

OPEN EYE

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India: An unbroken tradition of great souls and spiritual teachers

In Debt to Great Souls

Robert McDermott

In Book Seven of the Bhagavad Gita, the God Krishna explains to the warrior Arjuna, who in the course of the book becomes Krishna's student and disciple, that it is important to emulate a great soul. He also says that a great soul is very difficult to find. The Indian spiritual tradition consists in an unbroken line of great souls. In this century alone there are at least three to whom we can all readily apply the title Mahatma (great soul): Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, and M. K. Gandhi, who was named "Mahatma" by Rabindranath Tagore.

From its inception, this institution has assigned to Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi a special role in its intellectual and spiritual work. Recently, Sri Ramana Maharshi has come to the Institute's consciousness because of the inspiring stories told by his disciple, Dr. Ramchandra (Ramu) Gandhi, who is currently Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Asian and Comparative Philosophy. While Dr. Gandhi teaches and lectures on no fewer than seven modern Indian great souls—Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda,

Rabindranath Tagore, M. K. Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and J. Krishnamurti—it is Sri Ramana Maharshi, the South Indian mystic, to whom he names as his spiritual teacher.

In 1969, in commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's birth centenary, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri wrote an essay entitled "Mahatma Gandhi: Prophet of Truth and Love," in which he referred to Gandhi as "an epoch making event in the history of civilization" and "the symbol of a new hope for all mankind" (the essay is reprinted in this issue of the *Open Eye*). Dr. Chaudhuri's spiritual commitment to Sri Aurobindo did not prevent him from receiving inspiration and significant truths from other spiritual sources. As Dr. Chaudhuri and many others have long recognized, Sri Aurobindo's lofty vision and spiritual philosophy are ideally complemented by Gandhi's intensely practical experiments with truth in the push and pull of daily struggle for nonviolence and social justice.

Twenty years before Dr. Chaudhuri's essay on Gandhi, Louis Gainsborough, the primary visionary and funder of the San Francisco Academy of Asian Studies (the forerunner of this institution), produced the first U.S. film on *(continued on page 2)*



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Gandhi, entitled *Mahatma Gandhi: Twentieth Century Prophet*. Mr. Gainsborough showed this film to Dwight Eisenhower in the White House soon after Eisenhower was elected president. Mr. Gainsborough, who continues to guide Gainsborough International, an exporting corporation in San Diego, California, is still committed to the teachings of Gandhi, to the memory of Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, and to the mission of this institution. He and Dr. Ramchandra Gandhi and I have been discussing possible ways in which the cause of peace can be advanced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, Haridas Chaudhuri and the Institute.

In honor of Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri and of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Institute hosted a Gala dinner on September 29, 1995 and on the following day a symposium on "The Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi for the Modern World." The dinner was

a fundraiser for the Haridas Chaudhuri Chair in South Asian and Comparative Philosophy, occupied this year by Ramchandra Gandhi, grandson of M. K. Gandhi.

The initial gift for the chair was donated in 1989 by Mr. Laurance S. Rockefeller at the request of Dr. Ralph Metzner, who was then serving as the Institute's vice-president. Dr. Rina Sircar, who currently occupies the chair for World Buddhist Peace Studies, was Haridas Chaudhuri Professor from 1989-94. Along with its commitment to raising funds for a long-term building solution, the Institute is committed to raising funds for the Haridas Chaudhuri Chair as a way of honoring its founder and as part of its commitment to South Asian and comparative studies.

It was for the double purpose of honoring Dr. Chaudhuri (by supporting the chair which bears his name) and of commemorating the

one hundred twenty-fifth birth anniversary year of Mahatma Gandhi that 250 guests attended a dinner at Gabbiano's restaurant on September 29. The friends of the Institute who attended the Gala as well as the students of Gandhi who attended the symposium on the following day were treated to memorable talks by Dr. Gandhi and by His Excellency Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the Ambassador of India to the United States. For lovers of India, and particularly of the modern Indian renaissance, it doesn't get much better than a lecture by Ramu Gandhi, speaking on his grandfather the Mahatma and on his own spiritual teacher, Sri Ramana Maharshi, followed by a lecture by Ambassador Ray, the grandson of C. R. Das, a close colleague of Mahatma Gandhi throughout the decades of the nationalist movement, 1921-49. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, Dr. Gandhi will deliver a series of lectures in honor of Haridas Chaudhuri and as a way of raising funds for the chair devoted to Dr. Chaudhuri's spiritual and philosophical legacy.

As Ambassador Ray reminded the audience at the Gala dinner, C. R. Das was also famous for having been the lawyer who represented Aurobindo Ghose (later Sri Aurobindo) when he was on trial for sedition against the British Government of India. Nor did these two distinguished grandsons of a famous grandfather provide the only dramatic instances of high Indian lineage: Deepti Diwakar, who performed two traditional Indian dances at the conclusion of the Gala, is the granddaughter of R. R. Diwakar, author of brilliant books on both Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo. Ambassador Ray told a story at the Gala dinner which was so much appreciated (continued on page 18)

About This Issue

Honoring the Wisdom Traditions

This issue of the *Open Eye* looks back on 1995 as the occasion of the 125th anniversary year of the birth of M. K. Gandhi. We reflect on a number of figures who helped to shape the California Institute of Integral Studies and look at some of the ways the ideas and actions of these individuals continue to inspire us. President McDermott recaps the celebratory events hosted by CIIS in honor of this anniversary and talks about three great souls: M. K. Gandhi, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo. We have also reprinted an article about Gandhi written in 1969 by the Institute's founder, Haridas Chaudhuri. Ramchandra Gandhi (Haridas Chaudhuri Professor and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi) reminds us of seven of India's great sages, urging that we recognize the power of Indian spiritual wisdom and its relevance to our troubled times. In an excerpt from his new book *The Return of the Mother*, Andrew Harvey recalls Sri Aurobindo's vision of the Divine Feminine. The Divine Feminine has inspired not only Harvey's life and work, but the life of CIIS, most recently the Women's Spirituality program.

We are introducing an expanded section of *Alumni News*. We hope that this will better serve our graduates and give their accomplishments, interests, and activities more visibility in the entire Institute community.

In other news, President McDermott brings us up to date on the new location for the Institute, and we introduce a new trustee and a new academic dean. ■

transforms one into a real instrument of the Divine. It brings about a free flow of creative energy dauntless in its pursuit of the goal.

But Gandhi was not an anti-intellectual mystic. He was a rational mystic. He believed in the wholeness of the human psyche and affirmed the equal importance of reason and intuition as valuable means of apprehension of the total truth. Meditation produces intuitive glimpses and flashes of truth. But such glimpses and flashes have to be checked and re-checked by reason. They have to be evaluated with respect to their precise meaning and specific application in a given situation. It is through an harmonious interplay of reason and intuition that truth becomes a creative and dynamic force in life. It is the integrated truth-vision of the total self that alone can lay the foundation for truth-in-action. When truth comes alive in a person, love permeates his whole being. When truth and love become one in life, it gains the ability to turn clay into gold and work miracles. Gandhi's life was an embodiment of truth and love become one. Herein lies the secret of his miraculous achievements. By the magic of true love he transformed the ordinary clay of self-seeking politicians and lawyers, businessmen and intellectuals into self-sacrificing national heroes. By his magnetic personality he brought together in brotherly cooperation the antagonistic groups and parties, the oppressor and the oppressed, the high-caste and the untouchable, business leaders, and working men. By the power of his radiant personality, he often made the lion and the lamb lie together in peace.

The life of Gandhi is indeed the symbol of a new hope for all mankind. It focuses attention upon the profoundest spiritual potential of man for manifesting the Divine in human society. Gandhi inspires us with his thoughts and deeds to participate in the building of a new world order based upon the sense of sacredness of all life and the equality of all races and nations. ■

Distinguished Faculty

Robert McDermott

An institution of higher learning has many complementary needs, one of which is for individuals whose excellence inspires their colleagues and observers. It is with this in mind that in recent years we have brought a number of distinguished faculty to the Institute. Individuals who have fulfilled this role for our society have included people like Itzak Perlman and Yo Yo Ma, Steve Young and Cal Ripkin, Gloria Steinem and the late Barbara Jordan. My own choice for the most inspiring persons of our present time are Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, and, of course, His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For the past several years, the names of our distinguished faculty, each of whom has received national or international recognition and honors for their work, have been indelibly associated with this institution. James Bugenthal is a famed existential therapist and author. Pamela (Apela) Colorado (of the Oneida Nation) is co-founder of the Worldwide Indigenous Science Network and co-director of the Institute's Traditional Knowledge research concentration in the Integral Studies Doctoral program. Apela's life's work has centered on the revitalization and continuation of Native knowledge and Native life. Ramchandra Gandhi, Haridas Professor of South Asian and Comparative Philosophy, is a noted lecturer, author, scholar, philosopher, and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Stanislav Grof is one of the founders and chief theoreticians of transpersonal psychology and founding president of the International Transpersonal Association. Since 1960 he has been researching non-ordinary states of consciousness, approaches to spiritual emergency, and the relationship between consciousness studies and recent developments in science, particularly quantum physics.

Joan Halifax offers a unique integration of many years of study with Buddhist teachers, shamans, and medicine people throughout the world. She worked with the late mythologist Joseph Campbell, and has founded the Ojai Foundation, which promotes an integrated educational approach to cultural and spiritual traditions, and the Upaya Foundation, to encourage practices that foster effective action and right livelihood. Andrew Harvey, writer, internationally renowned scholar, and mystic, was the youngest Fellow ever elected to All Soul's College, Oxford University. A selection from his 1995 book *The Return of the Mother* is reprinted in this issue. Andrew is offering four public lectures at CIIS on March 7, 14, 21, and 28 outlining his vision of the Sacred Feminine and its revolutionary return. (Contact the Public Programs and Workshops office for details.)

The pioneering work of Charlene Spretnak, who lectures throughout the U.S. and Europe, has contributed to the framing of the women's spirituality, ecofeminist, and Green politics movements. Her most recent book is *States of Grace*. Richard Tarnas, former director of education and programs at Esalen Institute, is the author of *The Passion of the Western Mind*, an influential book that presents a narrative history of Western thought. William Irwin Thompson, a cultural theorist and founding director of the Lindisfarne Association, is a prolific writer perhaps most widely known for his book, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light*. He has taught religion, political science, consciousness studies, and Celtic studies. Robert Thurman, who will present a series of public lectures at CIIS in February, is founder-director of Tibet House in New York and is Jay Tsong Professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies at Columbia University. With His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he is writing *The Tibetan Book of Inner Science*.

Five years ago the faculty of this Institute had few members whose reputations transcended the institution. Incredibly, the one faculty member with a national reputation, Ralph Metzner, had served for the (continued on page 20)