

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

NEWSLETTER



In the flow of religious thought and practice,
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest.



FELLOWSHIP MATTERS

The Unitarian movement is small – and getting smaller! However, almost every month the NUF is pleased to welcome new members; it is interesting to learn how they came to find us. For quite a few, the NUF website has been the first point of contact; for others, moving to an area without a Unitarian chapel nearby, our fellowship provides a means of staying in contact with the Unitarian ‘ world ’; sadly, for some whose much loved chapel has closed, the NUF remains their only way of retaining a connection with the movement.

To those of our members who are also in membership of a Unitarian chapel, I would make a special request this year that they try to make the NUF better known; I have been surprised to meet several long-standing Unitarians who have never heard of us! Can you pass on your Newsletters/Viewpoints to members of your chapel who infrequently attend owing to infirmity or travel difficulties? If a particular edition interests you and you would like extra copies for others, please contact the Secretary. We have quite a few surplus copies each month, particularly Viewpoints – we were pleased this year to receive a request from a member for 20 extra copies of a Viewpoint!

An insert with the last Viewpoint reminded you that it is necessary to elect *three* ordinary members to the Committee of the Fellowship to serve for three years from April 2012. Names of candidates should be sent to the Returning Officer (Mrs. E. Lewis-Jones, 20 Grover’s Field, Abercynon, Mountain Ash, Rhondda, Cynon Taf, CF45 4PP) **by February 14th 2012** at the latest, duly proposed and seconded by current members of the NUF; candidates are further asked to submit a profile not exceeding 250 words to the Newsletter Editor by *the same date*, to be included in the March Newsletter which will include voting slips and details of date and venue of the count.

The Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (including the AGM of the NUF) will take place this year at Keele University from April 3rd – 6th 2012. These meetings are open to any Unitarian to attend but advance booking is essential and forms should be available for download on the GA website at www.unitarian.org.uk where further details may be found.

Ken Smith

Do you hold your beliefs lightly or tightly? When I hold them tightly, I arrogantly believe everyone should believe as I do. When I hold them lightly, I appreciate other's perspectives/points-of-view, even if they may not be mine. The spiritual path is not about trying to get rid of or not have beliefs. It is about holding them lightly because you know that they are simply one perspective among billions. When we cling to a belief, we are stuck. When we hold it lightly we are not stuck. . . . we are free.

Michael Jeffreys

Cover Picture: ‘It must have been the fox’ – Reflections page 5

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

THE TIN BATH

I have always kept dogs. In the past they were Blue Roan Spaniels but latterly cross-bred rescued dogs. Dogs need walking and about 8 a.m. each morning we would set off across the field to the River Tame. Other dogs were exercised at that time and a sort of dog-walking club grew up. The dogs chased each other and the humans, who ranged from an American colonel to a school dinner lady walked along solving all the village problems and for that matter any other problem that cropped up world-wide. Few things reduced us to silence. One was when the helicopter carrying Myra Hindley up over Saddleworth Moor to identify possible grave sites passed overhead. One woman called out, "Shove her out." Silence fell and then we remembered that the shouter was Polish and had been one of the few who had seen the inside of Treblinka camp and lived.

One day a new dog-walker joined the group. She had a Rhodesian Ridgeback, 'Abigail' a delightful lolling puppy. Trouble was that she lolloped all over the water meadows into the river and covered herself with mud. Her owner had a pristine new bungalow and refused to let her inside unwashed. The dog walkers decided that the only thing was to buy a tin bath. However, it seemed that tin baths were no longer made and the hunt was on for a second-hand one. Something stirred in my memory. I seemed to remember a full sized tin bath hanging on a peg in the cellar of Mossley Unitarian Church. And so it was.

Negotiations began and the bath was finally loaded into a 4 x 4 and a donation was made. Everybody happy. Problem solved. One thing still worried me. What was the bath doing in the cellar? Finally I asked an elderly member of the congregation. "In the past," she said, "the Whit walks were much bigger than they are today. We made tea for all the walkers, the Sunday School, the Brass Band." "But the tin bath?" I persisted. "Oh," she said, "that was for the jelly. We made a bathful of jelly."

Whilst you are struggling with the bathful of strawberry jelly I would hastily add that the moral of this rather rambling story is that almost anything can be recycled. So, with the bath in mind gather all the uneaten scraps for the compost bucket, the broken furniture for Emmaus to repair and sell the unwanted presents for the charity shop and the waste paper for the Council sack. If all this seems too lugubrious, think of the words of the Yorkshire Anthem, 'Ikla Moor Baht' at'. It says it all!

Happy Green New Year

Thought for 2012: 'If you see someone without a smile give them one of yours.'

Dorothy Archer

THE MINISTER'S MUSINGS

I have only ever kept one New Year's Resolution - and that was quite trivial. I have kept it to this day and its success is because it was achievable and caused me no discomfort - it just required a very small change of a regular routine. We make resolutions because perhaps we have recognised a shortcoming in ourselves. It says much that in most cases a new year resolution only lasts a few days. Don't resolve to change the unchangeable or the unachievable!

One of the readings I like to use at services around the time of New Year is the title piece from Robert Fulgrum's 'All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten'. He was a Unitarian Universalist minister when he wrote the pieces that make up this book. It became a best seller and made him quite rich.

He starts off by saying how every year he used to write a personal credo and how initially it was many pages long. Over the years it became shorter and shorter until he realised that all he had to write was what he had learned in kindergarten. Basically it is about being kind, looking after each other, sharing and taking time out for relaxation. Sounds easy of course but we know that it is an ideal that only a few aspire to.

Children leave kindergarten to start engaging with the real world with its competitiveness and the struggle between the parental pressure to perform better and the peer pressure to conform more and stay in the herd. We all grow up tainted by the pressures of modern life. We become jealous and we also feel inadequate. We can be ruthless and we can also be bullied. We need to be liked and loved but we also often have to cope with being disliked and unloved.

I suppose we should all ask ourselves, as the New Year begins, 'What one small achievable and lasting change can I make in my life that will make those in my life feel better - and make me feel better too?' It should not need to be a credo many pages long - but it could come from those kindergarten days.

Happy New Year

Tony McNeile

New Year's Day... now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.

Mark Twain

A New Year's resolution is something that goes in one Year and out the other.

Anon

REFLECTIONS

It must have been the Fox

The fox, elegant and handsome in her bright chestnut coat, was a lone vixen, her mate shot by a neighbouring farmer and no cubs in her earth. Having no babies to feed she hunted modestly but knew that this would not spare her from either the gun or the marauding terriers. Killing rabbits and birds, stealing autumn fruit, taking the occasional straying chicken, she was widely feared across Martyr's Marsh.

A pair of Indian Runner Ducks, the darlings of the sprawling marshland farm, had mislaid their eight ducklings. The parent ducks ran wildly about the poultry field their long necks and Roman noses stretched up to the sky, their fawn and white feathers ruffled by the freshening breeze, the duck quacking loudly and the drake crying hoarsely for his children. The little ducklings, no longer tiny bundles of pale brown thistledown floating on the shallow farmyard pool, had gone into the sea fret of an early May morning, and had disappeared.

"Well, we all know what has happened. It's the fox again. Couldn't be anyone else." The big Romney ewe sneezed, bleated and looked down her long nose. "You can never, ever trust a fox. Kills anything that moves." She turned sorrowful eyes across the marsh to where the little brick church rose modest on its grassy island and the great copper beaches on the ridge beyond stood like burnished clouds against the bright morning sky. Lying in her basket in the loosebox next to the paddock where the Romneys were grazing, Meg the collie watched the farmer searching the barn for the ducklings, round the back of feed bins, under the old rusty tractor and deep inside an abandoned wooden horse trough. All he found was a pair of disgruntled mice plundering a sack of barley and a dozy hedge pig who snuffled cantankerously at the intruder.

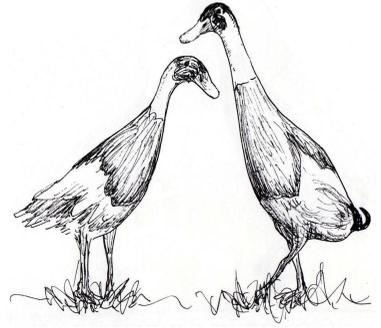
Early next morning Meg was awakened by a brief high pitched bark. There, barely ten yards away, was the fox, a dark silhouette on the coral canvas of the newly rising sun. She stared at Meg, cocked her head as if to say, 'Are you coming then?' and turned away. The fox ran, Meg ran and, alerted by the sound of their barking, the farmer ran too. Down the drive, along the lane, over and under the field gate and across the wide grass towards the little church they all went, the fox glancing over her shoulder at them as she flew. She leaped the small stream which ran close to the church and there finally she stopped.

"Well, I'll be ..." the farmer whispered. Trapped between the retaining board and the bank, feebly cheeping their distress, were eight little long necked bedraggled ducklings. He knelt down and gently taking them from the water he put them still protesting into the deep pockets of his

milking coat. The fox stood, looked for a long moment at Meg, and lolloped away towards Elmchurch Wood leaving farmer and dog to take the intrepid explorers home.

“Well that has to be a small miracle of unexpected kindness.” Meg thought as she returned to the farm. “Not at all. There is some kindness in every creature,” the big ewe pronounced sententiously. “I knew all along that the brave intelligent rescuer would be my dear friend the fox.” Meg sighed, shook her head and wondered yet again why when God made sheep he omitted to include their brains.

(Indian runners drawn by Liz EgebäckFoxbrook)



Naomi Linnell

AN OPENING BOW

To bow to the fact of our life's sorrows and betrayals is to accept them; and from this deep gesture we discover that all life is workable. As we learn to bow, we discover that the heart holds more freedom and compassion than we could imagine. The Persian poet Rumi speaks of it this way:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
Empty of its furniture.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing,
And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.

From *After Enlightenment the Laundry*' by Jack Cornfield

(Contributed by Colin Carvel)

THE CULT OF ASCLEPIUS IN ANCIENT GREECE

On a recent coach tour of the Peloponnese in southern Greece, we stopped one warm October afternoon at the sanctuary of Asclepius in ancient Epidaurus. In contrast to the previous day's visit to the fortified cities of Mycenae and Tiryns, which have come down to us as the sites of a warlike race, this sanctuary has always held aloof from war and power struggles, remaining true to its original calling as a place of healing.

As we walked around the ruins, it struck me that here Nature herself was fully in tune with the wishes and intentions of the god of healing, for the sanctuary is a peaceful and restful region, well endowed with woods and groves. In these ideal surroundings, which even today have a soothing effect on its visitors, the god Asclepius, the supreme physician, brought healing through the medium of skilled doctors to those who came seeking his help with faith in his powers, as numerous witnesses attest. We should not forget that the ancient peoples assigned supernatural powers to their gods, even if these were at times not completely free of human failings. An appeal to them had its transcendental effect as in any other religion: confiding prayer brought to its suppliants, if not complete healing, then new-found strength.



How does Asclepius fit into the panoply of the Greek gods? He was semi-divine, being the son of Apollo and the mortal Coronis. In one version, his mother died in labour and was laid out on the pyre to be consumed, but the father rescued the baby, cutting him from her womb. From this comes the name 'Asclepios', meaning 'to cut open'. Apollo carried the infant to the centaur Chiron who raised Asclepius and instructed him in the art of medicine.

Asclepius was later married to Epione with whom he had six daughters. Their names, such as Hygieia and Panacea, clearly reflect the general family theme of 'good health'. It was said of Asclepius that he was a gentle, deeply loving soul, much loved by the common people. He is associated with the healing influence of nature, the

Asclepius embracing and replenishing quality of Mother Earth, and he earned the epithet 'blameless' from the poet Homer.

Wandering south with his healing entourage from the mountains and plains of Thessaly, the godly physician walked everywhere, his snake-wrapped staff in hand, with his disciples following him. Finally his followers, the carriers of his religious and healing cult, reached the verdant

valley on the Argoloid peninsula of the Peloponnese. Here the major healing sanctuary of the god was established in 600 BC. News of his healing ways gradually spread throughout the Mediterranean world, radiating from Epidauros with both major and minor sanctuaries elsewhere.



As a healer, Asclepius achieved great fame for occasionally being able to bring life back to the dead. On one occasion, however, he raised Hippolytus from the dead and accepted gold for it; this angered Zeus so much that he killed Asclepius with a thunderbolt. His semi-divine status earned him a place among the stars as Ophiuchos, the Serpent-Holder, and to this day a snake-entwined staff, the rod of Asclepius, remains the enduring symbol of medicine.

In his honour, snakes were often used in healing rituals, and non-venomous snakes were allowed to crawl on the floor in dormitories where the sick and injured slept. From about 300BC onwards, the cult of Asclepius grew very popular, and pilgrims flocked to his healing temples (or Asclepieia) to be cured of their ills. Supplicants would spend the night in the holiest part of the sanctuary – the abytton – and their dreams would be interpreted by the healer-priest. These experiences were often followed by recorded healings, many of which would be regarded as miracles by modern standards. The priest understood that each person held within himself the elements of the cure, and it was his or her function to help the patient discover them.

According to ancient sources, Asclepius' tomb is at Epidauros. If the god is buried there, it would make Epidauros an especially powerful and sacred crossroads. But it was not only the efficacy of his healing methods that attracted so many supplicants and led to the great size and influence of Epidauros. They contained a fundamental principle that is at the core of our modern crisis in health care and must be restored if true healing is to be available to people who are suffering.

Epidauros was a sacred sanctuary, a place permeated by the spirit of the god. Patients were not "treated" as in the modern sense, and the physician-priests were not the principle characters in the drama of healing. Rather, patients were immersed in a complete sacred ecology, the physician-priests guiding the process, but the nature of the process itself guaranteed that afflicted people healed themselves through their own hard-won meeting with the god. As mythologist Carl Kerényi explains:

"A place for incubation served for the most direct possible method of healing. The patient himself was offered an opportunity to bring about the cure whose elements he bore within himself. To this end an environment was created which, as in modern spas and health resorts, was as far removed as

possible from the disturbing and unhealthful elements of the outside world. The religious atmosphere also helped man's innermost depths to accomplish their curative potentialities."

So, at Epidauros, the priest-physician was only a guide to a process, not an authority figure who instigated the process, so he remained very much in the background. The seeker needed to enter and directly experience rhythmic consciousness in order to achieve that which heals – a meeting with the god.

On my holiday, I had the good fortune to wander among the sacred groves of Epidauros and drink in the soothing balm of the ancient Asclepian healing sanctuary. I imagined the many thousands of ill and suffering who had arrived there as a means for healing what was otherwise intractable and inconsolable. And I imagined, for a people whose world was much closer to the gods than ours is, how a direct message or visit from the divine world might forever have altered and rearranged both spiritual and physical health for the better. Here indeed was an earthly shrine whose divine influence radiated to the far corners of the known world with genuine power, compassion, hope and divine encounter, such as we long for today.

Nick Morrice (30th October 2011)

DANCING IN MY HEAD: DOING WHAT WE DO WELL

Many personal and organisational development models take a deficit reduction approach – they focus on problems and then seek ways to tackle those. One difficulty with this is that you focus a lot of energy on what doesn't work, often trying to make it work. And you often then ignore your biggest asset – what already works well. A solution-focused (sometimes called a future-focused) approach suggests that we

- * Don't fix what isn't broken;
- * Find what works, and do more of it; and
- * Stop doing what doesn't work, and do something else.

A solution-focused approach uses the fact that change is always happening to our advantage by amplifying useful change however small. No problem exists at its worse all the time – the trick is to understand when things are better and why, then use this information to focus on getting better outcomes. Such approaches can be used in our personal lives, our spiritual lives and with the communities and organisations that we belong to and/or work with. But what does this mean in practice?

I remember some years ago having spent a week's holiday stripping down my small kitchen ready for decorating. Yes, a week! At the end of the week with an undecorated kitchen I realised that I should not spend my

precious time doing what I couldn't do and didn't enjoy. I decided to find something that I could do, make some money from that and pay a decorator. I wondered what I could do additional to my full-time day job with family commitments. After sorting through some far-fetched ideas I came to a very dull conclusion. I should do what I had a track record in doing (a range of things around welfare and regeneration) focusing on those that I most enjoyed. In the end I got a job tutoring students with the Open University which fitted round my family responsibilities – and I raised the money to pay for a decorator. Many more people benefited from me focusing on what I did well rather than what I did badly.

And what about our spiritual lives? Again from personal experience, I have tried many times to enjoy meditation and silence. To be honest I do like silence but that's because I can then do some thinking. Clearing my mind is not something I want to do – I like my mind being busy. The way that I de-stress is to be physically active e.g. playing sports or doing aerobics. And the way that I develop spiritually is being active in community and observing the miracle of creation – the relationships that we co-create which make a dynamic community.

I have tried to get some benefits from meditation but I have concluded that whilst it works for some it doesn't really work for me plus I don't enjoy it. A few weeks ago after our Monday Gathering led by a wonderful woman who teaches meditation elsewhere, she asked how I'd got on with the ten-minute meditation which was included in her 'service'. She is well-versed in the diversity of personality types and understands me well. Most importantly she wasn't judging but wanted to make sure that I'd gotten something out of the experience.

I said I was fine – I am not visual so when I close my eyes I don't see much at all and just amuse myself thinking about all sorts. If there's music then I dance in my head – it's wonderful. I am not (necessarily) doing what everyone else is doing but I am doing what suits me. On our individual spiritual quests we need to find what works for us. We don't need to fix ourselves if we feel different to others but honour what we are. Therefore find out what works and do more of it. And appreciate what doesn't work and stop doing that.

In community it is not as straightforward as that, as my experience at our Monday Gathering showed. It is about giving and taking, recognising and valuing other people's differences and attempting to ensure that everyone gets a little something from what we do. There are of course some things that we need to do just to survive. If we are poor then often we don't have many choices. However a solution-focused approach would identify when a problem situation was better, examine why it was better and try to replicate that. It is about learning from the smallest of improvements and amplifying them.

Another example: we were a small Unitarian community growing slowly and we needed to develop the bonds between each of us, to strengthen the core group. What didn't work was trying to do this over tea and coffee after the service. It fulfilled its purpose of a generally sociable time when we could chat briefly with people but it didn't work for anything deeper. We were (and are) good talkers but needed an opportunity to talk when we weren't making tea, adding up money, doing business and washing up – just too much to do after the service. We didn't stop doing refreshments after the service but we did stop expecting it to produce more than it could.

Many of the community were walkers so we started a walking group. Having experienced and passionate walkers in the group has meant a good range and quality of walks – well-planned routes and encouragement for those who are not used to walking any distance. We walk side-by-side and we get to know each other without really trying. Those who do not like to walk or who cannot are invited to join our pub lunch afterwards. We have focused on what we are good at (talking not walking) and found a way to do more of this. We believe that this has made a significant difference to our relationships.

The first time I worked with another organisation delivering a solutions-focused workshop was a bit hairy. I had planned the day as a problem solving day and changed it the week before. The person who had asked me to do this was a bit concerned and so was I. But I am able to refocus workshops as I lead them, actively managing the process. So I thought that if it started to go pear-shaped I would be able to rescue it and go back to the original plan. In the event it worked very well. People left the workshop uplifted as they had spent three hours talking about what they were all good at. I continue to work in this way when working with organisations and groups of people. I also do a bit of personal mentoring and it can be quite an eye-opener for people to be asked to focus on their strengths.

Some remark that this is just looking at things positively. In a way it is but it is not about being a glass-half full person. It is a model of change. Appreciate what works well, understand what makes it work even better and then do more of that. My brother recently sent me a book of short articles by '62 business thinkers pushing you to rethink the way you work' (End Malaria, edited by Michael Bungay Stanier). I am reading it very slowly – there are some very good ideas – often simple but nevertheless challenging.

The first one is written Kevin Kelly (editor, writer, photographer, conservationist and student digital culture) and is entitled, 'What you don't have to do'. In it he says, *'When you are doing something well that others want, and you are the only one who can do it, you will be uncommonly rewarded'*. He suggests that most of us will take a lifetime to discover that unique contribution that we can make. Perhaps the scariest part is that we have to stop doing those things that others do as well or better than us. This seems to me like a solution-focused approach to ones whole life.

As individuals and as local and national faith communities we need to find out what we do best. This fits with the oft quoted, *'to become the best you that you can be'*. We need to do more of this and much less of what we are not good at or others are better at. Indeed if we can, we should stop doing those things. Or at the very least for those things that we have to keep doing, identify when we are performing better than usual, find out why and amplify that. And if we are to use our energies more effectively we should spend less time thinking about our problems and more time thinking about our achievements.

Louise Rogers

NUF Committee Member

Member of Staffordshire Unitarian Community

CHANGES AT THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE

"I think people who haven't visited the centre for a while will be delighted to see just how much has changed at Nightingale," explained Stella, Centre Manager, as the details of the Christmas weekends were announced. "The improvements have focused on raising the standard of accommodation. The light tubes are just one of the innovations we are particularly proud of. They have turned dark and dingy areas in to light and airy spaces just using natural light." Stella has set herself a target of one new improvement a month. For the first time the kitchen is using ingredients grown in the new vegetable plot and herb bed with berries foraged from fruiting areas. "Employing a second chef has increased the diversity of the menu and has been another exciting move forward which will be particularly wonderful at Christmas. It is a time of year that really seems to bring out the best in the village here and we are always being told by guests what a truly magical atmosphere there is and they are always delighted just how much happens in and around the area. If you looking to ease the strain of Christmas this year, why not consider relaxing with us here at the Nightingale?"

'An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions'

A new book from the Cambridge University Press written by Andrea Greenwood and Mark W. Harris, Unitarian Universalist ministers. They offer an historical and a thematic approach to the development of a free faith. Available from publisher and online book retailers.

For further information:

http://www.cambridge.org/gb/knowledge/isbn/item6432939/?site_locale=en_GB

JAINISM

Part 2

Compassion and reverence for all life is paramount and must be seen in action. There are Jains who, for instance, will buy captive animals in order to set them free. Non-violence (ahimsa) is often practised to an extreme degree. Jains are strict vegetarians and avoid killing and harming all life-forms – even such as the atoms in the wind or in water. The monks and nuns wear a face-mask to avoid swallowing insects and carry a soft broom to sweep the ground in front of them as they walk in order to avoid stepping on insects.

Lay-people avoid drinking after dark in case an insect is accidentally swallowed. If they can afford it, Jains will employ non-Jains to lie on their bed to attract any bed-bug that may be there – only then will they go to sleep for the bugs are gone and cannot be squashed.

The ethic of ahimsa means that Jains must work in occupations which are not liable to destroy life. They must distance themselves from any act of injury or aggression. This includes detachment from the mechanism which drives the ego to possess and consume. Non-violence is not relative but absolute.

The laity, unlike their monks, can expect final liberation from physical existence only in some future life. Jain life revolves around the ‘Three Jewels’: right belief, right knowledge and right conduct. A commitment to asceticism is eventually a requirement for the laity but only as a preparation for rebirth as an ascetic. In this case lay-people take the five ‘Lesser Vows’: non-violence, truthfulness in all matters, honesty in all dealings, self-control in sexual matters and a moderate life-style which includes giving to the needy and to religious causes.

Those who join the ascetic orders take the five ‘Greater Vows’: non-violence in thought, word and deed, truthfulness, a reliance entirely on alms and having no permanent place of abode, avoidance of all sexual matters and a detachment from all possessions and sense-objects. Some monks possess nothing, go naked and use their hands as a begging bowl. Some own a bare minimum of articles. The focus always is on shedding all karmic matter (generated by one’s actions) which binds itself to the soul. The soul purified, liberation is achieved.

Monks and nuns, in same-sex groups, live a life of increasing discipline. They are mobile for most of the year travelling round giving instruction. They spend time in temples, in study centres and at places of pilgrimage; their days otherwise are taken up in meditation and ritual. In old age a monk or nun may choose to die voluntarily by ritual fasting. This ensures that spiritual progress is not impeded by clinging to material existence at the end of life. Their commitment to the idea of renunciation is thus confirmed.

Jain temples are among the finest in India. The Jain community is a wealthy one and money is willingly spent on maintaining and improving their places of worship. Mornings are times for quiet devotion, evenings are times for music and sometimes dancing. The sign of the swastika is an ancient symbol and has meaning for Jains, Buddhists and Hindus. It is thought to bring good luck and is often painted over the doors of houses. Jain temples are constructed mainly of white marble and there are intricate designs swastikas and colourful inlays of enamel or stone on the walls and ceilings. The temples contain images of the twenty four Tirthakaras, which are revered. The worshippers offer them food and flowers, prayers are said and hymns sung. In this way the laity express their gratitude for the example which they have been shown. It is also an expression of their hope and commitment to attainment of the same goal. Other activities in which the laity are involved are rites of passage, pilgrimages, observance of holidays and veneration of monks and nuns.

Jain merchants have always travelled in order to pursue business opportunities, not east to the big cities in India. During the twentieth century Jains have emigrated from India to America and Africa. A significant number have come to the U.K. and many live in London. The main temple in England is in Leicester. Many Jains have come from East Africa having been forced out of Uganda by Idi Amin. Other communities are in Antwerp (Belgium), Kobe (Japan) and Nairobi (Kenya).

As the strictures of the monastic code have made it impossible for monks and nuns to travel abroad, Jain communities have been almost exclusively lay. The situation called into question the matter of identity. Members of the laity found it necessary to fill gaps and to pass on the teachings. Identity is also reinforced by such as familial and cultural environment, neither of which is available to the expatriate Jain. However, like all religious traditions Jainism has responded to contemporary problems by, amongst other things, creating a new class of temporary monks and nuns. They are able to travel abroad and minister to the communities.

Jains make up a small minority in India but their influence is far-reaching. Although persecuted at times, they have always remained tolerant. They have a belief in the 'may-sidedness of reality', that different viewpoints can be defended. Their steadfast philosophy of non-violence, which now includes a concern for ecological matters, is to be greatly admired.

Michael Ablett

Correction: My apologies to Michael Ablett for three transcription errors in his article on Jainism (Part 1) in Issue 398 page 19. 'samsara' in paragraphs 3, 5 and 8 should be 'samana/s'.

CALLING ALL NUF MEMBERS IN WALES . . .

It been an exciting year for the Unitarian cause in Wales. In 2011, we witnessed.

- The successful GA meetings in Swansea.
- The growth of Bangor Unitarians, and the recognition of Bangor by the GA.
- The appointment of a professional General Secretary of the Welsh Department (i.e. mel!), working on a part-time contract.

As the Welsh Secretary, I have been able to work on a number of initiatives:

- A small presence at the National Eisteddfod at Wrexham in 2011. Previously, we have only been visible at the Eisteddfod on its alternate years in south Wales.
- Twitter feed and a blog for our communications.
- Affiliation to the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, to promote social issues.
- Proposed affiliation to the Wales inter-faith council.
- Promotion of the Unitarians in various internal and external forums.

I am quite proud of the fact that I came into Unitarianism as a “drifter”, via the NUF. This is something which sets me apart from my Welsh Department colleagues, who tend to have a strong connection to a particular place of worship. And, as we take stock and consolidate our activities in Wales, it occurred to me that the Welsh Department should make every effort to contact members of the NUF who live in Wales. I would also be interested to know how many NUF members live in Wales, and to try and make contact with them.

However, the reality of Data Protection law means that it would not be advisable for me to see the NUF membership list, to seek out names and addresses in Wales, as the NUF is clearly a separate organisation from the Welsh Department.

However, I would like to invite any NUF members who live in Wales (or who have a Welsh connection) to please get in touch with me, if they feel so inclined. I’m sure that closer links between the Welsh Department, and NUF members in Wales, can only be a good thing.

As Welsh Department Secretary, I would like to let readers know that I am free to meet with individual Unitarians, and to promote our faith, in all corners of Wales. Here are my own contact details – I look forward to hearing from you, one way or another! Bye for now...

Address: Carwyn Tywyn, 16 Heol Gwendraeth, Porth Tywyn/Burry Port, Carmarthenshire/Sir Gaerfyrddin, SA16 0AN Phone: (01554) 833194/07973 851590
Email: ctywyn@unitarian.org.uk Twitter: [@UndodiaidCymru](https://twitter.com/UndodiaidCymru)

Carwyn Tywyn

THERE IS A GOD

By Antony Flew

The subtitle of this book is ‘How the world’s most notorious atheist changed his mind’. The book is partly an autobiography and partly traces the development of Professor Flew’s philosophy over his considerable lifetime – to the point at which he rejected the atheism he had propagated for most of it. Having written a number of influential books arguing against the existence of God as well as having numerous written and verbal debates with theologians over the years he says he went where the evidence led. His was not a conversion of faith or religious experience but based on the central theme that the non-existence of God or an ‘Infinite Intelligence’ began to seem so improbable to him as to unseat his atheism. Many people who have transcendental or religious experiences or simply faith may find this kind of inquiry unnecessary. It may not be the rule that conversions usually take place through a process of deduction. But for Anthony Flew reason has been everything and it remains this which guides him and his total reliance on it still limits the scope of his current beliefs. He needs to make a case for something in order to believe it.

Nonetheless, reason cannot be divorced from religion without entering into very uncertain territory and the way in which the Divine is related to the temporal world must be understood with reference to the laws by which the temporal world is conditioned. In this regard there are many good points referenced in this book. Interestingly the findings of science are central to his arguments in favour of the existence of God. The proponents of what he calls ‘The new atheism’ of whom Richard Dawkins is the most well known come in for scathing criticism. He regards Dawkins as giving a poor account of the broader implications of evolutionary science and points to serious omissions in his referencing of the documentary evidence for Einstein’s atheism. Flew quotes several passages which attest that Einstein was a Theist. In other places he cites numerous other eminent 20th century and contemporary scientists who profess a belief in a Creator. Amongst these are the four originators of quantum theory.

Anthony Flew is a philosopher not a scientist and states quite clearly where he considers the scope of scientific knowledge ends and philosophical reason begins. He does not believe science should be in competition with philosophy but that philosophy should be informed by it. However philosophy does not simply follow on from scientific knowledge in the way that Richard Dawkins attempts to demonstrate. Indeed survival is not a purpose in itself. Survival needs to be for some higher reason before it can be said to have any meaning and thus have purpose and not just be a process.

Including the introduction but excluding the preface, appendices

(which are not written by Flew) and references, the text of this book is just 160 pages. The other parts bring it to a total of 246 pages. In this short work a wealth of ideas are explored, compared and assimilated. Some of the ideas are high-flown but most of the writing is quite accessible. Like any book approaching religious belief from the point of view of pure logic it cannot claim to be a proof of the existence of God or otherwise. Where it is useful is that it casts doubt on religious doubt. The author denies belief in an afterlife or that his change of heart has anything to do with his advanced years. He describes a journey of reason not a process of rationalisation. I am reminded of the saying to the effect that a little knowledge leads one away from God but great knowledge brings one back.

Chris Barchard (Guest reviewer)

‘TIL THE PEOPLES ALL ARE ONE:

Darwin’s Unitarian Connections

By the Rev. Cliff Reed

Cliff Reed attempts to answer the question ‘. . . to what extent – if any - are Unitarians justified in claiming the author of *The Origin of Species* as ‘one of their own’? This is a matter of great interest at a time when the inadequacy of Darwinian natural selection to explain the ‘origin of species’ and above all of self-conscious human beings is being exposed by many writers. Among them, Antony Latham makes a convincing case for ‘intelligent design’ (not fundamentalist young earth creationism) in *The Naked Emperor: Darwinism Exposed*. This book will encourage theists who reject the nihilism and shallow reductionism of Richard Dawkins and the ‘new atheists’.

(Ed.)

‘Til the Peoples all are one’ - The Lindsay Press. 2011. £7.50 + p&p.

‘The Naked Emperor’ – Janus Publishing Company. 2005. £9.95

Diamond Jubilee

Charities and community groups wishing to name a project for the Diamond Jubilee need to be careful how they do so. There is a blanket approval in place for the plain use of 'Diamond Jubilee' and 'Jubilee' for non-commercial purposes, subject to the proviso that building works start or finish in 2012 and events take place in 2012. However, anyone wishing to use other phrases - such as 'Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee,' 'Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee', or 'The Queen's Diamond Jubilee' - to name a community hall, a commemorative garden or other building or project will need to apply for permission to do so.

(GA)

MORE BOOKS FROM THE NUF COLLECTION

A Halifax Childhood by Mary Schroeder (1903-2002) published by Erskine Press 2004, is a delightful book that I have no hesitation in highly recommending. Mary was the daughter of a Unitarian Minister based throughout Mary's childhood in Halifax. We get the flavour of Mary's life in an Introduction by Hilda Ellis Davidson and 'In Memoriam: Mary Schoeder' the address given by Revd Frank Walker on her death. But it is in the meat of the book that we are taken into a childhood that led up to and included the First World War. With the skill and wisdom of age Mary is able to return to, understand and express that period of her life in all its joyousness, its discoveries of her immediate surrounding and her relationships within a family of four younger siblings, a stern father and a gifted mother. Being the artist she was, all the light and shade of childhood is deftly drawn, from stealing a bucket, being dunked in the sea by her father, being petrified at her first ride in a car and her encounter with 'the other side'. The book is well crafted, each short chapter covering an incident or memory, which seamlessly flows into the event following. Whether or not it was intentional, the book offers a way into the social history of the time, especially education which was very important in this Unitarian family. However, there is a rootedness and grittiness in the family and in the industrial town of the title. This is a book to lift one's spirits as it seemed Mary did throughout her long life. She had a zest for life and this can't fail to rub off on those who read it. It is available for loan from the NUF Collection but can also be bought from Amazon £7.16, and at the time of reading, through Amazon, one can go to Unitarian Books and buy it for £3.95 plus postage. However, there are only three copies left at the latter outlet so you may need to hurry.

Science and the Quest for God by Alister Hardy (1896-1985), is the Essex Hall Lecture of 1951, published by the Lindsey Press. This is a small booklet that can be read in less than an hour and thought about long after. More importantly it remains as good an argument, as we can read currently, regarding the importance of science and religion working together, rather than standing in opposition to each other. Hardy writes: "Can the scientific method be used to re-establish faith when hitherto the advance of science has done much to undermine it?" This lecture was given in 1951, eighteen years before Hardy, a distinguished marine biologist, went on to found the Religious Experience Research Centre, Manchester College, Oxford. Seeing religion and sacredness as different from theology i.e. the science of religion, unlike dogmatic institutions Unitarians with their "liberal and progressive theology need have no fear" of science. The GA at the time of the lecture was in agreement and declared: "We welcome every discovery that scientists and others are making even though they bring with them new problems, because

we are confident that when these discoveries are fully understood they can result only in a deeper sense of awe and reverence and gratitude before the great mystery of life". Hardy brought together biology, psychology and progressive theology in working towards a greater understanding of religious experience. He must have been delighted when, in 1965, the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies was founded with the Object: "To encourage the study of psychical phenomena in all aspect, **with a critical and open mind**". (My own bold text) Details of the society can be found at: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/psychical

The Divine Flame – An Essay towards a Natural History of Religion, again by Alister Hardy, was published in 1966 by The Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, Oxford. This book is the text of the second series of Gifford Lectures of 1965, the first series being *The Living Stream*, published in 1965. This second book I intend to buy through Amazon so that it can be available to NUF members. If anyone has a copy they would like to donate then please do contact me. The cost through Amazon is only £4.50 from new. The Introduction is a lecture in itself and deserves close reading. Throughout the book each paragraph is packed with meaning in closely argued points, that draw not only Hardy's understanding, but also carefully selected and lengthy quotations from others, particularly those who had understood the relevance of connecting science, psychology, religion, ecology, anthropology and ethnology i.e. science and behaviour through time. The title and language is carefully chosen, using the words divine and sacred to explain religious experience rather than understandings of God as it has been understood through ages and cultures. Underpinning all his thinking is the concept of evolution and how it relates to religious experience, human behaviour and scientific understanding. He makes the distinction between rational theology deism, which used reason to deduce from evidential first principles (scientific materialism), with natural theology "...a theology derivable empirically from the study of Nature, man and human history..." The holistic vision of Hardy sits more comfortably with the current generation, who understand the interconnectedness of the world. He does not deny scientific endeavour but does warn of the dogmatism that could so easily underpin what becomes an increasingly materialistic world with values that miss the special nature of our responsibility to the wider world of creation. Science in the laboratory, examining in more and more detail the world of the microscopic, is only a small part of understanding the nature of a disconnected discipline of biology. If this study does not include behaviour and its relationship to the biological it lacks a fuller comprehension of the world we live in. He writes: "In suggesting that the power we call God may

well have some fundamental link with the process of evolution, I hope I shall not be thought to be belittling the idea of God. I would rather appear to be saying the living stream of evolution is as much divine as physical in nature; and that what I am calling the divine flame is an integral part of the creative evolutionary process which man, with his greater perceptive faculties, is now becoming aware of'. The chapter headings give some idea of the breadth of this book of 250 pages: 'The Biological Background', 'Evidence from Social Anthropology', 'Naturalists of Religious Experience', 'The Numinous, the Love of Nature and the Inspiration of Art', 'Psychology and Religion', 'Roots in Animal Behaviour', 'The Importance of Psychical Research', 'A Plea for Theology to be more Natural', 'A Science of Theology and an Experimental Faith'. Hardy accepted that this was only a start of what he hoped would be built on in the future. There are many websites giving up-to-date work on what Hardy started that can be accessed by Googling 'Religious Experience Research Unit, Oxford', the work of this Unit now being continued at the University of Wales, Lampeter. This book is highly recommended for those who are able to take plenty of time to consider the carefully presented material closely.

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Joan Wilkinson

Be a part of the opening celebration at the 2012 Annual Meetings!

The opening celebration at this year's Annual Meetings will include a lively and moving tribute to Unitarianism of the present and the future. There will be great music, video, song, and more.

You can be a part of this special celebration in two ways!

1. Take pictures! Send digital photos that exemplify Unitarianism at its best, They will be included in a video presentation as part of the opening celebration.
2. Speak your vision! There will be short, inspiring, spoken contributions from a range of people. If you would like to be considered as a speaker, please prepare and submit a 300-500 word statement that you would like to present. The subject should be about how Unitarianism has changed your life and/or your exciting vision for the Unitarianism of the future. The best entries will be selected to speak for 3-5 minutes live.

Send your photos and speaking applications via email to Rev Andrew Pakula
revandy@new-unity.org. (GA)

'Observe how transient and trivial is all mortal life; yesterday a drop of semen, tomorrow a handful of ashes. So spend these fleeting moments on earth as Nature would have you spend them, and then go to your rest with good grace, as an olive falls in its season, with a blessing for the earth that bore it and a thanksgiving to the tree that gave it life.'

Marcus Aurelius

MODERNISM

Several years ago, the current Archbishop of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Dr. Peter Jensen, declared that we are now in the post-Modernist age. Archbishop Jensen is a Bible fundamentalist, with slight respect for Anglican traditions. In collaboration with his brother, who is Dean of the cathedral in Sydney, the already Low Church diocese, through its theological college, is being transformed into little more than a intolerant laughing-stock. We are back in the days of the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the Nicene Creed. For those of us who became enthusiastic Modernists in our youth, this is a most distressing and alarming situation. It is hard not to despair.

But what was Modernism? ‘The Universal Dictionary of the English Language’, (Sixth Impression 1946) edited by Professor H. C. Wyld in the U.K., gives an excellent definition:

‘Modernism: The system and methods adopted by a certain advanced school of theologians and historians who attempt to state, or re-state, the dogmas of Christianity in the light of modern criticism and thought, and to test the credibility of the historical facts recorded in the Old and New Testaments by applying them to the results of modern textual and historical research.’

Not everything of the past, however, is meaningless for us today. Surely, most of us will readily admit that the Book of Common Prayer’s baptismal call to resist the Devil (evil), the world, and the flesh is as relevant now as it was in the seventeenth century.

Ross Howard (G.A. Lay Preacher and Guest contributor)

ORBS AROUND THE WORLD

Last month a new kind of book was published: ‘*Orbs Around the World*’ an anthology edited by Sandra Underwood. The book is full of amazing photographic images of orbs and paranormal phenomena from six of our seven continents.

Authors, researchers and members of Kendal Unitarian Chapel, Katie Hall and John Pickering, tell of their involvement with this project to help raise money for children around the world.

‘Along with 27 authors from fifteen countries, we contributed our own images and accounts freely to Sandra Underwood’s project because the whole aim of this book is not only to raise people’s awareness of paranormal phenomena happening today but to give something back to the world. All proceeds from the sale of this book will go directly to UNICEF to help children in need in many countries.’

'We first met Sandy Underwood in Palm Springs, when she came to our presentation there. We felt an instant rapport with Sandy and discovered that our book, *Beyond Photography*, had been of help to her after her son died. The next year she flew over to the UK for a presentation we did in Glastonbury.

'How Sandy first encountered the orbs phenomenon goes back to a very sad time in her life. Her only son, Eric, who was an actor and had been in the film *Forrest Gump* with Tom Hanks, later took his own life in his apartment in San Francisco. Sandy and her husband were devastated by this awful tragedy, on top of which Sandy then developed breast cancer and had to fight her way through the triple burden of grief, depression and her physical illness.

'But then something wonderful happened. Sandy began to photograph strange circles of light in Eric's room and around his favourite tree. She had no idea what it was - but as someone with a scientific background Sandy began to look into what may be causing this. Like us, she went through all the usual prosaic explanations and found them wanting. Eventually, she bought a copy of our book, *Beyond Photography*, and found a resonance there with her own experiences, which was why she was keen to meet Katie and I when we visited the USA and we have been friends ever since.

Somehow the orbs had drawn a healing circle of love in her life and from somewhere Sandy found the inspiration to turn her grief into something positive and set about trying to help others around the world whose children had committed suicide. As part of this she wrote the book '*Eric's Story: surviving a Son's Suicide*'.

When Sandy did her own book on the orbs phenomenon, I was honoured to be asked to write the foreword - and when she came up with the idea of an anthology of orbs photographs to raise money for UNICEF we were happy to support her in that, for the most important aspect of the orbs phenomena are the interconnected circles of love that are bringing together people from diverse backgrounds from all around the world.

The photographs and personal accounts in *Orbs Around The World* are both thought provoking and inspiring. Now that you know a little about how this all came about, we hope that you may order a copy of this wonderful book, which can be purchased on Amazon or directly from: www.orbsaroundtheworld.com

John Pickering (GA UniNews)

'Our civilization has been built upon a spiritual interpretation of the world; if the majority of the population come to have a materialistic outlook the whole nature of our way of life may change and not I think for the better.'

Sir Alister Hardy

WEB NEWS

A comprehensive list of Unitarian blogs may be found at:-
<http://unitariancommunications.blogspot.com/p/blogs.html>

DIARY DATES

Further details of all events may be found at
<http://www.unitarian.org.uk/info/events.shtml>

3rd-5th Feb 2012 **The Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE)**

A keynote presentation by Robin Ince, TV presenter, comedian and scientist; A major worship service, led by Rev. Patrick O'Neill, minister at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead; More than twenty workshops on church life, personal spirituality, music and art; Networking and fun.

The Weekend Festival will be held in Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing
www.chatsworthworthing.co.uk Single rooms £195. Shared rooms £145. Day delegate rate £47 (plus £19 for dinner) Contact David Usher at the main Unitarian website above.

18th Feb 2012 **Unitarian Music Society Recording, Manchester**

Some congregations have little or no access to live musicians and rely on CDs. The Unitarian Music Society are responding to a demand for more CDs to support Hymns for Living with a recording day on Saturday, 18th February at Cross Street, Manchester. 10.00 for 10.30 and finish no later than 4.30. We shall record fifty hymns to make two CDs. We need a minimum of thirty enthusiastic singers to make a good congregational sound. Volunteer to David Dawson, 9, Olicana Park, Ilkley LS29 0AW.

24th-26th Feb **Improving Unitarian Visibility - UCCN Conference**

Workshops/Presentations:

Website possibilities; Congregational PR Strategy; Etiquette and Style Guide; PR Pictures; Publicity Case Study.

Optional Friday workshop: Photo Manipulation, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire. Ask your congregation, society or district to sponsor you.

NEXT ISSUE

The deadline for the next issue is Wednesday 15th February 2012. Contributions on any theme and responses to any item in the newsletter are always welcome. All contributions are acknowledged.

The views expressed in the newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the NUF or of the wider Unitarian movement. All contributors are members of the NUF except where otherwise indicated.