

CIIS at Thirty:  
Origin and Development of the Institute's Founding Vision  
by Robert McDermott, President

Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri came to the United States by boat in 1950, and was joined a year later by his wife Bina and their daughter. He immediately joined Louis Gainsborough (a businessman who was the primary founder and sole source of support of the San Francisco Academy of Asian Studies), Dr. Frederick Spiegelberg (professor of Sanskrit and comparative religion at Stanford and part-time faculty member at the Academy), and Alan Watts (dean of the Academy). In response to a letter to Sri Aurobindo asking for a disciple who could teach his philosophy and yoga, Sri Aurobindo, just before he died in 1950, recommended his brilliant pupil, Haridas, who was then a young professor of Indian philosophy at Krishnagar College in Bengal.

Haridas had visited Sri Aurobindo at his Ashram in Pondicherry, south India, had received letters from him and had written a dissertation on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy. Dr. Chaudhuri served as a faculty member of the Academy until it came to an unglorious end because the three principle directors could not agree on the aims or *modus operandi* of the fledling institution. From 1955 until 1968, Dr. Chaudhuri continued to teach the many students who came to his lectures and private sessions devoted to Asian and comparative philosophies, yoga and spiritual counseling. In the mid-50's, he and Bina founded the Cultural Integration Fellowship in a stately house on Fulton Street at Third Avenue. While the San Francisco Academy of Asian Studies is a predecessor of the Institute, the Fellowship, which Bina continues to direct, is the Institute's actual parent.

During the celebration of the Institute's thirtieth anniversary, we should join in celebrating the Institute's predecessor and parent, and should increase our gratitude to the board members, faculty, students, staff and friends who have generously contributed to the creation and advancement of this institution which means so much to the cause of East-West and spiritually-based education. When Dr. Chaudhuri died at his desk of a heart attack at 62, his wife Bina was in her early 50's and the Institute was in its seventh year. For several years after Dr. Chaudhuri's death the Institute was administered primarily by Bina with the assistance of Dr. Spiegelberg who served as president on a very part time basis. There has not been, and I doubt that there could be, a president of Dr. Chaudhuri's spiritual and intellectual depth as well as unquestioned ability to lead the the Institute which he founded with Bina in 1968.

enrollment from 150 to 400 students, and for having expanded its psychology programs. It was Ralph Metzner, who served as academic dean from 1979 until 1989, who wrote the self-study for the first successful application for WASC accreditation in 1981.

In years to come, the 90's will probably be viewed as the years when the Institute increased its enrollment from 400 to more than 1000, created an undergraduate program and extended its campus to the length of the superhighway. The once controversial School for Transformative Learning has created for the entire Institute, and particularly for the School of Consciousness and Transformation of which it is now an essential part, the ability to reach doctoral students on-line. In the near future the Institute will offer bachelors and masters degrees on-line, thereby reaching students throughout the United States and the world who are committed to the reintegration of the spiritual and the academic.

It is possible for learning on-line to be at least as spiritual as classroom learning, and for an on-line course on personal and institutional transformation to be more embodied than a course concerned with spiritual teachings. The spiritual will be real, transformative and embodied not by appearances but by consciousness. I think spiritual connotes experience free of dogmatism and egoism, non-attachment to the fruits of action, as well as a combination of individual and universal, reverent and creative, immanent and transcendent, embodied and expressive.

Disagreements about the characterization of spiritual will continue, and so long as they do the Institute's mission is served. The Institute will serve its mission so long as its members continue to do serious research concerning the range, depth, varieties and implications of spiritual experience. Let this institution be the place and the community where students and faculty can work together for a non-restrictive approach to spiritual and transformative learning. To that extent, the Institute's mission, humanity and the Earth will all be well served.