

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

NEWSLETTER



Issue 404

November 2012



SPECIAL FEATURE

Hannah

Page 10

*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

With regret it was decided to cancel the NUF Weekend at Great Hucklow this year owing to the very small number of bookings made. We shall think afresh about the possibilities of an NUF gathering in the coming year and I invite any members who would like to meet together but have not done so before to contact me with their ideas.

We are sorry that Naomi Linnell has left the committee but we are glad that we shall not lose her valued contributions to the Newsletter. We have decided to co-opt our Distributor, Derek Harvey, on to the committee, in her place, until the AGM, when it is hoped he will stand for election to the committee for the full term. At next year's GA, Joan Wilkinson, Louise Rogers and Ella Lewis-Jones will be stepping down from the committee and we invite nominations for members to replace them and Naomi Linnell. Further details are given elsewhere in this issue.

The steep rise in postal charges this year obliges us to raise subscriptions for the coming year. We are especially grateful to our diligent distributor who purchased a large stock of stamps before the increase took effect so that the full impact of the change has not so far been felt.

I advertised some months ago the opportunity for members to receive their monthly publications by e-mail; the response has so far been very small but the offer remains open — overseas members particularly may appreciate this form of dispatch which means that they receive their publications far more quickly. Please contact the Membership Secretary if you wish to make this change.

Our publishing schedule means that, although I am writing this in the middle of October, I must not neglect the pleasant duty of wishing all our members a very happy and blessed Christmas.

FORUM NEWS

Two recent topics, on the Forum, have created some thoughtful responses. The first one, which asks: 'Who leads the Unitarians?' addresses the organisation of the GA, which has left us without a clearly defined leader and/or spokesperson, who is recognised as such throughout the movement. The second topic asked whether the: 'Seven Principles of the UUA' are ones that would serve Unitarianism in the UK well or whether we would wish to add or remove any. Do go to www.nufonline.org.uk, register and join us. (*Editor*)

The President's Christmas Parcel of Wit and Wisdom Quotations

At Christmas play and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year.

Thomas Tossier (1524-1580)

The most wasted of all days is one in which one has not laughed.

Nicholas Chamfort (1741-1794)

Mix a little folly with your plans: it is sweet to be silly at the right moment.

Horace (65-8 BC)

He is very intelligent but sometimes his brains go to his head.

Margaret Asquith (1864-1945)

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Leviticus 19:18 (King James Bible)

My view is that in this life the golden rule is not to have too much of anything.

Terence (190-159 BC)

Gluttony is emotional escape from something that is eating us.

Peter de Vries (1910-1993)

How many things have I no need of.

*Socrates (469-399 BC) - looking at goods
laid out for sale*

When an idea is dead it is embalmed in a text book.

Patrick Geddes (1854-1932)

It's not what I call you that matters but what I answer to.

African Proverb

If a fence is strong enough I'll sit on it.

Unitarian MP Sir Cyril Smith (1928-2010)

You know very well that love is, above all the gift of oneself.

Jean Anouish (1910-1987)

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud.

Live well, learn plenty, laugh often, love much.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Wishing you all a Very Happy Christmas

Dorothy Archer

‘Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me!’ I was thinking of this little rhyme when the furore was going on over the film, which Muslims feel insults their prophet. Christianity in the old days used to be, and some sections still are in the present days, easily angered by criticism. I think that if your faith is strong, it can withstand everything — even sticks and stones.

For hundreds of years the Unitarians were kept as outsiders because they would not be ‘Proper Christians’. That is, subscribe to the Doctrine of the Trinity. Because of their faith, they were denied access to universities, they were denied work in the Government offices. They were considered to be pariahs — but there must have been times when they thought, ‘Is it worth it?’. They could have gone to church and said the prayers they didn’t believe with fingers crossed — and then been accepted as full members of society. If they had done that there would be no Unitarians today.

Nowadays we are not a threat to anyone and consequently we are ignored. It is true that many of the main stream Christian churches do not welcome Unitarians into the wider community events they organise — but so what? We don’t strive to be like them and we don’t strive to make them like us. The pity is that it is contrary to the Christian teaching to exclude anyone from anything so we can only look at such Christian groups with sadness.

When religious groups become hostile and violent, I do wonder where their religion has gone.

PRAYER

Blessed are the peacemakers! When there is anger, when there is violence between religious groups, let us pray that the time will come when all the leaders will stand up and be peacemakers, call meetings and find ways to overcome the differences which are causing dissent. We remember that history keeps the names of peacemakers in hallowed reverence.

We pray that all people can acknowledge that there are differences between everyone — between individuals and between groups and between communities. Let us celebrate those differences, let us acknowledge the barriers and respect them with honour. Let us not celebrate violence or destruction or hatred — but feel the shame that its suffering brings into the world. Let us believe that God turns his face away from the angry and the violent.

THE UNITARIAN PEACE FELLOWSHIP (UPF)

The Unitarian Peace Fellowship was founded in 1916, in the midst of one of the worst wars that has ever occurred between nations within human-kind. There is a process to war. It begins because of a power struggle, or through the greed of one for the territory of another. Rhetoric escalates; deadlines are given. And all the while the people of the other side are more and more demonised. They become dehumanised — so when you go off to fight them, you are only fighting a collection of words — guerrillas — or terrorists or communists — or anything else which doesn't reflect contact with another person like yourself, with family and feelings.

It takes courage to stand against the blanket publicity of demonisation and to remain a person committed to peaceful solutions to conflicts. It takes courage to be a person committed to a faith that speaks up for peace. When it comes to conflict history leaves us with two heroes — the hero of war and the hero of peace. The one who stands head and shoulders above the other is the hero of peace.

The Unitarian Peace Fellowship is a fellowship within the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, for those who witness to the belief that war and preparations for war are sins against God (sic) and failures of humanity, and who believe that right relationships can only be established through understanding and love. Members pledge themselves to the promotion of goodwill, justice and peace between people and nations. Members are supported in their individual work and witness for peace by the network that exists in the denomination. Information is disseminated via the newsletter'.

To learn more about the Peace Fellowship please contact their secretary: Sue Woolley; e-mail: sue.woolley@virgin.net



www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/

Canterbury Cathedral - the Corona Chapel

Naomi Linnell

*And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year. Eliot: Little Gidding*

At the farthest eastern point of the Cathedral there is a circular chapel long known as the Corona Chapel. Its shrine once held the crown of Tomas Becket's head sliced off in 1172 by one of Henry II's murdering barons. It became a place of popular pilgrimage, the air sharp with the fragrance of incense and the vault echoing with a million prayers of the faithful. But in 1537 its treasures were plundered and the shrine destroyed by Henry VIII's iconoclastic Commissioners. Empty now, it serves to remind us of those other myriad brave souls who lived and died serving God and loving their neighbours. With its jewel stained windows, its airy emptiness, its soft light and gentle peace, it has become place of thankful remembrance and quiet contemplation.

Here are especially honoured the saints of our own time, among them Martin Luther King; Archbishop Oscar Romero assassinated because he fought for the rights of the poor; Maximilian Kolbe, Franciscan priest, took the place of a stranger sentenced to death by starvation in Auschwitz; Maria Skobtsova Russian aristocrat, poet and nun, assisted Jewish refugees to escape Nazi occupied Europe, died in a Ravensbruck gas chamber in the place of an unknown Jewish woman; Edith Stein, Jewish philosopher and Carmelite nun, gassed in Auschwitz.

Theirs was a noble and disparate company, faithful to their God and prepared even to die for love of a stranger. They took no account of race or colour, in times of need they did not question creed or unbelief. If their enemy was hungry or sick they cared for him; if he crouched in the dark shadows of depression and despair, they took his hand and guided him into the light. They saw only that God had walked beside them all along the paths of injustice, terror and shame, and He did not discriminate between the unworthy and the righteous.

Canterbury Cathedral – December - the Corona Chapel

In this quiet chapel, where the welcome smile
of a winter morning streams through lapis glass
lighting up sun gold slim pillar and wide stepped stone,
I meditate on the saints and martyrs of our time,
commemorated here where once Becket's crown was laid.

Archbishop, poet, philosopher, minister, priest and nun,
long cherished in the hearts of all whose lives they embraced,
their loving spirits bright mirror of the divine.

They followed their Master far up the dangerous mountain path,
along the edge of the precipice, across the roaring torrent,
into a city of sad madmen, tyrants and thieves.

There, to reject neither the summons to deathbed or prison cell,
the trembling outstretched hand, the empty pleading eyes,
but to nourish the broken and the hungry soul,
to touch with love the outcast and the untouchable,
and break again the alabaster jar and anoint the weary feet.

They went to Bethlehem to greet the Christ Child's coming,
they sat in the Temple amongst the wondering doctors,
in the wilderness they prayed for him and at his baptism rejoiced,
they walked and talked with him beside the Sea of Galilee,
they wept for him in the moonlit agony of Gethsemane
and in his footsteps trod their own Via Dolorosa.

He, their Child, their Teacher and their Lord.

Verbum caro factum

Venite adoramus Dominum



My Journey Into Ministry

Jo James



My upbringing was one of atheistic agnosticism and my occasional ventures to the village church on a Sunday morning were treated with blank amazement from my parents who were refugees from a Welsh chapel childhood. That I went to church at all was from a vague and unsettled sense of the numinous which has never left me.

As a teenager I became involved in pacifism and anti-capitalism. I read about Zen Buddhism and became interested in Haiku, in particular the plaintive existential squibs of Issa. I became convinced by the idea of cultural resistance and embarked on a career in the theatre, where I worked steadily as an actor, teacher and director for twenty years.

On my way to work one day, down the hill from my house in Brixton to the tube station, I noticed the Unitarian chapel and resolved to step in one Sunday. I've been a regular worshipper there since that day in 2002. My wife Ann and I married there in 2005 and five years after that we held a naming and blessing for our daughter Elin there. Our minister Julian Smith has perfectly embodied for me a particularly Unitarian mode of being: he welcomed me and encouraged me to find my own voice within the congregation regardless of my lack of defined faith or theological knowledge. He would often invite me to read during services and a few years ago invited me to lead worship.

Although my first service was awkward and stilted, attempting too much and achieving too little, I was invited back a few months later. This time I had a completely different awareness of the real task; to serve the needs of the congregation instead of my own need for self-justification. The congregation of Effra Road proposed that I should be invited to lead worship more regularly; a proposal which I enthusiastically accepted. A regular service begins to shape your approach to worship, I investigated some of my unconscious affiliations, finding unexpected coherence and congruence in my religious heritage and

my aesthetic commitments, to poetry for example, to storytelling, to singing and to myth.

I discovered a real engagement with the sacred and a developing sense that I could restore an element I hadn't realized was missing from my life; regardless that I find the arguments of humanism persuasive I've never felt that the spiritual convictions of my forebears were worthless. Unitarian Free Christianity allowed me a chance to reassess the faith of my forebears in a rational, even radical perspective. I've always been interested in the interior life, the world beyond the surface, but I wasn't drawn, as so many of my friends have been, into Buddhism, Taoism or the New Age because tradition and the integrity of our particular *place* in the world are also important to me.

I resolved to find out as much as I could about the movement, discovering congregations and communities I hadn't known existed, among them the NUF. Since I now live far from any Unitarian congregation I signed up for the NUF annual get together at Hucklow and loved every minute of it. I began studying for a Certificate in Biblical Theology with the Anglicans and loved that too.

At an interview at Harris Manchester College Chapel over a couple of freezing days in early January I was able to convey both a sense of calling and an ability to listen and now I'm commencing a journey into Ministry in a denomination which certainly faces its fair share of challenges, but which has far more than its share of exciting theology, accessible worship and dynamic congregations. I have come to believe that the diversity of theological conviction within our movement can be a strength and not a weakness; a dynamic source of creative tension. I cannot agree with those who deny the vitality and strength of our movement, which I consider to be the inheritor of the spirit of the radical reformation. That radicalism is evident in our social witness as well as our determination to overcome our differences so that we continue to carry a light for generations to come.

Editorial Comment: Jo started Ministry training at HMCO in October. We will be publishing further updates on his progress between now and completion of his studies in 2014. I'm sure we all wish Jo well and look forward to following his progress.

My Daughter Hannah

Sue Davidson



I hate shopping. I happened to be at the supermarket recently and hearing the sound of somebody in obvious distress, I turned around to see a group of adults with severe learning disabilities. One young gentleman had his hands over his ears and was screaming. His Support Worker, a young girl who couldn't have

been out of her teens, was pulling him and urging him onwards whilst he continued to scream. I wanted to tell this girl to take him out of the store – but I kept quiet. It was obvious to me that this young man was autistic and was unable to cope with the sights and sounds of a busy supermarket. In autistic people the senses of sight and sound are very often heightened. My daughter, Hannah, is autistic and although she is happy to go into some of the quieter shops; busy supermarkets are not for her, she'd never cope.

Autism: a type of mental handicap due to abnormalities of brain development. Autism: a severe social impairment, lacking the ability to interact with others, which brings severe impairment of communication. Autism: a lack of ability for imaginative play, this is substituted for repetitive 'play' and behaviour. Autism: detachment, aloofness and not making sense of the world.

Hannah was 31 last June and as I silently observe my daughter transferring her vast collection of beads from one container to another, I call softly to her. She looks at me and her eyes grow larger and rounder; lighting up, reflecting warmth and love. She has a smile that can light up a room.

Taking time to reflect upon Hannah's life, I see myself looking down the corridors of time, to when it was realised that something was wrong with my daughter. Memories come rushing back to me; the constant battles for diagnosis, the battles to obtain services, the highs and the lows. On her good days, Hannah was akin to a burst of sunlight into our lives. On her bad days, when nothing seemed to pacify her, we took a deep breath and somehow got through it. However, whether her days were good or bad, seeing her making the slightest bit of progress was so rewarding to us.

I remember her as a young child; locked within her own world of remoteness. A herd of elephants could have stampeded through the room and she wouldn't have even looked up. To endeavour to 'steal' a hug and kiss was an on-going battle; she was so detached and aloof.

Hannah appeared to develop normally, although she would always be happier playing alone. By the age of 18 months she had a vocabulary of a couple of dozen words. By the age of two, she no longer talked at all. (This is common in an autistic child's development) Instead, she would often scream and have the most horrendous tantrums. I was devastated and afraid: what was wrong with my daughter?

Various professionals came and went. The first paediatrician to see her told me that Hannah was autistic but he didn't believe in autism. (I'm still puzzling over that one) There were also the labels which other professionals had attached to her: 'disturbed child' and 'severe mental retardation'. The overwhelming fear and uncertainty I felt regarding Hannah were certainly validated by these terms.

By the time Hannah had started a Special School at the age of 4, she had jumped out of a bedroom window on one occasion and on another, when the front door had been accidentally left open, she'd managed to slip out and it was an hour before we found her – happily sitting in someone's garden, playing with the grass. Prior to her starting at a Special School, she attended Nursery School where the staff had difficulty coping with her. I thought a Special School would be better and that the staff would be more understanding. I was wrong. The Headmistress at the school put me through hell. She would often make reference to the fact that my daughter was the worst pupil at the school and made me feel like an irresponsible parent as Hannah wasn't properly toilet trained. There were often horrendous Case Conferences in which I was criticised for every little thing – and the good days we had with Hannah were often marred by professionals who thought they knew best.

Our experiences with the hospital weren't much better. Hannah had to go to the University hospital in Cardiff for a brain scan and was admitted for 2 days. It was at midnight on the first day that the Ward Sister told me: 'Your daughter is a disruptive influence – would you please remove her from my ward'. Poor Hannah had been crying and screaming because of her new surroundings. She was frightened.

It wasn't until Hannah was 10 years old that we eventually got a diagnosis for Hannah. This was only after putting a lot of pressure on my GP. The professor who diagnosed Hannah felt that we wouldn't be able to cope with her once she reached adolescence.

Shortly after Hannah's diagnosis, I went to see an autistic school. I was not impressed. The atmosphere was eerie; there were children playing outside in the playground, but there was not a sound. These children were locked in their own worlds and there was no interaction between them. I decided to keep Hannah at the mixed special needs unit she was at. Hannah was enjoying the interaction of other pupils. Having four older brothers & sisters, she was used to people around her talking to her. We could also take her anywhere.

Hannah's teenage years were difficult as she developed a complex form of epilepsy. Sadly, she regressed during this time. Although she regained some of what was lost, we never got back to how she was. The professor who diagnosed her felt that she'd sustained brain damage on account of the epilepsy.

Today, Hannah is a loving and sociable young woman. She attends a Day Centre for adults with severe learning disabilities, most of who interact with her.

Over the years, barriers have been broken down as we've striven to give Hannah a life as meaningful as possible. Her autism remains severe without speech or communication skills, but it is a wonderful feeling when she gives me one of her affectionate hugs – unconditional love

More Ways of Volunteering

Colin Carvel

I found Pat Caddick's article "Complimentary Therapy in Volunteering" very interesting. For my own part my "Volunteering" began in 1998, when I ceased to teach full time.

Drawn to Community Service Volunteers, with its motto "Make a Difference" I was introduced to the "Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme".

The idea of "Retiring into Action" was just what the doctor ordered and I became the area organiser, never experiencing a dull moment from then on. Right from the start I resolved not to work for others but with them.

Providing help and encouragement to Learning Centres, Primary Schools and Youth Mentoring schemes allowed me to exercise my skills.

My primary care efforts were focussed on visiting the elderly, supporting the Memory Café. We created the first Memory Café in Cornwall five years

ago and now we have twenty-five throughout Cornwall.

More recently I put my energy into “Foodbank”, which is now going well. Now we are intent upon starting a Money Advice Centre to advise people in the community.

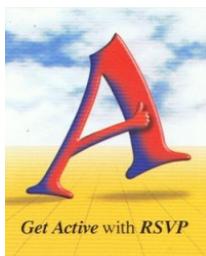
Another project to provide wheelchairs, on a not for profit basis, is being looked into.

Pat Caddick has clearly got it spot on, just look at the smile on her face.

RETIRE INTO ACTION

Some day, when the history of our time is written, there will be many a chapter on the changing role of older people, and how they gradually moved from the sidelines of society to becoming a positive force within it. It will also record that, because of redundancy and early retirement, they were joined on this journey by 50 year olds.

When so much change occurs it is not easy to find a meaningful role for yourself. The charity Community Service Volunteers took up this challenge, and in 1988 formed the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme to enable older people to feel valued and enjoy life again, through becoming active in their community.



RSVP can be reached on Tel: 020 7643 1385

Website: www.csv-rsvp.org.uk

Ed: Your experiences and contributions within your homes and communities seem to have struck a rich vein. Please keep sending them in.

Book Reviews

Scripting Jesus – The Gospels in rewrite by L Michael White should be welcomed by Unitarians, who wish to learn more about New Testament scholarship in today's world. Available in hardback £17.84, paperback £10.79 and £7.49 on Kindle it is very good value for this quality of writing.

The material moves beyond the question we so often hear, 'what did Jesus really say?' and considers NT writing in terms of performed stories of faith in different contexts, geographically separate and at different times. A more pertinent question would be, 'what did these communities say about Jesus and why?'

As in drama, the stories that were told about Jesus were edited and re-edited as they were repeatedly performed. This can be more easily understood, when considered as part of the Judaic, Greco-Roman story-telling and developing literary traditions.

In examining how each gospel, both in the NT canon and those not included or later discovered, it becomes clear how different they are and yet it would be impossible to talk in terms of one being true and another not. Rather in examining the scripting of each in a wider context and over time, the internal connections to a specific gospel makes absolute sense, when considered as 'faithful stories about Jesus'. The birth narratives of Matthew and Luke are very different with a different intent for the communities in which they were developed and came later than Mark, where there is no birth narrative. It is the differences that are important for our understanding rather than any attempts we might make to tell just one story about Jesus that is 'true'.

What I found most interesting were the similarities in styles of writing that were being developed in the Greek tradition at that time and were influential in the Mediterranean area. Biography and History as we know it today didn't exist but it is common to find the 'Lives' of key figures of that time portrayed as in some way being 'divine'.

It is in the detail of the scripting that this book makes its biggest impact in making sense of the New Testament and it is not a book that can be read quickly, but the time spent will reward the reader. (Ed)

The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide – edited by Rev. Peter Morales, arrived through my letterbox unexpectedly but what an interesting little book it turned out to be and how glad I am to have read it and learned

more of the UU movement in America. It is a small publication of 88 pages, consisting of essays based on the Seven Principles, which underpin the UUA. The various authors write from their own perspective of personal faith as they understand and practise it within their congregations and the wider community. Each writer examines a different aspect of the UUA: Faith, Ministry, Worship, Religious Education, Social Justice, Roots. At the end of the book is a useful list of resources for both adults and children. There is a freshness and energy to the writing, which should encourage those who read it to learn more.

In both content and presentation this will be a valuable edition to the NUF Book Collection. It cost £5.39 paperback and £3.64 on Kindle. A similar publication for Unitarianism in the UK would be well worth having. (Ed)

Phil Silk's Book Notes

THE RATIONAL OPTIMIST: How Prosperity Evolves by Max Ridley. 2010. 360 pages plus postscript, notes and references. "Thanks to the unique human habits of exchange and specialisation, our species has found innovative solutions to every obstacle it has faced so far."

TWELVE STEPS TO A COMPASSIONATE LIFE by Karen Armstrong. 2011. 157 pages plus Preface, notes, reading suggestions. After tracing the golden rule through history, she focuses on practical action we can take in our life-long, crucial spiritual development.

SEASONS OF LIFE: Prose and Poetry for Secular Ceremonies and Private Reflection, compiled by Nigel Collins; Preface by Tony Harrison. 235 pages plus Author's index and First line index. Wide range of topics relating to funerals, weddings and naming ceremonies.

THE LACUNA a novel by Barbara Kingsolver. 2009. 670 pages. She tells the story of an unusual male character, born in the US, but mostly brought up in Mexico before returning to the US. It covers 1929-1951, weaving detailed historical background into her complicated tale of a secretive writer, raising many issues and expressed with impressive language. Worth the effort.

Three books now by the US UU minister and artist, Judy Campbell, "The Sinister Minister". She has created Olympia Brown, namesake of the first female minister in the US, a Universalist, who faces serious modern problems as she struggles to save the innocent from disasters with the help of a friendly Catholic priest. The three are: A DEADLY MISSION: A DESPICABLE MISSION: and AN UNSPEAKABLE MISSION.

Whale Rider was released in 2002. The film is based on a novel of the same name by Witi Ihimaera, a novelist born and raised in New Zealand of mixed descent – a Maori mother and an Anglo-Saxon father.

The opening credits are shown over the underwater world of the ocean. It then moves to a hospital room where a young woman is giving birth to twins – a boy and a girl. The boy and his mother die but the girl lives. The girl's paternal grandfather, Koro, Chief of the local Maori tribe, is devastated because the first-born male has died. A brief exchange in the corridor between the Koro and his son, Porourangi, show that Koro is, at that moment, more concerned with his tribe than his family. Porourangi names his daughter Paikea (nicknamed Pai), much to Koro's disgust. Paikea is the Maori for humpback whale and the tribe's ancestor assumed this name after these whales brought him to New Zealand from their spiritual homeland Hawaiki. Porourangi leaves and Pai's grandmother Nanny Flowers (Koro's wife) cradles Pai whilst Koro mourns over the dead boy-child.

We next see Pai when she is 12 years old, by which time she and her grandfather Koro have developed a very strong bond. Koro knows that neither of his sons will take up the mantle of Chief – Porourangi is now in Germany, working as an artist and his brother Rawiri is a bit of a lay-about. Koro sets up a Sacred School of Learning for the boys of the area hoping to find someone to take over as Chief. Pai, as a girl, is excluded from this. What follows is how she struggles to fulfil her destiny. Whilst she is confused by her grandfather's rejection she has a very strong sense of her abilities and her connection with the whales which are so symbolic to her tribe.

Beached whales create a situation where Koro can see the end of his tribe, he has said previously 'If the whale lives we live, if the whale dies we die'. And yet for all his belief in the ancient traditions, in desperation, he turns to modern technology and brings in a tractor. Pai knows otherwise. Despite being younger she believes in the power of her connection with the whales.

A scene near the end set in a hospital contrasts to the first scene of the film – one was the birth of Pai and the other a rebirth for Koro. There is a lot of symbolism in the film, for example watch out for references and images of rope. I have only really appreciated much of this on repeat viewings.

This is not just about Pai and Koro, the other characters play their part. Nanny Flowers understands what Pai's destiny is, but holds back, trying to smooth out the bumpy relationship. But she points Pai to others who will support her in gaining the skills needed to become Chief. Her uncle Rawiri comes into his own and her father Porourangi reconnects with his family, his tribe and his own identity.

Filmed in Whangara, on the east coast of New Zealand's north island, where the book is set, it has a largely Maori cast with local people acting as extras. The director Niki Caro said that she tried to take an almost documentary approach to the film, because much of it is about the local traditions and local places. It has a very intimate feel about it and Keira Castle-Hughes, who plays Pai gives a stunning performance in her first acting role. The music written by Lisa Gerrard uses Maori instruments and complements the visuals. If you get the DVD it is worth seeing the additional features to better understand the film. It is also interesting to see the scenes which were cut – often these were the ones which were wordy and lacking in subtlety.

This film has many layers and is full of sacred imagery. It is a story of hope, telling us that we do not need to be mired in our spiritual past but can use it to move forward keeping faith in the past, the present and the future. Despite it not being a sad film I cried many times at the pure beauty and depth of feeling. Each time I watch it I see something new and am grateful that such films are made.



Letter to the Editor

Towards the end of his very interesting piece, *On Assisted Dying*, Wade Millar-Knight makes a couple of perjorative statements both of which I find disturbing and a mite insensitive.

“Many people don’t deeply know they will meet their dying loved one again, abundantly, in life’s fullness.”. No-one can actually “know” that this will be so. Surely this is a matter of faith, not of established fact, and only the experience of death itself will prove or disprove it. Who am I to say what is or is not truth? Very sensibly, Pilate washed his hands of the problem.

“They don’t discover until some while after bereavement that their love need not, indeed for their true Self must not, be caged by clinging to any one relationship.”. When my long term partner reached the point in his life so desperate and low that all he wanted was to leave and the law prevented me then from assisting him, I prayed only that death would take him soon. The love that we enjoyed together is neither detached nor destroyed by that death. There are many others besides myself who are supported rather than diminished by our honouring this kind of emotional chastity. This is our way forward, and it is called blessed Acceptance.

I have not consigned this, my altered life, to a sterile shrine of how things used to be, nor do I take old socks and hang them on the railings as objects of veneration. Every day I thank God for the mutual love that Oliver and I shared, the laughter, the tears, the touch of a hand that said ‘I will walk with you both in the dark times and the light.’ These are the invisible building bricks of what now is a secure and comfortable place, where accepting how things are has become not the sad central inward looking point of my existence, but a happy launch pad back into a life still rich, full of love, and eminently worth the living. Not a spiritual cage, not a pair of emotional handcuffs, not the damaging of the “true Self” – whatever that may mean – but a continuing encounter with joy in the spiritual company of the beloved.

Naomi Linnell

Don’t forget that the following discussion pack can be downloaded from the GA website: www.unitarian.org.uk : ‘Facts, Arguments, Personal Testimonies and Spiritual Reflections on Assisted Dying’. It has been compiled by Fulwood Old Chapel, Sheffield and I would like to congratulate Robert Ince in particular, for making this sensitive and informative publication available to us. (Editor)

2013 ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE GA
PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATES

THE 2013 Annual Meetings will be held at the Jubilee
Campus, Nottingham, from **Thursday 11th to 14th April 2013**

Diary Dates

FROM 7th NOVEMBER: A group to reflect on the Bhagavad-Gita, the most important Hindu scripture, will meet monthly, on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm at Golders Green Unitarians, 31½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS

REDISCOVERING THE BIBLE: A monthly bible-reading group will meet on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 pm: 12th November, 10th December, 14th January, at: Essex Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4RT

23rd-25th NOVEMBER: UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION OF LAY MINISTRY—ANNUAL CONFERENCE. The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow. Contact: Sue Woolley Tel: 01604 870 746 sue.woolley@virgin.net

8th-10th FEBRUARY: FUSE 2013 <http://fusefest.org.uk>
Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE), 2013. Sponsored by London and South East District and open to all Unitarians over the weekend of 8th-10th February.

Worship, fellowship and workshops covering Congregational Life, Spirituality, Social Action and Worship at: Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing. Single Adult cost, including Room is £229. Day delegate rates from £39.00. Bursaries are available to make this event accessible to all, regardless of distance or financial circumstances. Applications must be made by 1st December. Contact: Danielle Wilson, daniellewilson@ldpa.org.uk 01323 769 813 <http://fusenet.org.uk>.

Our thoughts are with those, who may be ill or alone over Christmas.

The closing date for articles submissions to the editor is 12th December.

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