



Volume 8, Issue 10

Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli

(near Milsons Point Station)

Website: www.sydneyunitarians.org

Contact; **0466 940 461**

Editor: Jan Tendys

October, 2012

Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

7 Oct. **Jan Tendys**

"Deeds not Creeds"

Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists have had a reputation throughout their history as people who **do** things. However, as human population soars to the 9 billion mark and climate change, if unchecked, makes life under the equator intolerable (with consequent millions fleeing to more liveable places) is there anything anybody **can** do?

Which NGOs are most useful at this time? What policies should we be asking our governments to pursue? As a small group, could we specialise in letter-writing to fulfil our Unitarian mission?

14 Oct. **Dr Max Lawson**

"Jane Austen : Living the 'Good Life' "

Max discusses how Jane Austen's attitudes as portrayed in her books demonstrates a good, Unitarian way of life.

21 Oct. **Morandir Arsmson** **'A Triumph of the Moon: Contemporary Paganism in the Modern World'.**

Ever since Gerald Gardner published 'Witchcraft Today' in 1954, contemporary Paganism has had some presence in modern Western culture. But what is contemporary Paganism, and what do its adherents believe? This presentation will examine various strands of contemporary Pagan belief and practice and seek to give an answer to these questions.

28 Oct. **Jenny Toisuta (Guest speaker)**

"The Work of Balmain for Refugees"

4 Nov. **Martin Horlacher**

"In Time"

Time is of the essence, as they say, and I believe it is still on our side. But will time prove to be the enemy - or, in time, will we be dancing in the streets all night?

From your editor: Having asked for contributions a few weeks ago, I now have an embarrassment of riches, including some long items, so please be patient if your contribution has not been published this issue. JT.

Dickens Reading

Geoff Usher has been a member of the Dickens Fellowship since 1970, and is currently a member of the committee of the NSW Dickens Society. During his ministry at Upper Chapel, Sheffield, he became known for his public reading of Charles Dickens' wonderful story A Christmas Carol every December 1993-2009.

He will be giving a special public reading of the story this year to mark the bicentenary of Dickens' birth.

The reading will be in St James Church, on the corner of King and Phillip Streets in the centre of Sydney, on Tuesday 18 December at 6.30pm. Admission will be free, but there will be a collection for charity, probably the sister Freda mission which provides meals for homeless and destitute people in the city—surely a cause that would have been dear to Dickens.

Make a note of the date now and plan to attend this special event.

Ask the Hard Questions —Demand Honest Answers.

Colin Whatmough

(This item is in the main an excerpt from the editorial in the Melbourne Unitarian Church's magazine "The Beacon", August, 2012.)

There are many countries now and in the recent past led by despotic and undemocratic leaders. Is it our responsibility (the Western nations) to remove these leaders? Are there perhaps degrees of lack of democracy and despotism? Do we tolerate some despots and not others and what is the criteria?

Saudi Arabia is our ally, yet its leaders are cruel and despotic. We were happy to allow Batista of Cuba to murder the Cuban people yet demonise president Castro for freeing them. We preferred fascist Pinochet of Chile to the democratically elected Allende. We preferred the fascist dictator Suharto to the democratically elected President Sukarno of Indonesia, and turn a blind eye to many others who flourish as our allies while they murder any opposition to their fascist

style leadership.

Yet Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Colonel Gadaffi of Libya, the Taliban of Afghanistan and now Bashar al Assad of Syria must be removed because their policies and practices offend our notions of democracy. On what basis do we decide? The removal of a dictator or unpopular leader surely must be an internal, not an external issue. How long can we tolerate the immoral devastation of lives and infrastructure by allying ourselves with pre-emptive strikes on sovereign nations?

Parable

Some fishermen pulled a bottle from the deep. It held a piece of paper, with these words: "Somebody save me! I'm here. The ocean cast me on this desert island.
I am standing on the shore waiting for help. Hurry! I'm here!"

"There's no date. I bet it's already too late anyway.
It could have been floating for years," the first fisherman said.

"And he doesn't say where. It's not even clear which ocean," the second fisherman said.

"It's not too late, or too far. The island Here is everywhere," the third fisherman said.

They all felt awkward. No one spoke. That's how it goes with universal truths.

~ Wislawa Szymborska ~

Modern technology; ancient good wishes

Found on twitter:

May you have food and raiment,
A soft pillow for your head,
May you be forty years in heaven
Before the devil knows you're dead.

>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Stephen Grellet

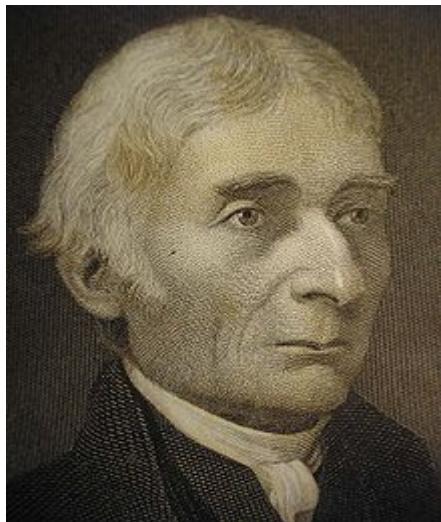
"I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again."

This, and variants of it, have been widely circulated as a Quaker saying since at least 1869, and attributed to Grellet since at least 1893. W. Gurney Benham in Benham's Book of Quotations, Proverbs, and Household Words (1907)

states that though sometimes attributed to others, "there seems to be some authority in favour of Stephen Grellet being the author, but the passage does not appear in any of his printed works." It appears to have been published as an anonymous proverb at least as early as 1859, when it appeared in Household Words : A Weekly Journal.

Stephen Grellet (2 November 1773 — 16 November 1855) was a prominent French Quaker missionary. He was born Etienne de Grellet du Mabillier in Limoges, the son to a counsellor of King Louis XVI. Raised as a Roman Catholic, he was educated at the military College of Lyons, and at the age of seventeen he entered the body-guard of Louis XVI. During the French Revolution he was sentenced to be executed, but escaped and eventually fled Europe to the United States in 1795.

Impressed by the writings of William Penn, George Fox, and Quaker beliefs, in 1796 he joined the Society of Friends. He became involved in extensive missionary work across North America and most of the countries of Europe, in prisons and hospitals, and was respectfully granted meetings with many rulers and dignitaries, including Pope



Pius VII, Czar Alexander I, and the Kings of Spain and Prussia. He encouraged many reforms in educational policies and in hospital and prison conditions.

In 1804 he married his wife, Rebecca, the daughter of the publisher Isaac Collins. It is reputed that he was the last living person who could have identified the "Lost Dauphin" of France.

He died in Burlington, New Jersey on 16 November 1855 and his body was buried there behind the Quaker Meeting House at 340 High Street.

Contributed by Evan Davies.

(Photo Wikipedia)

Margaret Armstrong's Books

Peter Berry

A few weeks before the Donnellys went to Canada recently, they kindly let me know about Margaret Armstrong's offer to make a number of her books available to Fellowship members for them to read if interested. They did so partly because of my long association in past years with Margaret and others at Sydney Unitarian Church, where I was a member from 1972 onwards. I shared with Margaret an interest in Mahatma Gandhi and Hinduism, and to some extent in eastern faiths in general.

As a result, Peter Donnelly and I visited her before they left for Canada recently. She was happy to lend a number of books to members of Spirit of Life. Peter and I brought these books to my unit where they have been as a temporary location, awaiting further action by the Committee.

I have listed the books here:

Freedom's Daughter: letters between Indira Gandhi and pandit Nehru 1922-1939. Published 1989.

The Khasi Milieu. H.O. Mawrie. 1980. Tribal Religions in the Khasi Hills region in India and the emergence of a Unitarian community there.

Buddhism. Michael Ridley. 1978.

The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha. An Anthology; edited E.A. Burtt, 1955

Religion and Culture. S. Raddhakrishnan. 1968

The Apostle of Peace: Seven Talks on

Ghandi. Dr. M. Aram. 1974

The End of an Epoch. Manubahen. (On Ghandi's last days). 1962

Land-Gifts Mission. Vinoba Bhave. 1953

Ba and Bapu. Kalarthi. 1962 (About Gandhi and his wife).

Women's Power. Vinoba Bhave. 1975.

To Women. Amrit Kaur. 1945.

The mother of Science. Manubahen. 1972

Bapu—My mother. A. Gandhi. 1949

Quest for Divinity Bhagawan Sri Sathya (famed micro-surgeon).

Note: The committee has yet to work out with Peter how to make these books available for borrowing.

A big thank you to Margaret for this gift. JT

Reason, Memes and Evil

David Blair

This note follows from the meeting of the Chalice Circle held on 29/7/2012, where I led the discussion on "What is Evil?".

One interesting question that came up was: where are humans located on the scale of good versus bad? On the one hand, what evolution has to say on the matter is not such good news. On the other hand, the strong capacity for reason that humans have (relative to even the higher animals), brings news that is quite encouraging and even inspiring. It may be that the latter news (which we like to hear!) did not receive enough emphasis. My intention here is to remedy this.

Peter Singer (in his book, How Are We to Live?, pp. 225-227) gives an account of the role of reason in the development of our species—an account with which I agree. His account—somewhat abbreviated—is as follows.

"Evolution can explain why ... we are concerned for our kin [and] for those with whom we can establish reciprocal relation-

ships ... Now we have seen that some people help strangers, both in heroic circumstances and in more everyday ways. Does this not break the bounds of our evolved nature? ... How could [the people who so act] avoid leaving fewer descendants, and thus, over time, being eliminated [by evolution]? ... Here is one possible answer. ***Brain power is our specialty. ... But the ability to reason is a peculiar ability. Unlike strong arms [etc.], it can take us to conclusions that we had no desire to reach. For reason is like an escalator, leading upward and out of sight. ... We may even end up somewhere that creates a tension with other aspects of our nature [aspects recorded in our genes]*** ... When the rebelling American colonists declared that all men have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, they may not have intended to bring about the abolition of slavery, but they laid the foundation for a process that, over almost a century, brought about that result." [Italics added.]

Later (p. 228) Singer speaks of "the inherently universalizing nature of reasoning", leading to such ideas as universal rights and the golden rule.

Richard Dawkins (author of The Selfish Gene) recently promoted the same overall view (television debate with Archbishop George Pell, first half of 2012). Dawkins has also pointed out that, since the invention of agriculture (around 9000 BCE), our genes have hardly changed (the time is too short). Yet our behaviour and our skills have changed enormously. The difference is due to the growth and spread of memes. (Memes are the cultural equivalent of genes. They can flow from one person to another by teaching or by one person copying another. For example, how to cook. Memory plays a big role in the process, hence the word "meme".) Reason and memes are closely linked, because so many memes require language and hence reason.

David Blair is a member of the Humanist Society of NSW and Sydney Unitarian Chalice Circle, a new organisation initiated by Ian Ellis-Jones. A later Esprit will hopefully contain the full talk given by David to the Chalice Circle.



Technology Changing the World

Waste to biofuels

Imagine being able to turn all our garbage into something useful like fuel. Oh wait, we can do that. It's called "energy recovery from waste" — a process that typically involves the production of electricity or biofuels (like methane, methanol, ethanol or synthetic fuels) by burning it. Cities like Edmonton, Alberta are already doing it — and they're scaling up. By next year, Edmonton's Waste-to-Biofuels Facility will convert more than 100,000 tons of municipal solid waste into 38 million litres of biofuels annually. Moreover, their waste-based biofuels can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 60% compared to gasoline. This largely overlooked revolution is turning garbage (including plastic) into a precious resource. Already today, Sweden is importing waste from its European neighbors to fuel its garbage-to-energy program.

Concentrated solar power

A recent innovation in solar power technology is starting to take the world by storm, though few talk about it. It's called concentrated solar power (CSP), and it's a massively distributed system for extracting solar energy with mirrors and lenses. It works by focusing the incoming sunlight into a highly concentrated area. The result is a highly scalable and efficient energy source that is allowing for gigawatt sized solar power plants. Another similar technology, what's called concentrated photovoltaics, results in concentrated sunlight being converted to

heat, which in turn gets converted to electricity. CPV plants will not only solve much of the world's energy needs, it will also double as a desalination station.

***The above are two items in the io9 article
9 Overlooked Technologies That Could***



Transform The World by George Dvorski

<http://io9.com/5942574/9-overlooked-technologies-that-could-transform-the-world>

Images: City of Edmonton & Desotec

North America's First Vertical Urban Farm is Being Built in Canada

Vancouver-based [Alterra Systems](#) will begin building North America's first VertiCrop urban farming system on the top level of a downtown Vancouver parking lot. Alterra's VertiCrop vertical-farming technology uses hydroponic technology to grow leafy green vegetables and herbs in a greenhouse without pesticides or herbicides. Posted by [Techvibes Newsdesk](#)

(From your editor: Could not manage to include the picture but worth looking at: <http://www.techvibes.com/blog/north-americas-first-vertical-urban-farm-is-being-built-in-canada-2012-08-27>

I can imagine these working well. One problem with agriculture is the area of land devoted to it (which could be left for wildlife etc). Organic farming uses more land than conventional. These vertical farms could be part of the answer. **JT**

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Who Speaks for Christianity and Islam?

**Dr. Joel C. Hunter
and Imam Muhammad Musri**

We can tell you who does NOT speak for Christianity or Islam: the radicals who are getting all the media attention.

In both Christianity and Islam, freedoms of speech and expression are cherished rights; however, a small fraction of extremists on both sides are abusing these rights and pretending to speak on behalf of billions of peaceful Christians and Muslims. The tendency to mischaracterize a religion other than your own is nothing new. The desire to defend one's faith and respond to insults is certainly understandable. But let us all take a moment to put this in perspective: Who is launching the attacks?

Recently, a demeaning and degrading hate film, produced by a radical Christian in California and promoted by a fundamentalist Christian leader in Florida, resulted in radical Muslims rioting in several countries. The Christian extremists intended to outrage Muslims worldwide, and to get the Muslim extremists to respond violently. They blame each other, but they are two faces of the same coin.

We have both been in the office of Rev. Terry Jones, on different occasions, to try to dissuade him from actions that would place Americans, especially those serving in our Armed Forces, in danger. We have failed for a simple reason: He loves the attention and he believes he is fighting evil. His tiny congregation loves the idea that believers like them are the only ones true to Christ and courageous enough to defend the faith against enemies. Like other fundamentalists of any faith, he speaks with disdain when talking about other churches let alone Islam. When we visited him, instead of carrying a Bible around the office, Rev. Jones and his assistant pastor carried guns.

We do not know any respected Christian leader or denomination who would promote or even tolerate a despicable video denigrating the leader of another religion. Out of the billions of Christians on this earth, only a very few would approve of such slander. The question is, how many will speak out against it?

We both have talked to Muslims, encour-

aging them to peace and dialogue. Compared to the millions that demonstrated for more democratic reforms in the "Arab Spring" movement across the Middle East, how many have been involved in these violent reactions to the film? Only thousands, in some cases hundreds, demonstrated angrily and only a fraction of those were violent.

Everyone likes to blame the media for focusing on the loud voices of the radicals, but some of the responsibility must rest on the majority of religious leaders who are silent during these times, the ones who would speak up for peace and respect of others but they do not take the initiative. Maybe if more of us spoke up, we could drown out the radical provocations and the radical responses with voices of reason, civility and thoughtfulness.

As a Christian leader, I, Pastor Joel Hunter, rebuke the Coptic Christian who made such a disgusting video. I know many Coptic Christians in Egypt and other countries who would be sick about this kind of attack on the Prophet of Islam. I will be part of the voices that will drown out future attempts to incite the clash of religions and civilizations.

As a Muslim leader, I, Imam Muhammad Musri, strongly condemn the cowardly criminal attacks against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, and other U.S. Embassies around the world. My prayers and condolences go out to the families and loved ones of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and his colleagues, who were killed in these senseless criminal acts. I strongly condemn the radical mob that carried out the attacks, and I stand up with the vast majority of Muslims who are peaceful against the extremists who keep trying to hijack our faith. Islam is peace, and under no circumstances is any kind of violence ever justified in response to such provocations.

While many religious leaders find it difficult to reach out across the religious divide, we are proud to say we have been best friends for nearly 20 years. We have advocated for many issues of compassion and justice and health together. We have worked together to reduce nuclear arms, pollution, eliminate torture, minimize poverty and other important issues. How many will stand with us to speak out and outlast the voices of deg-

-gradation when it comes to other religions? We are each strong advocates for our own scriptures and understandings of God, but we do not build our communities by tearing others down.

http://www.pastorjoelhunter.com/?p=1021&utm_source=buffer&buffer_share=42abe

Originally published: [Huffington Post Sept. 21](#)



Dr. Joel C. Hunter is senior pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed, a pioneering congregation of 15,000 focused on building an international community of worshipers. A nationally and internationally recognized bridge-builder among religious and mainstream leaders, his challenge to Christians is to be the church everywhere, every day. as he comments on today's issues, finding common ground so that issues of compassion can be addressed in ways that benefit all.

Imam Muhammad Musri, President of the Islamic Society of Central Florida, is very much at home in inter-faith dialogue, and would be most cooperative in further discussions.



<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralsm/affiliates/greenberg/iscf.index.html>

14 September, 2012 – the **Unitarian Universalist Service Committee** condemned both the anti-Islamic video that purportedly started the riots and the violence that continues to spread throughout the region.

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Four feet good, two feet bad?

Jan Tendys

In Sunday School in my neighbourhood, we kids were taught “love thy neighbour as thyself” with “thy neighbour” turning out to be everybody else in the world—or so the story of the Good Samaritan seemed to imply.

Those of us who followed our parents into the kind of democratic socialism expressed by the ALP circa 1950, were essentially accepting the same duty of care for the rest of the world. Of course, both Christians and Socialists were likely to regard that as “in theory at least”. In practice they were inclined to consider “looking after one’s own backyard” (with the assumption that others should do the looking after of their own backyards) as of equal importance. Too bad for those who had no backyard—most of the people in the world.

I still respect Christian/Socialist basic morality but I have come to have a grudging respect for street-cred morality too, eg “Watch your back” and “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” (with its implication that I won’t be scratching your back for long if you don’t scratch mine from time to time).

In the same spirit of being a bit jaundiced about how wonderfully fine ideals work when put into practice by flawed human beings, I am suspicious of having one part of society extolled as noble and another as depraved, eg workers good, capitalists bad; our religion good, their religion bad - too like Orwell’s version.

Almost everyone I know has worked for a living and also has shares in companies they hope will make a profit. Some even run businesses! In my experience too, the boy who stands up for the pregnant lady on the bus may be wearing a Christian School blazer or he may be wearing a turban; the girl who helpfully answers your request for directions may be sporting a Pagan tattoo or may be wearing a Muslim scarf.

I still do not think we should slacken our pressure on those “1%” who are outright greedy and corrupt. After all, the misbehaving among the “99%” get enough attention. Nor should we mince words when religious bigotry leads to some kind of despicable nastiness.

SYDNEY UNITARIAN CHALICE CIRCLE

RETREAT

Friday through Sunday, 26-28 October 2012

Edmund Rice Retreat and Conference Centre, "Winbourne", Mulgoa, New South Wales

Theme: "Walking in the Eternal Now" Retreat Director: The Rev. Dr Ian Ellis-Jones

The aim of the retreat is for each of us---individually and collectively---to experience and explore, as deeply as we can, in a peaceful place, the wonder and power of living in the omnipresence of the eternal Now---for all time is total and complete in the eternal moment of the Now. All time is Now. Walk on!

You see, life is movement. Real life is a timeless renewal in the present moment---from one moment to the next. All time is now.

Everything is contained within the now, which is why it is often referred to as the 'eternal now'. All duration (time) is total complete in the eternal moment of the now.

There's no escaping the now---even though we spend most of our time trying to live in the past or in the future.

Is there anything we can do about this? Yes, there is---and that is what this retreat is all about. Learning to live in the now is the secret to successful living. There is nothing more important!

Approx. cost per person: \$205.00 (twin share); \$225.00 (single occupancy)---includes main meals.

Activities include: group meditations (some guided); instructional classes; mindfulness; mindful walking; walking the labyrinth; audios; DVDs. Plenty of free time to enjoy the spacious beauty of the retreat grounds and environs.

Contact Elspeth Ellis-Jones <elspeth_ellisjones@hotmail.com>

Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter. Full membership \$50 concession \$20 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website sydneyunitarians.org . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.

If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit. It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month. jtendys@bigpond.com **Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?** As Unitarians, we support an “Open Pulpit” and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. **SOL contact 0466 940 461**

DISSATISFIED WITH SOMETHING YOU READ IN ESPRIT? Drop us a line.
itendys@bippond.com