

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians
and Free Christian Churches

News & Views

Issue 5



Summer 2020



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

Registered Charity No. 1040294

Becoming

red-daubed rosebuds, clasped
tight as pugilistic fists,
wait their turn, become
custard-pale petals, layers
of light, prancing petticoats

Liz Brownhill



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Editorial

“In a real and literal sense, our world is made up of countless layers of the past: we exist through what has gone before. A grave, a ruin, an ancient Greek coin picked up from the ground, a few written words – these things link us to our ancestors. And we too, in our turn, will be ancestors. The past, the present and the future are unendingly joined.”

Anthony Thwaite, introducing a selection of his poems in *Here and Human*, compiled by FES Finn, John Murray 1976.

It is strange that at a time of world crisis so many of us look to the past for comfort (why are so many people returning to making their own bread), understanding (looking at past plagues and their resolution) and distraction (so many of the historical dramas such as *The Mirror and the Light*). But how do we reconcile this with the frequent injunction to live only in the moment? And can we really learn from the current pandemic and put a better world in place when it is over? One thing is already clear. At a time when social distancing of some sort seems likely to be with us for a considerable time, the need for virtual fellowship as offered by the NUF has never been greater. So please spread the word to people you know whom you think might benefit, whether they are Unitarians or not. And of course now, more than ever before, we would appreciate feedback and comments on the issues raised in the magazine. We would like to publish readers' comments, and we would welcome offers of new material, any length from 20 to 2000 words, and book reviews, poems, prayers and pictures as well as longer articles.

The theme for the Autumn issue will be *“Talking with Strangers - Difference, division and dialogue”*. The deadline for receipt by the Editor will be **14 August**.

Nick Saunders, Editor

rnssaunders@outlook.com

Wanted: Secretary for the NUF.

The NUF is looking for a new honorary secretary to succeed Janet Lythgoe. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Tony McNeile, 01204 591 570 email: tony.mcneile@virgin.net to discuss what is involved.

Minister's Page

How are you managing? This lockdown has been an exercise in survival. It has been, and maybe still is, as we read this, a mental challenge as well as a physical challenge. We have been separated from our family and friends, deprived of social activities, deprived of playing or watching sport. We have had to endure loneliness or sometimes having too much family in the house with us.

When we are out for our walk we feel like 'Plague people' who must be shunned. We cannot see the virus that threatens and there is no light at the end of the tunnel which says, 'It has gone!'

The severity of the lockdown has been alleviated through our electronic gadgets. The TV with all its channels has been able to keep us entertained; our computers and phones have linked us through Zoom and messenger apps. Most of our Unitarian congregations have found ways to keep in touch with their members.

When we went out to clap in support of the NHS, we found ourselves waving and talking to the neighbours across and up and down the road. Most of them we had never seen before. We did our six foot pas de deux around strangers as we walked to the shop and exchanged smiles and said thank you when they stood aside to let us pass.

If much has been lost in this pandemic, there have been gains too. There is a stronger sense of community, a greater appreciation of the

fresh outside air and a greater awareness of the fragility of life. We are enjoying not having to do everything in a rush. Let us not lose the positives!

And when we pray and consider our world, let us pray for the families who have lost loved ones. For them it could not have been worse.

Whatever the situation as we read this, 'Stay spiritually strong.'

Tony McNeile

Prayer

The prayer in my heart is for the sufferers, the healers and the carers. Let us give them our blessings, pray that they are protected from the virus and pray that they continue to have the strength to do their work. Let us keep them in our prayers long after the crisis is over.

Bring into our prayers the families and friends of those who have died. Many sufferers have passed away in isolation without the comfort of family visiting. Families have not been allowed to visit. Keep in our prayers those who were unable to pay their respects because the numbers attending a funeral were limited to a few.

Pray that our faith remains strong and will give us the strength to support the many people cast into need because of this virus.

May meditation

Hello, I am Tony McNeile, minister to the National Unitarian Fellowship. The National Unitarian Fellowship is for Unitarians, and others, who may or may not be online or who may or may not be associated with one of the Unitarian congregations in the United Kingdom. We welcome all who are curious about the spiritual dimension in life. This is our meditation for May 2020.



How can I express those feelings of joy when the sun is shining on the month of May. The sun is at last warm. I feel its heat on my body. Everywhere I see the leaves are opening in bright new green, and the flowers are offering multitudes of colours. The lambs are alive in the fields. There is a sense of tranquil contentment beneath every gentle movement. On such days I could throw my arms wide open and shout those feelings of joy at the sky.

But sometimes I ask, how can I express the opposite feelings of sadness when life feels derailed? How can I express a feeling of hurt deep inside my heart? Life is not always sunshine. Life has a cruel side. People know how to sting. Life knows how to sting. There have been times when I could wrap my arms around myself and cry bitter tears into the darkness.

These emotions are alive within me - sometimes of joy, sometimes of pain. I don't think I am really any different from anyone else.

Emotions form a life force within the core of our being. They might be hidden behind the mask we call ourselves, but they are there none the less. There might be times when they are internally overruled to prevent us appearing vulnerable but they will never go away. There might be times when we just let them out. Emotions make us who we are.

Sometimes we seem to need a reference point in our lives with which to share these emotions. A reference point beyond ourselves, beyond human interaction. We need to feel that we are sharing our inner feelings with something positive and that they are not slipping away into the emptiness of space, unacknowledged.

We need to feel an answering emotion that understands. An answering echo that understands both joy and sadness. An answering emotion that is essentially a personal one.

Since the beginning of time there has been a sense that there is something spiritual out there beyond our normal everyday experience. Something greater, that can connect to us and respond to our emotions, sometimes sharing joy, sometimes sharing sadness and sometimes leaving a yearning to connect.

There have been and still are writers who say that that emotional connection creates the kind of harmony and relationship that is similar to music, when two or three different notes played together produce a perfect sound, joyful or sad, which is always melodic.

When our minds and emotions are disturbed it is best to focus on that harmony of emotions to find the still moment when the connection feels strongest.

They say the troubles and anxieties of the world create energies that vibrate within us to make discordant sounds. They melt away with the peaceful connection. In such a peaceful connection they say, love arises. Love with all its many meanings. Love for another person, love for all people, love for an animal, love for the goodness we see in others, love for what we see around us in the sunshine of emerging summer. Love for the world.

I hesitate to give a name to this moment of connection. Use a name or a word that gives you its meaning.

So as May with all its blossoms and lambs and leaves bursts into the world to herald a new summer, let us respond.

If you are feeling joyful then rejoice in that joy. If you are feeling low, then open the heart to those emotions within and reach to the emotions that are beyond. May you find comfort and may love emerge and bring you into the peaceful now of life.

As we travel through the month, we do not know where this lock-down of 2020 is going to lead us, maybe nowhere. But stay strong.

We at the National Unitarian Fellowship wish you patience and peace if you are isolating. If you have to go out into the world to work and care for others, may the world protect you and keep you from harm.

Thank you for your time.

Tony McNeile

What's New on the Website www.nufonline.org.uk

I hope you go on the website regularly! There're plenty of new things to see!

We are pleased to announce that thanks to Rev. Kate Whyman of Plymouth Unitarian Church we are now posting to the site each Sunday Kate's weekly mini-service. This lasts about 25 minutes and can be watched as a YouTube video. The words to the hymns appear on screen so you can join in!

In addition Nick Saunders is writing a weekly blog during the pandemic – he would welcome comments, either by e mail or via the NUF online Forum. Do consider signing up for the Forum.

As always the website holds the current issue of *News & Views*. The Summer issue will appear in June. Members who have indicated that they prefer paper copies will of course be sent them by post as usual.

John Wilkinson, webmaster

Message for the NUF – from the Presidential team

Hello everyone,

With the current pandemic cutting through all our fine plans for this year, I thought I would bring you up to date with one small part of the Annual Meetings that did not happen. There was no delightful welcoming to Anne Mills as your GA President for the year 2020/21, nor a welcome to Rev Sue Woolley to the post of Vice President. Instead, until we are able to conduct our General Assembly Annual General Meeting, I will remain as President of the GA. However, as this year will be so very different, Anne, Sue and I came up with a plan that we hope will be of use to the Assembly, (I point out every time I mention the GA that it means all of us, not just the office in London nor the Executive Council, though they work very hard on our behalf, most of them on a voluntary basis, but every member of every congregation, and its ministers, lay leaders, lay preachers, and all those who for whatever reason do not or cannot be part of a congregation but feel part of the Unitarian family.) We are now, officially the Presidential Team. I remain nominally the President, Anne the Vice President and Sue the VP elect.



We are offering Compassionate Communication, reaching out to the denomination, to help in whatever capacity we are able. We are aware that there is fear and trepidation around as to how our Movement will survive, how our congregations will regroup after the pandemic. We are very much aware that a large proportion of our Movement falls into the category being asked to remain in lockdown and

for them it will probably be a long time before any kind of new normal can evolve beyond staying in isolation as much as possible. We hope to be a link, a listening ear, a virtual hand to hold.

It is our hope that we can be of use, being used will show us how. We have a designated email address for people to use to get in contact. We are also on Facebook , and our phone numbers will be publicised too. For the record mine is 07 929 342 939, so if you want to talk to me, you can.

As the pandemic draws back and a vaccine and/or cure for this virus is discovered, worshipping life will return to a new 'normal'. One in which we continue to have a greater online presence as well as our churches and chapels, helping us to stay connected even when we are not physically able to do so. As we do get back to our churches, chapels and meeting houses, the 'team' hope to be able to celebrate with congregations and ministers, lay leaders and groups.

On behalf of GA Team President, I hold all our beloved community in the light of love and hope, and may we stay well to meet again.

Celia Cartwright

General Assembly Annual Meeting 2020 – Update

As many readers will be aware this year's Annual Meeting, planned for 7-9 April at the Metropole Hotel at the NEC in Birmingham, was cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. However, a programme of virtual meetings did take place under the banner of "Being Together". Many of the sessions were recorded and are now accessible on You Tube via the Being Together website the address of which is <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/beingtogether>.

Here is the introduction to the programme:

Being Together was a three-day online gathering for spiritual nourishment during a global pandemic. The UK Unitarian movement offered a space of togetherness, hope, inspiration and support during these strange and difficult times. With online talks, workshops, ritual, and sharing circles, people were able to come together in heart and mind at a time when we are isolated in body.

The Keynote Talk was be given by writer, academic and activist, Dr Alastair McIntosh. Connect with 'Being Together' on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/UnitariansUK

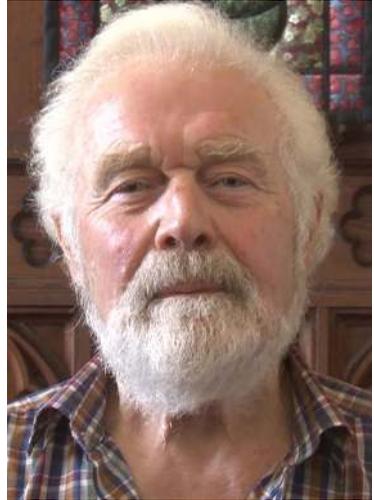
Videos, presentations, podcasts and other materials are available next to each item in the programme...

If you do not have access to the internet you will find discussion of some of the sessions in The Inquirer for 2 May 2020.

A sad loss for the movement

David Dawson, a lifelong Unitarian at national, district and congregational levels and a member of several societies, sadly died on Saturday 9th May. Our thoughts are with his wife Christine and family. David was a past President of the General Assembly, going on to become an Honorary Member of the GA, respected and loved in equal measure. He was a good friend to the NUF, UKUTV and many other Unitarian groups and societies. When asked if he could help on projects he would always reply positively and bring to them a professionalism and ongoing encouragement.

However, to most, David was the Unitarian music-man. Not only did he compose music for many hymns, but he also brought Unitarians together to perform. Audio tapes of hymns and a video of Christmas music were produced for congregational and personal use. As President of the Unitarian Music Society he encouraged others, of all levels, to come together at Great Hucklow to sing and play. He was a hard taskmaster, especially towards those who were more talented, but for those of us less so, he was gentle and encouraging, but all were in awe of him once he got the baton in his hand.



Being a Unitarian was central to David's life, and this was demonstrated at Great Hucklow in 2018, when four societies came together for a weekend conference. Representing the Unitarian Renewal Group, he gave a presentation on the development of the Unitarian movement over the past century. This had been a detailed project the Group researched over a long period of time and surely will remain a valuable document for future Unitarians.

He will be missed by all who knew him, but he has left a legacy of wonderful memories and wonderful music, for which we thank him.
Joan Wilkinson

Reports from regional associations

**FUSE: Festival of Unitarians in the South East
20-23 February 2020, Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing, West Sussex**

Looking back, Fuse feels like another lifetime.

It was a world in which people gathered freely, without concern, in a seaside hotel. A time when more than 100 people could assemble in a low-ceilinged room for worship, and afterwards congregate in small huddles for more intimate chats with friends, old and new. Even though coronavirus was already on the horizon, I don't think any of us realized that weekend would be one of our last chances to meet so many other souls face to face.



I have been going to Fuse since it started, continuing to attend even when I moved from Brighton all the way down the south coast to Plymouth more than 5 years ago. It has been a great way to stay in touch with friends and colleagues from the LDPA, the association of Unitarians in London and the South East, but I have also felt consistently nourished and inspired by the rich and varied programme of worship and workshops on offer.

Setting the tone this year was the gentle and delightful Philip Roderick. Rev Philip is a retired Anglican priest, educator and writer, and the founder and patron of 'The Quiet Garden Movement'. His opening 'pre-conference seminar' on Friday afternoon was a powerful and mindful process in which he encouraged us to slow down and discover the power of 'pause' through seven steps: space, time, intention,

attention, focus, insight and gratitude.

Philip is also a percussionist and plays the 'hang', an instrument based on the steel drum. Sadly Parkinson's disease means he can now only play for short spells, but I found the sound and rhythm of his music mesmerising. I recommend his 'Sound Blessing' recorded in 2012.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBNhnqgH3U0>

Saturday and Sunday mornings began with devotional practices before breakfast – including prayer, yoga and meditation – and each day was filled with too many workshops to choose from, including for example 'The Spirit of Nature in the Poetry of Kathleen Raine, Prayer as the Heart of Worship, and 'Pilgrimage Walks'. I co-led a session with LDPA District Minister Rev Martin Whitell entitled 'Taking Fuse Out'. Our group explored what elements of Fuse we found most enriching – such as the chance to meet and spend time with other Unitarians, to share ideas, and to try alternative ways of worshipping - and how we might offer similar experiences in other congregational and district settings. The consensus was to be brave, but also to go gently, keep people on board, and probably start small.

The Closing Service was particularly uplifting. One of Fuse's strengths is its excellent youth programme and the service featured both heartfelt and heart warming contributions from both the younger and older youth groups.

If there's a weakness to Fuse I'd say it's the venue. The festival began at the Chatsworth Hotel and has returned there, but for two years it moved to the rather splendid Horsley Towers in Surrey, a 19th century mansion with lovely grounds and even a magical 'secret' chapel. The setting gave the festival a much more expansive and spiritual feel, which was more like being on a retreat and less like attending a train-

ing course. Unfortunately the prices went up so the venue was no longer viable, but trying to create a spiritual atmosphere in a corporate setting is a challenge that can't always be overcome.

However, huge thanks and congratulations go to the six-strong organizing panel who work incredibly hard, year round, to pull together this major event. Their commitment has made it a real success story. Let's hope Fuse can continue and adapt as necessary to a perhaps more socially distanced future.

Rev. Kate Whyman

Report from the Manchester District

The Manchester District, like all other districts was initially hit hard as a result of the Covid -19 lockdown. The immediate loss of income from rites of passage, and room bookings, left many of our congregations panicking about their financial future. The MDA, took this on board, and immediately awarded each congregation a grant of £2000 to assist with the short-term losses, and we are currently in talks about ways in which we can further support our congregations, financially. I have also been liaising with the GA, feeding back the results from a survey that I conducted within our district. We believe that it is important to get a clear picture on what help is needed and where.

A positive that has come out of these very uncertain times, is our fantastic ability to communicate with each other. As District Administrator & Development Officer, I reached out to those who had shown an interest in hosting some form of online worship, and I guided them through the process. I also had many requests on how people could

sign up for Zoom in order to join in with the virtual GA meetings that replaced the traditional gathering. This was a huge success. We have some fantastic online material, which cover a wide range of topics, including, traditional Sunday worship via Zoom and Mixlr, pre-recorded YouTube videos, and there is also worship material sent out via email and post. We have virtual cafes, meditations, Heart and Soul, spiritual engagement groups, and even a children's Storytime. It really is fantastic. We are keeping our website updated with all available online worship, and there are even back recordings on there for you to enjoy <https://unitariansmda.org.uk>. If anyone would like me to include their virtual offerings, please do drop me an email and let me know: Mda.secretary@outlook.com.

It is very important now, more than ever, to keep the lines of communication open. We need to continue to support each other, and share ideas. There are some pro-active congregations out there, and learning from what has worked for them, has encouraged others to give new things a try. Equally so, it helps to know what has been tried, and not achieved the result as expected. If you have any tried and tested ideas that you would like to share, please do let us know.

I am the Authorised person for my chapel in Styal village (Norcliffe). These last few weeks have been difficult for the wedding couples that have had to postpone, due to the current restrictions. Many of these weddings have been 2 years in the planning. We have however, had a request to conduct a Zoom "Relationship Celebration" on the day that the wedding was due to take place, and then conduct the actual legal wedding later. I am currently in talks with the couple, and our Minister (Rev. Alex Bradley) on how we are going to facilitate this. One thing for sure, is that we are really looking forward to it, and I will report on how it went later.

The Unitarian magazine, has taken on a different format during the last 12 months, and since lockdown, I have been producing a weekly newsletter, in order to keep the news current. The newsletter is published on our website each week, and back copies are there for you to view or download.

Natasha Stanley

MDA Administrator & Development Officer

South East Wales Unitarian Society (SEWUS)

During this restrictive time of lockdown and social distancing, this district association has adopted a proactive approach and has embraced meeting together for worship via weekly 'Zoom' services from Cardiff, Gellionnen and Swansea and from Nottage, a Sunday YouTube service. All of these have welcomed an increased number of regular visitors from across the country. This method of meeting together, although very different from the way we met previously, has clearly shown that change can have a very positive effect and out of the negative necessity for isolating, we can be strong and hopeful. This experience has given us the building blocks for future decisions on how we meet together. Some of our district members have also taken the opportunity to connect to services across the country and experience the broad spectrum of Unitarian worship.

Creating a contact network for members of congregations has been undertaken by all of our chapels and this is of particular value to those who do not have internet or computer access. Making sure that everyone is safe and not suffering in any way from the enforced distancing criteria has been a priority. Women's League as well as congregation members have been particularly keen and active in this.

Throughout this period, the Officers of the District have worked to

maintain the standards of good practice required of us and although we have not been able to hold any meetings including an AGM, documents, reports and financial statements have been prepared and collated into an Annual Report as is the normal custom. Sadly, social events and training programmes have had to be postponed but these will be picked up when we can once more return to some semblance of a 'normal' routine. Meantime, we carry on in the best way we can, remembering the words of the Abbess Julian of Norwich 'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well', and remembering too that 'these things will pass'.

Lis Dyson-Jones (SEWUS Secretary)

Update from the Western Union

During the pandemic the WU has tried to keep up-to-date with everything, having to navigate carefully through adversity which has made it impossible for us to meet in person. All congregations have ceased to meet for a time, and most members of the WU group, would fall into the vulnerable adult category. As the Covid-19 crisis had not reached its peak at the time of writing (15 April) it would be terribly hard to predict for how long the current restrictions will remain in place. Even when a return to a semblance of normality becomes a possibility, we do not know whether places of worship will be among the ones to reopen first ... unlikely, is my guess. Additionally, congregations may be reluctant to hold "open door" meetings (for example, participating in local visitor schemes) even if they are open.

As our WU Secretary Kay Millard suggested and we all agreed, the WU Development Project has now been delayed until we at least have a much clearer picture and we can ask individual congregations whether they wish to be involved.

The WU is pushing ahead with its Foundation Course in Leading Worship, but even though we would not like it to be delayed further, we cannot be entirely sure that this will indeed be the case under the current circumstances. Especially given the need for preparation and available venues/dates, it appears unlikely that we can offer it in the WU in 2020 and, therefore, may be more realistic to aim for Spring 2021.

Last but not least, the WU Retreat scheduled for the mid-October weekend. This is something that looks more likely to go ahead, once again if the lockdown and other restrictions are lifted in time for all arrangements to be made. If we are successful, that may prove to be a significant and very positive turning point for us all in the WU. However, for the time being, we have decided to leave the booking as it is. This means that there will be a need to review the situation nearer the time, e.g. in August or perhaps earlier in the summer, pending on the lifting (or not) of as many of the current restrictions as possible.

Rev.Dr.Edgar Mihas, President of the Western Union

Reports from societies

Introducing the USPS

This year marks the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies (USPS). In 1965 Rev. George Stanley Whitby and his wife, Rev. Florence Whitby founded the USPS with the stated aim: 'To encourage the study of psychical phenomena in all aspects, with a critical and open mind'. Membership of the USPS is open to anyone who supports this aim.

Since 1965 the Society has published a regular journal twice a year, as well as organising its popular annual conference, which in more re-

cent years has been held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow. Aside from this, the USPS has delivered its regular popular lecture at the annual General Assembly, where distinguished researchers from the fields of parapsychology, anthropology and science are invited to share some of the latest research pertaining to psychical research.

The USPS has also organised two national conferences with the Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies and the Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies, in Worcestershire and London.

The 2020 USPS conference will be held between 25th – 27th September once again at The Nightingale Centre. The keynote speaker will be author and parapsychologist Dr. Serena Roney-Dougal. Her theme will be ‘Exploring Consciousness – An East-West Perspective’ based on her research with Buddhist monks in India. She will also lead a workshop on meditation and psychic awareness.

Other speakers include the Anglican lay minister Matthew Arnold who will explore ghost encounters in the Bible, and Nickie Aspetotis who will talk on Astrology.

Admission is £20 per person for the whole weekend. To book accommodation, at an additional fee, please contact the Nightingale Centre direct.

*For further details of the USPS
contact David Taylor: infousps@yahoo.co.uk or 07505 323443.*

Earth Spirit Network GA Report

The Earth Spirit Network was set up by those Unitarians who find divinity in nature.

It wasn't the GA we expected! I had already bought my non-refundable train tickets to Birmingham by the time the cancellation came through. Long live technology though! I had a bit of catching up to do when it was announced we would be having a 'Virtual GA' using Zoom. I rather like Zoom now that I am used to it. Everyone's face is on the screen and we can wave at the friends we had expected to share a beer with.

The Earth Spirit Workshop was hosted by Laura Dobson, who leads the Chorlton congregation. She is also training for the Unitarian ministry.

In our Zoom Earth Spirit workshop there were readings and a meditation. We showed pictures of our 'Wheel of the Year' cards and talked about the card which describes the 'Ostara' celebration, which marks the vernal equinox and was closest to our GA date. There are eight cards in the wheel of the year pack, one for each festival.

On Zoom we could separate everyone into small groups in 'Break Out Rooms'. There we introduced ourselves and talked about how we were keeping ourselves going during the lockdown. One of the topics was about bringing the natural world indoors. There were ideas about flower arranging, seed sowing, watching nature films, meditating on a picture of the outdoors and setting up a nature shrine.

In my break out room there was a gentleman from one of our mid-

land congregations and a lady from the Edinburgh one. There was also a lady from London who goes to the Quakers but is an independent Earth Spirit person.

I realised, after listening to the lady from London, that the Earth Spirit followers have much in common with NUF members. Many in the NUF are 'lone Unitarians'. They rely on the website and the newsletter to keep in touch with the Unitarian Movement. The Books of Fellowship are for more personal discussions between a small group. Whichever way we choose it is important to keep in touch, especially if we are feeling isolated in this lockdown.

Tony McNeile

Derbyshire Blood Bikes

I confess I had never heard of this wonderful charity until it was suggested that we invited one of the Bikers to come and talk to one of our meetings (Castle Donington Fellowship). We were lucky that we were able to meet as a group before Boris requested the nation to 'stay at home' and keep 2 metres apart to avoid catching or spreading, the Covid-19 virus.



The Biker who agreed to address us was Dave Harvey, who said he didn't mind that we were small in numbers. In fact afterwards he said how much he'd enjoyed the intimacy of 9 of us sitting in cosy comfort around our new log-burning stove. He didn't realise how fortunate he had been, because several weeks earlier I had nearly asphyxiated some other friends when the old stove gave up the ghost, emitted clouds of smoke and set the carbon monoxide monitor going into frantic alarm mode!

Dave began his talk by telling us that this charity began back in March 2011, with a member of the Derbyshire Institute of Advanced Motorcyclists who wanted to combine the pleasure of riding his bike with a positive focus. He was one of the many in this country whose life had been changed by our superb NHS and he wanted to give something back. He was totally supported by other Bikers in his aim to help the Derbyshire NHS reduce the cost of transporting blood and other medically related products, by providing, free of charge, out of hours transport service between hospitals in Derbyshire and surrounding areas. They were granted charity status in August 2011. Hospitals have welcomed them with open arms and these selfless volunteer Bikers, available now 24/7, have saved thousands of pounds for the NHS, but more importantly, many numbers of lives.

They are fully trained, work shifts according to their availability (taking calls at all hours of the day and night), are definitely not allowed to break the rules of the road, and can be requested to take more and more different products (eg records, pharmaceuticals) as far away as London, as well as Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. One precious cargo they are entrusted with is the gift of human breast milk, which has to be in special containers and delivered in a specified time slot. Coincidentally, the granddaughter of one of our group, was born some weeks ago very prematurely, and was sustained by the regular delivery of this milk to the London hospital where she was being looked after in the baby intensive care unit. Such life- saving deliveries are sometimes made in horrendous weather conditions, but still the Bikers go out.

Our new grandma was totally unaware of the part the Derbyshire Bikers had played in saving her granddaughter's life and has since made a special and grateful donation to this charity. Needless to say that

over tea and coffee, our purses were willingly opened and Dave went away with a small contribution towards the many thousands of pounds needed just for annual fuel and maintenance of the bikes. A recent up-date from the Bikers' Charity has told us how extremely busy their volunteers are right now delivering Covid-19 samples and other necessary products between the Derbyshire hospitals. Some of the team themselves are in isolation because of underlying medical conditions.

It is with gratitude to, and admiration of, all those selfless volunteers, kind neighbours and strangers, public service workers and above all, our unique NHS, that we say such a huge THANK YOU.

Pat Caddick

Learning from history – why don't we ever learn?

"History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today".¹

So said Henry Ford, creator of the production line that changed manufacturing for ever.



The philosopher Hegel was even more dismissive:

"What experience and history teach is this – that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it."²⁻³

During a world-wide crisis which is the worst since World War II it is perhaps more important than ever to consider the truth of these statements. If it is accepted that at the very least individuals and organisations have great difficulty in avoiding repeating the mistakes of the past why is this? Can we do better this time as we struggle to defeat the coronavirus?

One of the fundamental problems is with the notion of “history” itself. It is often taken to mean that account of the past produced by historians. However, the production of historical accounts is fraught with difficulty. Here are just a few:

- If produced by a contemporary historian the writer may have good access to contemporary sources but is very likely to have a particular point of view. Often it will be a bias towards the actual outcome of the conflict in question. As Orwell put it, “*History is written by the winners*”.⁴
- If produced long after the event contemporary records may be limited or non-existent. And even many years after the events historians will bring their own preconceptions and viewpoints to their studies.
- Differences in opinion as to the purpose of historical study are many and longstanding. The “scientific” approach, that history should be written solely to ascertain the facts and analyse the cause of events, has been dominant for the last hundred years or more but was not always a given. Thucydides is regarded as the founder of historical studies but his writings in Greek in the 5th century BCE are perhaps best read as historical novels rather than setting out precise historical accounts. Gibbon’s *Decline*

and Fall of the Roman Empire was written in part as a warning of the dangers of moral turpitude in bringing a once great empire to its knees. Toynbee's *Outline of History* tends to be shunned these days as an attempt to show that the world is steadily moving to a better state. Yet the desire of some writers, especially those writing for the general public and the stage and screen, is more to convey the flavour and feel of the past rather than to convey the facts accurately. We currently have a rich tapestry of such writings, which have captured the public mood. Provided such accounts do not actually contradict the generally accepted facts why should they not encourage readers' and viewers' historical imaginations? And the value of such accounts need not be limited to entertainment. For Claire MacDonald the notion of finding a "usable past" was crucial in becoming a Unitarian.⁵

- One fairly generally accepted view as to history's purpose is that it should debunk false accounts of the past and the reasons for key events. At a time when "fake news" has never been more prevalent this is surely an essential aim.

However, many will say that historians will only ever consider the most prominent events, individuals and organisations. Even social historians are restricted in their scope by the limited range of sources. What cynics like Ford are getting at is not the interpretation of past events but the events themselves. They consider that reference to the past is simply no help in deciding what to do now and in the future. The world since the industrial revolution and now the post-industrial world just cannot be looked at through the lens of the past. So trying to understand the current pandemic by considering accounts of the plague in the seventeenth century⁶ is a waste of time.

Even the comparison with the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918 is of limited value given the greatly increased mobility of people and the much greater capability of health services in the twenty first century developed world.

However, this dismissive attitude goes too far. While medical science has evolved beyond recognition, human nature is unlikely to have changed much since the seventeenth century or perhaps even since Thucydides' time.⁶ It is striking that in every country affected by the pandemic governments have been initially slow to react to the early signs of covid-19. There seems to have been a "wait and see" approach until it became clear that we were faced with much more than an extensive outbreak of a flu type virus. This is despite all organisations of any size being expected to have disaster plans in place and the rise of a whole profession of risk and health and safety managers. Yet accounts of the varied ways in which people react to disasters seem to have been overlooked. Why do governments and individuals ignore these well documented accounts? The following would seem to be just some of the reasons:

- The strong tendency to cling to routine and to revert to "normality" as soon as the worst of the crisis is over.
- The fact that whole structures of employment and government have been erected over many years and in many cases have worked more or less well.
- A reluctance of individuals and organisations to admit they were any way at fault in actions which may have contributed to the crisis or in their handling of it.

- A fear of actually implementing fundamental change, even if the pattern of events suggests that minor changes will not be enough to prevent a recurrence of the disaster.

It is perhaps for such reasons that there have been many repeats of disasters in areas such as child abuse, despite many detailed examinations through serious case reviews and exhortations to learn from them to prevent recurrence. Major change is uncomfortable.

However, while some will “find comfort from the notion that it takes generations for a way of life to fade...under certain circumstances this process can occur in the comparative blink of an eye. Popular upheaval, political turmoil, industrial progress – any combination of these can cause the evolution of a society to leapfrog generations, sweeping aside aspects of the past that might otherwise have lingered for decades.”⁷ To Towles’ list of causes of fundamental change should be added natural disasters such as pandemics.

So what is to be done if we are to learn from the corona virus pandemic? Do Unitarians have anything particular to offer? I am not a medic or indeed a scientist of any kind but I offer the following general points for consideration:

- We should not wait until the crisis is over. Where we can see certain truths becoming clear we should act on them now, so far as we are able given restrictions on social contact. There is an analogy with World War II here. The UK government during the war saw the need to rebuild a shattered country as soon as possible once conflict ceased. It put in place key bodies to ensure that happened quickly. Examples include the Arts Council and the Field Studies Council, as well as the groundwork for

what became the Welfare State and the NHS.

- We should find a way of honouring the diverse range of occupations which have been shown to be essential. The NHS of course but also those working in the food supply, communications and energy provision areas. Great care should be taken to see no significant group is overlooked. Hopefully this may lead to members of such occupations being regarded more highly in the future.
- Consideration should be given to the creation of a civil defence force. Natural disasters are likely to increase with global warming. We cannot count on using our armed forces for this role, despite their tremendous commitment.
- The churches should consider carefully the implications of their being told that public worship is not an essential activity. Many churches have responded creatively, with streamed services and extensive virtual contact with their congregations. Many will be hard hit financially through having to close their premises and in some cases “furlough” their ministers. On the other hand, some of the creative alternative ways of worship and support deserve to be continued and may be more attractive to younger people, as well as those who through age or infirmity can no longer attend a church service.

The last point is perhaps particularly relevant to the NUF. If there was ever a time when the NUF was relevant it is in a time of social isolation. I suggest the NUF is uniquely placed to lead new ways of developing fellowship, largely in a virtual way. I look forward to the

discussion on how best to make this a reality.

Nick Saunders

Notes:

1. In Chicago Tribune 25 May 1916, interview with Charles N. Wheeler
2. Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, 1830 translated by H.B.Nisbet
3. Tribune, 4 February 1944
4. See e.g. Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*, 1665
5. See Thucydides' account of the plague in *The Peloponnesian Wars*
6. Consider e.g. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
7. Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow*, p.144

Back to Normal



As I write this, we have recently entered the second phase of 'lockdown' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and there is a rise in speculation about quite when and just how we will all get back to normal . . . because of course that's what we all want, isn't it?

By the time you are reading this, we will know at least something of how the process of re-establishing societal structures and systems, and personal patterns of thought and behaviour, has begun to play out.

As I write this, I – and I'm sure many of you – have been hearing a growing questioning of what 'normal' was, is, and might be when all this is past; a wondering about a potential 'new normal' . . . or perhaps lots of them.

I'm currently sitting with a poem which has risen to prominence; it's by Kitty O'Meara – who has been labelled 'the Poet Laureate of the

Pandemic’ – and though it is untitled it has come to be known as ‘People Stayed Home’. I recommend the whole poem, but I want to share just a few lines here, as expressing the sense of opportunity – in the midst of the gravest of crises – to stop, look, listen, think, and perhaps choose afresh:-

And people stayed home
and read books and listened
and rested and exercised
and made art and played
and learned new ways of being
and stopped
and listened deeper

and people began to think differently
and they made new choices
and dreamed of new visions
and created new ways of life

If you were reading this as I am writing it, in the midst of the limbo of lockdown, I suspect I might now invite you to sit with two questions:-

Who was I – really – when we came into this situation of suspended normality?

Who do I really want to be when it is over; what pieces do I actually want to pick up?

But you are not reading as I write, and by now it may be that the familiar is reappearing, ‘normality’ has begun to reassert itself, and the time for such reflection and reinvention may seem to have passed.

What I want to say to you, though, is that not only is it *not* too late to

wonder about and work towards a 'new normal', but it is by no means a new possibility, arising exclusively out of the Covid-19 crisis. Looking at life from this perspective that is so far out of the ordinary, when our lives are so much 'on hold', I've been remembering some work I was very lucky to do a few years ago, with a particular group of people whose living had abruptly become compromised and constrained.

They were faced with a cancer diagnosis that threatened to place severe restrictions on their living – indeed threatened to bring an end to it altogether. Their lives were put on hold while they went through the treatment that was required.

Now what was significant about this group of people was that the treatment worked; they recovered – they survived.

Surely that meant they could simply pick up where they had left off, resuming their occupations and activities, their responsibilities and relationships, as they had been before? In other words could they not just get back to normal?

But no, it wasn't that simple.

When they returned from their journey so far out of the ordinary, and looked back at what had been normal, it didn't look the same to them. Their inner world had shifted, their perspectives had changed, and what had been ordinary for them no longer seemed such a good fit.

So the work, as part of a team brought together by Macmillan Cancer Care and Support, was to help each individual to stop, evaluate, and re-design a life – to build a 'new normal' to live into their future.

On their website (www.macmillan.org.uk), Macmillan articulate this reality:-

A powerful and traumatic experience “may change your outlook on life. Or you may find you think about things in a different way than you did before. Some people decide on what is important to them and make new priorities. You may discover new interests or decide to make lifestyle changes.”

As we engaged with this work it became evident that many of them had rarely, if ever, stopped and looked and evaluated their lives, asking whether their ‘ordinary’ was truly a good fit for the people they actually were.

Indeed how many of us have ever engaged with such a process of fundamental reflection, re-evaluation, and re-construction of our life – of its very fabric and form? Without drastic reason or cause, probably not too many of us.

It was a moving and thrilling privilege to be involved in such work – to see, and feel, the power and the benefit of it for those individuals. Our experience, back in 2015, was absolutely what is described here by M. J. Fosse (Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology) in a paper on Post Traumatic Growth, as he observed it in his patients:-

“many gained a powerful spur for personal growth, which was not just a case of adjustment or coping, but they underwent positive life changes and gained new inner strength. They predominantly developed a more spiritual attitude and a deeper level of awareness. A time of spiritual searching led to them finding new principles to live by, and then came a new spiritual integration as they applied these new principles to their onward living.”

I have no desire to undervalue the calamity of coronavirus, or of cancer, nor to underestimate the devastation wrought by the range of traumas which can be experienced – illness or bereavement, abuse or addiction, joblessness, homeless, and so many more – and of course I would yearn for anyone in such a situation to be supported in finding

a growth path onward from it.

On the other hand I *do* have a desire to wonder whether we need to wait until trauma finds us before we seek to find ourselves – our truest selves?

Preferably, might we not seek ‘Pre Trauma Growth’ at *any* time? If you re-read those words, both from Macmillan and Fosse, might it not be an appealing possibility to take a fresh look at who and how we would truly wish to be . . . whenever we wish to do so?

In ‘*anam cara*’ John O’Donohue encourages us to do just this – to awaken to ‘our inner world’. He suggests that the way to do so is to take a calm, cool, detached look at ourselves, as if through the eyes of a compassionate stranger; *not* to seek fault or flaws as much as to discover the richness and capacities within . . . to learn of ourselves *from* ourselves; to glimpse the life which could be ours in the yearnings already present, if we would but pay attention.

“People have difficulty awakening to their inner world, especially when their lives have become overly familiar to them.

They find it hard to discover something new, interesting or adventurous in their numbed lives.

Yet everything we need for our journey has already been given to us.

We should become more conversant with our reserved soul light.

The first step in awakening to your inner life, and to the depth and promise of your solitude, would be to consider yourself for a little while as a stranger to your own depths.

To decide to view yourself as a complete stranger, someone who has just stepped ashore in your life, is a liberating exercise.

This meditation helps to break the numbing stranglehold of complacency and familiarity.

Gradually you begin to sense the mystery and magic of yourself. You realise that you are not the helpless owner of a deadened life, but rather a temporary guest gifted with blessings and possibilities you could neither invent nor earn.

When you acknowledge the integrity of your solitude, and settle into its mystery, your relationships with others, (with the world, with life itself,) take on a new warmth, adventure, and wonder.”

If this is an attractive proposition, how may we go about it? Earlier in the piece, you will remember, I did propose two simple questions – which we could possibly re-work as:-

Who was I yesterday?

Who do I truly wish to be tomorrow?

Rather than that, though, I would like to put before you the offer of a gentler and more reflective approach, which you may consider trying, perhaps even as a regular practice:-

‘Touchstones’

. . . calling to heart and mind who you are.

Please make and take some time to sit in gentle enquiry asking what are the essential ingredients that give your life its unique flavour.

What are the things without which you could not do – without which this just would not be *Your* Life?

*This may not be quick;
it may not be a one-off enquiry, but require repeated patient
sittings in which to wonder and sift and settle .*

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

As it becomes clear what are those distinctive
'touchstones' for your life, begin to ask yourself how
regularly you touch, value, and engage with each one.

*You may be able to visualise each one as you reflect;
you may decide to gather an appropriate number
of pebbles or stones,
or other symbolic objects,
to give them physical representation
– holding each in turn and wondering how much in touch with this
aspect of your life you feel you are just now.*

Notice, without judgement, the balance or
imbalance that becomes apparent.
Intend, with compassion, to address or redress
what you have noticed.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Every now and then return to this enquiry –
refreshing your awareness of the balance in your living,
and renewing contact with the touchstones which
characterise your unique life.

With thanks for your company, I leave you with words of deepest good will, again from John O'Donohue (this time in "Benedictus"). This is a benediction entitled "to come home to yourself", which I feel is peculiarly appropriate to the theme of this piece:-

*May all that is unforgiven in you be released.
May your fears yield their deepest tranquillities.
May all that is un-lived in you blossom
into a future graced with love.*

Michael Dadson – April 2020

Rev. Michael Dadson is a retired Unitarian minister.

Time is a funny thing

Time is a funny thing – it flies, or it drags - or, more often, it simply jogs along, but all these modes of time have dramatically different effects on our well-being. Sometimes it 'catches up with us', wagging a finger because we haven't done what was expected of us – by ourselves or others. At other times it brings a blessed healing as our bodies and minds move silently onwards. It is sometimes a source of bitter regret - "too late, too late!" - or of reconciling comfort – "this too will pass".

What I find rather annoying, however, is the exhortation to "live in the present!" This makes me ask, "How long is the present?" Clock time is entirely useless in answering that question. Is it the (variable) length of whatever experience you're having? I know for instance, that if I am swimming, I will probably be concentrating on my enjoyment of the water, but I'm also anticipating the next wave, and deciding whether to use my time by going further out or, instead, re-treating to wallow in the warm water at the edge of the beach. And I'm probably not thinking about some unrelated event or 'topic of in-

terest', but I reserve the right to do so if I wish. The agreeable water sensation may actually help me to think about it more effectively.

And surely it is true that 'the present' is never simply a point but is fundamentally elastic – it's just the length of whatever experience or topic is engaging you at the time. The stronger the engagement, the more you are in fact "living in the present". But on the other hand, as Heraclitus famously put it, "All is flux" so perhaps there is no real 'present' to live in, and exhortations about it just foster a state of illusion.

We know (or imagine) that "the present" must exist, but we can't pin it down. Effectively it is defined according to what is of most interest to you – whether that is a mad bull thundering towards you, an ice cream you're enjoying, or an intriguing development in a relationship. Each significant event appears to create its own time-frame, and 'the present' will be short, medium length or even quite long, according to the nature and interest of whatever has presented itself. Invariably, specific events or concerns will suggest their own time-frames. Reading a poem - or watching a play - will need attention over a span of time, remembering earlier lines while you read the later ones. Your concentration is elastic and the capacity to stretch the mind across time rather than getting stuck in a single moment seems indispensable.

So I'd be grateful if people could consider further the practicality of 'living in the present'.

Christine Avery, Plymouth

History

History is more or less bunk. It is tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today. That's the trouble with the world. We're living in books and history and tradition. We want to get away from that and take care of today. We've done too much looking back. What we want to do and do it quick is to make just history right now.

Henry Ford

My knowledge of Henry Ford is limited. Like most people I know that he is credited with making the 'history is bunk statement' and that as both an engineer and an industrialist he successfully launched the first mass produced car; the Ford model T otherwise known as the Tin Lizzy. My only other knowledge about this outstanding entrepreneur of the twentieth century is that in 1938 he received the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from the Nazi government; the highest honour that could be awarded to a foreigner at that time. Against the horror of the holocaust, such an award has left an indelible stain on the character of this complex, enigmatic and yet talented man.

In trying to understand the sentiment that gave rise to Ford's 'history is bunk' statement one would naturally seek to place his words in context. Furthermore, we could imagine that under certain circumstances anyone could legitimately express the same feelings today. However, the source of Ford's antagonism to history is elusive. There are various published explanations but It seems that even his biographers have been unable to achieve a consensus on this point.

Years ago, there was a board game called 'Class Struggle'. It amuses me to remember it now, but on the box that it was contained in was a picture of Karl Marx arm wrestling with Henry Ford. I think this is very

apposite since after all more than any other man, Henry Ford seemed to personify what I would call 'classic twentieth century capitalism.' The advent of capitalism particularly as it developed in the nineteenth century caused great revolutionary upheavals throughout Europe. Henry Ford (1863-1947) was born in America, a land imbued with the ideals of its own revolution and the spirit of free enterprise. Ford was a man of his time and so it's little wonder that his outlook, his whole being, would be dynamic and forward looking. If history as Ford said, is bunk then perhaps he might have found some accord with Marx who said, 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.'

The American word, 'bunk' is slang for nonsense. Most likely, Ford inferred that continually relating to and identifying with an obsolete past is not generally a good business strategy. On these terms we could readily agree with him that history is indeed bunk. At the same time, it would be prudent to remember the words of George Santayana who wrote, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it', or alternatively as someone else put it, 'The only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn.'

At school we were all taught history. Personally, I enjoyed learning about the kings and queens of England, the Iron Age, the Romans in Britain, and later, the history of the industrial revolution. Such history enriched my life, it was enjoyable. How could we not be curious about the past? There is a whole industry devoted to catering to this interest through the publication of new histories, film documentaries and ever more interesting museums using digital media. Let's face it, most of us find history of one kind or another enjoyable. One of the BBC's successful television programmes is "Who Do You Think You Are?" This is a family history or genealogy programme, that has run since 2004 and regularly attracts an audience of around six million viewers.

So, whether history is bunk or not, we are still interested in it. One of

the reasons I think people are particularly interested in their family history is that through it, history becomes real. We can discover that history is about us. It means that with sufficient historical information we can see ourselves not just as individuals occupying a narrow space of time on this earth but rather through our ancestors, we see that we are part of a continuum, we have a past as well as a future as real actors no matter how great or humble. We are all there on that great broad canvas of historical events and human social development. Therefore, those of us who have even an inkling of the lives of our forebears over the centuries, are, I would say, in possession of a wonderful gift. This gift comes in two parts: the first part is the historical knowledge and the second part, at the risk of being repetitive, is the realisation of one's own connectedness to the history of the world and the universe itself.



When we visit a large city and see the teeming masses on the pavements or at the railway stations, when we know there are about eight billion people on this planet, and come to realise that this small planet of ours is only one of countless billions in the universe; then how insignificant can one individual feel! And yet the same atomic and sub atomic particles from which we are created are the same building blocks which make up this vast universe and everything in it. As Max Ehrman wrote, 'You are a child of the universe, you have a right to be here.' It's all history of a kind, a continuing, ongoing story, but

we would be hard put to call it bunk. I would call it wonder.

Bob Pounder (Bob is a retired Unitarian minister)

Phil's Book Notes

Recently I have read three challenging books by authors disillusioned with what they call 'the materialist' view of reality (metaphysical, not just 'consumerism') which has led each of them to propose 'spiritual' approaches instead. I shall discuss each one and then add a few comments of my own.



1. *Soul Story: Evolution and the Purpose of life* by philosopher Tim Freake. 2017. 323 pages, with chapter summaries, and a glossary.

This was recommended to me by Val Jackson of Macclesfield Unitarians, who has attended one of his courses, and I can see why.

Before reporting on the contents, I should mention that he has chosen an unconventional style: no punctuation, to be more direct. Once I got used to it, I was surprised to find it worked. Secondly, throughout he expresses his views as tentative and invites the reader to enter dialogue with him - which I plan to do, later.

There is too much content to cover, so I shall quote his p.1:

“EMERGENT SPIRITUALITY

contemporary society is experiencing a 'soul crisis', caused by the cultural dominance of objectivist science and the demise of outdated religion, which has left us adrift in a meaningless universe.

In this book i want to suggest the solution is a revolutionary new philosophy I call 'emergent spirituality', which brings together the scientific theory of evolution with a fresh understanding of perennial spir-

itual insights to reveal the deep purpose of life

I want to take you on an exhilarating journey through a huge number of new ideas, dealing with the nature of time, soul, purpose, volition, death and magic.

in this chapter I want to start by looking at how science and spirituality offer us opposite perspectives on the ambiguous nature of reality”

I can easily recommend this book, while disagreeing with some parts.

2. Science and Spiritual Practices: Reconnecting through Direct Experience by Rupert Sheldrake. 2017. 247 pages, including Notes and Bibliography.

This book is the result of a long journey through the realms of science, history, philosophy, spiritual practice, theology, and religion. Raised a Christian, he became an atheist and scientist. He became disillusioned with the 'mechanistic theory of nature' and rediscovered Christianity, but is much more aware of wisdom in other traditions. Gradually he became convinced that “our minds extend far beyond our brains, as do the minds of other animals” and can be studied scientifically as they are 'normal' with 'measurable effects'

He presents seven kinds of spiritual practice, with global historical examples and current ideas. They are: Meditation; Gratitude; Reconnecting with the More-Than-Human World; Relating to plants; Relating to the past; The power of music; and Pilgrimages. He practices each of them and is convinced they are useful for you, whatever your theology. But he concludes “Their practices can lead to a deeper understanding, but direct experience comes first.”

This book could appeal especially to those who are interested in rituals, but does explore defects of 'materialism' and the benefits of a 'spiritual' approach.

3. *Spiritual Science: Why science needs spirituality to make sense of the world* by Steve Taylor. 2018. 264 pages, including notes, a bibliography and an index.

This book is focused on the defects of materialism and the advantages of a spiritual view. “Although we might not be aware of it, our culture is in thrall to a particular paradigm or belief system that in its own way is just as dogmatic and irrational as a religious paradigm. This is the belief system of materialism, which holds that matter is the primary reality of the universe, and that anything which appears to be non-physical – such as the mind, or our thoughts – consciousness or even life itself – is actually physical in origin, or can be explained in physical terms...We don't just have to choose between an orthodox materialist view of the world and an orthodox religious view. This alternative can be termed 'post-materialism'. Post-materialism holds that matter is not the primary reality of the universe, and that phenomena such as consciousness or life cannot be wholly explained in biological or neurological terms. Post-materialism holds that there is something more fundamental than matter, which might be variously termed mind, consciousness or spirit.”

Whatever your views, you will find much to think about in following his explorations.

Each reader will respond differently, but I can recommend all three, especially Freake's and Taylor's. They are well written, present interesting research and explore serious issues. We share their efforts to understand our world and to find better ways to live.

I share more of their questions than answers, especially about human knowledge, reality, experience and consciousness. I hope to continue exploring these matters, maybe even re-reading these books.

Meanwhile, I wish you well in your search for meaningful living.
Phil Silk

Book Reviews – Let's have more!

While social distancing continues in some shape or form many of us will have more time to read. I wonder if you find book reviews helpful in deciding what to read – and sometimes what NOT to read! I certainly do. We at NUF would welcome more of you to come forward with your thoughts on new or newish books that other Unitarians might find worthwhile. There is no minimum or maximum length for reviews although most reviews are likely to be 350-700 words long.

Currently we would especially like to see reviews of books published by the Lindsey Press and also those written by Unitarians but issued by other publishers.

If you have a title of a book you would like to review for *News & Views* please contact me to discuss it.

Nick Saunders rnssaunders@outlook.com

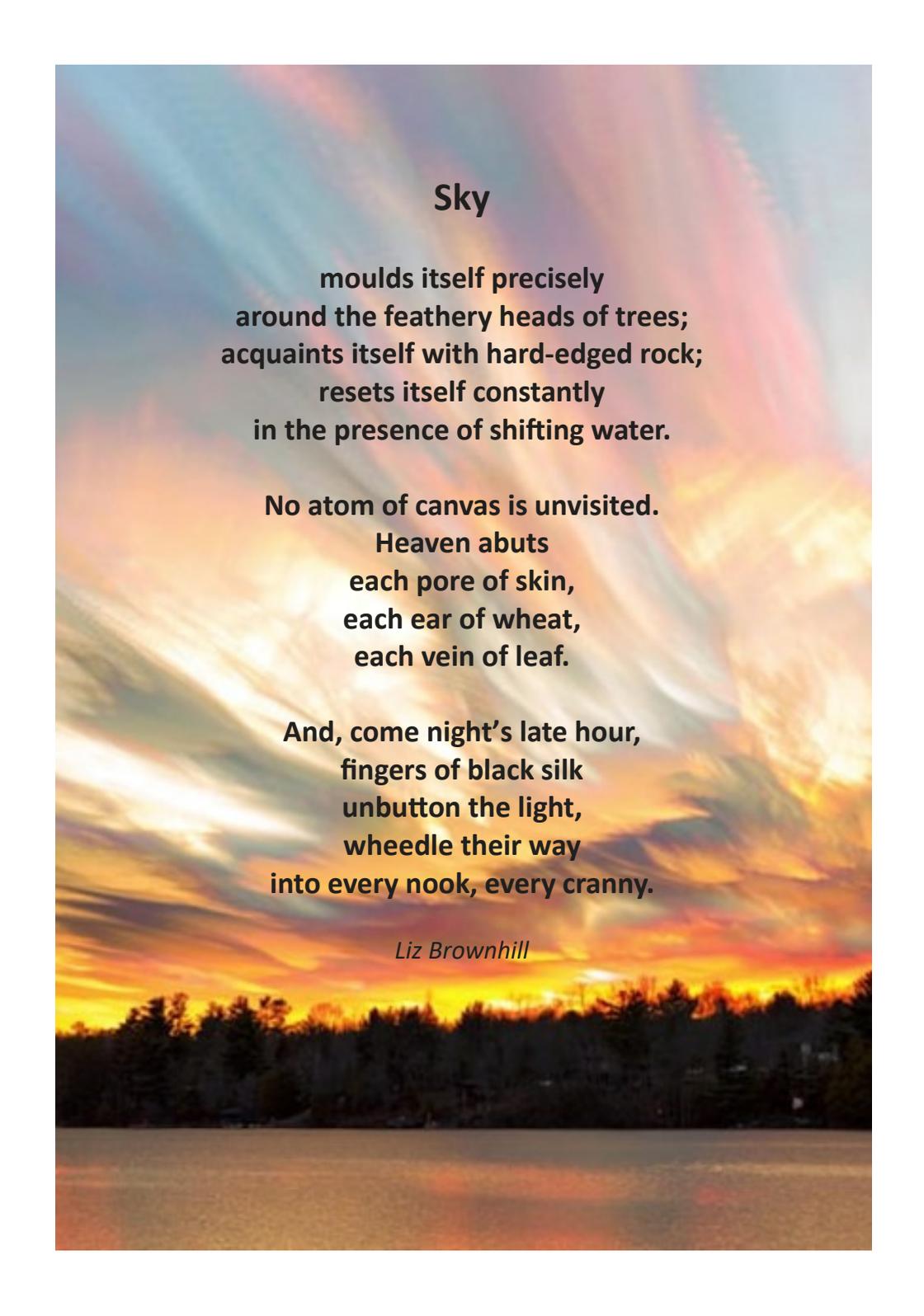
The Unitarian Societies Weekend

20th to 22nd November 2020

At the time of writing, the future of this meeting going ahead as planned, is uncertain.

It is too early to be able to make a definite decision on whether this will need to be cancelled due to COVID19. Those who have already booked will be contacted if it is cancelled. For those wishing to book, a final decision will be published in the September issue of *News & Views*. However, the weekend will definitely take place, if not in November, sometime next year.

For further information contact: Rev Tony McNeile, details on the back cover of this publication.



Sky

**moulds itself precisely
around the feathery heads of trees;
acquaints itself with hard-edged rock;
resets itself constantly
in the presence of shifting water.**

No atom of canvas is unvisited.

**Heaven abuts
each pore of skin,
each ear of wheat,
each vein of leaf.**

**And, come night's late hour,
fingers of black silk
unbutton the light,
wheedle their way
into every nook, every cranny.**

Liz Brownhill

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Linking those who value Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion

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