes beyond the form / this / in which Truth has decided to manifest itself to each participant.

If we take one step towards the Lord, He will take ten steps towards us. We have put our feet together and have taken this little first step at Altenhof, at Meierei Gut Altenhof, which has indeed become a temple of all faiths. My faith in His infinite compassion and in His grace tells me that He will guide us and lead us to the fulfillment of Reinhard's dream of living in harmony "in the place where the Fire burns"

Bhante KASSAPA THERA of Rockhill Hermitage, Vegirikanda:

To live with the representatives of all religions in the peaceful environment of Altenhof is indeed a great pleasure to me. To live in harmony, first one must understand the meaning of the word living. The best way of understanding this word is to actually experience it in life. We are thankful for this unique opportunity to live together, for it is only from such living together that loving kindness and harmony can arise. To me, The Dhamma is the greatest blessing in life, and I greatly take great pleasure in sharing this and other teachings from The Buddha with the others from the different faiths who are living together. My understanding of Religion is that it is nothing more than the development of an inner awareness and the extension of one's sympathy.

In the Mittanisamsa Sutta, The Blessed One says:

"He who maintains genuine friendship being hospitable to others in turn receives hospitality. Being respectful to others, in turn receives respect. He enjoys both praise and fame. He who maintains genuine friendship cannot be overthrown by enemies even as the deep rooted banyan tree cannot be overthrown by the wind."

By maintaining this genuine friendship and respect for the other faiths, and by sincerely attempting to live in harmony with others practicing their own faiths, I am sure that HIS blessings will ensure the ultimate flowering of this great dream.

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**Thursday. 14 August. 1980.**

For the past four days, our chief preoccupation was with formulating the principles of our living in harmony experiment. We followed the usual routine, but in our minds, each one of us were visualizing the theme of our novel and unique experience. Today, we decided to go to Lubeck, which is a Baltic Sea Port, about a hundred Kilometers from Altenhof.

We stopped on the roadside and entered a little forest, where the wild violets were in bloom. There, under the great trees, we sat in meditation for a while. The woods were lovely dark and deep, but we had promises to keep, and thus we left albeit reluctantly. We drove into Lubeck around noon.

The Great St. Marien's Cathedral was a symphony in light and sound. Like a phoenix, it had arisen from the fires of the Great war. It had been bombed, but now rose into the sky like a divine poem, on the wings of an unquenchable faith. High up on the Altar, Christ is king, amidst the soaring flights of our minds united in prayer. We walk through the hallowed corridors made sacred by the love He invokes in human hearts. We sit for a moment feeling the warmth of his love which cannot forsake us in spite of our transgressions and out taints. And when we rise, we feel a lot better, like having shed loads borne too long

And in the evening, after supper, Reinhard's Dream was finally put down in black and white. The project which took us four days to complete defines the fundamental concepts of the research in Inter Religious Harmony, by stressing the principle of these faiths being inseparable, though they do not mingle, or blend or even mix with each other. A copy of the final paper explaining this concept from the Christian, Hindu and Buddhist points of view is appended to this day's diary.

At times, it seems to me that the task of forging this harmony between the various religions of the world is truly Herculean. But a small step has to be taken at first before anything can be achieved. And ours is only to act, never to yearn for the fruit of our actions.(B.G. II.47.) Perhaps, the future will testify that the beginning was at Meierei Gut!!

The Evening meditation was on the theme:

"Asato Ma Sat Gamaya,

Thamaso Ma Jyothir Gamaya,

Mrithyor Ma Amritham Gamaya..."

"From the Unreal, lead me to the Real

From Darkness, lead me to light

and from Death, Lead me to Everlasting Life."

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**[Friday-Saturday]15th and 16 th August 1980**

On the 15th we continued the programme of morning meditation. Bhante read out portions from some of the authoritative texts on Buddhism and explained some of the principles of meditation. Meditation on the breath continues and there is a peace in our minds after the session.

The noon session was outdoors, the sun shining brightly. We read about the life and leelas of the Baba of Shiridi. Reading out portions from A Drop of the Ganga, on the life of Baba, I also told stories of his leelas which were not in the book. I told the story of Mrs Manager and the leper, and about the custom of offering food at the Mosque before the devotees had their lunch or dinner. The reading progressed slowly as the leelas of Baba were enthralling. I remembered the words of Baba in the Sai Sat Charita, where he told Hemad Pant, the author of the book that it was enough if his devotees read about his leelas and his life, he would confer salvation on them.

On the 16th, We had a much larger group consisting of visitors from Gettorf, a nearby town and Reinhard's son and his wife from Hamburg. The weather again was excellent, and we assembled under the great trees. Reinhard explained to the group the essence of his dream, and then we read the papers which we had compiled earlier about our Living in Harmony experiment.

The gathering listened in rapt attention, as Godela, Reinhard's daughter-in-law translated the paper into German. Several questions were asked about the programme and about our various faiths in general. The session ended at about 6 P.M., after which we assembled in the Yellow Room for a session of hymns and prayers. The hymn singing was magnificent, and we all spoke a few words on the theme of the unity of Religions and the harmony of our lives.

Hindu bhajans followed by Christian hymns, and rounded off with Buddhist chanting... and all without any hint of discord or dissonance. This is the truly remarkable thing about this experience. To me, prior to this, the concept of harmony among religions was only a theoretical exercise, which I had learned to respect from Bhagwan's ceaseless crusade for the creation of a lasting bond among the various paths. Now with his grace, I am Ale to experience this harmony in my life. We discussed briefly the idea of each of us holding similar live together in our respective places, where the concept of living together in harmony, could be practiced. With His grace, I hope this will come to pass, and that Reinhard's dream will slowly take root and flourish, in our respective corners of the world.

Since the evening session had been in the Yellow room, and since we were all tired, we decided to cancel the night session. However, Fredrich and Godela and I sat in the living room and we practically discussed almost all aspects of Hindu philosophy, with special emphasis on the different Yogas, and the paths of Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and in general about the doctrine of Karma. The session ended around midnight.

Each day brings fresh evidence of His infinite grace. Our bonds grow stronger, and we understand each other a lot more, and thus the sessions become a lasting pleasure, which we are reluctant to bring to an end.

At the end of the evening session on the 15th, we went to the Baltic coast through some of the most delightful woods in the country. The maple trees and the raspberries bushes threw their green shadows in the evening sunlight, inside the deep woods, the fir trees grew so thick that it was almost dark. The sea was calm and we saw ducks swimming in perfect formation skimming over the waves while the gulls flew above.

In the Prasna Upanishad it is said:

"Life is the fire that burns, and is the sun that gives  
light. Life is the wind and the rain and the thunder in the sky"!

What greater homage to his than in trying to LIVE together in harmony?

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...



**Monday. 18 August. 1980**

Today was the death anniversary of Reinhard's wife Margarete. At the breakfast table, we read her favorite passage from the Bible, and her favorite Psalm.

We then drove to the graveyard at Gettorf where her mortal remains were interred in the family plot next to her mother. We stood in silence for a while and then placed flowers on the grave. We also sang a hymn at the graveside.

Bhante Kassapa chanted a verse from the Buddhist scriptures praying for her Soul. I chanted the famous Mantra from the Shiva-Aparadha-Shamapana Stotra, where one prays to the Lord for His compassion and His mercy in forgiving one from any transgression one might have committed. The sloka in essence is given in translation below:

"Oh Shiva, Ocean of Compassion, God of the gods, Self Manifested, I pray to Thee to forgive my transgressions, committed with my hands, my feet, my body, through hearing, seeing, or through my mind, either consciously or accidentally."

In the Bhagavad Geetha, Krishna tells Arjuna:

"They have an end it is said, these bodies of the embodied Self. The Self is Eternal, Indestructible, Incomprehensible." (II.18)

"Just as a man casts off his worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the Embodied Self casts off its worn out bodies and enters others which are new." (II.22)

From this witness of the "FIRE" came the prayer: "Oh Lord, release her from the cycle of birth and death, and grant her the everlasting Bliss of merging in Thee".

Perhaps at some other point in Space and Time, she must have been a dear one to us. Or else, why should Bhante Kassapa and I cross the seven seas to be at her grave side, to offer our humble prayers for her Soul?

In the noon, we assembled in the Yellow Room, and according to the Hindu custom, offered food to the departed soul. It is conceived that one human year is one day for the departed soul, which awaits the working out of its Karma. The offering of food is the traditional way of ensuring their sustenance during the period of their waiting. Then we offered food to Bhante Kassapa who accepted it in his sacred bowl on behalf of Margarete.

The traditional blessings in Buddhism were then bestowed on her soul.

In the noon, the discussion veered around to the vital question of our individual beliefs and the paths we had chosen for ourselves. To Bhante, each one of us had to work out his own salvation, through introspection and clearing the mind of all defilements, and discovering the real nature of ourselves. To Reinhard, it was the voice of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the voice of Christ, who was both inside, and outside, and who guided through His grace the constant struggle to live up to the Laws of God, which was often, in his mind, rendered difficult by actual circumstances. To me, it was surrender in totality to the Sadguru, who was the indweller in each of us, and who would then guide us through the difficult stormy ocean of life.

To me, it is one of the greatest blessings in being able to see His glory through the eyes of others and hear His glory described through the tongues of others, each vision and description almost totally different from the other, but each being nothing but the Truth in essence.

This was the theme on which my mind dwelt during the last session in the Yellow Room, this glory of contemplation of His many Splendors...

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Tuesday, 19 August. 1980.**

The mind is given to wandering. That is its Dharma, to ceaselessly roam in its own world, created by itself, and to create a ceaseless flow of thoughts concerning things seen or heard of by it. It is the basis of all our doubts, joys and sorrows and is as difficult to control as the wind. What is the Mind? And what is its function? How does one control it? These questions have been answered by the Rishies, who have commented authoritatively on the subject as follows: The mind is not thoughts, for thoughts change, and flow, though the mind retains the impression of being the same. Thoughts are the manifestations of the Mind. The mind is often compared in the Shastras to a river. A river is not merely water, bounded by two banks, though these are essential to constitute a river. The river is a FLOW of water, between two banks. Thus, though the river consists of water, and the banks, it becomes the river only when the waters FLOW. This flowing of the water is what makes it a river, or this flowing of the water is the "riverness" of the river (to stretch the language a bit to explain a difficult idea is the writers privilege, and I unhesitatingly resort to this). Thus, the ceaseless flow of thoughts, in unbroken continuity, creates the mind.

Thus, mental control can be achieved by controlling this flow of thoughts. But this is more easily said than done. It is thus necessary to go to the root of the matter and discover the motivation for this ceaseless turbulent flow of thoughts. The Seers in the Hindu faith have prescribed simple and practical steps to achieve this end. They trace the cause of all mental agitations to the three cardinal interlinked causes of this state. These are: Ignorance of one's true nature, which is Auspiciousness, and Bliss and Perfection, which is Divinity, Purity, and the source of all Power, which is in reality all this and a lot more.

This ignorance creates in him the delusion that he is imperfect, and incomplete, and this in turn gives rise to Desire to seemingly set right this imperfection. Desire is the origin of thought, and also its chief motivating force. A simple example would be helpful. On a summer evening, relaxing beside a warm fire, one starts to wonder how perfect it would all be if there was also a Television set against the far wall, to help one to pass the long twilight hours. The feeling of imperfection in not having a Television set becomes an active desire to acquire one, and this results in the ceaseless flow of thoughts about such an acquisition, and the net result is the culmination of this thought flow, in the actual act of acquiring a Television set. Thus the culmination of desire is Action. All existence in this world can be analysed into this triple headed cause of Ignorance/Desire/Action.

The Rishis prescribe a simple practical way of purification. They advise that the first step for all seekers of Knowledge should be to cleanse our actions of the defilements of lust, anger, intolerance, greed, and cruelty. This is in essence the core of all the religions in the world. The Buddhists call for loving kindness, the Christians urge charity and compassion, and the Hindus advocate mercy tolerance and selflessness, to cite a few examples which are in no way exhaustive of the edicts of each faith. When one's actions are thus purified, thoughts in their turn, being nothing but the motivating power of these actions themselves get purified. A mind filled with pure thoughts cannot harbour impure desires. Desires, arising as they do from our feeling of imperfection, and of incompleteness, which is not our Real nature, and which is a result of Ignorance of our true nature which is Perfection, Bliss, and All Power, being so purified, wither away, till only one desire remains, to realize this All Perfect state, this state of Bliss and Divinity which is Man's True and Original state. This, the Rishis say is the true unfolding of Knowledge and of Self Realization.

Practical instructions on how to achieve this stage is imparted by the great Seers along with the theoretical stages indicated above. These steps can be investigated and explained tomorrow.

During the afternoon session, the discussion veered around to the true import of Vibuthi, the Holy Ash which the Hindu smears on his forehead. Vibuthi represents the ultimate stage of all worldly achievements and objects, and symbolizes the impermanence of matter. It is the result of the burning of the impermanent, transient world of objects emotions and thoughts, in the pure FIRE of true understanding, the fire which is free from the traces of Ignorance and delusion. It is the final stage, since

any amount of further burning cannot change its physical composition further, and cannot either destroy or defile it. It is indissoluble in water, and regains its pure white form, on dehydration. It is white, the color of Satwa, the first of the three gunas. Its imperishability is that of the Absolute. Worn on the forehead, it symbolizes the true understanding of existence. In the scriptures, it is said that Vibuthi is the attribute of Shiva Himself, who is often depicted in the form of an ascetic smeared with it from head to foot.

Muruga, of the Palini Hills is depicted as covered with Vibuthi representing the ultimate in renunciation. Vibuthi is given as prasad from Saivite temples. After Sai Bhajans, when the Vibuthi is distributed to the devotees, the entire congregation chants:

"Paramam Pavithram Baba Vibuthim,  
Paramam Vichitram Leela  
Paramartha Nishtartha Moksha Pradhanam,  
Vibuthim Baba Vibuthim Itham Ashrayami."

A loose translation would run as follows:

"Pure beyond Purity is the Vibuthi of Baba,  
Wonderful beyond words is this Vibuthi Leela,  
It is the great fulfiller of your wishes, and grants Moksha;  
Surrender and yearn only for Baba's Vibuthi".

But there is a deeper and more magnificent meaning of the word Vibuthi. Chapters 9,10 and 11 are sometimes referred to as the Vibuthi Yoga portion of the Bhagawad Geetha. This can be gone into on another day.

In the noon, we finished reading the chapter on The Two Sais. I explained the basic manifestations of the Avathara Mahima, of the Sai Avathars and the physical differences in the forms.

After supper, we watched Anna Marie's beautiful slides on South Indian Temples. The great Rathas of Mahaba ipuram, the magnificent Gopuras of Kanchipuram, the awe inspiring rock sculpture of the other South Indian Shrines, photographed in brilliant color and projected on the slide screen told of the glory and the grandeur of Dravidian Culture at its best.

The night session in the Yellow room ended another beautiful day in our living Harmony.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

[Wednesday to Friday] - **20. 21. 22. August. 1980:**

The cleansing of actions, the Rishis have said is through the triple detergent of Satyam, Ahimsa and Brahmacharya. These are briefly explained below:

Sathyam: Nature is the greatest University provided to man to enable him to discover for himself the basic essentials of Truth. The Mind should absorb and cook the various experiences gained from the world of our existence, and these gained experiences are analysed and digested by the Intellect, which in its turn arrives at its decisions and conclusions# This is true knowledge, and thereafter, the determination to live only as per the processed analysed and decided principles, innunciated by the Intellect which is the determining factor, is termed to live in Sathyam.

Man is provided with the Mind and intellect apparatus, as against the rest of the animal world which acts on instinct. This process of living according to the gained wisdom and knowledge of the true reality as manifest in the world is Sathyam. Sathyam is in essence living up to a correct interpretation of experience, through the Mind Intellect apparatus.

Ahimsa: The closest English word for Ahimsa is Non Injury. It is also interpreted as Non Violence, but this would be narrowing the word to one of its aspects alone. Ahimsa is NOT a cowardly abstinence from destruction. It is not bowing one's head to arrogant might, nor is it silent suffering of tyranny. The motivation of all actions should be non-injury. This should arise from Sathyam, and should be governed by love and compassion. Shorn of these, Ahimsa becomes a cowards escape from reality. True Ahimsa is the mental attitude of non-injury, arising out of the pure motivations of Love, kindness and compassion.

Brahmacharya: The concept of Brahmacharya has often been mindlessly restricted to mere sexual abstinence. This is robbing the term of its vibrant implications. True brahmacharya involves the total control of the 5 senses, and total self restraint. Physical abstinence, which is the outward manifestation should be accompanied by abstinence at the mental plane, failing which the entire exercise becomes a parody of brahmacharya. Brahmacharya involves a total control of the senses from roaming in the world of objects related to them. It involves total abstinence from any type of indulgence, for the sake of pleasure alone.

To sum up, application of these principles to all our actions, will result in cleansing of the thoughts, which will in its turn eradicate unwholesome desires, which open the way to Realization of the true perfection of the Self, its essential All Bliss state, its essential divinity, which is the true purpose of all spiritual exercises, and all sadhana.

For the past three days, Bhante Kassapa has been explaining the basic tenets of the Buddhist faith. The PARITA'

SUTA is the most sacred text of the Buddhists, and it is considered as the Buddhist Bible. This sacred collection of selected discourses of the Buddha is found in all buddhist houses, and in Temples- and is the handbook for novice monks. The Parita Suta is chanted to ward off calamities and all evils. It is believed that the mellifluous chanting of the Parita Suta calms the nerves and induces physical harmony. Chanting of this sacred Suta ensures worldly prosperity and spiritual progress.

In reply to the question put by King Mellinda to the famous Buddhist Monk Rev. Nagasena, as to why the chanting of the Parita Suta did not save a person from Death in all cases, the wise Monk replied that the reason was three fold: 1) because of the hindrances of Karma. 2) because of the hindrances from defilements because of lack of faith.

The essence of the Pirit Ceremony consists in chanting certain select texts by Buddhist Monks. This chanting is done holding in their hands a long thread called the "Pirit Nula" which is wound round the neck of a fresh pot made of clay, which is filled with water, called the "Purna Kumbha". The other end of this thread is held by the listeners who squat on the floor. At the end of the chanting, the sacred thread is

broken into pieces and tied round the wrist and neck of those assembled, and the sanctified water from the clay pot is sprinkled on the assembly.

The Pirit is chanted on special occasions like house warmings, starting new journeys, and commencing a new business etc. The chanting of the Pirit for a whole day is known as the Maha Pirit. On these special occasions, a special pavilion is erected and is decorated with leaves and flowers. The new clay pot containing the the water is brought into the pavilion on the head of a layman.

The Pirit Suta and the Relic Casket containing a relic of the Buddha is also head borne, covered by a canopy of cloth, and in a procession accompanied by beating of drums. The monks who do the chanting are brought into the pavilion, in procession, following the relic casket and are honored, and seated in the pavilion.

Before the actual chanting starts, the Monks chant the Three Refuge Formulas, and the Five Precepts, and this is repeated by the assembly. The sacred thread is then passed around the mouth of the pot of water, the Sacred Relic, and is held by the monks and the assembly. The recitation then commences, and is continued without break, the monks relieving each other. When the Parit Suta is concluded, it is commenced again. At the end of the chanting, a sermon is delivered, and the sacred string is then broken and distributed, and the sacred water in the clay pot is sprinkled on the assembly.

Buddhist Worship: The Buddha himself specified three objects to be worshipped. They are:

- 1) The relics of his body;
- 2) The articles which were used by him, like his alms bowl, the robe worn by him, his seat, and the vessel from which he drank water.

Along with these objects sanctified by association with him, is also included the Bodhi Tree, under which enlightenment came to him; and

- 3) those things erected for his sake, referring to images of him.

Relic Worship and The Relic Casket: The Venerable Ananda Thera was instructed by The Holy One himself as to how his mortal remains were to be treated following his passing away. The very words are best reproduced: "This Ananda is the way they should treat the remains of the Tathagata. A dagaba should be erected over the remains of the Thatagata. And he who places garlands or perfumes or lights and makes salutations at such place, or becomes in such place calm of heart, that shall long be for them a profit and a joy.

The Dagaba, or relic casket has great symbolic significance. Bhante Kassapa had brought with him from Ceylon a relic casket, as a present for Reinhard. The symbolic significance of the casket was explained in detail. The base of the casket signifies confidence. The three rings above it signify the Three Refuges, that is, The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, which is the order of Monks. The dome above the three rings signifies the teachings of the Buddha, and dispensations. Above this is the four sided enclosure, which signifies the Four Fold Noble Truth. Atop this is the tapering spiral with 8 rings, signifying the Eight Fold Noble Path. The conical pinnacle signifies Nibbana.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Monday 25 August. 1980.**

Meditation: Bhante Kassapa continues his valuable lessons on the technique of meditation during the morning sessions. In the noon sessions, he instructs us on the theoretical background of Meditation. To the Buddhist, of all virtues, Meditation is the foremost. "Buddhism devoid of meditation is like a well without water" (Lynn De Silva). Meditation is a way of cleansing the mind of its defilements, mastering it, and finding in this process, inner illumination.

The major defilements of the human mind can be classified as 1) lust 2) hatred and 3) delusion. Colored by these defilements, the mind leads us to consider the impermanent to be the permanent, the sorrows of life to be its joys, and the unreal to be the real. Through the process of Vishuddi Marga, the mind is cleansed of all its impurities and defilements, so that the Truth can be seen in its essence.

There are two main types of meditation. They can be broadly classified as follows: 1) Samatha: Tranquility meditation; and 2) Vipasana: Insight meditation. In Samatha meditation, the defilements are suppressed but not completely eradicated. The Samatha meditator acquires psychic powers, clairvoyance, etc, but can fall from this state in any unguarded moment. In Vipasana meditation, awareness of the body, feelings, mind and mental constituents is developed, and the mind analyses its contents and is slowed down leading to insight into the true nature of reality. Through this process of this four fold mindfulness, the defilements in the mind are eradicated, and insight into the Truth and Reality is developed.

Both these paths of meditation are difficult and for the unadvanced, the simple path of Metta Bhavana is prescribed. This may also be practiced by the advanced. This form of meditation involves a conscious effort to develop a friendly mind towards all forms of life, including human life, animal life, and everything else. Usually, this form of meditation may begin with the simple formula of radiating love to all beings. The usual process is as follows:

"May I be happy; May I be free from hatred; May I be free from disease; May I be free from grief!  
May I be free from envy; May I be free from jealousy; May I be free from Malice;  
May all beings be happy; May all beings be free from hatred;  
May all beings be free from disease; May all beings be free from grief!

These sentiments are then radiated towards parents, brothers, teachers, friends, servants and even to those who are not friendly to us. These feelings of loving kindness are also radiated to the ten directions and to all forms of life therein.

The Buddha said that one who practices Metta Bhavana will gain the favor of men, and the gods, will sleep comfortably, undisturbed by bad dreams, will acquire mental equipoise, will be free from harm from poison, fire etc, and will after his death be born into the world of the Gods.

Peter Fromm, the Humanist from Bonn has joined our group. There are four wicks in the great lamp in the shrine of the Yellow Room. Two days ago, Eckhart and Ola, Reinhard's brother and sister in law called on us, and along with the Campenhausens, we once again had an enlarged session in the Yellow room, where we had hymns, meditation, and enjoyed the glow of basking in the presence of Truth, in its many splendored forms and names.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Thursday. 28 August 1980.**

The relic casket brought by Bhante Kasappa from Ceylon as a gift to Reinhard was consecrated by us a week ago at a simple but significant function.

It was last Thursday, the traditional day of the Guru, that we asked Bhante to explain to us the significance of the Relic Casket. After we had heard from him about the various symbolic steps incorporated in the structure of the Relic Casket, Bhante put in it the sacred thread which had been consecrated for him at a Pirit Ceremony arranged specially for him before his departure from Ceylon. A length of thread was wound around a betel leaf and ceremoniously placed inside the casket by Bhante. Reinhard then put inside, a leaf from the Bo Tree which had been propagated from the seed of the original Bo Tree under which the Perfect One had attained enlightenment. I put Baba's sacred Vibuthi, from my casket, folded inside a betel leaf. Reinhard then brought a thorn from Jerusalem, signifying the thorn crown of Christ, and this was also placed inside the Casket. We then placed the Casket at the Shrine in the Yellow Room, as a symbol of the Harmony of all faiths.

One afternoon, the discussion veered around to the subject of LOVE. To Bhante, Life was movement, expansion, and this movement should be allowed to grow without and hindrance or disturbance, from defilements, or limitations of the mind. These limitations are created by the ego. This ego limits love, and makes it attachment. Detachment is unlimited love. Egoless love is unlimited love. Bhante further explained the concept of love in terms of love of one's wife, one's child etc. This, when analyzed could be traced to love for oneself. Reinhard's concept of love was of course in the Christian idiom. Christ said: LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR, AS THYSELF! He explained how in spite of his best attempts to put this into practice, it was not often possible for him, as he found that his efforts were often poisoned. He explained his attempt to be aware of the love with which God creates delivers and fulfills each person, and his conscious attempt to participate in this love, retaining his individuality, and personality and in the context of this individuality and personality. I, of course could conceive of love only in the concept of Bhagawan's exhortation to: "Start the Day with Love; Fill the day with Love; End the day with Love; That is the way to God!" Every relationship of ours with any person in our limited sphere, has in its kernel the essence of one aspect or the other of love. The mother loves her child, the lover, his beloved, friends love each other, each in entirely different manifestations of the basic emotion of love. This is conditioned love, and this conditioning is based on the relationship of the lover and the beloved. True love is beyond this conditioning. It is the love of the divine enshrined in the human, the love for the Absolute, which transcends the limitations of name and form and shines on all, irrespective of relationships and other limitations, seeing in each form, the enshrinement of the Absolute. Baba asks us to show our love for him by seeing him in each other, and in loving each other, in such a concept. Loving the Sai in each other is indeed loving the Sai at Puttaparthi, and the Sai which is above form, divine and absolute.

But then, as the poet said, we are mad men, in a state of intoxication, bitten by a wasp, and trying to explain the sensation to deaf people!! Mad, because it takes a tinge of madness to be truly individual in the world where conformity is sanity! Intoxicated because he who has tasted the divine experience of loving Him and being loved by Him, of having been given the chance to search for Him, and having searched and found Him, basks in the presence of "The Fire", in intoxication!! (Omar Khayyam, the much misunderstood Persian Poet says "A Book of Verse, a flask of Wine and Thou!") Bitten by the wasp of the suffering of being in the Fire, as a witness, and the burning excruciating need to reveal this to others, we find ourselves addressing deaf men, to whom the story of his Glory can never be an experience!!

Or perhaps, since God is Love, Love is God, it is as difficult to explain love as it is to explain God. Perhaps these have to be experienced, not explained, to be truly cognized.

On Sunday, Reinhard explained the miracle of Christ granting sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, as more than the physical acts enacted during the course of His mission on this earth, these represented his message to those of us who were indeed deaf and blind to Him and "The Fire".

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Thursday. 4 September. 1980.**

It was only when Peter reminded me that the last diary sheet related to 28 Aug., that I realized the speed with which the days were passing. We finished the first month of our Lives in Harmony on the 31st of August. Otto and his wife were with us in the Yellow Room that day, and after the session at the end of the day, Bhante reminded us that a whole month had passed. We praised his Grace in music before parting at night.

Joe and Georg returned from Denmark, and we had Imam Mehdi Razvi, of the Islamic Centre, Hamburg with us on the 28th Aug. In the first Lecture on Islam, Mehdi explained the basic framework of Islamic thought. As the weather was beautiful and sunny and warm, the afternoon session was under the great trees. We read Reinhard's paper and our notes, and Mehdi then summarized the basic concepts of Islam: Referring to the stanzas quoted by me from the Bhagawad- Geetha in my note (Ch.8.21 and Ch.2.18), Mehdi pointed that the Islamic concept of Allah was almost exactly similar. The major difference arose in the fact that Man is not created in God's image. God creates and guides. The entire process of birth, existence and death are all manifestations of His compassion.

The concept of the Unity of God, is fundamental to Islam. The second important concept is that of the Unity of the Prophets. Prophets, sages and seers are those to whom God has shown a special mercy to show the straight path to Mankind. When they left the world, they left it better, and very different. All prophets irrespective of religion are accepted in Islam. The Koran states that there are many prophets about whom it has not been spoken. The third important concept is about the Transience of the Universe. All is transient.

The Universe will not remain. We often clash with each other, as is our nature, for the impermanent. This clash should be directed in an effort for attaining the permanent. The fourth concept is to apply Gods Law theoretically and practically to run this world. The concept of Justice is above the Juristic concept. It is Righteousness, Harmony and Co-existence.

Mehdi also briefly touched on the aspect of Jihad, the Holy War. He stressed that the very term Holy war came from Augustine. In Sura 22 V. 39-41,

The concept of fighting is permitted for the protection of Churches, Synagogues, Monasteries, Temples, and against the Irreligious. In Sura 28 V. 4-6, the Pharaoh is described as representing oppression, and in Sura 4 V. 74 to 76, those who believe are exhorted to fight against oppression, whether it be by the state, the priestly class, or by the wealthy.

Mehdi had to leave for Hamburg that day itself. He however promised to come next Wednesday and be with us the whole of Thursday. On the days when he was here, we meditated together, and at night, shared our prayer sessions in harmony. Joe played the flute for us during the night sessions. And of course, after that I could sing of nothing else but Krishna, the Divine Piute player of Brindivan...

Reinhard left for Cologne, and Peter, Bhante and I went to Hamburg. We spent the day walking all over the beautiful city, with its parks and lakes and Art Galleries. The day culminated in a boat ride through the stupendous harbor, but not before we had walked around, touched, and photographed the Henry Moore's in the park, had a preview of an art show at Levy's by Igor Mitoraj the sculptor, and Katinka Neiderstrasser, an artist who painted in pale pinks and yellows depicting fantasy images of peeling faces, and falling autumn leaves which seemed to materialize from nudes decomposing while in the erotic embraces of cats or each other. A visit to a contemporary furniture show in Düsseldorf was an education in German tastes in interior decor. The furniture was all straight lines in steel, aluminium, and wood shorn of its plasticity potential, and reduced to severe straight lines or gentle undulations, whereas the upholstery was thick and lush and generally in muted greys, browns or even black. But on the walls, the prints were all from Indian motifs, Krishna sporting with the Gopis of Brindavan, tantric art with its convoluted script and rare miniatures from Rajasthan, all framed in severe golden and silver lines! And there was this book case in polished stone which Peter told us bore the price tag of DM 5000. That works out to Rs.20,000!! One could even in these days buy a small house in India for this amount!

And then, there was Ribe! But we do that on another day.

**Sunday. 7 September. 1980.**

The morning session in "PRASHANTHI NIYAS" which is the new name for the Yellow Room, and which means "The Abode Of Peace", was conducted by Reinhard, who read a passage from the Bible and explained its meaning and content. In essence it was a prayer to The Lord to charge one with His vibrant Love and to draw one towards Him, like the sails of a boat on the waters is filled with the wind and glides towards its destination. This was followed by a reading of the Lord's Prayer and our usual meditation.

The Concept of Man and God in Islam:

Imam Mehdi Razvi explained to us on Thursday last about the basic concept of the relationship of Man to God, making it clear that the views expressed by him may not always find favor with other theologians. The Basic concept was:

"La Ilaha Illa Allah. // Muhammad ur Rasullah."

A free translation would be: There is no God except Allah. Muhamad is the Prophet. The various stages of creation were diagrammatically depicted as follows:

"HU" This represents God in his Absolute aspect. This is "HE".

"LAHUT": This is the Divinity of God.

"GABRUT": The corresponding word for this in Christian theology would be Logos.

This represented the Word of God. All Prophets irrespective of Religion are considered as aspects of "The Word".

"MALAKUT": This represents the World of Angels.

"NASUT" : The Human being comes in this plane. This represents the creation of Man. On considering the entire chart it can be seen that this stands at the top of the visible world, and the beginning of the invisible.

"HAYWANAT" : The Animal Kingdom.

"NABATAT" : Plant Life in all its forms.

"JAMADAT" : The world of inanimate and fixed objects.

Mehdi pointed out a significant difference in Islam when compared to the other Religions. From the Gospel of St. John he quoted the sentence "In the Beginning was The Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In Islam, it was a slightly different concept that though the Word was with God, the Word is "Divine" and is not God. The Word of God becomes Mohamed, Jesus, Krishna Buddha, or any of the other Prophets. Another subtle distinction was drawn between Lahut, Gods Divinity and God. Even these two need not always co-exist. All the other factors in this are perishable and can die, except Hu and Lahut.

The seeker, in Islam journeys from the stage of Haunt, that is from the plane of humanity to Lahut, the aspect of God's Divinity. He is then called "Meiraj". He can remain there as a Paramahansa (the Indian concept of an enlightened one) termed Majsoob, or can return to the realm of Nasut as a Prophet. On the human plane, the classification of the various constituents of feeling, perception and consciousness are as follows:

LIGHT	DHAT	For every nafs (self) there is a guardian angel who guides him and protects him.
THE HUMAN	LIGHT: Nur.	
BEING	Soul : Ruh	For a candle to burn and to produce light, there must be a fire, which burns properly, under controlled conditions. These aspects in our personality when they are properly conditioned produce LIGHT
FIRE	Intellect: Agl.	
	Mind/Heart: Qualb:	
	Self : Nafs	
	Life: Hayat Body: Jasad.	

The Nature of Man: The constant aspect in all these constituents is "HU". As in Indo-Pakistani music, the struthi runs constant through the music, this factor is the Constant.

This Hu is without attributes, and is lost when it reaches the stage of Nasut, i.e., the Human plane. To regain his spiritual heritage, and to attain enlightenment, one can annihilate oneself in the Guru, The greater Guru, The Malakut (world of Angels), Logos (the Word, and the Prophets), Lahut (divinity), and

finally in Hu, where he can dwell forever. Mehdi concluded by saying that Moses got Enlightenment in one stroke, whereas Muhammed took 30 years to do so. The path to God is the path of Abraham, who is referred to as Khalil-ullah, the Friend of God. Abraham proceeds step by step, sacrifice by sacrifice, and God walks with him in his journey.

"LA ILAHI ILLA ALLAH. Muhammad ur rasullah

Om Shanthi...shanthi...shanthi...

**Monday. 8 September. 1980.**

Swami Chinmayananda, the dynamic Indian Guru who is to a large extent responsible for the spreading of the message of The Bhagawad Geetha and the Upanishads to the masses, both in India and the West, and who was my first contact with Indian Spirituality, and who taught me what little I know about the Geetha and the other scriptures has a novel method of introducing the subject of Vedantha to the novice. He explains the entire concept of Man and his relationship with the absolute Truth, OM, in the form of a diagram. One rainy day last week, when we were sitting in the living room, warm and cozy with a huge fire burning in the fire place, our discussion turned to Vedantha, and the Hindu concept of the constituent factors in Human personality, and the actual relationship of Man to the world of action. I then turned to Pujya Guru Swami Chinmayananda's method of explaining this relationship. Reinhard's board was brought to the living room, and I explained the BMI / PFT / OET concept of Man and the World. The Body Mind and Intellect, act in the world of Objects/Emotions/Thoughts, as the Perceiver/Feeler/Thinker, and is in reality vitalized by the Life Principle, without which all is naught. It is this life spark in us that vitalizes the eyes and makes them see, the nose and creates the sensation of smell, the tongue, and confers the power of taste, and the skin and provides the sensation of touch. These sense organs minus this Life Principle become inert and impotent. To experience the World of Objects, Emotions, and Thoughts (OET), This Life Principle which is the Atman or The Self must preside over the Body Mind and Intellect apparatus (BMI) and only then can they be Perceived, Felt, Thought (PFT). (Poor English, I must confess, but while explaining the abstract, one must take certain liberties with the spoken and written word. My apologies to the purists).

Thus the Self of the Atman is the Seer in all the sense organs, the mind and intellect of man. In the Isavasya Upanishad it is said:

"The Atman moves, and it moves not. It is far and it is near. It is within all this and It is also outside all this." (Isa:V).

The Atman is the central vitalizing force of the personality of Man, and it is the basic sub-stratum of the Entire Universe. This self is immaculate, untouched by sin, and pure (Suddha). The Hindu concept of Sin is Ignorance of one's real nature which is Divinity, Purity, and Immaculate (among other attributes). This Ignorance creates animalistic passions in man, guarding him on to inhuman actions which bear fruit in sorrow and despair.

When Mehdi and Friedrich joined us, and our group was fuller, the path of Right Action came up for discussion in Hindu concept. Again, using Swami Chinmayananda's method, I explained the yoga of Action, borrowing Swami's Diagrammatic representation of this concept. As the Mind, so is Man. The Mind can be considered as constituted of two distinct aspects: The Subjective Mind, and the Objective Mind. The Objective Mind is called Manas, and faces the world of stimuli, reaching it from the objects of the world. The Subjective Mind is called Buddhi, and reacts to the stimuli so received.

When these together work in harmony, the Individual is integrated and healthy, and creative. But often, these two "Minds" are separated by a thick layer of egoistic desires. The Subjective Mind has its own storehouse of mental impressions gathered from its past (lives) called the Vasanas, and all entering impulses channeled through the Objective Mind, reach it, adding to these existing layers, and also get colored and contaminated by these Vasanas, and all actions arising from such stimuli get the flavor of these Vasanas. Vasana purgation is the only way of making the mind pure and volatile and revealing to it its inherent. Divinity, and true Spiritual nature. By ruthlessly removing the dividing factor of the Ego-centric desires, the Subjective and Objective minds are brought together in harmony and unity. The Objective Mind then reacts faithfully to the external stimuli, under the direct disciplining of the Subjective Mind, and thus all action resulting there from is faithful to the external stimuli, and by so acting, the Vasanas in the Subjective mind get purged, in the fire of selfless and egoless Action

"Endowed with Wisdom of evenness of mind, one casts off in this life both Good and Evil deeds; therefore, devote yourself to Yoga. Skill in Action is YOGA".

(Bhagawad-Geetha II.50).

On this divine note, we part today.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Thursday, 11 September, 1980**

" Guru Bramah Guru Vishnu Guru Devo Maheshwara  
Guru Satshat Parabrahmah Tasmai Sree Guruvaiah Namah "

On this sacred day of the Guru, I bow to my pujya Gurudev, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba with these sacred words. The Guru is Brama, Vishnu and Mahesh. He is indeed the Absolute, my prostrations to my Guru»

Yesterday during the morning session in the Living Room, Reinhard formulated some questions which each one of us was to answer relating to the Altenhof Experience» I reproduce them below:

1. What has become clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof?
2. Which are the points which seemed most important to me in the Dialogue?
3. Where did I see difficulties?
4. Where have I seen differences?
5. Where have I seen parallels?
6. What have I gained out of this experience?
7. How do we continue this dialogue and apply its fruits to our daily lives?

Reinhard also explained his concept of the essence of Christianity in the form the Infinities. Time was the first Infinity, stretching forward and backward in mind blowing perspectives. Space is the second infinity, which was also an ever expanding realm of reality. The third Infinity was the concept of complexity, starting from the amoeba, the monocellular form of life, which gradually developed in complexity in the form of life in Water, and then in the form of life on land, till at last it started the process of cerebralisation, culminating in the development of the brain, and finally flowered into Gods most perfect Creation, MAN. This is the ultimate in the process of development of a growing consciousness and Man represents the peak of this growing consciousness at that stage of creation. The growth of consciousness in the individual man gradually develops into the consciousness of Mankind, and this development is all the time being projected into its own Infinity, as in the case of Space and Time. This gas / liquid / stone / atom development represents another aspect of Infinity, Complexity.

The Christian concept of God the father, in Reinhard's view, is a power that contains and encompasses these three Infinities, and has them for His attributes. This is God The Father, and can be conceived at a point overlapping these three Infinities, and in whom the three exist. God The Father would then, to explain His attributes in Hindu terminology (on which alone I can fall back, being overwhelmed at the enormity of the task of describing what cannot be described) can be cited from the Bhagawad Geetha as:

"...without birth, without death, It does not become existent after non/ previous/existence. Nor does it cease to exist after previous existence. It is birthless, changeless and eternal  
...immutable, all pervasive, eternal, unmanifest, unknowable, unchangeable".

(Chapter II.B.G.)

This Super Force, out of its compassion, mercy and love for Mankind, sends Christ as a human being among Mankind to show the Royal Pathway, again to use my own terminology. "I am the Way" He says, to The Father, who can be seen when he is seen. The sending of the Son, and the power which encompasses the three Infinities, and the Power which causes the sending of the Son as man among men is the HOLY GHOST.

We stopped there for the day, as this was enough to contemplate on for a long time. What immediately struck me in this explanation of the coming of Christ was the light it threw on the Hindu concept of the Avathar, and our understanding of His powers. In the Bhagavatha, the powers of the Avathar are described in detail. I quote from "Bhagavatha Vahini" of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba:

"The manifestations of God (Manifest Incarnations) will not engage themselves in the least, for their own sake or for the sake of fulfilling any personal likes! All activity is for the good of the World. Though without them, the world cannot exist and survive, They move and act as if the

world has nothing to do with Them. In every word and deed of Theirs, one can observe the underlying current of total renunciation. For Them who hold the World in the palm of Their Hands, what can the World give or withhold? They can shape it as They like." (P.254 Bhagavatha Vahini).

Today, we had amongst us, Michael and Christa Mubois [Möbius], Wolfgang and Tuula, who work as a team in a centre at Flensburg. They conducted the night Session with their own prayers and services. They were wonderful, and in them, I saw the seed of a Faith and Hope which might change the world.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**14 September. Sunday. 1980.**

The more I go through Life with my eyes open, searching for His Divine hand, guiding me at every step, learning the hard way to consider even my gloom as "the shade of His hand held caressingly" over me and mine, the more it becomes evident to me that nothing in life comes purely accidentally, and without His specific intent. So when I lay awake at night, and woke up late, I knew in the back of my mind that it could not be accidental, and that the consequent delay in the puja, resulting in my absence at the breakfast table, also could be one of His leelas. It was. Reinhard and Annamarie could be cause of this, join me for my morning pooja. After it was over, and I had distributed the prasada, Reinhard asked me to explain the actual inner significance of the rituals. I consider rituals as attempts to portray on the physical plane, what is difficult to accomplish on the mental plane, because of our constant preoccupation with the world and its mundane trivialities. But in my initiation rites, when I was given my manthra by my puja Gurudev Sri. Sri.Chitprakashananda Swami of Sri Ramananda Ashram, Gurudev prescribed a Maanasa Puja, which is to be performed in the mind, before the actual chanting of the manthra is to be commenced. I have followed this to the extent possible in the physical plane in my daily pujas.

The explanation I give below is based on this Maanasa puja:

WATER: Water is one of the five elements constituting all living organisms, animate or inanimate. Water is purified by chanting the Ganga Manthra, by which the goddess Ganga Devi is invoked to manifest herself in the water to be used for the puja. The right hand ring finger is dipped into the water and this manthra is chanted, and thereupon, the water, from whatever source it is drawn is considered to be converted to Ganga water. This purified water is then poured on the idol with a white conch, which to me represents the human heart (not the physical organ but the spiritual heart). The child on the seashore who holds the conch to its ear hears the ocean. This is considered the sound of the OM, the Pranava manthra which is constantly present in the atmosphere, and the Conch represents in microcosm in this sound, the macrocosmic OM, the cosmic vibration causal in all creation.

EARTH: The Idols are then wiped clean and sandal wood paste is applied with Kumkum on the forehead. Sandal wood paste stands for the Earth element, the physical characteristic of which is smell. The Kumkum is also fragrant. With this, the idols are replaced on the lotus pedestal (of the heart) and meditated upon.

Ether or Akash: Space contains the created universe. Mind is the creator of the concept of space. Flowers represent the thoughts in the mind, appearing out of the mystery of nothingness, blossoming in all glory, spreading their fragrance for a brief moment, and then dying away into oblivion. Flowers are offered to the Idols representing the ephemeral quality of the mind and its thoughts. These are the only decorations our mind can give The Absolute!!

AIR: The other vital element of Air is symbolified with the offering of incense sticks. Their fragrance is wafted through the Air. The fragrance of your devotion now surrounds you, and the Idol worshipped!

Fire: The Vedanthin considers the stomach as the sacrificial fire in which all offering of food are made, and conveyed to the body as energy. The sacred lamp is lit and waved before the idol signifying the offering of the Fire element in ourselves to the Divine.

Nivedhyam, or The Sacred offering of Food: The five sense organs, which are the eyes, nose, ears, tongue and skin, transmit the sensations of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch, on contacting their respective objects in the world outside. All living experience is a result of this contact and transmission. This Panchamrit (five fold nectar) is symbolified in the sacred offering to the Idol of food. All experiences transmitted to us by the sense organs in the form of experiences are thus Surrendered to the Idol worshipped.

Camphor: Having surrendered all, now comes the final offering symbolising the aspect of total surrender. Camphor is perhaps the only substance which burns out leaving nothing behind. The final ritual is the burning of the Camphor.

This is called "The Mangala Arathi" the final auspicious offering of Lights, at which the last vestiges of one's being is offered to the Supreme. One remains in meditation till the camphor burns down to NOTHINGNESS and in the mind, it should be conceived as the total annihilation of the little self to the Great Self, the Supreme Absolute. This signifies total and complete self abnegation.

This is the Hindu Puja as I see it. There can be as many interpretations of these rituals as there are interpreters. But we interpret as we are given to interpret.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

**Saturday. 20 September. 1980.**

THE REV. BHANTE KASSAPA THERA has given me the draft of the answers he has formulated to the questions regarding the dialogue. I reproduce them below:

What has become clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof:

1. It is clear to me that people having different faiths, and practicing their faiths and religious activities can live in harmony and with full love for each other
2. I had a good opportunity at Altenhof to watch people and their behaviour and how they try to generate their love according to their understanding and deep faith in their religions without in any way mixing it up with other religions, or other faiths.
3. It seems to me sometimes that the house at Altenhof is sometimes a Church and a school for the Christians, sometimes a temple and a school for Hindus, sometimes a Mosque and a school for Muslims, and sometimes a Study centre and Meditation centre for the Buddhists!

Which are the points which seemed most important to me in the dialogue:

1. To live with people who profess different faiths, and to hear them speak about Karma, Re-birth, Ignorance, etc., spoken by them according to their separate faiths was very important to me.
2. I thought it very important that I could understand about other faiths professed by other people.
3. The Love shown by the participants to each other was very important to me in the dialogue.

Where did I see difficulties:

Actually for me, there were no difficulties, as I did not mix up my faith with those of others.

Where have I seen differences:

1. The Buddha never claimed that he was the son of God, or the messenger of God.
2. Buddha is not an incarnation of God.
3. Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic.
4. There is no belief in Buddhism about the Eternal Soul.
5. The Buddha has rejected both extremes of externalism and nihilism.

Were have I seen parallels:

1. All religions insist that one should not commit bad actions, and that one should perform good actions.

What have I gained out of this experience:

1. I have gained an opportunity to learn about other religions.
2. I could develop my harmony with others.
3. I could get to associate with other people to improve mutual friendship.

How do we continue this dialogue and apply its fruits to our daily lives:

1. We should hold this dialogue annually and live together in harmony.
2. We should encourage other people in our own countries to have this dialogue and explain its importance to the world of today.
3. This dialogue will be helpful to the peace of the world if we apply it to our daily lives.

+++

The days are flying past with a terrifying speed. The first leaves of Autumn have started falling, and as our dialogue quietly draws to an end, we start discussing our future plans, and laying our schedules. We agreed to meet again next year in May/June to continue the Live In at Altenhof. That way, I would not lose too many court days. Life flows on, its even course unfurling like a well charted programme. I spent a night and a day with Friedrich at Hamburg and in their delightful flat overlooking the treetops and poised over the busiest section of the city. We called on all the embassies in Europe, asking for visas for my travel during October. And walked down the banks of the Elbe and watched the boats and the barges floating down the waterways. It was a perfect day, ending in a glorious sunset, and when the park

became cold, we left, to locate the house of Mr. Vijayasundaram, who I understood had settled in Hamburg for about 23 years. We found the house in the Elbschausee, one of the most exclusive residential areas in Hamburg. The moment I entered the Living Room,

I saw Baba's Photograph, and I knew that He had brought me here. But the story of the Vijayasundarams deserves another day.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

- Om Sairam.-

**Monday. 22 September 1980.**

GOVIND BHARATHAN'S replies to the Questions:

What has become clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof:

- 1) It has become clear to me that we have been propelled, into this togetherness by the supreme will, which created, the idea of this dialogue, the conditions under which each one of us could come here, freed from the obligations of our daily existence, and who gave us the strength to weather the storms, to inter-act in harmony even while buffeted by the strong winds of divergent beliefs, and raised us to heights where it was possible for us to view our faiths in a new light of an active tolerance.
- 2) It has become clear to me that the various pronouncements of faith at Altenhof about His attributes (or lack of attributes), His forms and formlessness, His similarities and differences, are all the individual experiences of the streams which are born of the same rainfall, and which flow down the same mountain and which will ultimately merge into the same ocean which gave rise to the rain-clouds which caused the rainfall in the first instance.
- 3) It has become clear to me that in spite of the transgressions and the waywardness of man, and the unspeakable crimes committed by him in the name of religion, God is not yet discouraged with man or his religions.

Which are the points which seemed most important to me in the dialogue:

- 1) It seemed to me most important that men and women professing totally different beliefs can soar above the secondaries of doctrine and ritual and divergent creeds winged by an unshakeable faith in His existence and His love, and can pray and meditate and live together in total harmony with each other, "unmixed, but indivisible and inseparable", and bask in His glory and bloom like flowers of different hues and fragrances, in His divine garden at Altenhof.
  - 2) It seemed to me most important that we discovered that a little bit of tolerance and mutual understanding could melt away the walls prejudice and antagonism built up by the centuries.
  - 3) It seemed to me most important that living together in love is the solution to the problems created by seemingly irreconcilable theological differences.
- Truly, THE ANSWER IS LOVE!

Where did I see difficulties:

This may sound presumptuous, but I felt no difficulties in any sphere at Altenhof.

In relation to the dialogue, this is perhaps due to the wideness of the Hindu faith, the scope of which ranges from "atheistic atheism to theistic theism", and enfolds in its embrace the Agnihotri Brahmin and the Aghori Panthi sanyasio And ofcourse in the domestic field, Reinhard with his patience and insight and kindness anticipated my personal difficulties and solved them before they even made themselves felt.

Where have I seen differences:

God made even the flowers of the same species different in form, color, hue and fragrance. There are thousands of trees in the forest, but no two trees are identical to each other. It thus does not seem distressing to me that the major religions in the world are colored by differences, which are sometimes irreconcilable and seem almost mutually exclusive.

To me, the major differences between Hinduism and the other religions were: the following:

- 1) Among other aspects Hinduism differs from Islam in the basic concept of Prophethood, and Avatharhood, the total separation as conceived in Islam between God and His creation, and in the duality of God and man.
- 2) Christianity considers Christ as the 'Only Son' of God the Father. To the Hindu, Christ is an Avathar,

the descent of the Divine to the human to trace the forgotten and neglected royal pathway to God» This difference becomes more pronounced in the light of Lord Krishna's pronouncement to Arjuna in the Bhagawad-Geetha that the Divine incarnates from age to age, to save Dharma from the onslaught of the forces of Adharma.

3) Again, as against the Christian concept that man is basically a sinner, in Hinduism man is conceived as basically pure, and in essence divine and perfect, clothed of course with the imperfection of Avidhya, or ignorance of this perfection and divinity of his nature.

4) We differ again, Hindus and Christians in the concept of the Goal. The promise of the Kingdom of Heaven appears to me in spite of my best efforts to understand it otherwise, as a promise embedded in the future. If it is in the present and the future, I cannot conceive of how once one has achieved it, in the present, he can consider himself any more as a sinner thereafter. As against this, in the Bhagavad Geetha, Krishna says to Arjuna:

"Mentally renouncing all actions and fully self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gate city neither acting nor causing others to act (body and senses)". B.G. Ch.V/13.

5) And finally for me, the fear of the Lord is not the beginning of wisdom. This concept is irreconcilable with any of the canons of the Hindu faith.

6) As for Buddhism, the denial of the Eternal Soul is also irreconcilable with the Hindu concept of "Brahman" which is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient and which embodies itself as the indweller in all forms of life. To us, The Buddha is himself an Avathar.

#### Where have I seen parallels:

To me, parallels abounded everywhere. The great religions are themselves parallel paths which remain unmixed and separate when viewed here and now, but which become beguilingly indivisible and convergent when viewed in the vistas of infinity

#### What have I gained out of this experience:

My gains are infinite. I gained a treasure of knowledge of the theological aspects of the great religions and their doctrines. I gained an insight into the working of truly dedicated Christian/Muslim/Buddhist minds. I gained the invaluable experience of actually visiting and observing the prayer rituals of devout and dedicated muslims at the Islamic Centre Mosque at Hamburg. Surprisingly, I had never entered a mosque in India in my whole life.

I had also the unique experience of visiting and participating in the Sunday service of the Lutheran Church of St. Micheal [right: Christuskirche] at Mürwik near Flensburg. I understood the basic dynamism of the Christian faith, observing the young Taizé oriented group of Wolfgang, Tuula, Micheal, Christa, Susie, Lisa, and Jan Petermann who appeared to me to have shed the secondaries of theology and have found the primary approach to Christ through Love, Faith, Compassion and Charity.

And in the peace and calm of the Buddhist centre at Rosenberg, near Hamburg, I saw the self assurance which arises from meditation and prayer in the face of Bhikku Vimalo, and marveled at the timelessness and universality of the teachings of the Perfect One, The Buddha. And of course, I gained an infinite confidence in myself and emerged a better Hindu from these enlightening encounters.

#### How do we continue this dialogue and apply its fruits to our daily lives:

This year, we have laid the foundations with the preliminary generalities of our various faiths. We should build on this firm base in future years, following the same "Living in Harmony" with the same emphasis on not mixing up, but indivisible and inseparable together, concentrating on the practical aspects of social service, social contacts, and public relations.

We should let others observe (and enjoy if they would) the fruits of our harmony, We must open to each other the rich treasure houses of our individual cultures and customs and traditions.

And over and above all, we should with our little feet together, take another little step towards Him, with so much love, sincerity and dedication that He will take not ten but a hundred steps towards us.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi ...

[later inserted here are the answers from Mehdi und Peter Fromm:]

### IMAM MEHDI RAZVI REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS:

The seven questions which we have been asked are in my opinion not only very important for those of us who have taken part in the Altenhof Experience, but furthermore, they are extremely difficult to answer, in a concise clear and pertinent manner without either running the risk of sounding utterly trite and platitudinous or being completely misunderstood by those who have not shared our experience

For example, let me take our very first question: What has become very clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof. Now many things have in fact become clear to me but I think the first and the foremost of them is the realization that how valuable and enlightening these informal discussions and free from undue constraints exchange of views and informations have been to me and how much I have personally gained from this unique encounter with men of other creeds. It has given me the opportunity to discover what my Christian, Buddhist and Hindu companions regard as more intrinsic aspects of their religions and to share some of their profound spiritual experiences. This has strengthened me in my own conviction that all our different faiths have initially sprung from a common source and the basis of our various religious experiences inspite of all their infinite diversities has been our encounter with the one perennial and at the same time tantalizingly elusive reality.

There is so much we can learn from each other and there are so many things to share among us, traditions, symbols, insights, to name but a few, that we could go on meeting each other indefinitely without exhausting our topics or satiating our appetites.

For me, the most important point of our present dialogue was our general consensus that the God is the ultimate source of all beings and not only of formal revelations and individual experiences. Even the Buddhist proposition that there may not be any personal deity beyond and behind the spatio-temporal order of our perceptions does not necessarily invalidate either his transcendental existence as revealed by our different scriptures or his immanent presence in his creation and in our personal experience.

If we go on evolving a mutually comprehensible vocabulary as we have already started to initiate, I do not see any serious difficulties ahead. Indubitably our theological positions and dogmatical differences are not going to disappear. Yet in most of the cases we can and are able to understand each others opinions and beliefs without any compulsion to accept or reject them. Even in extreme cases where the stated positions are absolutely incompatible with each other we can agree to disagree without diminishing our mutual esteem.

During our dialogue in Altenhof we have made certain introductory statements about our fundamental beliefs and expressed some of our theological, anthropological, ontological, epistemological, teleological and socio-political views. As for my own impressions are concerned, it seems to me that on the whole Jews, Christians and Muslims can more easily grasp each others positions that the positions of non-Abrahamic traditions. In the same way, the fellow members of the Indian tradition share a large amount of conceptions, ideas and semantic subtleties which enable them to arrive at some very profound understanding of cosmic realities. I think the Islamic mystical tradition can play a very important role in bringing historically these two so very different religious, cultural and socio-political entities closer and mutually comprehensible»

As I have said before, it has been a very valuable experience for me and I have gained some new insights which in return will help me to a better understanding of my own personal faith and our Islamic scriptures and thoughts. At the same time this experience will be very useful in my every day dealings with my fellow human beings both in and out of my work. I am most certainly looking foward for the next installment of our living dialogue. I hope very much to meet a real devotee of Thora and Talmud in our next encounter. The absence of a genuine representative of Mosaic tradition from our circle was keenly felt.

## PETER FROMM REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS:

As Govind often says: The OCEAN is the WAVE, but the wave is NOT the ocean. The coming and growth of a wave is affected by many forces. All in all peaks and troughs always tend to reach an equilibrium. My participation in the DIALOGUE -all too short- created strong waves in me, however lacking the source of time, remoteness and quiescence. Thus I'll try to give answers to Reinhard's questions of September 10.

What has become clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof?

What have I gained out of this experience?

Vanity of daily affairs. Not a denial of activities but questioning the relative importance usually assessed with these activities.

Is a value-system -or even a hierarchy of values- needed for orientation?

Searching for the right question. Becoming or being aware of those awesome complexities (R's concept) and often fooled

by equally complex answers-seemingly persuasive- I'll take this narrow path. Very easy to break out.

Importance of individual action.

Doubt as antidote of wholesome action. If I succeed in b) my skepticism/doubt may also vanish. The power of reasoning is still overwhelming, it is just very, very tempting to ask "why? what purpose? what effect?"

e) The pursuit of happiness by being modest and generous.

The importance in knowing more about the Reality of others for my own social, political, mental and spiritual existence.

Even more (factual) respect for equal rights and opportunities.

Which are the points which seemed most important to me in the Dialogue?

An accord between subjective individuality and objective conditions may be possible. The position of the individual

in and as part of its environment is settled by some fictitious contract which governs existence. Sets of agreement, rules, habitual tradition more or less serve as a supporting structure for a life without real chance and risk. Breaking these boundaries and allowing subjectivity to grow and rise will provide the strength for finding/experiencing one's true limit(s), including all the conflicts inherent in accords.

Love is the absence of death. Death will come, for sure. I am attached to that Finite. Love is (Banthe brought the focus on it) the detachment from the Finite toward which I direct my emotions, feelings.

2

X5.

Where did I see difficulties?

The very exclusive concentration on mind/intellect.

The lack of action corresponding with the discussed topics, thus avoiding conflict. Just think in line/terms of Govind's fine differentiation: non-injury vs non-violence. Words may impress, affect the mind/spirit, harm the intellectual Ego. Deeds/Actions are the test.

The danger of abstraction. Any intellectual discourse tends to generate abstract ideas, often receives its true stimulation from them - but is that mindful? Excessive abstraction creates absent-mindedness.

Where have I seen differences?

In the meaning/comprehension of same words (more than semantic). Very much due to my short period of participation. Comprehension has to grow, slowly. Careful listening and understanding the original concept/thoughts behind the words (like: space, time, existence, re-birth etc.) takes time.

In the reliance on the Absolute.

In the basic orientation toward the Finite vs the Infinite.

I (still) feel my existence as being limited by human and natural forces. The aspect of transience is strange to me, however intriguing. I cannot (yet) say: staying and leaving is the same.

In the neglect of dialectical logic (forces) as a condition/ prerequisite of i.e. any creative process.

Where have I seen parallels?

In the inherent evolutionary aspect in all religions present.

In the Here-and-now motif as a not-so-fundamental aspect in all. Important to me since it opened the

door to comprehending the aspect of transience a bit.

In the rejection of psychoanalysis in favor of wholesome action toward the world.

How do we continue this DIALOGUE and apply its fruits to our daily lives?

For me the DIALOGUE appears to be an attempt of merging/ combining quality and quantity, the soft and the hard, the human and exact aspects of our lives. If we fail in this and concentrate just on one aspect without taking the other into conscious consideration the FIRE of the DIALOGUE will quickly vanish/be extinguished, the power of the experiment will fade. Ample time for growth should be provided and set aside. Although the format of the discussions (loose, fen ended) permitted an easy entry for me an agreement on major topics should be attempted/found. Besides personal enrichment such concentration may enable me/us to break the previously mentioned boundaries. Continue to meditate on and apply LOVING KINDNESS. The FIRE gave me the strength to speak out of MYSELF to those wonderful friends and relatives during last weekend.

The Fire broke into the open without the usual concealment. Without too much organisation we ought to maintain communi- cation with each other via periodic circulars as long as we are away from each other.

Peter

**Monday. 15.9.1980, Altenhof,**

SOME POINTS TO OUR QUESTIONS FROM REINHARD.

I. What has become clear to me during these weeks at Altenhof?

- 1.. The urgent need for this dialogue,
2. Living together for an extend period of time represents an excellent opportunity for living this dialog,
3. To me it seems to be a great present that it is possible to engage in such a dialogue.

II. Which are the points which seemed most important to me in the dialog ?

1. The fact, that it is taking place.
2. The efforts, the open mindness and the patience with which it is carried out.
3. Meditation and prayer as the inner centre of this dialogue.

III. Where did I see difficulties?

1. The difficulty of finding the essential questions and answers.
2. The difficulty of continuous perceiving the limits of one's own perceptions and to perceive the difficulties of the other one with his world.
3. The difficulty of changing some of one's own habits and expectations and of anticipating the nervous reactions and of helping to overcome them.
4. The difficulty of apprehending things unspoken and unspeakable, of expressing the speakable things precisely and of again and again giving time to renewed attempts at expressing them and being all ears.

IV. Where have I seen differences?

1. Each of our faces is different without any alloy as far as the great figures of the different traditions and the individual shape of one's own experiences, tempers and convictions are concerned.
2. Outstanding differences proved to be for me the problem of the trinitarian statement (inclusive the Christologie) in the field of theologies and the problem of sin and law in the field of anthropologies.

V. Where have I seen parallels?

1. In the expressed intention of and the perseverance in conceiving of ourselves as undivided as a group in our dialogue with all the various differences and opposing ideas.
2. In the analogous and sometimes converging interpretations of the different traditions.
3. In the immediate experience of our living together in the prayer, in the meditation, in our sensations, ideas and reactions, above all in the way in which we could laugh and be happy together,

VI. What have I gained out of this experience?

1. The immense gratitude for a way which we have been shown
2. The experience of a "life in harmony".
3. The courage to go on.

VII. How do we continue this dialogue and apply its fruits to our daily lives?

1. I envisage our reunion in Altenhof in May and June 1981 joined by a Jewish partner.
2. I want my daily life to be influenced by this dialogue.

VIII. Proposals for the next times of our dialogue.

1. A progressive clarification of the different positions by living together and by mutual visits, by reading and also by reading the same things.
2. To protect the "delicate flower" so far.
3. No anxiety about the time!

- Om Sairam -

**Tuesday. 23 September. 1980.**

THE LIGHTER SIDE OE ALTENHOF (not for publication):

The time has come to sum up this dialogue. We have only a week more and we have to evaluate our efforts, and arrive at our conclusions.

With this sheet, my daily diaries at this session of the dialogue also come to an end. I will from now on compile the views of the other partners to the dialogue, and start work on the paper summing up the entire dialogue at Altenhof. I thought that in this last sheet, I should do my own summing up too.

But I would like to sum up the days of fun and laughter that we had together. Never during these two months did we lose the gift of laughter, at ourselves. As Papa Reinhard put it, we could always laugh together at the same things. Among Gods creations, only man can laugh!

There was this afternoon when we had beans cooked so deliciously by the inimitable Annamarie, that all of us threw caution to the winds and sated ourselves with extra large helpings. Of course, nature had its way, and we were all slightly green around the gills at tea time, and some of us kept surreptitiously creeping out of the afternoon session for reasons best left unsaid. By evening, when things were slightly better, and we reconvened in the Living room around the T.V., when a phone call came for Bhante, from one of his acquaintances, inviting him to Lunch the next day. Pappa with his usual flair for hyperbole described the lavishness of the treat that awaited Bhante. The rest of us in one voice said: "Let's hope they give him beans!".

And then, there was this day when Pappa discovered that his trousers were too long. They had fitted him perfectly when he had them made, but a month later, after living with the Harmony Dream Team, (an original Kirchbach term coined by the family's flute playing offspring Johannes), Pappa discovered that his waist line had decreased disconcertingly, as a consequence of our abstemious food habits (no meat, no fish, no nothing). And so Pappa decided to shorten his trousers when he went to Gettorf to do the shopping. And Pappa, being Pappa, the philosopher/ poet, and absent minded as all such people are likely to be, I am sure, had forgotten to take along with him a spare pair of trousers when he went to Gettorf. This is my geuss, and it has been hitherto unconfirmed. However, it was interesting for us to contemplate Pappa sitting in the back room of the Tailor's shop at Gettorf, looking very forlorn while the tailor shortened his trousers! It is a matter of conjecture whether when the dialogue is over, and we return to our home towns, and when Pappa reverts to his normal diet, and is in good spirits (of the bottled variety), he will regain his old dimensions around the waistline, and in such an eventuality, whether the tailor at Gettorf will be ingenious enough to lengthen the trousers to their pristine glory, or whether Pappa will go around wearing a very short pair of trousers. Very interesting!!

And of course there was the visit to Hamburg, to Mehdi's house, where we were treated to high tea and Indo-Pakistani classical music, both of which were superlative. To the staid Hamburgers who were the Imam's neighbours, it was quite an experience. Never was so much noise made since the Blitzkrieg. Never were so many treated to so much confusion and noise by so few!! The highlight of the evening was when Mehdi's sweet little daughter wanted to give her little doll to Bhante. The doll was female, and Bhante has nothing to do with females, and this he tried to explain in English to Nosheen (Mehdi's daughter) who knew only Urdu and German!! When she finally got the idea, she went to her room and returned with a monkey doll. Bhante of course wanted to know if that was male or female. Peter, who claimed expert knowledge on these things solemnly lifted the tail of the monkey and proclaimed that it was male, after which Bhante took it in his lap and sat with it the whole evening. Peter later told us that it was in his opinion a female monkey, but knowing Peter, I would not bet on it.

All this and heaven too. There was nature in all its glory, ripe wheat and corn ready for harvesting, the green meadows where fat black and white cows grazed unconcerned about the noisy jets which roared by at often mind blowing speeds. The gold and red sunsets over the great trees, the new seeds being put

into the freshly turned earth, and the first shoots raising their heads in tender green. There were days of glorious sunshine, and days which were grey and wet. And there was the moon, shining through the great trees....

And to me, THE ANSWER WAS LOVE.

Om Shanthi ... Shanthi ... Shanthi