

Bhanté, John Bennett, College for Continuous Education and Claymont

“In the same year (1973), Bennett began editing Gurdjieff's Third Series of writings, *Life is Real Only Then When I Am*, undertaking its publication on behalf of the Gurdjieff family (who were having difficulties in dealing with the Gurdjieff Foundation). He also revisited Turkey, meeting with Hajji [Muzaffer Özak](#) al-Jerrahi^[10] (1916-1985), the Grand Shaykh of the Halveti-Jerrahi Sufi Order.

During the period of the second course at the Academy, a Theravada Buddhist monk and teacher from Cambodia named [Bhante Dharmawara](#)^[11] (1889-1999) came to Sherborne at Bennett's invitation. During his visit Dharmawara introduced meditation techniques that continue to be practised by many people.

Other visitors to the Academy were **Süleyman Dede**^[12] (1904-1985), head of the [Mevlevi](#) Order in Konya, as well as Süleyman Dede's disciple [Reshad Feild](#) (1934-2016). Idries Shah paid a brief visit during the first year, but soon left, with harsh views on the attitudes and disposition of the students.

Throughout the period of the Institute's existence, Bennett had been toying with the idea of founding a spiritual community. He saw the [Sermon on the Mount](#) as a document describing the true community. His contact with Idries Shah combined this in his mind with the possibility of establishing a Power House where 'enabling energies' could be concentrated. He set his sights on some kind of self-sufficient community, populated by Sherborne graduates, to evolve out of the school. He was profoundly influenced by contemporary ideas, such as those of [Schumacher](#), about the need for alternative technology and by the argument of conservationists for intelligent, ecologically sound agriculture. He was also greatly impressed that his spiritual hero and inner teacher, [Khwaja Ubaidallah Ahrar](#) (15th century) had turned to farming after his period of training.

The soaring price of land in the UK led to Bennett's interest in starting something in the USA. In 1974, he signed an agreement whereby the Institute loaned \$100,000 to a newly formed society for the foundation of a psychokinetic community. He signed this document shortly before his death on December 13, 1974.”

<The [Claymont Society](#) was founded to attempt to carry out Bennett's vision, but without the help of his guidance. **Süleyman Dede** sent his son to Claymont for at least a year with special request that Bhanté guide his spiritual development. **Süleyman Dede's** disciple, [Reshad Feild](#) led a modern sufi life with in depth emersion in Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. Reshad was a horseman, aikido practitioner and deeply spiritual presence. Reshad was also an early student on Pir Vilayat Khan of the Abode of the Message. Reshad taught in Boulder, Colorado among other places. A peripatetic soul as was Bhanté.>

“In the summer of 1974, Mr Bennett visited [Maharishi Mahesh Yogi](#) in Rome to question him about Transcendental Meditation and his interpretation of the [Bhagavad Gita](#). Bennett had been initiated into TM several years before and first met Maharishi in 1959. He disputed Maharishi's presentation of the Gita in which Maharishi eliminated the need for sacrifice and suffering.

In the last year of his life, he gradually made it known to those working with him, that his own personal task centered on the creation of a way of religious worship that would be accessible to men and women of the West who were lacking in religious formation. During this period he made experiments with the Islamic [namaz](#) and Sufi [zikr](#).

The teachings he developed in his last years were recorded and published in a series of books put together by Anthony Blake. He showed that at last he was independent of Gurdjieff and had his own understanding of the spiritual world, based on a radical questioning of all current assumptions.

Bennett died on Friday, December 13, 1974, shortly after the start of the fourth course. That course, and the fifth, were completed by his wife, working with a few of his most experienced pupils.

With his death the Institute was faced with the typical problems of a body which had been led almost single-handedly by one man since its inception. The decision was taken to continue the Academy's work until the five-year period, originally specified by Bennett, had been completed. The setting up of the USA community at Claymont Court, West Virginia, went ahead.

In the months before he died, Bennett worked to establish an experimental "ideal human society" embodying the methods and ideas that he had developed and derived from Gurdjieff. He made substantial efforts to overcome the rifts that had grown between different groups of Gurdjieff's followers, and was beginning to talk about the development of new forms of worship appropriate for the modern world.”

The above is from the Wikipedia page on John G Bennett:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_G._Bennett

The above quote documents a deep spiritual connection between John Bennett and Bhanṭé Dharmawara. Bhanṭé felt that Bennett was a true seeker and a diligent practitioner of spiritual life. Bhanṭé brought the color healing system he decoded to students at Sherborne and then to Claymont. Claymont is in Charles Town, W VA, on a property that is reported to have belonged to George Washington in the 18th century.

An anecdote that I have heard from at least half a dozen separate people has to do with John Bennett's passing and Bhanṭé becoming a spiritual advisor to the community at Sherborne.

About a month before his death, Mr. Bennett confided to his most trusted students that

he would soon pass and that they should contact the Venerable Dharmawara to inform him and to request him to return to Sherborne.

A telegram was sent to Bhanṭé at the Ashoka Mission in Mehrauli area of Delhi. About an hour after the telegram had been sent, a call was received from London Heathrow airport. The Ven. Dharmawara had arrived and was seeking their assistance to travel to the Sherborne facility.

The students were surprised since the telegram had barely been sent. Bhanṭé simply explained that his friend John Bennett had summoned him. Bhanṭé asked if they had been informed by Mr. Bennett of his role as meditation teacher and spiritual advisor. Yes, indeed, the students had been told. What surprised them is how Bhanṭé seems to have set out to travel from Delhi to London at essentially the time of Mr. Bennett's passing, many hours before the telegram was sent.

In my time with Bhanṭé there were a number of instances where his awareness transcended logic and usual conventions. He never made any claims; he always had what was needed in the moment through fully engaged and absolutely non-attached living.