

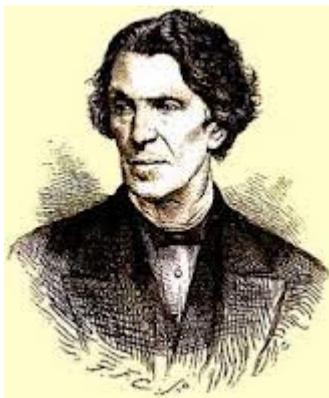
NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

# NEWSLETTER



Issue 412

March 2014



**James Martineau :A Unitarian Minister for Life  
SimpleGifts—a Unitarian Social Action Project  
NUF Members' Questionnaire Feedback  
Bridge in the Sky—Naomi Linnell**

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

Reg. Charity No. 1040294

It is with regret that we have received the resignation of our President, Rev Bob Pounder, owing to the number of his other ministerial commitments. We thank him for his contributions to the NUF and hope to have input from him in the future.

We are very pleased that Joan Wilkinson has agreed to accept the invitation of the Committee to become President of the NUF in Bob's place. Joan's service to this Fellowship has been long and distinguished across the whole spectrum of its activities. To try to list them all would inevitably incur important omissions; she is ever alert to the possibility of new directions for our outreach as may most recently be seen in the professional quality video meditations that feature monthly on our website. We are very grateful to have her wisdom and expertise available to us as we approach the NUF's seventieth anniversary in 2015.

As the NUF 'year' comes to an end, we are sorry to say 'goodbye' to Alan Oates, who has co-ordinated the Books of Fellowship for many years. These are still valued by many of our members who enjoy the chance to read and reflect on what others have thought before adding their own contribution and posting on the book. I have been especially grateful to Alan for his advice as a committee member over the past three years; nearly always by return of post and full of good sense. We wish him improved health in the months to come.

We are grateful to Pat Caddick for taking on the role of co-ordinator; she will be well known already to many users of the scheme.

We shall not require an election to the NUF Committee this year as only one nomination for the two vacancies was received.

*Further details on page 17 -18*



## Minister's Page

**Rev. Tony McNeile**

I notice that our cousins in the United States - the Unitarian Universalists - are making some changes. The first is to adopt a new logo which is quite distinctive and quite un-church like. It is bright red. I feel that they want to make the point that they are more than just a church where people go on a Sunday to worship and that only part of their activity is doing some good deeds in the community.

Now they want to be seen as the ones who principally speak up for social action in their communities and their country. They want to be seen as outward looking and caring. They have the energy and will for this as a community with values and ideals. At the heart of this will be a spiritual strength that is nurtured and grows through their worship. It is a subtle difference. Now their spiritual life is the food that makes them active and caring in the world.

I think this is a change that will attract people who are young and feel disappointed with the world they live in. Those who see unfairness and injustice around them. Those who see inequality everywhere. Those who see wealth as a malignant growth in our society. Those who wonder what is the purpose of life.

They see our churches as places as out of date and out of touch in most cases, not where they can address the issues that worry them. It should not be so and that is why the Unitarian Universalists are adapting themselves and facing the challenge of the modern era.

There is a similar challenge for our own congregations - and actually it is a challenge for us as individuals too.

Do you agree?

## Worship page

Let us build walled gardens for our spirits, filled with warm sunshine, flowers and trees in blossom and birds singing. Let it be a safe haven for small animals and for ourselves - a place to rest and contemplate. A place to build up our energies and restore our souls.

In our gardens let there be special places with seats and fountains - places to pause and think about life.

Let one of these special places be dedicated to love and another to forgiveness.

The garden of love is to contemplate the love that is caritas, - care and compassion and charity for all living things. Caritas for our own loved ones and our friends. Caritas for the people whose lives we touch as we pass through each day. Lives to appreciate and give thanks for. Lives to understand. And in the garden of love that is caritas let there be a place where we can see our own reflection.

At the entrance to the garden of forgiveness is a saying from the prayer that Jesus taught - 'As we forgive them that trespass against us'

Let this garden be a garden of paths and spaces and places to write a promise. A corner to sit and ponder about forgiveness - why it is harder to forgive than to love; why the scars and blemishes of old hurts and misunderstandings still give pain. Why anger burns slow and destructive and will not go out. How to deal with an insult or manage an injustice. How to review a comment or a moment and look for a truth and not a poisoned arrow.

From the garden of forgiveness let there be a gate into the garden of love and from the garden of love a way of return to the world.

## **President's Ponderings**

It was a very pleasant surprise to be invited to be your President. I will do my best to serve the Fellowship in any way I can, during my term of Office. To follow in the footsteps of past Presidents is a rather daunting task.

By the time you read this, Charnwood Fellowship, to which I belong, will have reflected on the theme *Walls*. Initially this seemed to be a strange topic, but on further pondering a wealth of ideas came to mind. The walls of the Gaza Strip and of Berlin, came to mind first; walls of separation for some but for others walls of security. It all depends on which side of the wall one is/was. What is clear though is that a wall divides, scarring physical and emotional landscapes. The graffiti that began to decorate those walls then reminded me of Banksy, a figure of stealth, whose graffiti is art-work to some, an eyesore to others. In the most troubled areas of Belfast, telling murals adorn the house walls. It seems that wherever there is a wall the graffiti artist will develop their skills, bringing life to what is grey and dreary, expressing a spirit yearning for a more colourful life and freedom.

The Wailing Wall has become a place of prayer for all nations and all peoples although this has not been the case throughout its history. Prayers over countless generations seem to have imbued it with a holiness that those having prayed there claim to have experienced.

The style of religious buildings mostly reflect the faith of those worshipping there, with people from the same communities going to the old Parish Church, some to the synagogue, others to the mosque and yet others going to the unpretentious dissenting chapel.

*(continued on page 8)*

## **SimpleGifts – Just do it!**

**Louise Baumberg**

I first heard about SimpleGifts in 2011 when Rev David Usher, the LDPA District Minister, and others began to think about using the large Mansford Church and Mission building in Bethnal Green to serve the community and as a centre for Unitarian Social Action. SimpleGifts started with an after school club for local parents and children one afternoon a week.

SimpleGifts celebrated their first birthday in the Summer of 2013 and reported that the weekly Tuesday after-school cafe regularly attracted more than 70 children, parents and carers for healthy snacks, crafts, homework help and games. There was also a language class for adults learning English. SimpleGifts was at that time on the threshold of several other programmes, including a meal programme for undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers, a teenage leadership programme in conjunction with the neighbouring school, and a table tennis league, plus other ideas in the pipeline. Strong links have been built with other service organisations in Tower Hamlets, particularly with Quaker Social Action. All this has been made possible by Rev. Rob Gregson and Ann Howell as the paid part-time staff (who work many more hours than they are paid for), plus a regular group of Unitarian and other local volunteers.

SimpleGifts currently runs the after school club two afternoons a week, two English conversation groups – one for women and one mixed, a weekly community lunch, a youth leadership programme and has held several one-off events particularly with Unitarian young people in the LDPA and further afield.

In addition to its work providing direct services to a very impoverished local area, SimpleGifts' other mission is to empower Unitarians throughout the UK in their social action witness. It has held

workshops, and given presentations at the General Assembly Annual Meetings, FUSE and other District events. The Steering Group adopted as its vision “Inspired by Unitarian values, SimpleGifts enhances the lives of people in East London, and empowers British Unitarians in the work of social action.”

The success of a project like SimpleGifts is, I’m sure, due to a huge amount of work behind the scenes – meetings, planning, fundraising, networking. However, as an occasional general volunteer and then English teacher, my personal perspective is that one of its major achievements is the special atmosphere – the way that the ethos and values come through from the co-ordinators to the volunteers and, I hope to all who use and participate in the activities. I have volunteered in many other organisations and SimpleGifts is where I have felt most valued and appreciated. There is also a “can do” attitude about SimpleGifts where all suggestions are met with positive enthusiasm. Cautious people take note - at SimpleGifts it’s less “Let’s not rush into things” and more “Let’s try it and see what happens”!

It is this atmosphere that, I believe, has enabled SimpleGifts to be successful. It has to be emphasised that at SimpleGifts the volunteers gain as much as the parents and children of the after school clubs, the English students, young people and community lunchers. By advertising in local volunteer bureaux and to Unitarians throughout the LDPA area, SimpleGifts has gained a diverse volunteer group - sixth form and university students, new immigrants, and older volunteers from a huge variety of backgrounds. Some stay for just a short time but many have continued their involvement. Some of the mums who come with their children are now volunteers and all are welcome. Friendships have been forged at SimpleGifts between people who would never otherwise have

met. I don't think that there is anything better for self-esteem than the feeling that you are part of a supportive group doing something worthwhile. This is positive for all of us, but especially for those volunteers who may be at the margins financially or socially.

Bethnal Green is a very different environment from my home area (leafy West Surrey) and I appreciate the opportunity to meet all sorts of different people, to see a world outside my own limited circles, to develop my teaching skills, and to try to make a difference in a small way. A Social Action project like SimpleGifts not only provides a service to its "clients" but can be a source of development, opportunities and new perspectives to all involved.

.....  
(continued from page 5 )

I often visit the website of our NUF equivalent in America, called: *The Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) – A Unitarian Universalist Congregation Without Walls* [www.clf.org](http://www.clf.org) . I've always thought what a wonderful description for a Fellowship such as ours, one where we can explore new ways of being together even when we aren't able to, or choose not to, go to Sunday worship. Perhaps some of you feel trapped within your own four walls at times and would dearly love to get out. My sister in Canada is very ill and can rarely get out to worship. She regularly visits [www.ukunitarian.tv](http://www.ukunitarian.tv) and watches the NUF monthly video worship on: [www.nufonline.org.uk](http://www.nufonline.org.uk) . Our fellowship must ever be alert to new possibilities of reaching out beyond the limitations that walls can impose including any who wish to be with others, where they are.

Having begun pondering on 'walls' I could fill many pages. If you have any thoughts, please share them.

**The Path of Humanism by Wallace Tavener**  
**Published by The Lindsey Press 1968**

Wallace Tavener was a long respected Unitarian Minister, especially to be noted for his successful time in Edinburgh.

In this book he shows that even during his time in the 1960s, humanism figured highly in the much disputed territory between science, philosophy and religion. He demonstrates the crucial role of how free Christians, not attached to any of the organised church bodies, are well placed to make a meaningful contribution in their approach to humanism. The book clarifies to the reader today the way modern Unitarian and Free Christians can offer a religious humanism that has a deep tradition in our movement.

Tavener sets out the reasons that have made it necessary to engage with and reclaim our religious humanism of the past. He looks to the problems that occurred when the religious humanism of the Renaissance got lost in the Reformation. When the Protestant break came from the authoritarian Catholic Church instead of building on the religious humanism of the Renaissance it replaced Church authority with a fanatic Bibliolatry ushering in just another form of mental slavery. It was against this background that the development of a new, secular humanism grew. It wasn't at this stage due to an abrasive humanism but rather down to a rampant Protestantism. The author recognised the ground that liberal Christians and religious humanists needed to make up in their engagement with secular humanists. I wonder whether we are now making up that ground.

He saw humanism, not as 'a single body of formulated doctrine' but rather as a 'comprehensive movement, a general orientation, broadly inclusive of varied shades of thought'; (P.14) this is offered

as an alternative to the brutalism of power-seeking, money grabbing, utilitarianism and mental indoctrination. The writer goes to some lengths to describe what humanism isn't and finally demonstrates the goodwill and constructive nature of people when faced with evil and difficulties. He encapsulates his definition of humanism in a sentence: '...man as an existence in time, and as the most evolutionary of creatures, before whom are great moral tasks and possibilities'. Humanism has faith in people not in dogmatism and authoritarian institutions.

The book covers the broad sweep of humanist thought, where 'humanism was [seen as] the assertion of human status and not the denial of God's', up until the major changes seen developing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Earlier thoughts were stated but with a new vigour. There was a revival of irrational supernaturalism and secular humanism. And yet there remained the thread of the relationship of 'man-to-God-through-nature' and 'rational mysticism' that continues to this day.

Space is given to an assessment of secular atheistic humanism, but in the later stages of the book it is the positive relationships between non-dogmatic humanisms and religious humanisms that are shown to offer a positive way forward. This remains the case as much now in 2014 as it did when the book was published in 1968.

*Joan Wikinson*

The above book is available from the NUF Book Collection and also at:

<http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/publications/index.php>

Please contact Joan directly if you wish to borrow a book from the NUF Library—address details on the back cover.

## ***Bridge in the sky***

***Naomi Linnell***

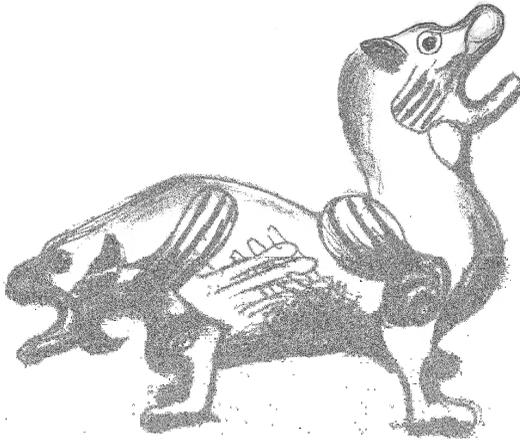
My pavement plodding feet protested  
that their bones hurt; muscles seized  
with the chill of the damp afternoon  
cried 'Hold, enough, now is the time  
for a soft chair beside a glowing fire.'  
But a rogue breeze touched my cheek  
and whispered 'Turn around, and look  
at the symbol in the sky, an airy bridge  
where the old double headed dragon  
who sees both before and behind,  
mediates between earth and heaven.'

I turned around towards the cold east  
and saw a great arc of light, its seven  
colours springing from the headland,  
spanning the bay and sinking gently  
into the distant horizon's misty edge.  
Each translucent droplet was made  
a prism by the pale sun's emerging rays  
as dark rain clouds drifted away  
into the afternoon's jealous embrace.  
Tired, foot weary and cold no longer,  
I stood filled with wonder at this sign.

This was the bow Yahweh set in the  
sky to confirm his covenant with Noah  
that never again would such a flood  
threaten the world of his children;  
this was the silhouette from which

came the myth of the Rainbow Serpent,  
creator god bringer of life and death;  
these were the colours that inspired  
the Rainbow Flags, symbols of hope,  
of inclusion, of tolerance and reform.  
But I thought on none of these things.

I heard the waves beat on the sand,  
a brisk *Intrada* fit for welcoming a king.  
Touched by the immutability of God  
I felt enveloped in a new soft warmth,  
which seemed to radiate from this  
celestial miracle, today come glowing  
into my world, and I sang a mute *Jubilate*.  
For I saw clearly the bright ribbon of light  
in the heart of this magic arch, holding  
the universe secure in an invisible web,  
and the source of my pure undiluted joy.



## James Martineau: a Unitarian Minister for Life

James Martineau was born in Norwich on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1805, seventh of eight children of Thomas Martineau, a Huguenot fabric manufacturer, and Elizabeth. The family worshipped at the Octagon Chapel. Family tradition said that one Sunday young James was found on a little stool before a lectern Bible open on a chair. He claimed to have read from Genesis through to Isaiah since morning chapel by "skipping the nonsense."

After four unhappy years at Norwich Grammar School he attended Lant Carpenter's school in Bristol between 1819 and 1821, where he was happier. He learnt Greek as well as Latin. He resented being taught the Newtonian calculus still favoured in Britain, not Leibniz's truly differential calculus. To master the calculus, grasp this philosophical difference, identify the more rigorously based, and feel keenly that it mattered, argues considerable mathematical talent.

Barred from the Universities as a dissenter, he was apprenticed to Samuel Fox of Derby to become a civil engineer. He lodged with the Unitarian minister, Edward Higginson, whose daughter Helen he courted. He experienced religious conversion, finding a vocation for the Unitarian ministry; from 1822 he studied at [Manchester](#) College, then at [York](#), passing out top.

In 1828, Martineau was appointed co-pastor at Eustace Street Chapel in Dublin, where he was ordained. He married Helen Higginson, who would bear him eight children, although two died young. In 1831 he succeeded as full minister, becoming entitled to the *regium donum*, a Crown cash benefit of £100 pa to all Irish protestant ministers. He rejected this state intervention in church affairs, objecting to taxes paid by Roman Catholics unfairly sup-

porting Protestant churches, and left Ireland to begin a long ministry at Paradise Street Chapel in Liverpool. Here he triumphed in "the Liverpool Controversy" of 1839. .

Unitarianism was still characterised by the heritage of Priestley and Lindsey, a dry theism asserting one creator God who remains involved in organising and governing the universe. Its scientific rationality and materialism made Jesus fully and only human.

Martineau revered Priestley but rejected his "mechanical" theological determinism, called "necessarianism", as blaming sin on God and denying personal ethical responsibility. He became influenced by the American ideas of Channing, and by Emerson's 'transcendental' religiosity, emphasising devotional warmth. In 1840 Martineau became part-time Professor at Manchester College, back in Manchester from York, whilst continuing as minister at Paradise Street.

In 1848-49 Martineau took a sabbatical at the *Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität* in Berlin, attending courses in Logic and Philosophy, concentrating on Plato and Kant, and was impressed by German Biblical scholarship. He imbibed the innate inner motivation of Kant and rejected the historicism and exterior force of the 'will' taught by Hegel.

He returned to Liverpool as minister of the newly built Hope Street Unitarian Church, teaching a new mature faith and philosophy. Science and religion were coming into conflict, with the Evangelical Alliance (1846) asserting Biblical creationism confronting Auguste Comte's Positivist Philosophy (1850), translated into English by his sister Harriet Martineau, introducing the aggressive 'scientific' naïve realism that is still with us. Martineau endorsed science but feared secularising influences.

Manchester College moved to London in 1853; he commuted to lecture there until in 1857 he resigned his Liverpool pulpit. He became pastor at Little Portland Street Unitarian Chapel (London W1) with a distinguished congregation including Charles Dickens. He retired on strict doctor's orders in 1872 but occupied pulpits for many years after this.

Trinitarian Christians and atheists controversially joined forces to block his appointment as Professor of Philosophy at University College London. Five other universities conferred doctorates on the man formerly excluded by religious tests: Harvard (1872); Leiden (1874); Edinburgh (1884); Oxford (1888); and Dublin (1891).

In 1868 Martineau and others formed the Free Christian Union, but it never took off and dissolved in 1870. A later scheme, "The National Church as a Federal Union" (1887) also failed.

After retiring as Principal of Manchester College in 1885 he published a trilogy of books: *Types of Ethical Theory* (1885); *A Study of Religion* (1888); and *The Seat of Authority in Religion* (1890), the last by common consent his greatest work. George Chrystides has shown how it freed Unitarianism from Biblical literalism, and it located God in the ideal sphere away from scientific refutation. This will be the subject of a later article.

In his final years, his friend J. Estlin Carpenter interested him in other religions. Martineau died on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1900 and is buried in Highgate Cemetery next to Helen who had died in 1877.

*Jim Stearn has recently completed an Open University MA with a dissertation on the thought and writings of James Martineau*

## NUF Questionnaire

On behalf of the NUF committee may I thank those who responded to the questions included with the voting slip on reform of the constitution. Although the number of responses was small - just above 20% of the membership (and any conclusions need to be read in the light of this ) – we have gained much useful information from the survey.

Two-thirds of respondents were also members of Unitarian chapels, the remaining third being those who were unable to attend for various reasons of mobility or geography. We have a very loyal membership – the average length of membership of NUF was 17 years ; this does highlight the need to add more ‘new’ members to carry the fellowship’s work past its platinum anniversary in 2015.

For our respondents, our publications remain the heart of our activity – only a third had used other resources such as the Forum, Facebook, Video Meditations and Books of Fellowship.

There was general appreciation of what we produce – between a quarter and a third of replies commended all the issues and there was particular commendation of Rev. Tony McNeile’s ‘From the Minister ‘ column and of Joan Wilkinson’s book reviews. The extended pieces in the Viewpoint are obviously enjoyed by many members ; especially those that arise from the writer’s own experience. Sue Davidson’s article in the Newsletter about caring for an autistic daughter also received much favourable comment. The publication of sermons by our Unitarian ministers was well liked – some of the sermons posted on the Internet Forum, part of which is available to be read without prior registration, have received over a thousand ‘hits’!

Apart from the Officers of NUF there was little call for one-day meetings, difficulties of travel being cited as the main reason. However I am sure NUF members would always be welcome at district association meetings and we shall endeavour to announce the date and venue of these in advance for those who would like to attend.

Several members asked if the texts of the video meditations could be made available as hard copies and we are currently addressing how to fulfil this request. Those who lead services in our chapels obviously appreciate the small devotions and meditations that we print – editors like them too, as they fill awkward half pages ! The audio discs of publications are much appreciated by those who avail themselves of this facility – unique to the NUF .

The ‘further comments’ section brought forth diverse suggestions – as might be expected some called for inclusion of material that others asked us to restrain ! We shall take into account all the suggestions made and some of them will certainly find their way into future issues.

From our survey of members’ responses to the articles we feature, it is clear that readers enjoy hearing about what other members are doing or particular experience(s) they have. This year I am particularly seeking articles about Unitarians in action, rather than in discussion about it; if there is an activity that you are undertaking that is of benefit to others, please feel free to share it with us.

### **Committee Elections**

There was only one nomination for the two vacancies available so **Ian Martin**, nominated by Ken Smith and seconded by Howard Wilkins is elected for a further three year term.

*Ian writes* :-I am an English teacher now living in Thailand, originally from the south of England . I have been part of the Unitarian

movement for more than thirty years. I started to attend the Brighton Unitarian Church and later Westgate Lewes with whom I retain contact. My long years of living and working overseas have taught me the spiritual journey begins and ends at home. The truth is not discovered in exotic places. However one will discover in the world at large religion is certainly not in decline. Church membership has fallen in England but there are many who are still looking for an alternative to outdated dogmas and the void of negative and arid atheism. I believe the NUF plays an important and expanding role for those seeking such an alternative. In these days of the internet, we must use the tools of the modern media to reach those who have lost touch with religion yet seek a more spiritual life.

**Discovered in Kathmandu :How I found my Nepalese family** is the title of a recently published book by NUF Committee member Nick Morrice. If you read Nick's article in the NUF Newsletter last July you will already know a little of how he was led to sponsor a group of orphan boys in Nepal ; the book expands this story further . Illustrated with excellent colour photographs and line drawings, it tells of a 'life changing experience in which the author comes to be 'adopted' himself into a Nepalese family , as brother, friend, uncle and godfather. '

You can read more about Nick's project to support young people living 'on the brink' at : [www.discoveredinkathmandu.org.uk](http://www.discoveredinkathmandu.org.uk)

If you would like to purchase a copy of the book directly from Nick , please send a cheque for £12 ( includes p/p) made out to N.Morrice to 4 Manley Close, New Earswick, York YO32 4DN

### **General Assembly Meetings at Whittlebury Hall, Towcester**

The AGM of the NUF will take place on Monday April 14th at 1.45 p.m. during the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of UFCC. After the business part of the meeting, Derek McCauley, Chief Officer of the GA will address the meeting on the theme ‘Challenges and Opportunities—the Unitarian Future’. Members are invited to post questions to the speaker in advance, either on the Unitarian Internet Forum, where a special thread is set up for this purpose, on the Unitarian Facebook page or sent them by e-mail / in writing to the Secretary by the 7th April.

UKUnitarianTV will be videoing the meeting and it will appear in due course on the NUF website.

### Erratum

Apologies for an error in last month’s Viewpoint (issue 233 ) which spoiled the sense of Tony McNeile’s article on pages 13 and 14. The first line of page 14 should start thus:-

*‘The taxi driver who cut in on me spoiled everything I really shouted at him*

We hope you enjoyed the compilation of radio broadcasts in the Viewpoint. It is good to learn that the Unitarian voice is being heard on the airwaves.

Contributions for the next edition should be with the editor by April 21st.

### New Members

A warm welcome to Jim Stearn, a recent contributor .

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Illustration on page 12 by Liz Foxbrook.

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