

The National Unitarian Fellowship
affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian
and Free Christian Churches

News and Views



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

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President's Message – Rev. Patrick Timperley

Dear NUF members and friends

Wherever you find yourself in life just now, we hope that you will find something of encouragement and interest in News and Views. Thank you to everyone who has taken time to send in items for this edition.

Please look out for details of the NUF Annual Conference at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester on Saturday 28th September. Speakers will be: Andi Phillips on Artificial Intelligence and Claire Macdonald on Art and Community.

With best wishes

Patrick

NUF President

Minister's Page – Rev. Tony McNeile

On the second of February I celebrated the festival of Imbolc with my friends from the Bolton group of the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network.

Imbolc (pronounced without the B) is the halfway point between the winter solstice and the Spring equinox. February may continue cold at times but at this point there is a change. We notice it! The dark is retreating from the daylight. We notice the light of day staying longer in the evening and the early morning being lighter too. We notice the skeletal trees seem to be shaking the winter stiffness out of themselves. We notice the birds are busier. They are out and about now looking for a mate or gathering to build or repair a nest. Farmers notice it too. Gardeners are returning to the allotment or taking stock in

their own gardens, because the soil is that bit warmer. Seeds that have been held dormant by January's cold and lack of light are ready to germinate. The snowdrops emerge.

The word Imbolc comes from the old language and means 'Ewe's milk' because at this time the ewes are beginning to lactate in preparation for the birth of their lambs.

There is a sense of uplift in the spirit. The time has come to look forward to the year ahead and leave behind the nostalgia for Christmas and last year and January. Of the eight festivals of the natural year, I love this one the best.

We live on the edge of town. Behind our road and below us is the Bradshaw Brook which flows from the outfall of the Jumbles reservoir, gathering strength from the hills until it meets the mighty Irwell river that flows through Salford and on its way to the sea. There's a nature trail following the river and the brook and we walk along it, sometimes just to reach the supermarket, other times to head off into the Lancashire hill country.

At this time of year, I do notice the life and energy of the beginning of the coming Spring. To stand still beneath the trees, some are very old, to see and hear the rippling river and see the remnants of old stone walls that were painstakingly built some two hundred years ago but today we don't know what for, and feel the frost gone from the cheeks, gives me a religious feeling. The scene is permanent but alive. No two days, no two moments are ever the same, standing on the edge of unseen eternity and knowing for sure there is a presence amongst us

that is part of that eternal world. The spirit is filled with a deep emotion and a premonition of spiritual splendour. Often that moment goes and thoughts of the world intrude or a passing dog walker is saying hello, but that moment and all those special moments feel etched on the heart. Lucky me or fortunate me!

I hope for everyone of us there are such moments of knowing Spring is on the cusp. Whether we experience it now or keep a fond memory, it connects us to the religious source of our lives.

Tony McNeile

NUF Minister

Prayer

I rejoice in my heart for the coming of Spring. It lifts my soul out of the resting time that was winter. Now I am ready to see the snowdrops and the daffodils trumpeting their arrival. I see the earth renewing its energy. The birds sing for a mate. The still bare trees have taken on a vibrancy. The afternoons are driving the dusk further into the evening. The world is waking up.

My prayer too feels energised. No more the weary waiting. No more the sense of hibernation. Let me shake the winter out of my thoughts and out of my memories. The hurts and disappointments of the past have been lessons for life. Now I see. I will not fear the past. I will not throw anger back at the memories. I will rejoice instead. I have survived it all. I am stronger because of my past. I march into the spring unbroken. I feel the growth in me. I feel a love for life. I

am ready to renew and grow. I am ready to be part of Spring's gift of love and renewal.

Tony McNeile

Dorothy Archer Prize

Each year we hold a prize in memory of Dorothy Archer in recognition of her generosity to the NUF as a benefactor. We have a secret judge who advises that in order for a hymn to be singable the text requires both a consistent rhythm and metre for each verse and this year's winner met both criteria. We are therefore delighted to announce Anne Mills as our winner this year who wrote '*Sweet harmonies surround our worship-joy*'. Anne had the music *Highland Cathedral* in mind as the tune to the hymn but indicated that three other tunes with the same metre would apply ie *St Agnes, Eventide and Ellers*. Our secret judge suggested *Sursum Corda* (purple book 195) would also work. We hope you enjoy the hymn and the two lovely poems submitted by the runners-up Claire Barton and Liz Tuckwell.

'Worship'. by Anne Mills. 10.10.10.10. (Iambic)

Sweet harmonies surround our worship-joy;
Truth strengthens words that we should all employ.
Joining in song, we sense the rafters ring;
Beauty combines with pleasure - thus we sing.

Deep is our rev'ence, as we bow in prayer;
Minds respond fully; we awake - aware!
Freely, but silently, our thoughts we weigh;
Hearts' inmost, private wishes -- thus we pray.

This truly matters, as we link with life:
Treat others with affection; forbid strife
To rule within this land; allow the dove
Of peace and mercy's advent -thus we love.

Justice and freedom, too, will play their part.
These are our values, which affect the heart.
We sing with love and light; we pray to give
Our hearts and souls with vigour -- thus we live.

'By being the change you wish to be' – Claire Barton

Fostering the light of eternity,
our spirits lift to embrace all beings
irrespective of species, genus or mental divisions:
Let's celebrate One-ness.

Being the change: We are Love.

Being the change: We are Peace.

Being the change: We are Generous.

Being the change: We are Kind.

Being the change: We are Compassionate

Being the change: We are Genuine.

Being the change: We are Responsible.

Being the change: We are Connected.

By being the change that you wish to see:

Look within, accept everything.

Make time for amends and so, forgive.

Move onwards, Your presence is a gift,

Divine in and of itself.

Let's celebrate; each breath of our lives

With integrity, gratitude and smiles.

'We choose to gather here today' - Liz Tuckwell

We choose to gather here today

In our beloved community

We choose to worship in our own way

But the lot flame shows our unity.

We take a deep breath and settle down

For an hour of sacred space.

Whether chapel, church or meeting house,

Each can be our holy place.

Candles of joy and concern
Share each blessing and sorrow
So the community can learn
A little more compassion tomorrow

Open hearts and open minds.
No one truth and no one text
That shapes our lives and defines
How to think and how to act

A little more poetry Dennis Evans

You

I'd forgotten how beautiful you are,
had seen you on my last year's walks:
naked, arms aloft,
silhouetted against blue-gold skies.
Fingers curled like a dancer's,
rooted in your being.
Clad in autumn remnants
you blaze like a cathedral
in this early-morning winter light.

And the Desert flowered

In the beginning was the Desert.
Hot, endless, arid.
Round as an orange,
reflecting the Sun.
There were caves in the centre of the Desert,
latticed, reaching upwards.

Full of water,
waiting...
The Sun who liked his own reflection
felt it was permanent.
Knew nothing of the caves,
could not have comprehended.
At night,
Moon showed her cool face.
Turned a blind eye to cracks in the Desert.
Smiled, as water seeped through.
Laughed, as torrents surged forward.
And in the morning, Earth appeared.
Sun, perplexed, shone harder
wanting his own reflection.
Dormant seeds flourished,
and the Desert flowered.

© Dennis Evans FRSA

From Occasional poems (Celebration Press, London)

The NUF Autumn Conference. 28th September 2024

We are looking forward to seeing you at what has become an annual event in Manchester, held at Cross Street Chapel which is in the heart of the city. You will see details and programme for the day on the poster which is on the back page of this N&V. Rev Claire MacDonald will be speaking about art, community and Unitarianism. She will also be giving insights into her work as tutor of Harris Manchester College

Oxford where Unitarian ministers can train. In particular it will be her experience and vision of Unitarian communities engaging with their local communities through the medium of art. Some congregations already invite music groups to perform in their chapel or have art exhibitions on the premises. People who attend or visit can see that a Unitarian chapel is not a closed or secretive group.

Rev Andi Phillips has a background in computer technology and communication. His talk about artificial intelligence will highlight how AI as we call it, could become so dominant that the human mind and heart is pushed out of all decision making, and we find ourselves being dictated to, organised and subject to machines. This is being discussed at the Unitarian annual meetings in April. In the background paper Andi notes that prominent leaders in the field of AI have called for a pause in its development. Machine programmes can be developed with a so called 'super intelligence'. This will enable them to adjust and revise their own operating programme and software based on their own experience, leading to results and actions the human can no longer interfere with.

It could develop a nightmare situation where the computer that runs the missile control system also decides who to fire it on. In medicine a machine's programme could make life and death decisions based, not on the doctor's assessment but the success/failure history held in the machine. The patient is just a number in the code.

Unitarians are being urged to speak up to keep the machine as a servant of humanity and not humanity a servant of the machine.

The day at Cross Street starts at 10.30 with a short devotion led by Rev Cody Coyne. A buffet lunch is provided by the Chapel and after

the presentations there will be refreshments and time for discussion.

Presentations by Zoom for the NUF

We hope that those who are able will join us during the year for a series of talks using Zoom.

The first will be from Walmsley Unitarians telling how they used part of their grounds to join with the local 'Incredible Edible' group to grow flowers and vegetables. The chapel started a complementary 'Nature Cafe' and cook the food that is produced by the gardening team. The café operates on a Friday lunchtime. All the food is home cooked and the clientele is growing. .. and growing. The Nature Cafe Christmas Dinner attracted over eighty. It creates a crossover to the worshipping community. The daughter of one of the gardeners decided to use the chapel for her wedding and a year later came with a daughter to be christened.

The second will be Prison Chaplaincy. How do the chaplains deal with remorse, or the female prisoner shackled to the bed for the birth of her child, or the prisoner on palliative care dying in chains? It is an emotional journey that has to be addressed.

The third presentation will be about modern ministry. The tradition role of the minister was to lead worship, visit the sick and infirm and perform rights of passage. Does that still apply in the modern world? What does the congregation expect of their minister and what does the modern minister expect of his ministry?

I hope you will join us. Details will be given in our email briefings. Don't forget, if you are not 'on line' you can still join using your landline

telephone. Write to us for details.

From York to Kendal – better late than never! - Nick Morrice

Here Nick Morrice shares he and Adrienne's adventures as they move over the border and much more

Since 2013 Adrienne and I had been living in a quiet, sedate – almost posh – retirement community on the outskirts of York, when the idea began to creep up on us, “Enough! Where is the real world?”

Much to our friends' and neighbours' surprise, and very much against the trend, we made steps to move to the wilds of Cumbria, where, over the last three months, we have been challenged by thick snow, strong winds and long steady rainfalls, often leaving us breathless and reeling. On dry days, vast clouds hurry overhead, and hills near and far shine out in bright colourful outline as we set off for our 20 minute walk down from Kendal Green into the town itself.

There must be at least ten routes which we can take, along Low Fellside, then down steep narrow alleys or 'yards', between solid squat stone cottages built for the wool-makers, following in their footsteps of long ago as they took their wares into the markets. From the High Street there are more yards leading down to the River Kent. One such is Braithwaite's Yard, where George Braithwaite, dyer, established a dry-salters business until it closed in 1812. When food became scarce during the Napoleonic Wars and was sold at near famine prices, he experimented on himself to see how little food was necessary for a person to survive – then recommended the diet to his poor neighbours. History is silent on his success or otherwise.

If it is a Sunday, we will be heading for the Market Place and the Unitarian Chapel at the top of Branthwaite Brow (Brant means “steep” and Thwaite means “clearing” – “steep clearing brow”. The cobbles were intended to help horses get a secure grip with their iron shoes and so maintain their pulling power up the steep lane.) We enter between smart black and gold wrought iron gates, through an alley to admire a colourful Interfaith mural painted in acrylics by member Katie Hall, emerging into a well-tended rose garden before entering the vestibule where probably Susan Blunt, member, will greet us with kindly words and hand us our hymn books. We pass through thick maroon curtains into the Chapel itself, built in 1720 during the ministry of Rev. Caleb Rotheram, as ‘The Protestant Dissenting Congregation of Presbyterians’, thus bearing no doctrinal significance. Currently Rev Amanda Reynolds presides – or Rev Mandy, as we call her - and if it is one of her Sundays, she will address us from a not-too-imposing pulpit, beaming down at her flock who have gathered in surprisingly comfortable wooden pews. We listen to gentle organ music and wait for the service to begin.

I have become interested in the Kendal-style of service, if I may call it that. There is no sense of building up to the Big Sermon by way of hymns, prayers, readings and music; no, we are launched right into the theme of the day, delivered with deep feeling from the outset, and in which we are invariably expected to participate. The message will be spiced with passion and commitment – no holding back by these good straightforward Cumbrian folk who have a powerful message to deliver – and they certainly pull no punches. Gosh, if I am going to join the tribe, I will certainly have to wake myself up!

After a lively period of tea and fellowship following the service, we head back out into the Market Place, where by now it is probably raining. We chat to each other as we cross the square, but exchange farewells quickly as we don't want to get soaked. Adrienne and I head back towards Windermere Road (from where one fine day we intend to catch the famous 555 bus, and from the top deck admire the routes to Ambleside, Keswick and beyond – but not today), then climb the steep hill back to Kendal Green, such a wonderful 10 acre site for dog-walkers, families, and hopefully impromptu games of cricket on summer days.

Back home after lunch, we nap...but then, flinging back the curtains, the sun has come out again so we look at each other. "Come on, let's get out there! North to Helvellyn and Blencathra, or south to the Nature Reserves of Arnside and Silverdale, or west to Morecombe and the sea?" No, despite the challenges of living once again in the real world, we have no regrets. It is altogether more fun than living in docile retirement – we are not at that stage yet, we realise. And, for what it's worth, of happy places to live in Britain, Kendal takes the number one spot in the north-west of England (possibly the wettest as well).

Nick Morrice

In awe of my big, and small local landscape – Monika Strell

Much further north Monika offers a wonderful description of where she lives and works

I live in a small corner of the North-West Highlands of Scotland, and yet it's a place of BIG nature. Expansive beaches of impressive white coral sand & turquoise water, a collection of 'Inselberge' rising

from the level plan of the high land, and 3 billion-year-old rocks that are exposed to the human touch. I remember when I first encountered this landscape nearly a quarter of a century ago on a brief visit... it was awe-inspiring, not just because of any of the individual natural wonders, but also because of the big variety in such a small space. Some years later I came to live here and since then my love and awe have both spread and deepened and re-focused on a smaller scale.

I still look in awe at Suilven (our most prominent and iconic Inselberg – see photo below) when it catches my eye - you really can't miss it most of the time, although on days with low clouds it can be shrouded in impenetrable white, before popping up again and catching you out with its improbable shape.



And yet my everyday enjoyment is about the much smaller and yet no less fascinating discoveries in nature. I can get lost forever looking into a rockpool on our rocky shores, admiring those fascinating tiny habitats that dazzle both with their deceptive stillness and business of

life. My gaze might be initially drawn to the far-away horizon when standing on a beach, admiring the shades of white blending into shades of blue. It doesn't take long though to shift my gaze to the fascination at my feet though... not just the shades of sand but also the shape of each grain of sand and all the other treasures you can find, from tiny snail shells to iridescent mussel shells.

Then there are those magic woodlands, our very own Atlantic or Celtic rainforest, awe-inspiring in its green abundance. Enriched with the colour of wildflowers through most of the seasons, and an evergreen feast of moss and lichen all-year-round. Once again, after taking it ALL in, my focus usually shifts quickly to the micro and nanoscale.

We are lucky to be able to stargaze in a dark sky area with very little light pollution and admire the Milky Way and yet gazing into a patch of star moss is as awe-inspiring for me. Spending time admiring the trees covered with bearded lichen unleashes a childlike level of joy. It's this microcosm of nature that is my true spiritual home.

My heart & soul get their fuel there... and every so often by looking up from the small, the BIG catches your eye and you get another boost of awe, and energy, and deep love for the earth in all its shapes and forms.

How I became a Unitarian - Kathy Beckett

Here Kathy shares her own experience of becoming a Unitarian

Like Nick Saunders (see Autumn issue), over the years I have spent time in several mainstream denominations. I was baptised and confirmed in the C of E in my childhood and attended a Congregational church in Eccles, Manchester. We came South when I was 11 where I attended a C of E until I was 21. Then I met someone from the URC. It resonated with me so back I went until marriage. Later, living in a village near Winchester I attended the local C of E again. Still later I was baptised by total immersion aged 40 , in the Baptist church in Winchester. ...then, later on to Winchester Quakers for 2 years. Again, later, back to the URC !

After spending about 10 years there I became disenchanted with it so took myself off to the Quakers in Southampton. I was there about 2 years when, one Sunday, after parking in an adjacent road ,I passed Edmund Kell Unitarian church. I had never heard of it so stopped to read the outside board. " Why, that's just what I believe" I thought and vowed to visit one day. It took me another 6 months.

To be honest, I was not very impressed with my first visit. I thought there was a funny smell--which I later deduced to be coming from the polished rafters--but in time I didn't notice it. Then there were the hymns. So dreary and old fashioned I thought. I didn't think I would go again. However, I stopped to read the notices and saw an advert for a Unitarian holiday. I was interested because I had just spent a National URC holiday where everyone saved places for their friends. I had felt very pushed out and unwelcome. A lady called Brenda Knopf, dear Brenda, came alongside and said she would send me the details. I didn't hold out much hope.

Later in the week a large envelope plopped through my letterbox--all about Unitarian Experience Week. Although Derbyshire was a long

way to go from where I lived near Southampton, it looked interesting. So I booked. The rest is history! I made many friends and found out so much about the Unitarian movement and the various groups and associations to belong to. It felt very in tune with my personal faith. I had come home and was hooked for life! The next year I found myself on the committee, surprise, surprise!

I went back to Edmund Kell church where I attended for 16 years. I went to John Pounds Unitarian church from time to time and supported Lucy Harris for the first year in her attempts to start a fellowship in Romsey. Still going.

Now, unfortunately, due to ill health and the demise of services at Ed Kell due to the pandemic, I attend Winchester Quakers about once a month, join Unitarian services on Zoom when I can and belong to the NUF. I miss an active Unitarian church and community and have tried various local churches but nothing matches it. I sincerely hope the Unitarian movement will continue to flourish. Unitarianism is open to new light, new thinking and new revelation.

Kathy Beckett

More, perhaps another time says Kathy.

No and Yes – Rev Phil Silk

Do you remember Keith Gilley, former editor of The Inquirer (among other things)?

I find myself thinking about something important he claimed: that you cannot be a Unitarian on your own!

My first response was: “That is the only way! All humans experience life on their own”. My second was: “But we are social creatures, embodying a multitude of influences, within which we become aware of ourselves as interconnected individuals”. So I guess my conclusion is both “Yes” and “No”.

I think Keith was actually saying: “Being a Unitarian in a community is much more rewarding than being unattached”. This probably is true for most, but there are few Unitarian communities available.

The NUF is one useful response to this situation. And church goers can also benefit from being part of a long-distant community. It is less demanding, but less fulfilling as well...

How can we as a group help our members and others like us, live Unitarianly, and well? Besides Zoom, which has its limits?

I appreciate our NUF heritage and the people who have built it. I hope we current members and associates can find ways to not only continue it, but even better, enrich it.

No doubt the management committee would be happy to receive any suggestions.

What do you think?

Phil Silk

Some thoughts on community and social media - Indra Sikdar

Jesus once said that he would show his followers how to be

'fishers of men' by that I think he meant how to build communities from a group of individuals. If we over intellectualise we might think that life is not good for the fish if they get caught in the fisherman's net as they lose their freedom and possibly their lives; indeed becoming a member of a community does have some demands such as money and time.

The money for a Chapel could be used to pay for a Minister or for the upkeep of the Chapel but a community can be rewarding in many ways by creating a place of safety, community and spiritual growth. We have often been told that a Church is not a building but a community, whilst the building is a tangible asset the community would be intangible but it can also be seen as social capital.

Jesus would perhaps not have envisaged that in the future communities could meet both in person or on line. I use Zoom to attend and facilitate Unitarian meetings as well as Family Zoom sessions. Facebook has also helped me to share aspects of my British as well as my Indian / Hindu experiences with my friends and family. This media has helped me to socialise with those further afield including family who live abroad (to whom I was an unknown quantity as I had not grown up with them). What's App is also very popular for calls, sending pictures, videos and even attending video calls.

This idea of community is not just limited to Christian communities but to other religions, political groups and even more secular groups and one of the groups I attend on a monthly basis for dinners is called Oddfellows. I enjoy mixing with the diverse membership.

Employing a carer can also be a way of introducing a much-needed helper to an elderly person and lately I have been initiating calls with my mother's family and friends by scheduling them on a reminder system. This way my mother is able to interact with her elderly relations

and friends on a regular basis.

Indra Sikdar

Reverend Phil's Book Notes – Rev. Phil Silk

Rev Phil Silk shares his thoughts with us on books he has read

The Secret Path by Paul Brunton; 1959; Grey Arrow; 224p

First read years ago, recommended by a friend; it didn't suit me then, but decided to re-read it. Still not my style, but interesting, challenging.

Brunton believes in a two-dimensional world: matter, which is perishable, and spirit, which is eternal. He wants to guide the general reader through the early stages of the process of finding our true self, which is the oversoul. He rejects 'materialism' and proposes we get away from emotion and reason to access intuition and 'lose ourself to find ourself.'

The path involves practising breathing exercises and meditation; the goals are illumination and inner peace. Mystical moments of deep joy will also be experienced, at least occasionally. Up to a point this can be developed on your own, with careful practice but the final stages require reliance on a trusted guru.

We can all benefit from careful breathing and times of quiet but this path does not seem aimed at Joe Bloggs; nor is the rejection of monism convincing. I do not think he appreciates the flexibility of matter and energy. Nor does he explain how spirit functions. But he is a sort of unitarian universalist: One human race with one imminent and transcendent God.

*Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls edited by James H Charlesworth;
Doubleday; 1992; 302p; Many pages of support material*

I have not paid much attention to these, but came across this book and decided to see what the fuss was about - and still think too much attention has been given to the Qumran documents. But these international writers certainly take their research seriously: this is the most scholarly book I have ever read.

And I have learned something. For one thing, the documents -some tiny fragments -were found in 11 caves West of the Dead Sea and date from the third century BCE to 70 AD, after the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. They were produced by The Essenes, one of many factions of Judaism current in the time of Jesus.

Like the other sects, they expected the Messiah to soon bring in the Kingdom of God on earth, as the covenant had not been kept well. They saw themselves as the best covenanters and mostly withdrew from society to build a pure community, to be ready for the awaited rebirth. Some did live in Jerusalem, but not active in the temple (or state). They were secretive and ritualistic, gave all their goods to the commune, and had their own 'Righteous Teacher' well before Jesus and produced copies of scrolls conserving their teachings.

But there does not seem to be a single reference to Jesus- and scholars have been scouring the texts to find similarities and differences from the Gospels and Pauline writings, many of which were written before the gospels. It appears that early Christians grew out of an anti-temple, liberal form of millenarian biblical Judaism. However we do not have much first hand evidence for the documents or the movements, How did the life of Jesus lead to the development of the Christian Churches, its history and worldwide spread?

On the Nature of Things by Lucretius; translated from Latin by A D Rowse; revised by Martin Smith; 592 pages half in English, with many notes

I first read this in 1954. I was impressed and it helped me become a naturalist. Having re-read it, I wonder how much I understood it then. It certainly impresses me now. A follower of Epicurus, the Greek (who now is mistaken as a gourmet and superficial pleasure-seeker), he goes to great length to explore the world of atoms! (Democritus first possibly suggested it). His original book is a great didactic yet energetic poem in hexameters aimed at converting a friend, Memmenius, from conventional ideas to realise that reason shows that we do not need to fear the gods or death, enabling man to attain peace of mind and happiness. Written nearly 100 years before Jesus.

It is heavy, but in six books he presents his case in remarkable detail, with imaginative examples.

The Last Voyage of Valentina by Santa Montefiore; Simon and Schuster; 2014; 404p

I enjoyed this novel the first time, a while ago but I did not recognise author or title or story, at first. It starts with a mysterious prologue, with no time or place, but very strong feelings. Then it tells of a WWII love story which starts in Italy, in 1945. Usually I dislike stories which keep changing the timing of chapters, but in this case, I think it works well. The scene shifts to London, 1971 where we meet Alba, the daughter of the lovers. The father has remarried, having told everyone his beautiful wife died in a car crash soon after they were married. The

middle explores the main characters. Next we are in Italy in the Spring of 1944 and the romance is developed then we switch to Beechfield Park 1971, Alba decides to go to Italy to feel closer to her mother. Then back to Italy in May 1944. Thomas returns to Italy to marry Valentina and finds she has his lovechild. Plans are made. Back to London, 1971 Alba is off to Italy, where she is welcomed and even works in the family cafe and helps look after her niece.

She discovers her parents never married and that Valentina was murdered.

In the final chapters, we discover what actually happened and why. Then Alba's latest boyfriend, Fritz, appears and the book too quickly ends. Or is it the young man who delivered her to Incantellaria.? Future seems to be in Italy, with Alba finally happy. There are study notes at the end, too.

Conscious : A brief guide to the Fundamental Mystery of the mind by Annaka Harris, 2019.

111 pages plus notes, acknowledgments and index.

I have long been interested in the wonderful phenomenon of being aware of inner and outer 'reality'. How can matter in motion be self-aware? After centuries of inquiry, we still do not know. This little book reviews current views, which I find stimulating, and I think you would, too.

One important distinction to make is 'being aware', receiving and sending messages from inside and outside the living being, however tiny, and being 'self-aware' and knowing that you are doing it. Some people claim everything is conscious. I'm not convinced. But I

understand that living things are connected to their environment and do receive and send messages, even microscopic life. So, aware, yes; conscious, no.

Another tricky distinction is between being 'conscious' and 'unconscious, subconscious'. The human nervous system is split between the 'autonomous' and the 'conscious'. And they communicate with each other too. A great deal of our lives happens without our knowing it! And dreams bridge the gap, if mostly unclear. Which raises serious questions not only about why and how this came about and functions, but also about the self (soul?), identity, will power, responsibility and more.

My tentative conclusion is that we learn to be more and more conscious of who we are, what we can and can't be. It seems the more you believe you have some power to shape your life, with initiative and responses to what happens to us, the more influence you have; but we are not fully 'masters of our fate'.

So how should we educate our people at all ages? What are the best ways to govern ourselves? What are the most effective ways of dealing with crime? And more...

Each individual experiences 'reality' in their own way. But we are embedded in society and nature. Living Unitarianly is appropriate to what seems to be the continually changing nature of human existence: inquire, cope with uncertainty, share insights and inspiration, work with all with empathy and goodwill.

Learning to read ...? Ros Connolly

As an avid reader I found the book notes really informative and Phil's notes on Lucretius has spurred me to lift out my copy and add it to

the already expanding 'to read' pile. I was also reassured as often I buy a book only to realise I have already read it! How do we read though? Do we plough through, sometimes skim reading when we find the going a bit tedious only to reach the end and wish we had focussed more on the detail in the middle? Do we just give up? I have recently learned to read ... differently (thanks to our NUF book circle and Joan Wilkinson) particularly when the text is complex, by focussing on short sections, reflecting and affording it the consideration it deserves by leaving a little time before returning to the text. Perhaps you already do this and could share what you read and just as important how?

In the meantime our current book is 'A Dream too Wild'; Emerson Meditations for Every Day of the Year edited by Barry M. Andrews

We thank Valerie Walker for her summary of our Autumn Conference

NUF One-day Conference Cross Street Chapel Manchester 7 October 2023

The Rev Cody Coyne opened the proceedings with a short period of worship. Attendance was not large but a varied group from a variety of Unitarian 'backgrounds'.

Tony McNeile gave a short introductory talk about the National Unitarian Fellowship and how it operates and provided information on how events are publicised. He also referred to UK Unitarian TV and the Dorothy Archer prize.

The first session was a workshop led by Helen Mason (Director of Unitarian College).

Sharing how we Unitarians inspire and share our values

Helen introduced herself and explained that she had two Unitarian grandfathers (Leonard Mason and 'Humph' Winder) and further back

her ancestry included the founder of Unitarian College Manchester – John Relly Beard. She then gave a résumé of her childhood and earlier times and the connections with Unitarianism.

Helen then spoke of the leadership crisis in UK Unitarianism. The need for STRONG leadership for a community to THRIVE; the ongoing campaign for new ministers as there are many vacancies.

She then outlined how it had been necessary to look at training and making it accessible; to ensure that the necessary competences, the skills and attributes, became the basis for the academic theology.

Ministerial training has changed greatly and now involves distance learning, residential workshops and conferences – sometimes at a Retreat Centre – but still with the requirement to appreciate and understand not just the Judeo-Christian theology, but also the need for pastoral care.

She also referred to the Lay Training courses, now using the Zoom facility. The Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Level; again not just workshops on the ‘preaching’ but also on pastoral care.

Helen then had us break into small groups (threes or fours) by asking us silently, using just our hands and fingers, to indicate to one-another our date and month of birth – some mirth here!

We were then ask to tell each other in our group ‘How Unitarianism has saved my life’! Then, back as a large group, we all had to write what attracted us to Unitarianism VALUES on a small piece of paper, just a couple of words; these were put into a pot which was passed around the room and each person took out a slip (not their own) and read it aloud. So we all met, and mixed, mostly with people we had never met before – but who we will remember in the future.

The afternoon speaker: Professor Linda Woodhead (Kings College London).

Teaching Ethics, Religion and Morals in a 'post-church' age.

An absolutely fascinating journey from the first post-war political discussions about how to teach values, the compulsory teaching of (non-denominational) RE in state schools (parents allowed to opt their child/ren out) to the wider 'Personal, Spiritual, Health Education (PSHE) coverage.

Accepting that practising (even thinking about) religion has declined there is now the 'value statement' in education establishments, when teaching covers ethical topics, other (not just Christianity) religions, non-religiousness, morals. Even cosmology and theology – is there a God? Or many Gods? or spirits?

In the UK we do not consider it the answer to NOT teach religion in schools (the USA and France do not) but also important is the function of religion in society. Does it involve power and influence, the abuse of power; indoctrination; what about parents views?

A very interesting discussion ensued, not just about spirituality but also ritual; the latter including, Rites of Passage, music festivals, football/other sports matches – even Paganism, Tarot, Astrology! One very clear opinion from the room was to get rid of selective requirements for 'Faith' schools.

Valerie Walker ~ for Watford Unitarian Fellowship Newsletter

Thank you Valerie, hope you join us in September – all welcome

After the conference - Ros Connolly

At the time we were feeling uplifted at the NUF Conference and enjoying the freedom to consider the role of religious education in our society, a horrific scene was unfolding in Israel and Palestine. It felt surreal walking out into the Manchester Autumn sunshine where the bars and cafes were buzzing and the shoppers swarmed the streets whilst perhaps not conscious of the day's events and its implications. As we chatted on the way to the train station for home I considered how events which might appear inconsequential to us can have a significant and long reaching impact. An article by Brian Klass in The Guardian newspaper (29.1.24) for example suggested the possibility of Trump deciding to run for president following public humiliation by Obama's joke in 2011; another Trump presidency may be on the horizon and whatever the result of the presidential election in the USA it will reverberate across the world.

The atrocities in the Middle East continue and we feel all we can do is watch in horror although there are those who are trying desperately to seek resolution and peace and hopefully there will be a significant moment when the situation changes for the good. The Guardian article ends by quoting Kurt Vonnegut, the science fiction author, who offers the advice that 'A purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved'. Sound advice but I expect this is a lot easier for us who enjoy relative freedom and peace than those in war torn countries who have little or no control at all; and yet human compassion is still evident in the most challenging and catastrophic of situations. Let us hope this compassion gains ground to overcome human catastrophe and perhaps all we can do is ensure we don't unconsciously help proliferate the hatred and conflict in

our own communities and take the opportunity of the moment to offer love and compassion to those we meet.

Ros

Membership of the National Unitarian Fellowship costs £13 annually, payable on January 1st.

Join on line at <nufonline.org.uk>

or write to the Membership Secretary at:

17 Rowan Gardens
Ashton on Trent
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Deadline for the Summer issue 30 May 2024

Let us hear about you, where you live, why it is well known, about your favourite book, author or place, how come you are a Unitarian.



**National Unitarian Fellowship:
Saturday 28 September 2024, 10am-4pm
Cross Street Chapel, Manchester
Annual One Day Open Conference**

Join the National Unitarian Fellowship for their annual get-together!

The morning talk will be by **Rev. Andi Phillips** on 'Artificial Intelligence and Human Values', and the afternoon speaker will be **Rev. Claire MacDonald** on 'Unitarian Values, Art and Community'.

All are welcome for a fascinating event! £10 to attend, including lunch and refreshments. Please register in advance by email at: nuf@nufonline.org.uk or text / call: 07769 895 396. Thanks!



Rev. Andi Phillips



Rev. Dr. Clare MacDonald

the unitarians