

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

NEWSLETTER



Issue 402

July 2012



Abdoulaye Diabate

Taha Ghasemi

**Rev Bob Pounder, Oldham Minister & NUF Member
Reflects on the Asylum Campaign: Pages 10 &12**

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

Reg. Charity No. 1040294

Fellowship Matters

Ken Smith

Many of our regular readers are unable to reach Unitarian worship services on a regular basis, if at all ; one of the main reasons for the existence of the NUF is to provide for them through our monthly publications. At the NUF House Party in November we are going to devote a large part of the weekend to developing ideas for personal spiritual practice that members can easily undertake at home. If you already undertake some regular pattern of spiritual reading and prayer that you have found valuable and could be used by others, please share it with us; the simpler it is the better. Even in retirement we seem to lead busy lives and a few quiet minutes of reflection may be all that we can manage.

Another means to bring members in contact with worship is through the means of the UK Unitarian TV channel – a web based channel which can be accessed from a link on the NUF website: www.nufonline.org.uk. It is hoped to screen regular videos of worship services there during the coming year. There is already a collection of recorded services and clips of Unitarian events available.

Several members have inquired if they can receive the NUF publications electronically rather than in paper form. Please let the Membership Secretary know *if you wish to make this change*. There is no plan to cease the dispatch of paper publications unless you request otherwise.

With all good wishes for the summer – when it comes !

Amendment to information given in the May Issue

Donations to support Stella Burney's 'Endurance Run' in support of the Fiftieth Anniversary Appeal of the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund should now be sent to the treasurer, Chris Goacher's new address: 24 Arlington Drive, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 0AU. Any donation to S.A.C.H. for their Fiftieth Anniversary Appeal can be made through their website: www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk. You can also read there of the many events that individuals are doing this year to support the Appeal.

The Unitarian Women's League have made the S.A.C.H. Fiftieth Anniversary Appeal their project for 2012/2013. www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensleague.
(ed)

President's Page

Dorothy Archer

In a general conversation recently a new acquaintance claimed to be the youngest person ever to have been expelled from a British school. This caused general interest. We gathered round.

She explained that she had gone to a private Roman Catholic school. It was her first day at school and she was three. She was happily playing at tea parties, pouring water into thin miniature tea cups from a tin tea-pot on a tray. Then it seemed that the game was over and that it was time to stop. She wanted the tin tray. When it became obvious that she was losing the argument she heaved with all her strength and threw the whole lot at the nun. Consternation. Parents were sent for and told to take the child away and bring her back when she had learned some manners.

“Manners maketh Man” says the motto of a well known public school.

When asked what she thought was the most attractive thing about a young girl the late Queen Mother replied, “Good manners”.

Manners are the semi-formal expression of consideration, care, respect and desire to help others. They have little to do with ritual and etiquette and more to do with the commandment “Love your neighbour as yourself”. Good manners give time and space for groups working together and ease social exchanges. Each country has developed its own cultural variations of good manners. In some it is not acceptable to present a gift with the left hand, in others to sit with crossed legs and in another for a man to wear headgear indoors or whilst eating.

All the world's major religions, like Christianity, a strong theme of loving and therefore helping and easing the paths of neighbours is present. The individual who does not conform to his society's version of good manners often gets expelled, like the tea-tray thrower. Sometimes these individuals become total outcasts and sometimes trailblazers, who help to modify society itself and prevent us becoming moribund.

However, I am happy to report that this particular tea-tray-thrower was accepted back into school two years later, when she was five. She must have passed the test. Sixty years later, a valuable member of society, she still remembers the day she was expelled.

Best Wishes from Dorothy

From Our Minister

Tony McNeile

I run a small meditation group. There are only six of us and we meet at one another's houses about once a month. There is a familiar routine. We arrive with all sorts of things going on in our lives, shopping, house, work, children, interests, worries, the journey here and so on. So we start by what is known, 'centering down'. Sitting quietly in a good posture with our eyes closed and breathing gently. Sometimes there is slightest background of music. Centering down gets beneath all these running thoughts to try to reach a calmness beneath them. We use the image of the sea, going on beneath the choppy surface to the calmness below.

Meditation rests the mind and we also try to make it a little more disciplined, so that we can concentrate on what we are doing without our thoughts simply losing interest and wandering off. We talk about our minds chasing rabbits or being like chattering monkeys.

We try to declutter our minds by following a visualisation, trying to create the images formed from what is being read. There might be a short session of focussing on ourselves, on our own bodies to visualise the blood flowing round and healing and loosening the bits that hurt or the joints that are stiff.

In another section we might focus our thoughts on other people, those who are close to us and who need some healing thoughts.

Practising meditation makes us more aware of ourselves and we hope to find within ourselves that calm serene person that is balanced and has shed all the phobias and self deprecating thoughts that have been built up over the years. Thoughts about ourselves we have conjured up on our own, or words with barbs stuck into our spirits by other people. We want to shed all the self doubt and feelings of unworthiness.

I knew a couple once who were pretty fraught because they did not know where to go next when their little business seemed to be in the doldrums and about to fall around their ears. It was his wife who suggested a ten minute daily meditation over the breakfast table. They said later it was the meditation that gave them a better insight into their problems and the strength to deal with them.

Meditation restores the spirit and the mind. It is surprising that it always seems to work better when we are in our small group, but it is possible when we are alone. At the NUF House Party this year, we are exploring and preparing material for personal worship and meditation. As well as using written words we shall be exploring the use of symbols and shrines. Most Hindu families have a small shrine in some corner of the house where they offer a short devotion at the beginning and end of each day. It only need take a few minutes. I have one. On it I have Unitarian symbols and photographs of the family, some souvenirs of life's achievements and some colours and a candle. It is a place I can connect with.

Reflection

The glorious light is concealed and then revealed. We are born in that light but with our spiritual eyes closed, blind like kittens. Some in life will never open those eyes, not interested or not daring. Others will feel the light on closed eyelids and need to know what is around them. They can only learn about the light through hearsay. They hear about the religion of their culture and about the truth it contains. They hear what they must believe and how they must live. For some that is enough and the eyes stay closed and warm.

The still restless seek to move beyond the hearsay.

Eastern religions are known and their worship based on mystical teaching and meditational practices. The Christian scriptures contain similar markers and signs but they are hidden because we read intellectually or with the wool of long remembered hearsay in our minds. But see the historical Jesus not as a Hebrew rabbi but as a teacher of light. And read differently. He opened the eyes of the blind, telling followers time and time again to look and see. To let your light shine.

Those who then see have the knowledge of God within them. They are in love with life that transcends hearsay. The spiritual world is all around them and in everything. They share knowledge of truth, beauty, love and time They are enlightened.

www.unitariansocieties.org.uk

The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network has opened a facebook page and already we have more than a hundred people who have signed up to it. It is a great way to exchange information about events and groups, particularly our sister group the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans, CUUPs. CUUPs are growing in the United States and groups are being formed within congregations. In this country we have separate organisations outside districts and congregations. Congregations and societies are like the weft and warp of the fabric that is the Unitarian Movement. It makes me wonder how this would change if societies began to have branches within congregations. Would it give them a stronger voice or would it weaken them by fragmenting them.

Unitarian societies are self governing and mostly members only, because this is their only way to raise income, through membership fees. The shop windows they have is through reporting their activities in *The Inquirer*, the in-house fortnightly newspaper for the Unitarians, or by having events at the annual meeting of the Unitarians.

Most people hold a candle to some interest or good cause and most can be found among the Unitarian Societies.

The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network is expanding slowly and local groups are being set up here and there. The Earth Spirit concept exists within Unitarianism. There is a regular *The File* published four times a year, with contributions from members, on a theme which is suggested by the editors. Art as well as written words features in *The File*. The editor is a good artist and adds dynamic art work to the written words.

The facebook page is open to all, Unitarian or not, and is proving to be a good PR move by the Society. This Newsletter is happy to promote the events of Unitarian Societies.

Don't miss the NUF House Party at Great Hucklow, 2-4 November. The cost will be £99. To book please contact Stella at the Nightingale Centre: 01298 871218: info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk. Go to: www.nufonline.org.uk where you will find the booking form or contact the NUF Secretary Ken Smith on: 01252 628320

Brahmo Samaj Websites

Indra Sikdar

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmo_Samaj

www.thebrahmosamaj.net/

<http://brahmosamaj.org/>

www.thesadharanbrahmosamaj.org/

The above are the four web sites that I found for the Brahmo Samaj.

For those not familiar with the Brahmo Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj is a Hindu reform movement which was heavily influenced by Unitarianism. It was conceived at Kolkata in 1830 by Debendranath Tagore and Rammohan Roy as reformation of the prevailing Brahmanism of the time (specifically Kulin practices) and began the Bengal Renaissance of the 19th century pioneering some of the religious, social and educational advances of the Hindu community.

The Wikipedia entry has the history of the organization: name, timeline, divisions (there appears to be two Brahmo Samaj's one called Adi and another called Sadharan), controversies and current status - number of adherents.

The second web site listed is the UK based website and talks about history, founding fathers and has a contact page. A criticism is that it could have some more up to date activities (some listed are from 2009 and 2011). Also, the web site could include some current members' photos and a short paragraph about them.

The third web site purports to be from the World Brahmo Council it is a colourful site with three paintings of the leaders in the centre and more than 20 tabs on the left taking you to specific areas of the website. There is a blog, yahoo group and a links page of 32 sites.

The last web site is Kolkata based Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, it has a picture of the HQ and has gone for the simple approach with only a few tabs including: About Us, Organization News and Events and Publications.

See: <http://bristolunitarians.blogspot.co.uk/2008/03/rammohun-roy.html> to read more about Rammohan Roy and the Bristol Unitarians.

From whence comes Joy?

Naomi Linnell

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy. Rabindranath Tagore

The Sparrow Family had bathed in the sandy dust of a hot summer's afternoon and now, wings spread wide to trap the cooling air, sat close to their nests in the shrubs beside the iron railings. The Patriarch, while pretending to sleep, was keeping a sharp bright eye on his extended family.

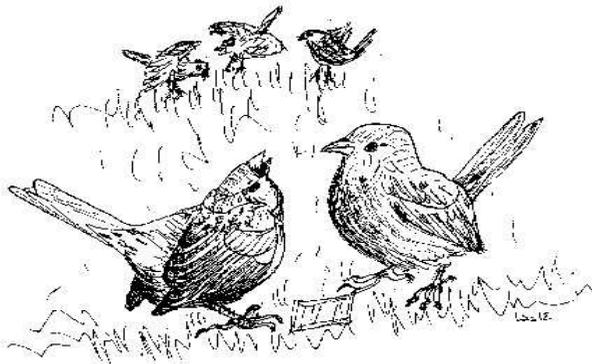
"What in the name of Rhiannon is that boy doing?" he demanded. "Who, Grandpapa? Oh him! it's Eldest Son." said Eldest Daughter. "He's making a chart showing his evolution from some flying monster who disappeared a million years ago." "Why's he doing that?" Grandpapa asked. "Search me" said Eldest Daughter. "I know," cheeped a Grandson, who was dissecting a particularly succulent worm, "it's Science." "It's boring." said his fluffy big sister. "He's stopped singing, he's stopped teasing Seagulls, and he hasn't time any more to visit the Venerable Old Bird in his evening nest of a thousand sky blue flowers."

"True," said a Cousin, "but he's really devoted to this Evolution thing. He says it's 'Logically beautiful' and 'The intellectual Key to the mystery of our being.' Very posh." "But does he find any joy in it?" asked Grandmama. "Not joy, perhaps," said the Cousin, "but lots of satisfaction from the patterns he's found in his chart. He says the answer to the whole enigma of life is there - who are we, what are we, and why are we." "Maybe." said Grandmama. "But we need nectar for the soul as well as grist for the mind."

She fluttered across the grass to where her Eldest Son huddled over his extraordinary Chart. "May I see?" she said. Eldest Son looked up amazed. "Do you really want to look at this 'boring old thing'?" "Yes I do, because it matters to you." She stared wide eyed at the Chart, and then said "I wonder if you can look up at Science and say: 'You are the delight of my heart, my consolation in sorrow, a light that guides me through the dark of the storm. You shelter me from the fierce heat of Summer, and in Autumn you share with me the bounty of the harvest. You warm me through the bitter days of Winter, and in Spring-time you invite me into the Circle of Life which is a dance eternal.'"

Eldest Son shrugged. “No, not really.” He said. “When I look at Evolution, I begin to find answers to my questions about real life about yesterday, today and even tomorrow. There are a thousand questions still unasked, and I shall never find answers to most of them, but I cannot stop looking. Something drives me on, but I can’t tell you what. I don’t look into the heart of your Holy One, whom I have yet to meet. I’m not a poet like you Grandmama.”

The Matriarch chuckled. “No poet. Just a plump old bird in a faded old motley brown coat, who has caught a glimpse of the Divine One mirrored in the fiery face of the Sun and the sweet silvered features of the moon. He is both the source and the end of my being.” She smiled at Eldest Son “Between us, you and me united, we might one day bring a little extra Joy to the whole world.”



The Chinese Sparrow War: in 1958 Chairman Mao declared sparrows to be one of The Four Pests and the whole population was required to kill the entire national flock. The sparrows were practically wiped out, the insect population increased alarmingly, harvests were poor and the ecological balance of the country was seriously compromised. After 1960 the sparrows were welcome again. Since then bedbugs and now cockroaches have variously replaced them on the national hit-list. Here in Britain we should do all we can to halt the current decline of our national sparrow population, or risk losing the company of these wonderful small birds who are an integral and shining part of our daily lives.

Bob Pounder Reflects on the Asylum Campaign in Oldham

We live in a crazy world really; there is a potential abundance of everything on this planet. Humanity has the ability to feed itself and meet the needs of every human being in the world and yet everywhere there is hunger, starvation and want. In spite of the massive economic problems that the UK continues to face, we remain one of the richest countries. Nevertheless as the recession continues to bite along with unemployment, personal debt, and cuts to benefits we are reminded every day of the rising levels of homelessness and the poverty that is affecting swathes of the population. Everywhere there is want and certainly in Oldham it's not hard to find.



When I first started my ministry in Oldham in August 2010 I went along with Marian Nuttall, every Thursday, to the Destitution Project at the Baptist Church across the road from our Unitarian Chapel. The Baptist Church hosts and assists Oldham Unity which is a non-partisan, broad coalition of people of faith and those of none. Every week food parcels are distributed to destitute refugees who are seeking asylum. In the present climate the project, which also receives Unitarian funds, is struggling to meet the increasing numbers of those who 'fail' the criteria for asylum. Now another church in Oldham has set up a food bank to help feed the increasing numbers of the indigenous local population who are going hungry because of the recession.

Personally, I do not see a division between these two problems. Where there is need on this level it must be met for we are all human beings at the end of the day and we are all God's children. Our Chapel is located in the town centre and surrounded by a large Muslim community. There is no shortage of goodwill here and, I have had some very positive experiences in working and worshipping with the Islamic community. The challenge for our Unitarian community is to become relevant and to ask the question, 'what is the mission, for this Chapel in this town, what does God want us to do?' We continue to address this question and as we do so the opportunities for mission (and hopefully for growth) are becoming more apparent.

One of our initiatives that is proving to be challenging, rewarding and at times difficult is the campaign for asylum for Abdoulaye Diabate from the Ivory Coast and for Taha Ghasemi, a Kurd seeking asylum from Iran.

Both of these men have lived in the UK for over six years. They both live a life of destitution which means that they are homeless without any entitlement to state benefits and are not allowed to seek work. Basically, they both inhabit a sort of twilight world where they are forced to live on handouts and to live and sleep where they can. They have to rely on somebody allowing them a spare bed, a sofa or just a space on the floor. Abdoulaye fled the violence of the Ivory Coast which is still ongoing. His sister, his only sibling, has been murdered and the family home has been burned down. Taha was arrested and tortured in Iran for demonstrating for Kurdish rights. He escaped Iran in 2006 and cannot return.

In June 2011, the members of Oldham Unitarian Chapel took the decision to support both men and to campaign for their right to remain in the UK. Within the past year we have launched a number of initiatives aimed at bringing their campaigns to a successful conclusion. We have obtained the support and coverage of local newspapers; we have enjoyed also the support of Oldham's MPs, Michael Meacher and Debbie Abrahams. We have had regular coverage in *The Inquirer*, we have nearly 100 supporters on our e-mail list and regular updates and coverage have been provided. Further to this there is also extensive coverage on our website, thanks to John Wilkinson. Essentially we have also obtained the services of a good and reliable firm of solicitors in Manchester who deal with immigration law. Fundraising has been and continues to be one of our central concerns. We have so far raised £3,734 but have spent £4,204 and the bills keep coming in! Nevertheless, I have to say that we have had a terrific response from many Unitarians, from our churches and chapels throughout the UK and we continue to do so (very many thanks to all of you).

One of the great things about this kind of work is that far from being disheartened one becomes inspired by the kindness and generosity of others. More than that, others take heart from our actions and are likewise inspired. I think the whole purpose of the spiritual life is to become fully human. In the service of others we can truly find ourselves:

"And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

How We Are Changing the World

Wade Miller-Knight

“We can’t do anything about asylum-seekers in leafy Our-town”, the minister said.

Some nights before, Khaled * stood at a bus-stop, the nearest outside an airport, bereft of everything except the clothes he stood up in, for on this cold evening even his overcoat had been stolen along with the few possessions he had brought from the country he had fled. Khaled waited with no passport, no qualifications, nowhere to go...and no bus fare.

If someone in Leafytown had known, had collected Khaled, it would have taken them a whole thirty-five minutes to get home. *Can't?* Isn't it curious what 28 miles of six-lane highway can do to the mind!

Leafytown *can* engage. Perhaps it needs more interest, or organisation. Leafytown has, I imagine, some residents trained to teach English as a foreign language, some mechanics who know how to show someone else the way to replace a clutch and repair a brake (skills that a returning refugee might turn into a job back home), a lawyer or two trained in immigration law, maybe even a psychotherapist who can help people overcome the traumatic effects of seeing their father shot, or of carrying out an ‘honour’ killing. Leafytown might even be able to make good use of a few asylum-seekers as volunteers, if one or two of its citizens can spare 80 minutes to collect them and drive them home on Saturdays.

Leafytown has schools. Perhaps geography classes could make a field trip to a centre three miles north of the airport where asylum-seekers meet. Asylum-seekers who speak English spending a couple of hours talking with the children might teach them a more memorable lesson about life in Zimbabwe or Sudan between breakfast and lunch than they will get from twenty weeks of study over maps and websites.

I am optimistic at a deeper level of truth. The first essential move towards the oneness of the world that we are building is change in thinking. 75 years ago a refugee from Barcelona, then in civil war, was not allowed to land at Dover though his brother was resident here and willing to feed and house him and his little girl. I know, because many years later I married that daughter. You see, Britain thought it had too many immigrants. That Khaled is here at all, that in fact he was collected at the bus-stop by Social Services and that

that he and thousands like him are living and studying here and getting legal aid and psychological support, all at taxpayers' expense, is due to the change over these eight decades in how interconnected in our world we, the islanders of Britain, feel. Because for some Britons now, Khaled, and Jane from Zimbabwe and James from Eritrea, are not 'three more of *them*', but three of us. It is because the minister of Leafytown, and those of Thistown and Thatsuburb, have preached love, unity, peace and forgiveness, and are focusing on the common strengths of the world's faiths rather than preaching divisive "I'm right, you're wrong" religion, and because the listening people in the congregation are practising universal human values more and selfishness and greed less in their lives, in how they parent their children and how they care for their friends, in how they engage with the ninety-year old blind people of Leafytown and how they act as employers of their English gardeners, their Slovakian au pairs and their Transylvanian cleaners. That is genuine positive contribution to making the world awaited a world attained.

- not his real name

peace flows in my heart

Mohammed is a messenger of peace

peace, inner peace: a major human value.

think peace

peace grows from meditation

peace is the space between the words

peace forms like frost or dew:

It condenses out of the atmosphere.

peace is love and love is peace

peace is of the heart, is in the voice, is a vibration

peace is a quality - immeasurable, though one may experience it in lesser or greater depth.

in relationship, peace connects to acceptance.

Especially unconditional acceptance.

peace is stillness

peace is resonance

make peace

peace is a feeling, not an outer circumstance.

Peace is an act of will, especially goodwill

peace is light - both illumination and weightless.

Book Reviews

Ella Lewis-Jones

Finding Happiness by Christopher Jamison is an insightful and helpful book from which much can be learned. Although the author, Christopher Jamison, is the Abbot of Worth, the Benedictine monastery in Sussex which featured in the 2005 TV series *The Monastery*, the book is “for everyone in search of happiness”, for people of “all religions and none”. It presents a number of theories of happiness which come from a variety of ancient and modern religious and secular sources. The key idea running through the whole book is that happiness cannot be guaranteed, the emphasis is much more centred around the idea of helping readers to identify and refrain from those behaviours and actions which are often the cause of much avoidable unhappiness.

The book acknowledges the generalised feeling of dissatisfaction and lack of meaning in life which is frequently expressed by many people in contemporary society.

It is suggested that the monks who live within the Benedictine order are faced with similar problems to those which we encounter in dealing with others in the various “communities” in which we live, work, take our leisure or worship, and that the pattern of life and the way that the Benedictine Monks respond to others in their community has much to be recommended. Learning to deal positively with the problems which arise when we mix and work with others in our various communities holds the key to happiness.

The monks at Worth live according to The Rule of St Benedict, which is a practical philosophy, which many modern liberal Christians have adopted. Alongside all the classic religions Benedict’s Rule recognises the strong link between happiness and virtue and provides moral and practical stepping-stones for daily living.

This book is not a prescription for happiness. Rather it is a resource which enables the reader to identify and avoid those thoughts and actions which are at the root of their unhappiness. In the same way that being a member of any community tends to support and encourage particular attitudes and behaviours, from time to time this book needs to be revisited so that the reader can be reacquainted with its wisdom.

Ella is a member of the NUF and Highland Place Unitarian Church, Aberdare

The Contribution Of Plato To Free Religious Thought, Essex Hall Lecture 1949
Dorothy Tarrant MA, PhD **Reviewer Pat Caddick**

I came to this article untutored in scholarly Platonic thought and also in the mode of discourse. However, I tackled it with some curiosity as one who upholds freedom in religious thought without the fetters of institutional constraint. I found the language dense and had to re-read some sentences and paragraphs more than once; had I heard it first as a lecture I would have lost the plot fairly early on.

The first page captured my attention with the problem of the tension that exists between freedom and authority, but almost lost me with the introduction of the concepts of 'ultimate truths' and 'supra-rational knowledge', both being meaningless notions to me. These themes introduced Plato, drawing comparison with his time and ours in the struggles of war and its aftermath, political unrest and the ferment of new ideas. The author reminds us that Plato was an Athenian of the 4th century BC struggling with the Greek mind of his day, and who was at the beginning of philosophical speculation.

Plato followed his master Socrates in the conversational model of working through problems, allowing themes to develop spontaneously and arguments to take their own line 'whither-soever' they went. Both men were interested above all in the human personality and 'the solemn duties and responsibility of the human soul'. Plato recognised moral weakness in humans, but believed in re-incarnation and the possibility of ultimate release from the body and union with God, with reason (the intellectual and spiritual faculty) being the immortal soul in its purity.

The lecture develops this platonic concept, then introduces his idea of the Forms — knowledge of which is the proper destiny and goal of the spirit of man. His parable of the prisoners in the Cave illustrates how the mind can proceed upward to the genuine realities of the intelligible world (the Forms) illuminated by the supreme light of the Good, which is beyond the faculty of reason. Plato does not identify the Good with God. His soul finds its satisfaction in 'clear-eyed conscious vision of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good'; not in 'ecstatic union with the Deity'. (This seems to conflict with his re-incarnation thoughts!)

Ultimately though, I can see how that 4th century problem of harmonising intellectual reasoning with experience of the abstract 'other', resonates with the free religious struggles of the human mind today.

Phil Silk's Book Notes

I like reading, especially 'serious' things. I also like sharing, which I plan to do now and then. Here are a few books you might find of interest, with just a few comments. All are stimulating, even if you disagree at times. Perhaps you will share some, too, or let me know your responses.

Soul Dust -The Magic of Consciousness: by Nicholas Humphrey 2012. 264 pages, plus notes and index. He blends science and philosophy to explore a modern theory of self-awareness.

Homestretch -The Art of Finishing Life Well: by Tom Owen-Towle. 2008. 1141 pages. This American UU minister explores some problems and possibilities as we grow old. If you like this, you have 14 more to try.

The Tyranny of Choice: by Renata Salecl. 2011. 136 pages plus notes and further reading. Choice can be enabling and frightening..

The Age of Absurdity - Why Modern Life Makes It Hard To Be Happy: by Michael Foley. 2010. 228 pages plus notes and index. "The Problems; The Sources; The Strategies; The Applications; The Happy Ending".

The Spirit Level - Why Equality is Better for Everyone: by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. 2010. 272 pages plus various useful bits.

The Spirit Level Delusion - Fact-Checking the Left's Theory of Everything: by Christopher Snowdon. 2010. 152 plus notes and index. Both are challenging and overstated. How can we build a better Britain? (I have read a review of another relevant book: *So You Think You Know About Britain?* by Danny Dorling. 308 pages. "An angry study of increasing inequalities". "For this country to change for the better we must get to know it better."

Ed Note: Phil has promised us more of his 'Book Notes' so watch out for this feature in future Newsletters.

NUF Book Collection

1662 - 1962 The Ejection and Its Consequences is a collection of essays reprinted from the *Hibbert Journal*, April 1962 consisting of four essays by L A Garrard, C Gordon Bolam, Roger Thomas, Dr Jeremy Goring and H L Short. This short booklet is for those who have already some familiarity with, and interest in, the roots of our movement and are prepared to engage with a more detailed account, but I wouldn't recommend it for those looking for a light read. Available from the NUF Book Collection. (*Editor*)

Rev Dr Ann Peart in conversation with Joan Wilkinson

Ann and I, at the Unitarian Communication Coordinators Network (UCCN) Workshop Weekend at Hucklow in February, were in conversation whilst John Wilkinson filmed. The last section, when Ann spoke of her experiences and thoughts of her GA Presidential year, is now included on the video section of the NUF website: www.nufonline.org.uk with the longer part of the conversation, covering her life story, being included on the Unitarians Womens Group and on my own website covering Unitarian Women: www.yorkshiregirl.org.uk.

Ann has a long experience of the Unitarian movement and what has surprised her most over this last year, has been how much congregations have changed over recent years and how many new and diverse ranges of people she has met and felt encouraged by.

She has always been fascinated by change and acknowledged that change, diversity and controversy had always been part of Unitarianism. The importance of finding a way to negotiate them is an ongoing process we have to accept. Congregations may respond to the question, 'how long you been doing it?' with the answer 'always'. She then asks 'how long is always?'. Now that can be more difficult. She gave as an example, the question; 'how long have you been lighting a chalice?' It is quite common for congregations to believe they have always lit a chalice to open their services. Ann was able to tell them that no chalices were being lit in the 1950s/60s/70s. That has allowed her to go on and explore with the congregations, the whole concept of change.

Probably the biggest change over the past twenty years has been the growing influence of the Internet. Almost all the new people finding us now, do so through the Internet. Ann believes that ministers and congregations need to be involved with the electronic media. Social changes have taken place coinciding with the changes brought about by communication over the Internet .

The change whereby there was a certain etiquette, expected and taught, whilst growing up, has resulted in the respect of boundaries being lost. If the main means of communication is through the Internet the art of listening may no longer be there .Those joining a group or congregation, that physically meets, may not know how to behave in that situation, with etiquette and guidelines on how to meet in community having to be created.

The situation between Minister and congregation is also something that has been affected by these changes. In the past there were no mobile phones and email access whereas now the Minister is easily accessible at almost any time. This can make it very difficult and is another area where boundaries and respect for time have to be negotiated.

It was heartening to hear that Ann had enjoyed her year as President more than she had expected because of change rather than in spite of it. How we negotiate our future is an ongoing process and my overall impression from our conversation was that we could and should negotiate the changes positively. (*Editor*)

Assisted Dying Resolution discussed on the Forum

At the GA Meetings at Keele this year, the following motion was put forward by Fulwood Chapel, Sheffield. It was referred back in order that it could be more fully discussed within the movement and presented again next year. It reads as follows:

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches believe that:

Any individual who faces an intolerable existence because of a debilitating and/or incurable condition should have the right to seek support for the termination of their life in a painless and dignified manner: and legislation should respect their choice and allow them compassionate assistance in achieving such a death without fear of prosecution.

Fortunately some Forum members had been at Keele and were able to outline points made there, e.g. that the individual conscience, not the law, should be our guide: we treat our pets more humanely: the vulnerability of the sick or old feeling pressured into feeling that they are a burden: what about the pressure put on those assisting someone to die.

Forum members felt that individuals should have the right to choose for themselves and be able to seek assistance to end their life. Difficult questions should be addressed though. How do we ensure that the vulnerable are protected? Would decisions made months or years before, when in sound mind, be respected later? How would we know that the person still feels the same?

Join the forum and take part in the discussion: www.nufonline.org.uk .

Do send your thoughts on this issue to the *Newsletter Editor*.

Diary Dates

9th - 13th July: UNITARIAN DISCOVERY HOLIDAY. 'Ways of Seeing - all in the eyes of the beholder'. A short, themed holiday break; relax, sing, worship and have fun together. The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow. Contact: Margery MacKay and Marjorie Walker: 07718 106732 or 01506 493 612

16th July: FRESH APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE: open informal study and discussion group lead by Jim Corrigan at Golders Green Unitarians, 31½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS. Promptly at 7.30 pm. Nearest tube: Golders Green.

24th July, 6.30pm: YOUNGHUSBAND INTERFAITH SERVICE at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ

11th August: OPEN DAY AT THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE. Come and visit the centre, take in lunch, afternoon teas and all the stalls and activities. See the improvements made to the centre and meet up with old friends. Stay overnight if you wish: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk

31st Aug - 3rd Sept: UNITARIAN MUSIC SOCIETY - SUMMER CONFERENCE. At The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire. Contact: Adrienne Wilson 01483 421 905

Don't miss the 'Longest Unitarian Sermon in History'

On the 29th July James Barry of Ditchling Unitarians will set a record for the world's longest Unitarian Sermon, with 12 hours being the first milestone. The event will take place from noon at the Ditchling Chapel. Visitors are welcome at any time and for the 11am service beforehand. If you can't visit Ditchling in East Sussex the whole event will be broadcast live on www.ukunitarians.org.uk/tv where you can join in and ask James questions, but be aware, serious subjects are banned! Money raised will go to 'Send a Child to Hucklow', the National Youth programme and the Ditchling Chapel. More details at www.ukunitarians.org.uk/news The event is registered with Guinness.

New Members

Mrs Barbara J Dyke
Graham and Mrs Sharon Greenall

Next Issue

The deadline for the next issue is: 18th August.

Points of Contact

- President:** Dorothy Archer, Sandon House, Market Street, Mossley,
Ashton-under-Lyne OL3 0JG Tel: 01457 836632
- Secretary:** Ken Smith, 12 Gravel Road, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants GU52 6BB
Tel: 01252 628 320 email: kensmith4@btinternet.com
- Treasurer:** Elizabeth Barlow, 67 Wychall Park, Seaton, Devon EX12 2EL
Tel: 01297 625955 email: treasurer@nufonline.org.uk
- Membership Sec:** Howard Wilkins, 46 Brookside, Burbage, Hinckley, Leics. LE10 2TL
Tel: 01455 635043 email: membership@nufonline.org.uk
- Minister and
Viewpoint Editor:** Rev Tony McNeile, 102 Turton Road, Bradshaw, Bolton BL2 3DY
Tel: 01204 591570 email: tony.mcneile@nufonline.org.uk
- Newsletter Editor:** Joan Wilkinson, 10 Shirley Close, Castle Donington, Derby DE74 2XB
Tel: 01332 814055 email: joanwilk@nufonline.org.uk
- Webmaster:** John Wilkinson, 10 Shirley Close, Castle Donington, Derby DE74 2XB
Tel: 01332 814055 email: postmaster@nufonline.org.uk
- Forum Manager:** Ken Smith, 12 Gravel Road, Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants GU52 6BB
Tel: 01252 628320 email: moderator@nufonline.org.uk
- Books of Fellowship:** Alan Oates, 28 Placehouse Lane, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 1LA
Tel: 01737 551788
- Distributor:** Derek Harvey, Flat 2, 34 Broomgrove Road, Sheffield SL10 2LR



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email address: nuf@nufonline.org.uk

Website: www.nufonline.org.uk