

# NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

## NEWSLETTER



Linking others valuing Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion.

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## JOAN'S JOTTINGS

### NUF Secretary

We are sorry that John Greenwood has decided to relinquish his post as NUF Secretary. He has had to adjust his life around many other personal priorities recently. I have enjoyed his company along the way and we had good fun at the last Hucklow House Party and at the GA Meetings. He ran our stall at the GA with great enthusiasm and success. I would like to thank John for the work he has done as Secretary and wish him well. I would also like to thank Joan for taking up the mantle again on a temporary basis. She brings so much enthusiasm and expertise to the NUF but we cannot lay all our expectations at her doorstep and must actively look for a willing and capable person to become our permanent Secretary.

*Tony Mcneile*

Although it seems all too easy to step back into this role we must all recognise that this can only be temporary, for the health of the Fellowship. In order to move forward new volunteers are required on a regular basis. High on this list is the role of distributor. Lucy Harris has diligently done this job for several years. Some good long while ago she advised that she would be standing down next August at the latest, giving plenty of time for someone else to take on the role. The computer makes the task much easier than it must have been in the early days of the Fellowship, when each address would be written out by hand. The distribution list can be saved for future use, with only small changes each month. Even the labels can be peeled off the sheet ready to stick on. Please get in touch with me if you think that you would like to do this job in the short or long term.

Nominations for the NUF Committee will be called for in the January issue of the *Newsletter*, so please talk to other members and see if you or they feel able to make a contribution in this area. The next *Newsletter* will explain further what is expected from Committee members.

Finally, if you have good secretarial and Internet skills and are a good communicator, who would like to learn more about what is involved as secretary, then please get in touch with me initially and if you would like your name to be considered by the Committee I will pass on your details to them for consideration. The most important thing is that you are able to understand the unique nature of the Fellowship. Although you may be a member of a congregation the main focus is on non face-to-face communication, reaching out to Unitarians who cannot, or choose not, to meet and linking the Fellowship with the wider Unitarian communities. E-mail has become very important but telephone and writing are also important. I shall be eagerly waiting your phone calls.

*Joan Wilkinson*

*Cover picture: 'Nativity' by Kim Ki chang. 'I believe that as you grow old, you should talk to the heavens and return to a child's world. That is what art is all about. I believe this is the sole aim in art.'*

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

### A Christmas Cracker of Quotes

'He who laughs lasts.'  
*Ambrose Bierce (1842- 1914)*

'Oon eare it herde, at the other out it went.'  
*Chaucer (1340-1400)*

'Beware all enterprises that require new clothes.'  
*Thoreau*

'Growing old is obligatory, growing up is optional.'  
*Anon*

'Man does not live by words alone  
despite the fact that he sometimes has to eat them.'  
*Adlai Stephenson*

'Keep an open mind but not so open that your brains fall out.'  
*Anon*

'A lie is an abomination unto the Lord, a very present help in trouble.'  
*Adlai Stephenson*

'A cold coming they had of it, the worst time of the year to take a long journey,  
especially a long journey . . .'  
*Archbishop Lancelot Andrews (1555-1652)*

'Hospitality is making your guests feel at home even if you wish they were.'  
*Ambrose Bierce*

'I saw him now going the way of all flesh, that is, toward the kitchen.'  
*John Webster (1535-1623)*

'Keep smiling; it makes other people wonder what you are up to.'  
*Anon*

'The sight of you is good for sore eyes.'  
*Jonathan Swift (1667-1743)*

'Half the therapy is in the fee.'  
*Freud*

*Dorothy Archer*

## THE MINISTER'S MUSINGS

I have always been interested in inter faith dialogue and activity and have been the Secretary of the Bolton Interfaith Council for a number of years now. We are a registered charity, a company limited by guarantee and we have an executive committee with a strategic plan. We recently formed an 'Interfaith Support Group' to bring together the movers and shakers around the town who are actively interested in furthering the aims of our work. The group are mostly clergy from several different denominations and we are very pleased that they are interested.

One of the observations raised at a recent gathering - we meet over lunchtime and bring our sandwiches - was that many people in the Asian community cannot understand the complexities of the Christian church. It arose because we run a Bolton Faith Trail and take parties to visit two or three different places of worship and some of the questions raised on these visits are about the churches. (Last year we arranged Faith Trail visits for more than two thousand school children and numerous groups from the local authority, health service and police.)

We decided that it would be a good idea to give a little booklet explaining Christianity to every Faith Trail visitor. It would answer all the questions about why there were so many churches and why they all seemed different from each other both in shape and content; why there were groups of churches with different names and so on.

I volunteered to write a draft of this booklet and circulate it round the group for what I call 'improvement'. I did think that as a Unitarian I could be quite objective about it all. Some of the feedback has been interesting. Some want a greater emphasis on the Pauline epistles as being the foundation of Christianity; others don't want any mention of heresy or schism, saying it is too negative. One saw heretics as being the ones who tried to break the church up.

It reminds me of the time when the leaders of the town centre churches in Bolton decided to see if all ten of the churches could speak and act in one voice on many of the issues that faced the town. We ran a series of meetings with people from each of the churches and examined what we all agreed on and what would always be boundaries between the different beliefs. All we had to do then was to accept the boundaries and live with them as acceptable differences. We then formed a group called 'Christians Together in Bolton Town Centre' which is still going strong and it includes the congregation members too.

I keep this exercise in mind as we go about our inter faith work. That's why I am sure our little booklet will one day come off the press.

*Tony Mcneile*

## REFLECTIONS

### WELCOME

*Bitter snow falling - waiting the King's arrival - born in a cave*

The afternoon was dark and chill with the promise of a bitterly cold late December evening to follow. The hail siling down upon the roof of my little house sounded for all the world like a stream of ball bearings thrown from a great height into a bucket. I let myself into the inky blackness of my unlit hall, threw my briefcase onto the sofa in the living room and went into the kitchen. I had had a tiring and a tiresome day in the university and all I wanted now was my supper. As I stood in the middle of the kitchen contemplating the meagre contents of my fridge, I was distracted by a small high-pitched cry from the back porch.

“Open this door. Let me in please,” it ordered.

With only the slightest hesitation I obeyed, and a tiny creature made apparently from half a foot of oiled ebony string rushed past me like some demented bat fish out of a marine hell. It hesitated for not one nano second, but ran through the kitchen into the coal dark hall, plunged up the uncarpeted stairs, and disappeared. I followed the trail of raindrops into my bedroom but no alien being was to be seen. I stood very still and heard a faint rasping noise under my bed. Lifting the valance I found a black kitten sitting on its right hind leg, its left hind leg high in the air motionless behind its left ear, tiny pink tongue protruding, staring at me with eyes unwinking and huge in its tiny face.

“I am rather busy at the moment,” it seemed to say. “However a little supper in about twenty minutes would not go amiss. Thank you.”

In my fridge there were two tomatoes, a sweet potato, an old oyster mushroom, a rather small steak and a pint of milk. I cooked it all and precisely twenty minutes later the kitten, now dry and immaculately coated, strolled into the kitchen. It ate half the steak finely chopped with a spoonful of sweet potato and delicately lapped two bowls of warmed milk, while I dined on what was left over. Having washed its paws and whiskers, it made its way back upstairs and took up residence again under my bed.

The next morning, after our modest breakfast of milk and cereal, I turned it out into the garden, grabbed my unopened briefcase, shouted, “Bye, Cat,” and scurried off to the Cathedral. I could almost feel the eyes of the furry sentinel now sitting atop my wall boring reproachfully into my rapidly disappearing back. When I arrived home that evening, I was well prepared with cod fillet, Munchies, and a large frozen pizza in my reticule. Mewing quietly the kitten ran along beside me, darted ahead of me into the hall and ran straight into the kitchen. We dined; we sat beside the fire; the kitten replete with fresh cod slept.

“You can sleep here tonight, small Cat,” I said, “but ...” The kitten opened one eye and stretched languorously. “... tomorrow I must try and find out where you belong.”

I was speaking to an empty space - the lodger had made a sudden dash for the stairs and my bedroom. I tried to find Cat's owners, but no-one knew him or wanted him or cared at all about him. So I made him a bed in an old bicycle basket and left him in the warm while I went out to do the Christmas Eve shopping. By the time I returned the air was dry and cold and a pale sun was setting



over the Cathedral towers behind the old city wall. I was greeted by the warmth of my living room fire and a small black torpedo who shot into my outstretched arms.

“Hello, small Cat,” I murmured. “You know, I can’t go on calling you Cat; it’s not respectful. Who then shall you be?” I paused. “I could call you Baruch, the blessed one. Would you like that?”

The kitten stirred, climbed up onto my shoulder, rested its small face against mine, and with a tongue like the finest sandpaper gently licked my cheek. I switched on the radio and we sat in the old armchair while the familiar music of the carols and the words of the Nine Lessons floated around us.

“I have no Christmas present for you,” I confessed, “but I don’t expect you will mind.”

From the radio the voices of the fair choristers of King’s gradually rose to a poignant crescendo:

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.”*

The kitten’s quiet purr suddenly exploded into the heavy rattle of a miniature Kango hammer. God was in his heaven, Baruch had been welcomed into his new home, and all was very right with our world.

*Naomi Linnell*

## **THE PERSISTENCE OF WILBERFORCE A PERSONAL STORY**

I first saw him at the end of June. He was lying awkwardly on the patio – a beautiful wood pigeon with one wing obviously badly broken. Probably I should have ‘finished him off’ as he seemed to have no future, but that would be beyond my

capabilities. When Hugh returned in the evening, there was no sign of the bird, so we assumed he had crawled away to die.

Not so. A few days later, we found him in the 'side return', the narrow path from the side door to the back garden. The wing was nearly off and he dragged it round behind him with great difficulty. Without telling the other, we each threw out some food for him where he was resting, and expected to have to do a burying job within a few days.

Again, not so. After a few more days, he reappeared, now without the wing, and the stump seemed to have healed up nicely. He wandered about the patio quite easily during the day and disappeared at night – being July there was a lot of vegetation to hide under. Then one day he was spotted up on the grass. Somehow he had climbed up the two steps from the patio, which gave him access to more bushes to hide under whenever he needed to.

Then one afternoon, I was working in the Conservatory and heard a flutter of wings followed by a pitter-patter across the patio, more fluttering, and then silence. Then again – flutter, pitter-patter, flutter, silence. Peering out, I saw him. He was going up the steps on one side of the patio, walking across the grass, down the steps the other side, and back along the patio. Each time he got better at it, and eventually he managed to keep his balance on each traverse of the steps. That was when we decided to call him 'Wilberforce'.

As the summer wore on, he got stronger and stronger, and sometimes ventured up into the bushes to get a better view of the world. Or maybe he felt safer up there. Occasionally he tried to fly, which was very distressing, both for him and for us. But he did learn to glide down when he fell from one of his perches. He used the wing on one side for balance, and his tail twisted to the side on the other.

By then I had taken advice from an ornithologist friend. He pointed out that wood pigeons spend a lot of time on the ground, and that, provided we made sure food and water were available, Wilberforce could live out his life with us. He would not be at risk from cats, being quite a size himself, even with only one wing spread out, and he had several companions who came down and joined him often.

Autumn came, bringing some colder nights. It was always a relief to see Wilberforce when he first appeared in the mornings. Several times I spotted him just sitting quietly in the early morning sun, as though it was taking him longer to warm up, and we wondered what would happen when the weather really turned cold.

Then, at the beginning of November, Hugh went out just before lunch, with some rubbish for the compost, and saw white feathers blowing about. Our little friend had been killed, and the culprit had stated to pluck him. We both saw the sparrow-hawk come down again into the garden – not a usual place for such a bird and she was very wary. Before she could get back to her plucking, Hugh was outside again, scaring her off. Our lunch had to wait until Wilberforce was properly buried under his favourite bush. Hugh had no intention of letting him be torn apart, even if it meant that another little bird had to be sacrificed for the hawk's lunch!

Wilberforce was with us for four months. He remained a wild bird, with a wild bird's instincts, yet he taught us the value of persistence when learning new skills. He also showed us how to accept our limitations and work round them.

Some time later, when I was telling the story of Wilberforce, a friend pointed out that there had been a man, more than a century ago, who had been determined to learn to fly. But Wilbur Wright succeeded!

*Elizabeth Barlow*

## NEAR AND FAR

Sometimes we long for silence,  
Peace,  
And less pain  
For ourselves and for others,  
Kin, kind and all life.

We do not choose our genes,  
Culture, family or the rules,  
But we must play the given game  
As best we can.

We can end  
Or extend  
The sentence.  
But the best bet,  
It seems to me,  
Is to endure  
And endear  
Life to us  
And us to life.

*Phil Silk*

## MULTICULTURALISM: A DICTATORSHIP OF VIRTUE

During the last fifty years there has taken place an unprecedented mass migration into Europe of people mainly from Asia and Africa, causing serious problems of social adjustment. The doctrine of multiculturalism that evolved in response has imposed on previously free people a dictatorship of virtue.

The doctrine does not emanate from the migrants but from the heart of European civilisation itself. The virtue is 'tolerance' of which the British historically have had more than most other peoples. But such tolerance was an old-fashioned liberal virtue and the new guardians of morality demanded more. No longer was it

enough to be kind to strangers and learn from other cultures. Now not only must we live and let live but the newcomers must have immediate social acceptance and social inclusion. We must make friends of them, employ them, include them in everything we do in proportion to their numbers. Anything less was seen as insulting. So hard multiculturalism was born, based on the relativist belief that all cultures are of equal value. It is a doctrine that goes far beyond respect for others and equality of opportunity. It is about purity of heart.

The trouble is that multiculturalism sets an impossible goal for it runs contrary to the universal human disposition to live in the company of one's own kind. The demands it makes on us cause conflict between our natural feelings and the ones we are told we ought to be feeling. The result is a debilitating sense of guilt. Furthermore, the doctrine is enforced by the state and dissent from it is suppressed by the threat of being accused of racism. The 'racism' remains vague and undefined which gives it a sinister power to intimidate like accusations of heresy or witchcraft in former times. The same indeterminacy is found in the ever-expanding list of 'phobias'. No account is taken of the difference between feeling antipathy for a culture and assaulting those who belong to it.

Multiculturalism belongs to a family of antinomian beliefs with a long religious history of which the best known examples are Puritanism and Communism. In both of these the doctrine of purity of the heart was advanced as transcending mere rules of right and wrong. The result is the emergence of an elite of the 'pure in heart' who must, of course, have the power to change society until it too shares the purity. Sin must be rooted out, those who fail to show proletarian solidarity must be purged, those who fail to celebrate our diversity must be denounced as racists. In antinomian doctrines there are many ways of being a sinner. Sin may lurk in the most unlikely places, even in those who appear to be pure in heart. Where no obvious individual racists are apparent we discover 'institutional racism'. Ordinarily decent and tolerant members of the institution must attend racism awareness courses where they will be led to discover the covert racism lurking in their own souls.

But why should we speak of a 'dictatorship' of virtue? Anyone who values freedom will recognise that modern government has grown to resemble a giant octopus sucking up over half the nation's wealth and redistributing it through its tentacles that intrude into every area of life, into most of our institutions, even into our homes, telling us what we should eat, if we may smoke and how we should bring up our children. The octopus, of course, is full of good intentions. Money is given to subsidise beneficial social activities. Soon the recipient organisation becomes dependent on the subsidy and is required to account for how it is spent. Very soon independence and freedom of action are lost. This is the fate that has overtaken our universities and countless other organisations that were formerly beacons of altruism and independent public service. And, of course, politicians cannot resist favouring with subsidy those who are most likely to vote for them. The civil society that was a network of independent social activities conducted within a framework of law and order provided by government has been replaced by the octopus, squatting over us, eager to help in, regulate and control any activity we might wish to undertake.

The marriage between big government and multiculturalism was made in heaven – or in hell depending on your point of view. The doctrine of purity of heart gives government licence to extend its tentacles into hitherto free corners of society and into the minds of our children through the national curriculum. Geography teaching, for example, has become a vehicle for environmentalist/warmist propaganda (e.g. Schools' Low Carbon Day 24 June 2010). History downplays or ignores the great achievements of our island race and focuses on the evils of empire, the slave trade and genocide. In a sense, the old alliance between Church and State is reborn. The police have become the secular arm enforcing the edicts of the doctrinally pure elite.

This new alliance is a response to the complex social problems arising from mass migration from areas of the world outside the Western cultural heartlands. Multiculturalism has become the orthodox state policy for dealing with the problems of migration. The core, underlying belief on which it rests is that all cultures are equal and must enjoy parity of esteem. The problem arises from the fact that this belief is manifestly untrue. A single example will suffice. A culture that practises ritual female genital mutilation, as in parts of East Africa, is obviously inferior to that of the United Kingdom. The strange unreality of the doctrine that all cultures are equal echoes the naïve belief of easily-fooled Marxist intellectuals in the 1930's that Communism was the way of the future.

It necessarily follows from multicultural belief that cultural diversity\* is a blessing to Britain, a good in itself. Echoing the slogans\*\* of the totalitarian nineteen-thirties (Strength Through Joy, Freedom Through Work), the Metropolitan Police Service proclaims 'Peace through Diversity' while the Commission for Racial Equality gives us 'Strength in Diversity'. Anyone who expresses doubts about the wisdom of believing that all cultures are equal and that diversity is unequivocally good for us must, of course, be prey to the twin evils of racism and xenophobia. Naturally, the need to combat such impurities has led to the creation of large, expensive and ever expanding bureaucracies, anti-discrimination officers, equal opportunity consultants, tribunals, rules of political correctness, a whole complex apparatus for enforcing purity of heart. It is ironical, therefore, that tolerance, expressed principally as the equality of all individuals before the law, was a largely British invention.

The way in which multiculturalism is most keenly felt is in the insistence that the Anglo-Saxons and Celts of Britain must not think of their language, religion, laws and customs as being in any way superior to those of the people who choose to leave their own countries and come to live here, not only for economic reasons but because it is, or used to be, a free and tolerant society. In practice this has meant that in any conflict between migrants and local custom, local custom should give way. It is this aspect of multiculturalism that most upsets the average Briton. Why, they very reasonably ask, should we continually change our ways to avoid 'offending' any ethnic minority that chooses to complain? This anti-British - perhaps more accurately anti-English - attitude permeates the education system and local government, generating feelings of anger and frustration that cannot be publicly expressed. The low level agents of multiculturalism are forever discovering new sources of ethnic offence,

endlessly sniffing out racism and xenophobia, sometimes to the dismay of the immigrants they claim to be representing. It is they, rather than the immigrants, who insist on describing Britain as a racist society. Previous waves of immigrants, Jews and Poles for example, eventually settled successfully partly because they were not continually being told by multicultural zealots that they were the victims of British xenophobia.

The truth is that human beings the world over like to live among their own kind, among people they recognise and trust. Antipathy and conflict between ethnic and cultural groups is part of the human condition and is found in all societies. Migration is never easy and it is a remarkable tribute to the tolerance and good sense of the native British people that, despite the provocations of multiculturalism, mass immigration has hitherto caused so little conflict.

The eagerness of the multicultural elite to abandon British customs reveals that the doctrine arises less from love of others than from hatred of our own way of life. No other culture is so ready to abandon its own convictions. Birmingham City Council, for example, renamed Christmas 'Winterval' while enthusiastically supporting Islamic Awareness Week. At the OUP, in an alarming application of multicultural theory, Vineeta Gupta removed hundreds of words relating to Christianity, English history and the countryside from the children's dictionary.

Multiculturalism has created the most obvious mayhem in the areas of promotion and visibility. Rather than promotion strictly by ability multiculturalism demands that every ethnic minority must be represented at every level in proportion to their numbers in society as a whole. This can only make sense if we assume that all cultural and ethnic groups are equally good at the whole range of skills required in a modern society. If the upper levels are 'hideously white' the cause must lie in racism and xenophobia. In reality aptitudes and abilities are not shared equally by all cultural and ethnic groups. Nor are they by men and women. One result of this false dogma is the incompetence to be found in international organisations such as the U.N. where jobs must be shared out equally on the basis of nationality. It also generates a steady stream of complaints from would-be ethnic high flyers in the more lucrative occupations that they are discriminated against and, at times and perhaps more seriously, in their over-promotion. Another malignant effect of multiculturalism is the emergence of direct anti-English discrimination as in the recent case of the creation by Bristol City Council of a management trainee job 'open to black and minority ethnic candidates' only.

If multiculturalism was simply an expression of British decency and tolerance then it might be acceptable. But it is not. It is a doctrine entirely alien to our historical tradition, a doctrine that has generated an expensive and intrusive bureaucracy that increasingly dominates our lives. It has clamped on us a dictatorship of virtue whose like has not been seen since Cromwell's major-generals abolished Christmas.

*Mark Allaby*

\* 'Diversity is a term of description and not a value or a moral category. The fraudulent project of treating diversity as an end in itself serves as an escape clause for an elite that lacks the capacity to believe in a clearly formulated moral purpose.'

*Frank Furedi*

\*\* 'The longer I live the more distrustful I become of slogans. A slogan is a bunch of words designed to evoke a particular response; it is a party-cry, a flashy and assertive signal, useful as a bugle is useful, but a bad substitute for thinking as is the bugle's blast for a military band.'

*The Rev. Leslie Belton, first President of the NUF, July 1945*

I wish to acknowledge my debt in writing this article to an essay by Kenneth Minogue, Emeritus Professor of Political Science in London University.

## **SCIENCE AND THE AKASHIC FIELD: AN INTEGRAL THEORY OF EVERYTHING**

**By Ervin Laszlo**

Ervin Laszlo draws on much cutting-edge physics to underpin his thesis which aims to provide a unified view of all known phenomena. In contrast to the structural and hierarchical vision of Ken Wilber's 'A Brief History of Everything' Laszlo's reality is more interwoven. Rather than viewing the evolution of life, societies and the spirit as a step by step holistic unification of previously separate entities, Laszlo's holism is more all pervasive. In spite, indeed by virtue of the science, it goes further into the realms of what would ordinarily be called paranormal or supernatural phenomena.

He discusses the nature of developments in scientific theories with examples of paradigm shifts in quantum physics and cosmology. He describes scientific research into paranormal phenomena such as telepathy, spiritual healing and meditative trances and says there is much which is not explained by conventional science. However, he holds on to science for explanations. As much ground is covered as possible to support and expand the scope of the argument in order encompass all aspects of reality including consciousness.

His central theme is what he calls the 'Akashic field'. This is a formless, possibly infinite, sea of potential from which all forms arise and into which they return. The more established theory of the quantum 'vacuum' is used as the basis for the Akashic field. This he says is consistent with the primordial source of everything the Hindu tradition calls Akasha. He sees it as able to record the developments of a whole universe and when it collapses a new universe is formed building on the previous one. Even if the universe does not collapse it will have left a record in the Akashic field and this 'in-formation', as he calls it, will influence the development of future universes. He uses the term 'Metaverse' for that from which universes arise – the origin of the Big Bang. Aspects of the conventional Big Bang theory are called into question however. The possibility of many parallel universes is considered. The science he describes to flesh out the way this all works is extraordinary to most

laymen. Involving quasi-holographic records, phytons, virtual bosons and communication speeds millions of times the speed of light it makes most science fiction seem naïve. Yet this is the stuff of the scientific avant garde.

The capacity for there to be a memory base in the whole of existence is closely linked to another key idea called 'coherence'. In this sense 'coherence' is a concept in quantum physics involving the unification of particles such that they act on each other regardless of space and time. He describes a very bizarre world by day-to-day standards. Given the limitations of space in the book some of the scientific theory is so abbreviated as to be difficult to understand. Nevertheless a strong impression is created that there are indeed many more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. He cites a number of improbable facts about the universe and life and suggests that 'coherence' exists at these levels of magnitude as well and not just in the microscopic world of particle physics. Such 'coherence' offers a means of explaining paranormal phenomena such as telepathy and spiritual healing. It is a hopeful book which opens the door to a much more integrated and purposeful view of reality than is portrayed by conventional, reductionist science.

Consciousness is also considered to arise from and indeed to be a feature of the Akashic field. While being linked to matter he sees consciousness as an entity in its own right capable of autonomous existence opening the possibility of survival of death.

He states that he has been searching for meaning through science, looking for order and purpose beyond the individual human mind. Most of the book describes the interrelationship of different physical laws, branches of science and theories of consciousness but with some heartfelt commentary. Frequently parallels are drawn with Hindu philosophy.

The unification of mysticism and science is controversial but nonetheless attractive. It provides a solid base for the former and meaning to the latter. One basic tenet of Hindu philosophy is that everything springs from and ultimately returns to a void and re-emerges for further development; this is called Samsara. Although reincarnation as a mode of survival of death is integral to this philosophy he is, however, somewhat sceptical about it.

Eastern philosophies are often used as a basis for philosophical writings as well as some theories of everything. This adds consistency between the theories because Eastern philosophies often have much in common. For instance, the concepts of the Void and Samsara span the Hindu and Buddhist worlds. Theories of everything are syntheses and hypotheses at the present time rather than theories in the strict sense.

Nevertheless this is a very thought-provoking book and sheds new light on the consistencies between new science and mysticism. It is very difficult to live a meaningful life without some faith and in today's world thinkers like Laszlo are needed to prevent scientism eroding people's perception of the good sense of this.

*Chris Barchard*

Treat the earth well.  
It was not given to you by your parents,  
It was loaned to you by your children.  
We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors,  
We borrow it from our Children.

*Ancient Indian proverb*

## **PURE, UNBOUNDED LOVE . . .**

What is called ‘Unitarianism’ is, as many associated with it will surely admit, a very ‘mixed bag’. For my own part, I no longer care to be thought of as either Trinitarian or Unitarian, for both terms imply knowledge of the Godhead which I think eludes us. Better, I think, to be ‘Free Christian’ or ‘Free Religious’.

My years in Unitarianism have, however, introduced me to two viewpoints which I particularly value – to non-Christian religions, especially Buddhism, and to a deep belief in life after physical death. But when it comes to Christianity, it seems to me that Unitarianism has only slightly comprehended it. My understanding is that in the early days of non-Trinitarianism in Poland and Transylvania, there were those who worshipped Jesus. But the attempt has since been made to turn away from the worship of Jesus to the worship of the Father, to the God of Jesus. So we find in several British Unitarian hymnals, Charles Wesley’s beautiful ‘Jesus, Lover of my soul’ altered to ‘Father, Refuge of my soul’. But for an increasing number of thinking people, belief in an all-powerful, all-loving God, in the ‘Father’ of Jesus is difficult, and often impossible. Yet human hearts need religion, and as William Blake (1757-1827) perceptively observed: ‘To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love All pray in their distress;’ and Mankind in his distress ‘Prays to the human form divine.’

There is no need, however, to embrace the largely unbelievable notions with which religion has surrounded such beautiful figures of compassion and virtue as the Buddha, Kuan-yin, Jesus and Mary. They are available to us as uncomplicated celestial Friends. I have found that using such names as two-syllable mantras (my own mantra is Kuan-yin) can be of tremendous value. As Charles Wesley wrote, there is ‘Pure, unbounded love’, celestial love for us to make our own.

Earlier in this essay, I mentioned life after death, and on this theme, I should like to conclude by quoting some words from a sermon by Anglican (for 27 years), later Unitarian (for 33 years), minister, the Reverend Wyndham Heathcote (1861-1955) who made a considerable study of psychic and spiritualistic matters:

‘Why do I speak about these matters and lay such emphasis on them when most clergy never say a word about them? I speak about them because I know them to be true, and because, sooner or later, we shall all be dead, and I don’t want you to be able to say, “Why didn’t he tell us?”

‘A great many people, when they arrive in the next world, receive a great shock; they don’t know where they are. There is no heaven or New Jerusalem, no

harps to play as they expected. There is no throne or judgment seat, but a world extraordinarily like the one they have left. Some cannot even realise that they are dead, and many are greatly bewildered and lose much time.

‘My duty is to tell you what I have discovered, and at least to get your hearts and minds set in the right direction. When we die, we do not go to heaven or hell, but to those conditions of existence which we, by our lives here, by our thoughts, motives and actions have made necessary. Death has no power to change us spiritually or morally. We are after death exactly what we have made ourselves before death. Conditions vary immensely. For certain kinds of people, for cruel people and hypocrites, for those who have been ruthless and who have exploited their fellow spirits; for them the conditions are exceedingly painful. “They do not come out thence until they have paid the uttermost farthing.” They can get away with it here, but not there. But for most folk, conditions are much better than here, even in the next world they are much better, although it is not a spiritual world but only the first of many spheres through which we pass, or mansions, as the Bible translates it, within the earth soul.

‘The average decent man or woman need not fear death any more than they fear sleep; for them it is a happy release. We have to make compensation for any evil we may have done, but any generous spirit would be anxious to do so. Of the amazing future which lies before us after we have passed to the next sphere, I cannot speak now. All I am anxious to do is to ask you to be prepared for the next step. What counts is love of wisdom, truth, beauty and goodness. Set your minds on these things, for all the things men mostly seek are of no value, or even may be dust and ashes.’

*Ross Howard*

## **A NOBLE LOVE**

Nothing is so completely beyond the power of death as a noble love. Parting can shatter only its outward shell. Under that strange touch, love in its inmost recesses kindles and glows with a divine fire. Whom of the living do we love as we love the dead? Whom else do we hold so sacredly and so surely? Not as a memory of a lost past – nothing in our present is so real as they, and toward our unknown future we go with great and solemn gladness, beckoned by their presence.

*G. S. Merriam* From a Unitarian minister’s handbook pub. London 1915.

## **UNITARIAN GREETINGS CARD**

Advance notice that the youth department are creating a Unitarian greetings card. These will be on sale very soon and are suitable for Christmas and other occasions. This gives our community an opportunity to send a Unitarian branded card, as well as helping the youth department to do some fund raising.

*John Harley*, Youth Officer [jharley@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:jharley@unitarian.org.uk)

## A MORALLY DEEP WORLD Part 2

By Lawrence E. Johnson

Human societies have taken two forms. The first communal and co-operative, is conjectured to have persisted for aeons (evidenced today in some isolated groups), the second is openly or covertly exploitative (slavery, feudalism). Once, when discussing profits with a friend, he said: 'You make a profit each week when you draw your wages!' (Actually the economic text-books define "profit" as the reward for enterprise, and "wages" as the reward for labour). I had thought that I made a loss each week-end, or to be more precise, I felt that I had 'suffered deprivation' being deprived of the full value of my labour because some portion of it must needs go to my employer in the form of profit. Thus, (if I am correct), the old exploitation system did not disappear as we moved on from slavery and feudalism but re-emerged in such a disguised form that some workers could see their wages a being a profit!

This economic exploitation is masked, too, in situations where both worker and employer seem quite satisfied with their rewards (probably the result of trade union pressure). But it comes plainly into view when, because the workers' pay aggregatively is not sufficient to buy things which they have produced, a downturn in the economy is experienced and some workers have to lose their jobs. To me, neither the hidden exploitation, nor the sacking of workers have anything in common with religious or philosophical exhortations to love one's neighbour as oneself, or to treat people as ends in themselves and not as a means to our own ends. Are we big enough, wise enough, loving enough to develop a planet-friendly, ecosystem-respecting, yet dynamic way of conducting way of conducting our industry and commerce which does not rely on exploitation?

Karl Marx (1818-1883) thought that capitalism was an important stage through which humankind had to pass in order to enormously accelerate the productive processes thus increasing the output of the material goods necessary for a better standard of life. And, indeed, were it not for people with such verve, panache and enterprise we may today have been experiencing a Stone-Age kind of existence. Many of these people ploughed back some of their great wealth into magnificent buildings, museums, schools, etc. Ports such as Bristol were built by profits from the slave trade. So where does that leave us? Do we accept the way of Love, or turn a blind eye to its violation? Our TV screens show us Third-World people paid a pittance, trade union leaders murdered. With the collapse of the 'Tiger' economies of the Far East and of such giants as Enron, is our own future safe? This global economic superstructure, in my opinion, has injustice at its core. Perhaps now the chickens are coming home to roost.

*George Cope*

## NUF BOOK COLLECTION

**A Short History of Myth** by Karen Armstrong, published in 2005 is an accessible, enjoyable and informative read, as we have come to expect from this insightful and accomplished author, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject covered. She demonstrates, using the myths of each period of the development of humanity, how important myths have been for our well-being and as a way of understanding ourselves in all our aspects. Myths change over time, borrowing bits that have gone before into new narratives and forms of expression. We learn how they have always been closely linked to ritual. From the Palaeolithic period down to our own we are taken into different world views that move from hunter, to agriculture, urban, the Axial period and the 'Great Western Transformation'. She considers the overshadowing of myth by science and what has been lost in this process. We are left in a situation where we haven't moved on from the myths of the Axial period, to the detriment of our shared religion/spirituality. All too often we now look to the arts, and in particular novels and music, to fill the void that has been left. Here we can give voice and find expression of myth in our time. At only 150 pages this easily digested book is a must. (NUF Book Collection)

**James Martineau: "This Conscience-Intoxicated Unitarian" by Frank Schulman.** In terms of writing about James Martineau and his work this should be considered recent, being published in 2002. Considering it is no more than 176 pages, including index and notes, it is incredibly broad without losing any depth of comment. Following a few pages of biographical detail it sweeps through the developing philosophy and theology of his long life, 1805-1900, demonstrating the changing intellectual and educational thinking of his time and his role as a key thinker, a Minister, Educationalist, Theologian and Philosopher. Being a Unitarian Minister, his contribution to the elements of worship was significant, through producing prayer books and hymn books. How to worship and the role of Minister, he considered important. But it was his theological and philosophical learning that led him to a different understanding of where ultimate authority should rest. No longer was the Bible the final arbiter, but the conscience, the inner voice, the God within. This did not mean that Christianity ceased to be central but that his learning and understand had freed him to understand God, Jesus, Church, Scriptures and other religious traditions, in new ways. In the end, what is central is the individual's personal relationship with his conscience, the seat of authority and morality, where the personal God is encountered. (NUF Book Collection)

**This Essex Hall Lecture of 1987 by Jeremy Goring, *Where to Belong Religiously: Martineau, Maurice and the Unitarian Dilemma*,** highlights the difficulty these two giants of nineteenth century religious thinking faced.

Both were born into Unitarian families, Martineau staying within it, but sitting uncomfortably with any sectarianism and denominationalism, and Maurice, who left to minister in the Anglican Church. This very readable lecture takes only a very short

time to read, but as well as throwing more light for contemporary Unitarians on the perennial dilemma of the movement rooted in its history, it may also go some way into showing that the dilemmas many individuals experience are not new. Whilst readers may not wish to read the longer book by Schulman I feel sure that this short Essex Hall Lecture should be considered essential.

All books from the NUF Book Collection are available to borrow. Please contact Joan Wilkinson: Tel. 01332 814055 or [joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk](mailto:joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk)

## **SPEAKING OF GOD**

### **Unitarian Adventures in Theology**

What a brave theme title for this year's RE Summer School I thought, when it was first announced; a theme which in any other situation might well cause dissension amongst a group of Unitarians meeting together. But, of course, Summer School came up trumps yet again for those fortunate enough to have been the beneficiaries of all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes by a dedicated steering group, workshop leaders, theme talk participants, and ministers, who have to take credit for maintaining such a high standard of religious educational method, content, and experience.

The five morning theme talks were given by Mel Prideaux plus a different speaker each day. They gave us five different perspectives but yet structured to move the whole examination forward as we progressed through the week. Mel's belief that it is unhealthy for Unitarians not to talk about God proved to be correct for me and from all the healthy comments made by others over the week I think this was a general feeling. For those of you who are able to access the Internet the five talks can be heard in full at: [www.unitariansocieties.org.uk](http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk). The theme talks are never periods of stark lecturing but rather set within a worshipful context so that minds and hearts are receptive to religious learning within community.

This attitude is carried over to the morning workshops that follow, after much excited exchange over coffee. We had all been allotted to our chosen morning workshops when booking and these are compulsory. This year the choice was as difficult as ever: 'Experiencing God', 'Icons', 'Build Your Own Theology', the 'Children's Programme' and finally the one to which I had been allocated, 'Exploring Prayer'. Again I was fortunate to find our own Mel Prideaux along with Jane Blackall to be leading the group. The course itself was based on a book by a UU Minister, Rev Erik Walker

Wikstrom entitled 'Simply Pray', and whilst the week of exploring prayer was a profound experience for all those in the group, it did seem so natural and so simple in the end. There were a mixture of making and/or very short written or discussion pieces but also a lot of prayer done in the prayerful setting of an engagement group well facilitated. Each day was structured specifically so that we worked from an introduction/preparation, 'naming', 'knowing', 'listening', 'loving', and finally personal prayer practice. We had all hoped to be able to end the week being able to return

home having achieved different but specific targets. I returned with much more than I had hoped. The difficulty of leading group prayer when meeting for our Charnwood Fellowship gatherings had always been something that I had found to be challenging. Through various tasks we did together during the week I became much more confident, but more than that, my own personal prayer life has been enriched beyond anything I could have hoped for, and that is due largely to the group facilitators and all those in the group. Already it has been possible to use some of the material and ideas with the Charnwood Fellowship and still they are hoping to hear more about the theme talks in particular and have the opportunity to discuss the topic.

Both speaking of God and prayer were shown to be areas that Unitarians can and should do in an understanding that we can do it in a way that is different from what is so often held up to be stereotypically orthodox. We don't need to see differences as our stumbling block to engagement at a level that is meaningful for each individual if we do it in right relationship.

There is much more to Summer School than just the theme talks and the workshops. There are morning meditations, evening epilogues, afternoon and evening optional workshops as well as poetry, singing, dancing and fun. Many go to the daily discussions on the morning theme talks that take us deeper into the day's considerations. We are able to engage directly with the speakers. These are very fruitful sessions, although without the disciplined and detailed work that the speakers make they would not be possible. The minister for the week is available by appointment as for many the experience of the week can be overwhelming. It is all too easy to try and do too much and newcomers, and even older ones, have to work hard to discipline themselves into missing some of the things on offer.

For NUF members Summer School is a perfect opportunity of being with other Unitarians but also a way of deepening their understanding of what religion means to them in what is often a situation of isolation from regular religious contact with a community.

Having had the wonderful experience of sharing and exploring prayer within a group of sensitive Unitarians I feel bolstered and energised to face whatever the coming year might bring until I meet with Summer School friends again, next year at Hucklow.

*Joan Wilkinson*

## **A BLAST FROM THE PAST**

Refurbished from an old workhouse chapel, Wilton Spiritualist Church is now a delightful building. In the days to which this tale relates it had a lectern on each side of the altar area where stood the master of ceremonies on one side and the visiting medium on the other. On this occasion I was sitting in the front row on the medium's left and the altar was behind her right shoulder.

The medium was both clairvoyant and clairaudient and came to me with a message. She described a man in a brown suit with smoothed back brown hair who, she said, held rather strange political views. During this description she was looking

alternately at me and then over her right shoulder to the altar where he stood. She said, "I don't know why he is standing over there" and asked and motioned for him to come round to her front, but he would not. She then went on to say, rather diffidently, that he was saying 'Fascist'. This didn't sound much to the congregation but to me it was earth shaking.

I had worked with Jim (the man in the brown suit) some 30 years previously and had not seen or heard of him since then. This was in an open plan instrument servicing department of Marconi which had a lovely atmosphere of camaraderie and micky taking. Jim was much loved for his Old Time Music Hall songs and jokes but at the same time was an object of political scorn for his communist views at a time when there was a 'Reds under the bed' outlook. He was rumoured to be a card carrying communist. He revelled in political arguments of which he started many.

His party piece was to get you arguing between him and someone on your other side, his amusement then being to watch your head swing from side to side wondering who you should answer next. Although there was no argument here he had the medium caught up in that same scenario.

If Jim was losing an argument he would finish it off by loudly spitting at you, 'Fascist pig!'. Of course the medium didn't like to do this.

On another occasion I was given a message from an aunty I never knew of since she died before I was born. My mother confirmed this. It was more convincing evidence but not nearly so dramatic as our Jim.

THANK YOU, JIM.

*Eric Talbot-Batting*

'The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal.'

*Aristotle*

'It was a wise man who said that there is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals.'

*Felix Frankfurter*

## **CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR AT THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE**

**Christmas Walkers and Hucklow Village Lights** - December 3rd-5th

Turning on the village lights is an annual event in the village, accompanied by entertainment. As in many of the Derbyshire villages, along with the summer well-dressings, this is an event not to be missed.

If you enjoy walking there will be the opportunity for a group walk during the day. If you prefer to visit Castleton or Bakewell to finish your Christmas shopping this would be an enjoyable option. Or you might just like to relax in front of the open fire in the lounge!

### **Christmas lunches** - Weeks commencing December 6th and 13th

The quality of the meals at The Nightingale Centre is well known and many have enjoyed a good Christmas lunch over the years. Some people several times! So if you would like to come alone, with a friend or even bring a bigger party book now for this year's Christmas Lunch.

### **Christmas at Hucklow** - December 10<sup>TH</sup> - 12<sup>TH</sup>

This successful weekend house-party is now in its third year. A lovely start to Christmas, there will be carols in the lounge on the first evening followed by a Fete and Christmas dinner on the Saturday. On Saturday evening there is also a welcome return of 'Flash in the Pan' who will be providing music for the Ceilidh. For those who wish to, there will also be time for walking or sightseeing.

For those of you with only a few hours to spare, come along to the **Fete** on the Saturday 11th. There will be all the usual stalls, lunches, afternoon, refreshments and 'maypole dancing', and, as dusk falls, the Christmas lights will light up the village. Fill a car with your friends and 'pop in'!

### **Winter Walking** - Weekends January 14th-16th and 21st-23rd plus Mid-Week Winter Walking January 26th-28th

After all the 'excesses' of Christmas there is nothing better than a quiet 'get away'. With two group walks, games in the evening, good food, a roaring fire and good company, what could be better!

The peace and beauty of the Derbyshire countryside at this time of the year is very relaxing and for those who can visit 'mid-week' it will be even quieter as they can walk while others work!

Sorry we can't guarantee the snow!

If you wish to know more about any of the above please contact Stella Burney Tel: 01298 871218 Email: [info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk](mailto:info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk)

## **WEB NEWS**

**Cover picture artist** [www.artnet.com/artist/713485/kim-ki-chang.html](http://www.artnet.com/artist/713485/kim-ki-chang.html)

## **SIR CYRIL SMITH MBE**

Members of the Fellowship will have heard with sadness of the death of Sir Cyril Smith. Cyril was a lifelong member of Rochdale Unitarian Church. He had always supported the church and was immensely proud of his Unitarian roots. As a youngster he was in the UYPL (Unitarian Young People's League) and he went on to become a Sunday School Superintendent, a role he only relinquished when he became an MP in 1972. Cyril was the chair of the Trustees of the church until ill health forced him to resign, although he remained a member of the trustees. Cyril was a tireless

worker on behalf of Rochdale Unitarian Church from being a young boy. He will be greatly missed by the members of the church and our sympathy goes to his brother Norman and Norman's wife, Shirley, at this sad time.

The funeral service took place at Rochdale Town Hall at noon on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September and was followed by a private service at Rochdale Crematorium. The Chalice and Banner from Rochdale Unitarian Church were used for the service.

*Rev Gillian Peel* Minister, Rochdale Unitarian Church

## **DIARY DATES**

### **UCCN Conference Feb 2011**

Is your congregation/society holding a special event in 2011, or do you wish to update your current outreach material about your organisation? If so, the UCCN Workshop Weekend will provide a perfect opportunity to prepare publicity material and learn how to target it appropriately, with the help of experts. There is always space to exchange good ideas and get advice about your Newsletters, websites and all forms of communication. Ask your congregation, society or district to financially support you and book early with The Nightingale Centre to ensure a space. Booking forms can be printed off from: [www.uccn.org.uk](http://www.uccn.org.uk), or for more information contact Joan Wilkinson at: [joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk](mailto:joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk).

## **NEXT ISSUE**

The deadline for the next issue is Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010. Contributions on any theme and responses to any item in the newsletter are always welcome. All contributions are acknowledged.