

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

NEWSLETTER



Linking others valuing Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion.

Email address: nuf@nufonline.org.uk

Website: www.nufonline.org.uk

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS

Call for nominations

The time has come around again to thank committee members, who will be standing down at the AGM in April, after three years valuable service: Barry Bell, Vic Mason and Ruth Nash. This means that we are looking for three nominations to serve for three years as from the AGM that will be held at the GA Meetings at Swansea 15th-18th April 2011. The proposer is required to ask the candidate whether they are willing to stand, find someone who is willing to second that proposal, and advise the Returning Officer, in a signed letter, by **24th February 2011**. The Returning Officer is committee member: Ken Smith, 12 Gravel Road, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hampshire GU52 6BB. By the same date the candidates are asked to submit a profile, not exceeding 250 words, to the Newsletter editor. This will be included in the March Newsletter along with voting slips and details of date and venue of the count.

Although lack of computer does not preclude any member from being elected, use of emails and a Committee Section on the Unitarian Internet Fellowship, aids communication and full participation in all committee discussion and eases the workload on any one individual. However, a Committee Paper is created from time to time and for those not able to receive it as an email attachment or access it on the UIF a paper copy will be mailed to them for their comments. In between Committee Papers the secretary will ring any committee member not in possession of a computer. The role of a committee member is to ensure the financial and practical well being of the Fellowship, participating in committee matters and supporting other volunteers. In a time of rapidly increasing modes of communication and the possibilities this opens for our unique Fellowship, committee members are expected to offer what they can to development and growth into the future, without diminishing our outreach to those who will continue to need and value the publications that are mailed to them each month.

NUF House Party 5th-7th November 2010

Members, who managed to attend the above may have been disappointed that the numbers were again few (8) but certainly not disappointed in the enthusiasm and participation of each person there. We must never forget the value of the NUF Weekends for those, who are isolated for the rest of the year and look forward to this one weekend of being with other Unitarians. Since Peter discovered the NUF he has travelled all the way from Sweden to be with us and his input is greatly valued. Due to the fact that we were sharing The Nightingale Centre for the weekend with the

Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry (UALM), we had the benefit of being invited to some of their activities and we would like to thank their members who joined in our Saturday evening 'Monthly Meditation' filming for the NUF website. The UALM epilogue on Saturday evening will stay in my memory forever. Being 5th November a 'Unitarian Divali' suitably ended with sharing sweets and waving sparklers together outside.

Our group size was ideal for discussing weekend's theme: 'Where are you on the religious/spiritual spectrum?' On Friday evening Tony McNeile asked some questions pertaining to our individual perspective and on Saturday morning I posed some questions looking at the NUF, the broader Unitarian community and organisation, finally asking where members felt the NUF should be going. Having established that the NUF can only benefit from working with other organisations and societies within the Unitarian movement we created a vision for the next five years.

Disappointment was acknowledged that some members of congregations don't know what the NUF is and what it does. It was agreed that whenever any one of us is asked to speak at a congregational service or event that if we can't accept the invitation ourselves then we will find a member who can. It was agreed that every opportunity to work on shared projects with other societies should be encouraged. A full breakdown of tasks undertaken by volunteers is to be listed and a handbook created. There should be a skills audit of membership and a new Resource Register created. A greater emphasis on outreach is to be made with a vision to doubling membership in five years. We should work towards having a resource centre with a paid secretary to carry out administration.

It was felt that the Internet should be our first line for achieving growth so our website should have a new look in 2011. The small group came up with a mission statement that should be shown clearly on all our material: *In the flow of religious thought and practice, Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest.*

2012 will be the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Dickens and it was felt that a *Dickens' Festival* would be a suitable way to celebrate a great novelist with Unitarian links, opportunity to work with other organisations in the movement and at the same time be an excellent mode of outreach.

For the many members, who couldn't be at the NUF Weekend, please feel encouraged to comment on any of the above through the pages of the *Newsletter*.

Joan Wilkinson

Cover Picture: Aiolos the Shepherd (See Reflections p. 5)

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

"I NAME THIS CHILD"

The coffee cups were re-filled and the discussion continued. It took the topic this time of choosing what used to be called Christian names. A very old man named Perrin had died recently and his name was the topic.

Some 80 years ago two new fathers had made their way to the Registrar's to record their new born sons' arrival. From what followed it might seem reasonable that they had both stopped at frequent intervals 'to wet the babies' head' for whilst they were in the waiting room together, despite the fact that they had been well briefed by their wives, the two hatched a plot to exchange the babies' names. This they did.

What their wives said afterwards is unrecorded. Two local men went through life bearing unintended names, one with a family name to which he has no blood connection. At this time though a good many folk did borrow surnames to use as Christian names as witness the heaps of Stanleys, Sidneys, Herberts, Percys, Nelsons and Clarences.

If you are thinking of names for a present-day new-born do consider how quickly names become dated and how soon Lucca, Errin, Tyler, Jordan and Freya will seem dated. Other names come with tags. Liams will be called 'lemons' as long as schoolboys have lungs.

I have known grown men shake in their shoes at the mention of names especially two old colleagues. One was named Hyacinth, a perfectly grammatically correct name for a boy but, I think, a cruel one. The other is Ughtred, possibly redeemed by a dash of dashing Saxon.

In fact all our names can be redeemed by the fact that it is so easy to change them. A swift Deed Poll costing no more than £35 will do the trick or you can adopt one just by constantly using it. So if you have an awful name that sounds silly, does not match your temperament or years and generally invites derision you can spend your spare moments when drifting off to sleep constructing a name that perfectly matches your character, personality and position. When you have decided which nobler aspects of yourself you would like to emphasise and which you would like to shade from publicity you will not only have conquered insomnia but made considerable progress in self-evaluation. Next a review of names, their meanings plus a visit to your piggy bank would give you almost instantly the perfect name.

What's this? You feel more comfortable with your old name? You feel more at home in it? Well, I never! More coffee anyone? Mrs. Bottom? . . . Miss Lightfoot? . . . Mrs. Fullalove? . . . Patience . . .

Dorothy Archer

THE MINISTER'S MUSINGS

Religion is the spring of peace and joy, the inspirer of universal virtue, giving life and energy to the intellect and the heart, fortifying conscience, awakening love. Religion gives happiness by its inward influence. Too many ascribe to it a different operation they regard it as a worship of God in order to win his favour. Few understand how essential is the growth of their own highest affections and energies. Our supreme good is the perfection of our being; and nothing which does not involve and promote this deserves the name ... Religion.

These words were written in 1873 by William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian Universalist preacher. After all these years I still find his sermons are inspiring and relevant for today.

What is the point of going to church, singing the hymns and saying the words if in our hearts there is no thirst to make ourselves better as a person; if we are not inspired by our scriptures to be the good Samaritan, to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile?

It is easy to settle into complacency and feel that we are good citizens because we are 'church goers,' that as long as we attend we are doing the right thing and our world is all right - and everyone else's world can be looked at with a certain kind of disdain.

Channing reminds us that our religion should be a challenge to our lives, lifting us closer to a union with that universal love and giving us the energy to look around us and do what we can to help others who share this fractured world with us and whose needs are great. For Unitarians this is often more a personal challenge than a collective one. We walk alone as pilgrims. But should our religion or our view of the world be any different to that of Channing?

Tony McNeile

REFLECTIONS

ORCHIDĚ AND AIOLOS

Or The Genesis of Orchis Papilionacea

'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; ...' Shakespeare

The Nymph Orchidě was weaving herself a crown of olive leaves and pink meadow flowers. At her feet in the soft grass near the foot of Mount Olympos, his eyes deeply ablaze with lust and love, a young shepherd sat and worshipped his new goddess. He put out his hand to touch the crown, but Orchidě snatched it from him. 'Not for you, Aiolos. This is a crown fit only for an Immortal, and all the silver and gold in these mountains could not buy it.' She placed the last pink spike carefully in the centre of the wreath. 'Not for you, Aiolos,' she said again and holding the crown high above her dark gold curls danced around the love-sick boy, the

bright mockery of her laughter boring jaggedly into his brain. ‘Poor little earthling doomed to die, what would you give me for Orchidë’s Crown?’ The boy sighed. ‘That crown is a part of you, and I want so much to have a part of you to keep as my own. There is my new lamb, with a fleece as white and soft as swansdown; there is my grandfather’s pipe on which he played the tunes the Muse Aiodë taught him. Those could be yours. Great Zeus knows how much I want that crown, but alas I have nothing else to give you.’

Orchidë came close to him and stroked his cheek. ‘If you were to give me your soul, I would place my crown on your head and take you to where the Islands of the Blessed are cradled by the waters of Oceanos. In this Paradise we would walk together across the bright sand, dine on grapes and honey cake, drink sweet Khios wine and you would be mine for eternity. Will you pledge me your soul?’ she asked softly. He hesitated, and then: ‘Oh yes. Yes. Yes.’ She smiled, radiant, jubilant in her dark triumph. Finger tip to finger tip they stood motionless beneath the sultry sky while dense leaden clouds swirled around the top of the mountain and plunged down into the darkening meadow. The one eyed Cyclopes struck their anvil. A monstrous thunder growled and angry fingers of blinding light ripped apart the enveloping cloud as the thunder bolt cast by Zeus flew like a double headed

arrow into the hearts of the impious Nymph and the sacrilegious boy.

When the dark clouds lifted and the Cyclopes put aside their anvil and their hammers, Ophëlos the hermit, roaming the slopes of the Mountain heard the echo of a herdsman’s pipe in the song of the stream and the laughter of a girl in the wind rustling through the olive trees. At last he came to the meadow where the grass was soft, and saw



Orchis Papilionacea that from it had sprung a tall exotic stem bearing waxen petalled, delicate striated pink flowers. Close by he found a curiously coloured small marble statue of a young man who wore a wreath of olive leaves decorated with spikes of pink flowers which looked, he thought, just like a cloud of hovering butterflies.

(Drawing by Liz Egebäck Foxbrook, NUF Sweden)

BORN GAMBLERS

Sentenced
To life.

We did not desire, require, or deserve
To be born.
But as it happened
Here we are,
The result of billions of years
Of evolution,
History,
The choices of our parents,
And the wheel of fortune.

We survived the difficult
Foetal phase,
The birth
And infancy.
Gradually we became
Aware of ourselves,
Others
And the ways of the world.

Sometimes we stare in wonder,
Sing for joy,
Share in treasuring
The world.

Phil Silk (NUF Member)

If I Can Stop One Heart From Breaking

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

Emily Dickinson

LIVE SIMPLY THAT ALL MAY SIMPLY LIVE

In 1972 the Very Rev. Horace Dammers (1921–2004) founded the 'Lifestyle Movement'. Its motto: 'Live simply that others may simply live'. The Rev. Dammers goal was to enlighten people as to the importance of wise, personal use of the earth's resources and the critical issues of peace, justice and the environment. He believed that a simple lifestyle would release the resources and energies necessary for social change.

Ever socially aware, and concerned with the human condition, Rev. Dammers recognised that peaceful development and even our survival are threatened by:

- 1) the injustice of poverty and wealth
- 2) the reckless use of natural resources
- 3) the careless pollution of the environment and
- 4) the denial of useful and creative work to so many people.

The philosopher Emmanuel Kant asked three questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? These questions, both basic and ultimate, combine all the interests of human reason. In his book 'Life Style – a parable of sharing', Rev. Dammers uses them to explain his own philosophy of living simply and devotes a chapter to each question.

The author then tells of his life, his experience while serving during WWII and of the time he spent in India with his family. Rev. Dammers is from the heart of the Christian tradition. For him, Jesus' poverty was not an affliction but strength: the ore of his teaching about simple living. A chapter is included which links such a lifestyle to the Christian faith.

There follows next a consideration of the implications, domestic and global, of our decision to consume less. The final chapter is by John West who sums up the situation and the problems involved. Advice is given on campaigning and supporting efforts to protect our environment and to reduce poverty levels. Subjects under scrutiny include: the arms trade, the financial markets, advertising, use of energy, ethical investment and our benefits system. Criticism is levelled at governing elites, all of whom prosper in our so-called democracies at the expense of those they govern.

For anybody wishing to pursue these matters in more depth, other publications are outlined which cover matters such as the threats posed by globalisation of the economy, by national and international debt, and by the universal pursuit of profit and power.

In the foreword to Rev. Dammers' book, Walter Schwartz, the former Guardian newspaper correspondent, writes about the preposterously extravagant way in which we live, global warming, poverty, the population explosion and the forthcoming world shortage of water. We are obsessed, he

says, with luxuries but do not count their cost in terms of overwork, stress, congestion and pollution. We forget that such a lifestyle is unsustainable because as our economies 'grow', the planet does not.

Increase in the Gross Domestic Product of every nation causes a corresponding decrease in reserves of fossil fuels, water, forests, topsoil and clean air. If, on the other hand, the earth's sustainable natural output were to be shared equally among the present world population, the needs of all would be met.

Rev. Dammers' book ends with an interesting bibliography and some useful contact addresses. It is an easy-to-read and highly informative publication which is offered free of charge to all members of the 'Lifestyle Movement', while stocks last.

Horace Dammers passed away in 2004 but his movement continues and is open to anyone who wishes to do something practical towards saving the planet. The benefits of membership include a quarterly magazine, 'Living Green', which airs important issues and enables members to report what they are doing. The subjects covered in the magazine range widely: readers' letters, personal profiles, reports from the House of Commons, an editorial, a business section and one on home and garden. Climate change, energy resources and poverty are included. A section, too, for youngsters, which aims to educate on 'green' issues and sensible lifestyles. The Lifestyle Movement organises an annual conference weekend where members meet to exchange views and make plans.

Current membership stands at just under 200, but is increasing. There is no specific political or religious agenda; member's beliefs vary. The Treasurer of the movement, a retired lecturer, has for 33 years, been a member of an agricultural community in the Essex countryside. The focus is on organic farming and living harmoniously with the natural environment. Jonathan Porrit is a 'Lifestyle Movement' member and its president, Mayer Hillman, is a strong proponent of the concept of personal carbon trading and allowances which he helped to develop. His doctoral thesis was on transport, planning and environmental issues.

Nothing is more important than our environment – we all know that. But there are many who prefer to let 'someone else' deal with the problems raised by Rev. Dammers' book. We must think not only of our own welfare but of the generations of sentient beings as yet unborn.

Michael Ablett (NUF Member)

For details contact: The Lifestyle Movement, 65 Beechwood Avenue, Chatham, Kent. ME5 7HJ Tel: 01634 307474

ANIMALS AND MACHINES

The period when philosophers such as Descartes and Locke lived was one of great discoveries and inventions, for instance Galileo's telescope, and Newton's theory of gravitation. Perhaps because of this there was a tendency to try to explain everything in terms of the machine. Thus, Descartes believed that an animal could not feel pain since it was a kind of machine, and, in any case, did not possess a soul. La Mettrie, who wrote 'Man, a Machine', went even further, saying that Man, too, was nothing more than a machine. Even today we jocularly refer to the human body in terms of a machine, speaking of our 'ticker', plumbing' or 'waterworks', or saying that our 'batteries' need recharging! But this has a serious side to it when such an attitude leads us to engage in factory-farming, which, to be successful, can necessitate the mutilation of creatures and their confinement in darkness and over-crowded conditions with the use of anti-biotics to prevent disease.

Besides seeing life forms as types of machines, there has grown up a tendency to see things as commodities – as things produced for sale. Locke (1632-1704) in his 'Two Treatises on Government' sought to furnish the theoretical justification for reducing the power of the King, and for advancing the interests of the new propertied classes who were now emerging and who wanted government by consent. Add to this the ideas of Adam Smith (1723-1790) who reasoned that the market, left to itself, would, like an 'invisible hand', guide the economy in that direction which it would benefit the whole community, and we come up to the present time with its emphasis on 'market forces'! Land, a gift of Nature, became a commodity, as did labour (the labourer was paid for his ability to work, not for his produce), and in recent history, people, too, have been treated as commodities – for example, slavery. Now recent developments in genetic engineering mean that some life-forms and human body-parts can become commodities owned by Governments and corporations.

The U.S. Government and large corporations are patenting genetically engineered products, which mean they have ownership of living things. (Strictly speaking, patents should be solely for new mechanical inventions which have an industrial application.) There have been many legal challenges to this patenting of life-forms, and the issue is still not completely resolved. Of particular interest to the U.S. Government is the acquiring of the cell-lines of indigenous peoples.

Some scientists seem blinded by this mechanical model of life, and fail to see life as a vibrant, evolving and interconnected process, so that altering one gene may affect the whole organism. (The very word 'engineering' in 'genetic engineering' really says it all – a mechanical approach to living things!) Monsanto, who launched genetically modified soya onto the world, has been

trying to develop a plant whose seeds were sterile, so that farmers would not be able to re-sow seed from their harvest but would be dependent on Monsanto. Monsanto is not the only company which seems to be putting profitability before service to the community.

We are told by the Government (and many scientists agree) that genetically modified food is quite safe. But we remember thalidomide and BSE! Science has battled with Superstition over the ages – its method is beyond reproach. Yet scientists are human beings, subject to many pressures; just a few practise outright fraud! We lay-people are left with the problem of trying to fathom out just what is the truth. Probably a good thing to remember is that Machines are made, Life grows (from a single cell).

We seem to be getting away from ‘reverence for life’, stressed by that great theologian and philosopher, Albert Schweitzer. There are a growing number of people who are questioning the way we are going. Many people are now calling for organic food, for an end to blood-sports, for preserving the world’s forests and wild-life and areas of green. Green Peace, Friends of the Earth, the World Development Movement, the Green Parties, the Tree People, the writers and poets who sing the song of caring for the Earth, the Churches and other religious groups who have a message of love and compassion, all are challenging our mechanical approach towards life. For our purposes, this can be summed up in saying ‘Let Love Prevail’.

George Cope (NUF Member)

‘Faith separate from love is not faith, but mere science, which in itself is void of spiritual life’.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (Heaven and Hell)

IMAGE LIBRARY

Headquarters runs an image library for Unitarians involved in publicity and promotional publications. This includes congregational publicity officers and newsletter editors. Images can also be made available to the media for articles about Unitarianism.

Currently there are **5410** images available. Images are of Unitarian events, buildings and people, as well some stock ‘concept’ images which may be useful for specific articles.

Anyone who feels that the images might be useful can apply for access. Such users can search the database for images and if there is one they would like to use, the webpage will generate an email request for the specific image. Those who use the library on a very regular basis are given an access code to enable them to download the images directly. To apply for library access please contact James Barry at jbarry@unitarian.org.uk

THE PERENNIAL PSYCHOLOGY

by David Doel (Lindsey Press) 1990

David Doel's most recent book, 'The Man they Call the Christ,' was reviewed in the September NUF Newsletter. The book which is the subject of this review contains an extended statement by the author of the psychological systems common to the great contemplative religious traditions, both Christian and non-Christian and how they compare in theory and practice to the 'modern' schools of depth psychology, especially those of Freud, Jung and the Existentialists.

The title was chosen to parallel 'The Perennial Philosophy' by Aldous Huxley, (Reviewed Issue 361 p.16) which in an extended anthology and commentary outlines that author's belief that there is one philosophy, that underlies all religions, independent of epoch or culture, which includes universal truths on the nature of reality, humanity or consciousness.

Doel has been a practising psychotherapist in the Jungian tradition and this forms a background to the book; a reader who is not familiar with the Jungian terminology of Ego, Super Ego, Id, would be well advised to start with the final chapter, entitled 'An Outline' and read it in tandem with the tabulated appendix which shows how the concepts he describes are exemplified in the different religious traditions.

The goal of both psychotherapy and religion, as the author sees it, is the restoration of wholeness in the soul. His examination of both clinical examples and the reports of the contemplative mystics of the major religious faiths lead him to assert that humans are brought into a state of inevitable alienation between their 'surface self' and their 'deep self' through the conditioning of society, both within the home and beyond. This division (in Christian terms – the Devil, the one who divides) creates a barrier and inner restlessness ("our hearts are restless till they find their rest in God") which leads people to identify with a 'false Ego' which seeks satisfaction in what 'the world' offers – power, status, wealth, body image, etc. This desire is accompanied by fear that our cravings will not be fulfilled and that our lives will ultimately be a failure, even if we can manage to fabricate a 'mask' (the 'false Ego' system) to hide it from ourselves and others.

The separated 'surface self' is sundered from the 'deep self' – in Buddhist terms, we are separated from our Buddha (enlightened) nature, or in psycho-analytic terms, the Ego has become split off from the Id (our creative potential). To achieve restoration, we need a teacher, guru, analyst or therapist to show us the Way (N.B. the first Christians were called disciples of the Way); the 'teacher' is one who has trodden the path before us and the only way is through annihilation of the false 'surface self'; the author finds this message in the writings of the great contemplatives of all traditions – the Dark

Night of the Soul as described by St. John of the Cross, the 'baptism into death' spoken of by Luther, the allegory of Dante's 'Divine Comedy', with its progression from Earth, through Hell, to Paradise parallels the journey from the unreal 'surface self' to the 'real self', which brings about a period of acute upheaval, which may involve regression to earlier suppressed stages and events in life.

Doel does not hide the descent into despair that this 'voyage into the interior' can involve for those who take it, as 'giving up their grip on 'reality' and the security of their identification with the persona, they may find their very sense of being is threatened. He instances William Blake as one whose art and poetry is a document of such a journey. As Bunyan found, to reach the Celestial City, one must go through the slough of Despond and encounter Giant Despair (I was rather surprised that Doel only makes one reference to Bunyan's writings in the text).

As a psychotherapist, Doel is much interested in the functioning of the Unconscious mind and goes to some lengths to defend the concept against philosophical detractors who cast doubt upon the existence of 'mind' as an entity. He instances both loss of memory and recovery of memory not only as evidence for its existence but also points to dreams as evidence for its activity. Scientific method he declares, in the strict sense employed by Logical Positivists, is almost useless when applied to the psyche. *Poetry and painting are ways of discovering truths about our inner lives...that offer an alternative scientific method...more flexible than any form of Positivism.*

It is not surprising that he draws frequently on Eastern religion for examples; the Taoist tradition teaches that the soul has 'become silted up with successive deposits of daily toil and perturbation' and must return to the source of all things – to the Natural Self, which existed before the Ancestors (quoting Arthur Waley) and the Buddhist tradition, teaching that *life utterly defeats our efforts to control it, that all human striving is no more than a vanishing hand clutching at the clouds* (quoting Alan Watts).

As in his most recent book, Doel has some provocative views on the doctrine of the Trinity; it is a *psychological model of the psyche whose members in Jungian terms are archetypes of the Father (the ground out of which we have arisen), the Child (our potential wholeness) and the creative power of Eros. When we begin our psychological journey towards the union of our nature, we follow the paradigm of the life and death of Christ...born not of the will of man but of God (the ground of our being) ... Thus in the words of Martineau, the incarnation is true not of Christ exclusively but of Man universally and God everlastingly.*

What are the rewards for undertaking this 'interior journey?' Greater capacity for spontaneity, love and awareness of the natural world, satisfying and realistic personal relationships, enhanced creativity, less defensiveness are some of those listed by the author. For me it was summed up by a quotation

he makes from Traherne's 'Centuries of Meditation':-

Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth and the air as Celestial joys... You never enjoy the world aright, till the sea floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars : and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world and more than so, because men are in it who are everyone sole heirs as well as you.

It is a great pity that this book is out of print (although available in the NUF library) as it draws together so many different strands of religious and psychotherapeutic thought (well referenced in the extensive bibliography) that it really needs several readings to do them justice. The same fate has sadly befallen David's other books including 'That Glorious Liberty' (A Meditation on the Life and Writings of St. Paul) which is a most insightful contribution to New Testament study.

Ken Smith (NUF Committee)

THE AGE OF ABSURDITY

Why Modern Life Makes It Hard to Be Happy

By Michael Foley

Michael Foley takes a long look at how, in an age of unprecedented prosperity, health and security modern people struggle to be happy and seeks answers with the help of writings from throughout the ages. Immediately he encounters contradictions even with the definition of happiness. Some of the authors he cites such as Flaubert believe that happiness is not possible. However, he takes a more positive view than this himself. He makes his own mark on the subject, informed by those aspects of the literature with which he feels most attuned.

The book begins with a quite humorous look at the folly in modern life. He describes a world of easy gratification, endless possibilities both as a consumer and supposedly in personal potential. As he puts it the impression has been created that 'anyone can be anything and have anything'. He lays the blame for this Utopian dream, in which he sees modern people residing, at the corrosive effect of advertising, corporate culture and the industry of personal communication and comments that 'the bubbly, smiley age of nice days is increasingly dosing itself with antidepressants'. He is describing a massive collective illusion.

He regards as futile attempts to unseat the advertising industry itself. Instead, he goes deeper, recommending methods where the ego is able to control the id, the amygdala, which is being stimulated by the advertising. He makes reference to psychoanalysis, Buddhism and the philosophy of Spinoza.

He turns to the culture of entitlement and potential. He traces the origins of this to the liberation movements of the 1970s but says that the

admen have exploited and corrupted the ethos. In fact it has undergone some extraordinary reversals, for instance the belief in entitlement set alongside an extraordinary level of conformity of which the people are largely unaware. Alongside entitlement he sees a culture of blame and the erosion of personal responsibility. At one point he discusses the issue of free will, in which he clearly believes but it is not entirely clear how free it is. While ascribing a degree of autonomy to the individual he does not clear up the moot question as to whether this autonomy is a process or truly free. It remains perhaps a matter of belief. Either way it may not be too important regarding the validity of his central proposition that the autonomous individual can take control of their life and that this is the only true road to fulfilment.

He attacks the popular self-help movement, however, while supporting the findings of serious psychology. He cites this and traditional Buddhist teaching amongst others to illustrate the power the human has for self-deception. The road to fulfilment is never easy. It is fraught with illusions and questions as to its possibility and its authenticity. The book unfolds with a continuing alternation of focus between modern myth and older wisdom supported by modern psychology and neuroscience. That the older wisdom addresses the basic issues indicates that the problems themselves are not the exclusive domain of modernity. It does seem that they have come to roost at the present time nevertheless. He makes a strong case throughout the book that this is mainly the doing of corporate commercialism. Although he says he is not a believer one is easily reminded of 'Mammon' in the object of his critique. It is an eclectic thesis, much of which is making a case for traditional concepts of depth and self-realisation, the value of solitude and contemplation and the meaning of love. The urgency in the writing is because he sees the corporate world all but taking over. It is, however, not a political book calling for the end of capitalism. It extols the virtues of the individual and freedom and veers away from recommending collective action, maintaining all the time that the people have become homogenised in a pervasive and subtle way under the guise of a false sense of freedom.

The most important aspect of this book is that it unpicks the illusions of the world in a detailed way which relates recognisably to today. And following on from this it gives one reason to feel good about leading life in a way which would be widely regarded as staid and passé.

Chris Barchard (Guest reviewer)

CORRECTION

A Morally Deep World Part 2 on page 17 of the last Issue 392 was wrongly ascribed to Lawrence E. Johnson. It was entirely written by George Cope 'as a kind of mirror image of Part 1', a review by George of Lawrence E. Johnson's book.

DONATION TO THE NUF BOOK COLLECTION

NUF member, Hilda Handoll has kindly donated a series of eight books in the 'Understand... series': **Understanding Buddhism** by Malcolm David Eckel: **Christianity** by Rosemary Drage Hale: **Confucianism** by Jennifer Oldstone-Moore: **Hinduism** by Vasudha Narayanan: **Islam** by Matthew S Gordon: **Judaism** by Carl S Ehrlich: **Shinto** by C Scott Littleton: **Taoism** by Hennifer Oldstone-Moore. The books were published from 2002-2004.

Each consists of 112 pages including index and glossary as well as beautifully coloured illustrations to accompany the informative text. The same format is used for each book, explaining the traditions through, origins, beliefs, practices, holy texts and sacred places. These are well worth reading for those new to these traditions and the illustrations are worth seeing in their own right. To date I have read the books on Buddhism, Christianity and Confucianism, the latter, which was mostly new to me and the first two covering familiar ground whilst re-enforcing the sheer complexity of each tradition. As always it is fascinating to see the crucial role that religion has played in forming the culture and politics of different continents of the world. I am looking forward to working my way through the other books. This is a valuable addition to the NUF Book Collection. Thank you, Hilda.

Joan Wilkinson

'A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face. It is one of the few havens remaining where a man's mind can get both provocation and privacy.'

Edward P. Morgan

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The NUF Idea

I have long believed that the idea underlying the National Unitarian Fellowship is an excellent one – indeed, the only way possible for devout men and women who wish to think freely about religion. Most churches rightly require devotion to certain religious figures and the acceptance of certain beliefs, whereas Unitarian churches appear to require no commitment to any objects of devotion and no acceptance of any beliefs. That, to me, is simply being stupid. So it was that after my initial contacts with an Australia Unitarian church in 1947, I resigned my brief membership in 1949 and became a member of the N.U.F., even though it was thousands of miles away and called national'.

In the current 'Directory' issued by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in the U.K., it is said of the Fellowship:

‘Founded in 1945, the N.U.F. aims to meet the needs of Unitarians and others who value a free and positive approach to religion, whether they attend a church or not.’

That suits me fine. So here is praise for the concept of the N.U.F. (Though naturally, as expressed before, I should prefer it to be called ‘The Free Religious Fellowship’.) Long may the Fellowship survive, and be truly devotional and inquiring in character.

Ross Howard (NUF member Australia)

The vital importance of Right brain thinking

I have read Mark Allaby’s article ‘Multiculturalism: A Dictatorship of Virtue’. Anything with an ‘ISM’ on the end needs to be approached with caution. All ‘ISMs’ develop the characteristics of an institution rather than those of a community and often lead on to dogma and fundamentalism and dictatorship as the author points out in the article.

No-one in their RIGHT mind would agree with the direction that multiculturalism appears to be going in.

In fact, it is our increasing dependence upon the LEFT side of our brain that is having a negative influence upon all aspects of our lives.

Iain McGilchrist, in his book *The Master and His Emissary* (The divided brain and the modern world) explores this phenomenon in great detail. He concludes, ‘We need both hemispheres of the brain, but, Mr. McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere has become so far dominant that we are in danger of forgetting everything that makes us human. Taking the reader on an extraordinary journey through Western history and culture, he traces how the left hemisphere has grabbed more than its fair share of power, resulting in a society where a rigid and bureaucratic obsession with structure, narrow self-interest and a mechanistic view of the world hold sway, at an enormous cost to human happiness and the world around us.’

Increasingly the left brain has looked at the right brain (which is like trying to examine the sun with a flashlight) and been unable to comprehend its vital importance.

Ultimately, all we need to change is our minds or, more accurately, to realise the mind’s true potential. Only when we find not only different ways of thinking about the world but also different ways of BEING in the world and just how interdependent all those ways of being actually are can we expect to draw back from the verge of inanity.

Colin Carvel (NUF member)

‘I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little farther down our particular path than we have yet got ourselves.’ *E. M. Forster*, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

By Khaled Hosseini

(Pub. 2007 Amazon pb. £5.49)

If you have read *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini you will know how beautifully and movingly he writes. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is not as good. It is better. His first book concerned the relationship of two boys growing up together. His next is about the interwoven lives of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila. Mariam is a 'harami', the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy shop owner. She adores her father and is betrayed by him. Laila is an orphan who becomes pregnant at fourteen and, to save herself and her child, marries the same brute who married Mariam. The two women form a bond of friendship that endures beyond death. Although, for one of them, it ends in hope, the story of their lives is heartbreaking. Their story blends with the history of Afghanistan over a span of nearly thirty years from the Soviet invasion of 1979 to the post 9/11 U.S. led invasion that drove the Taliban from power.

There can be few oppressed groups in our troubled world who have suffered more than the women of Afghanistan. There are two Afghanistans, that of liberal, reformist Kabul and that of the rural provinces. The communist government installed by the Soviets in 1979 was not the first to try to emancipate women. In the 1920's King Amanullah banned the wearing of the burqa in public, tried to ban forced marriage and raised the minimum marrying age for girls to sixteen. The patriarchal tribal leaders rebelled and Amanullah was forced into exile. Life was a struggle for women long before - following the departure of the Soviets and a period of conflict between the warlords - the Taliban took power and implemented shari'a law.

The warlords, and more so the Taliban, effectively enslaved the female half of the population. Perhaps for the offence of being out alone or for laughing aloud, a woman might be beaten in the street by a Taliban official 'until her mother's milk leaked from her bones'. The crimes committed against women in those days make grim reading. They were beaten, tortured, humiliated and imprisoned for actions that no civilised person could regard as an offence. Women were abducted and sold as slaves, forced into marriage to militia commanders, forced into prostitution, and raped, a crime particularly heinous and unforgivable that was used to intimidate families opposed to one faction or another.

Today there is again talk of liberating women in Afghanistan and progress is being made. Once again women are serving as doctors and teachers, choosing who they will marry and going to college. But many are afraid that the West is a fair weather friend and that when they leave the Taliban will return with a vengeance.

Khaled Hosseini is now a United States good will envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency. He writes from the heart of his own need to understand and explain the country of his birth. There is much to be found in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* - how the young can be deadened to compassion by a baleful ideology; the indomitable courage of ordinary people in adversity; the undying persistence of hope. This story may move you to tears but in so doing it will remind you unforgettably that though we may wear different clothes and speak different languages we all share the same human need to give and receive love.

Mark Allaby (Editor)

Hope is the thing...

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

Emily Dickinson

What is to give light must endure burning.

Viktor Frankl

Viktor Emil Frankl M.D., Ph.D. (1905-1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor. His best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (published under a different title in 1959: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, and originally published in 1946), chronicles his experiences as a concentration camp inmate and describes his psychotherapeutic method of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most sordid ones, and thus a reason to continue living. He practised psychiatry in Theresienstadt and by giving hope to fellow inmates in despair prevented many suicides. Frankl was one of the key figures in existential therapy and a prominent source of inspiration for humanistic psychologists.

Editor (Derived from Wikipedia)

FROM FATWA TO JIHAD

By Kenan Malik

(2009, paperback edition Atlantic Books 2010)

In this book, Kenan Malik, born in Britain of Indian Muslim parents, retells the tale of community relations in England (he says next to nothing of Scotland, Wales or Ireland) since the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. His basic argument is that public policy has created 'community leaders' – of whom Sir Iqbal Sacranie is one of the most prominent – who in fact cannot demonstrate any mandate from their 'community', whether that is defined in ethnic or confessional terms. Publishers and public authorities alike defer to these 'leaders', Malik says, even though there is no logical reason for them to do so.

Whilst it is hard to disagree with this view as far as it goes, I am not sure that it goes as far as Malik seems to think it does. What is missing from Malik's account is any comparison of the experience of Muslims in England – most of whom, of course, trace their ancestry back to Pakistan or Bangla Desh – with that of non-Muslims from the subcontinent, principally Hindus and Sikhs or indeed with that of people of African descent.

Basically, British Muslims want to reject both integration and the ghetto, even though history suggests that these two options exhaust the possibilities for ethnic minorities. Malik hints at, but does not fully explore, the psychological implications of minority status (whether that is conceived in ethnic or confessional terms). He is unable to do this because he makes an unwarranted prior assumption: that what people want is equality and fairness. There is good reason to think that what people actually want is to feel empowered, which is a horse of a different colour.

Malik himself is empowered by his ability to make his views known, which in turn rests at least in part on his personal skills as a writer. Another form of empowerment is an effective spirituality, whether embedded in a religious tradition or otherwise. As Unitarians we approve of both these forms of empowerment – but what of those who lack empowering personal skills and are too afraid to embark on the often lonely and scary journey to spiritual empowerment?

Such people will seek solace in the group, and since they will be, however dimly, aware that in so doing they are acknowledging a degree of shortcoming, they will be only too anxious to claim that they are in a state of victimhood. Which would hardly matter if it were wholly absurd, but it isn't. If I derive my sense of self-respect merely from identification with a minority group – it matters not whether that group is racial, confessional or a racketsy mixture of each – then I am going to be afraid that I can only survive in this society by the grace and favour of the majority I can never join. And that will

be intolerable to me. So an episode like the *fatwa* (or indeed terrorist atrocities committed in the name of my faith) will be like manna from heaven – I will misrepresent the creation of fear in the majority as the burgeoning of their respect for me and my ilk.

As Malik shows, the current generation of political leaders have behaved unhelpfully by playing along with this misrepresentation. What else might they have done – and therefore what else might we, individually or denominationally, have called upon them to do?

In the one part of the UK where confessionalism has led more than once to civil war, an important element in the resolution of the problem was the introduction of a political system for local government which allowed for both sides to be represented according to their numbers. More particularly, it allowed the minority confessional community to choose between two political parties, one wholly constitutional, the other with a military wing.

If PR is appropriate for local Councils in Northern Ireland, perhaps it is also appropriate for English cities, mill towns and other areas with ethnically and therefore confessionally mixed populations. Members of minority communities would be able to choose between supporting ‘mainstream’ party candidates, as now, or avowedly communalist ones. I suspect Malik would argue that the great majority of British Asian Muslims would back the ‘mainstream’ candidate and so the self-appointed community leaders of the Sacranie type would be exposed as sham. What I do not understand is why Malik cannot bring himself to argue for this proposal. That, however, need not deter us.

Mike Killingworth (NUF Member)

UNIQUENESS

The one thing we all have in common is our uniqueness. If each of us is unique then this is something we all share.

This uniqueness is an endless source of curiosity and wonder. It is the exploration of our infinite diversity which draws us together and since each of us is subject to change moment by moment the process is full of energy and movement.

This real unity is alive and dynamic and springs fresh from diversity. Uniformity is entirely different and does not lead to unity. Like consistency it only creates an illusion of unity which contains nothing of the warmth, acceptance and understanding that is vital to our wellbeing.

This kind of deep acceptance of other people becomes mutual by a kind of psychic osmosis manifested in the form of good will, simple human interaction and compassion.

Such subtle forms of interaction are outside the collective/consistent and uniform comprehension of those locked into an institutional, hierarchical system frozen in orthodoxy and committed to performance and reward.

Colin Carvel

UNITARIAN GREETINGS CARDS NOW AVAILABLE

The colour card (blank inside - good for all occasions) has been designed by our young people, with all profits supporting the Youth Programme. A pack of 10 cards is just £4.95 (+60p p&p). You can purchase these by: - Visiting Essex Hall (and save the postage); Order online at www.yuonline.org.uk Post the form below that can be downloaded from: [the.ga.org.uk/pdfs/Card_Order_Form.pdf](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Card_Order_Form.pdf) (http://www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Card_Order_Form.pdf)
If you order 5 packs or more you receive an extra 10 cards free!

GA News

THE STORY OF KUAN-YIN TEA

It is said that in the third year since the Qing emperor Yongsheng ascended the throne, in Songlintau Village of Yaoyang District of Xiping Town of Anxi County of Fujian Province, there was an old tea farmer named Weiyin. He grew tea plants and believed in Guanyin (Kuan-yin). With great respect filling his soul, he placed a cup of tea in front of the statue of Guanyin every morning and evening as a tribute, and continued doing this for many years. One day, Guanyin appeared to him in a dream, and told him to seek a special tea plant between the rocks in a place named Guanyiniun dashikeng. Weiyin followed this divine enlightenment and found the miraculous tea. He then transplanted this species to his field and cultivated it with great care. Weiyin tried to propagate the plant by layer, and, in due time, collected and prepared the tea. He was delighted to find that the tea was of a high quality and tasted excellent. After that, he named the tea 'Tieguanyin', for the tea was obtained thanks to Guanyin's enlightenment in his dream.

Ross Howard

(Information derived from a pack of Kuan-yin tea, 2010.)

GA PHOTOGRAPHER REQUIRED

After many decades, John Hewerdine has announced that the Unitarian Meetings in Swansea in 2011 will be his last as the official photographer. John has said that he misses so much of the meetings performing this task, he would really like to be able to start attending as a normal delegate from 2012.

The Annual Meetings Panel is looking for a new person to take on this role, someone who can work with John in Swansea to get a better understanding of what this job involves and then to work solo in future years. It needs to be someone who can do the job for many years to come and who will not mind missing out all the sessions as so much time is required for this job. Anyone interested should contact Andrew Mason at amason@unitarian.org.uk

GA News

WEB NEWS

Modern Muslims use dreams to make major life decisions

The traditional practice of using night dreams to make major life decisions is in widespread use among modern Muslims, reveals a new study. Research leader, Durham University anthropologist Dr Iain Edgar, focused on the centuries-old practice of Istikhara, or Islamic 'dream incubation'. His study is the first comprehensive and the most contemporary academic study on Istikhara prayer and practice, which can also include daytime prayer about an important decision. www.dur.ac.uk/research/news/?itemno=10706

Rev Bob Pounder (NUF member) writes: Dear Friends, John Wilkinson has done a great job putting the service of induction (Oldham 23/10/10) on to our website www.oldhamunitarians.org.uk Click on to our Latest News: 'The Minister's Induction Video and Photos.'

Did you think Essex Hall was destroyed in the blitz? Well you are wrong! We now have the whole of the book '**The History of Essex Hall**' written by Mortimer Rowe in 1959 online at thega.org.uk/support/doc-EssexHall0.shtml

DIARY DATES

15th January, 1-4 pm Michael Servetus, 500 years. Rosslyn Hill Church 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. Rev. Cliff Reed will open our programme with a worship service using the worship packet on Servetus which he has prepared. This opens our Celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the birth of Servetus (1511-1553), a Unitarian martyr for Religious Freedom, burned at the stake with his books in Geneva, 27th October, 1553. Jaume de Marcos joins us from Barcelona. 8th -10th March 2011 IARF/WCF Conference at Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre (8 miles south of Oxford)

NEXT ISSUE

The deadline for the next issue is Tuesday 15th February 2011. 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.