



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

Website: www.sydneyunitarians.org
Editor: Jan Tendys

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Schedule of Services

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

5 August Candace Parks "The Ghost in the Machine."
Some people think they know a god when they see one. But how do we (or would we) recognize God if we saw her? Or saw him? What does God look like? Would we know it if God were sitting beside us in the next pew, or if the Creator panhandled us on the street?

12th August Eric Stevenson "Introducing the work of John Dominic Crossan"
What I think Dom thinks other people might have thought about Jesus. A potted version of the Christology of John Dominic Crossan

19th August Dr. Andrew Usher Reflection and Response.
A meditative service with space for the congregation to reflect on and respond to the readings.

26th August Morandir Armson "Kashrut and Dhabiha Halal: An Examination of Religious Food Taboo."
When examining the intersection of food and spirituality, the food taboos practiced by adherents of both Judaism and Islam come readily to mind. This presentation will discuss both Kashrut and Dhabiha Halal as examples of culinary spirituality.

2nd Sept Rev. Geoff Usher TBA

A Response to the June Issue of Esprit, 17 July 2012

I have just finished devouring Esprit, having also just watched the Earth programme on ABC 1 which Colin recommended to us at Fellowship this morning. Thanks for all the work you have put into such an enjoyable read. For Andrew's notes which I too appreciate. For Jim's contribution on Channing who despite his so called theological deficiencies did not believe in a supernatural world of the hobgoblin variety. Thanks too for the wonderful quotes by him especially the one about if our boat sinks it is "for another sea".

Keat's lyric in the stanza on grasshoppers reminded me of the magnificent TV Earth programme I have just seen - "poetry of the earth" indeed. I am grateful also for your publicising of John Dominic Crossan's visit, and hope many of our readers will be able to come along. I will close by sending you a bunch of Xu Yum's flowers. They are a much better way of finding the Buddha.

Eric.Stevenson

Looking Down for God

Rev. Eric Stevenson

After Fellowship on July 1, I attended a celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Eremos Institute which was addressed by Professor David Tacey of Latrobe University. Among his many publications is the book, Re-Enchantment – the New Australian Spirituality, Harper Collins 2000. In his address, David revisited much of what he wrote in the book about Australians finding a new spiritual identity through their contact with the earth. This he said involves us “boat people” in contemplating the ground of our ethnic origins overseas, as well as the vast brown land of our adoption.

To re-enforce his message he drew our attention to the lesson which the original inhabitants of Australia have been trying to teach us since we started forcing our western world view on to them — his famous quotation, “white man got no dreaming”. According to our indigenous friends, a truly Australian spirituality has been found beneath us. Instead of dreaming about a spiritual reality “up there” where the spires of our cathedrals point to, they have learned to find it under the pounding feet of their ritual dancers, and in the stories of the Rainbow Serpent out there in the desert.

I start to resonate with David's message when I recall the wonders of nature experienced in earlier years in the Kimberly, and along the Tanamai Track and across the Simpson Desert, at Ularoo and the Bungle Bungles...and, more recently Megalong Valley. I have been learning to find the sacred, not by looking up, but by looking down and all around me. But as life's circumstances have become more restrictive, I have had to revert mainly to the ground underneath my feet in Ryde for my ground breaking reverential experiences. I am glad to report that this is happening in my garden.

I am not talking about landscaping; I am a most untidy gardener! It is my direct contact with the earth and my co-operation with Nature in the cultivation of floral and vegetable harvests that inspires me. I am one of those silly people who actually like weeding. It moves me to be more human as it draws out my caring instincts — probably because weeding helps the plant fulfil its pur-

pose and frees it up to engage in more photo-synthesis and to extract a greater share of moisture and nourishment from the soil. It is also because every sacrificed weed is consigned to the compost heap to join the inevitable cycle of life, death and re-birth.

There are also a number of extra benefits associated with worshipping in the garden. The miracle of plant growth in the creation of an edible product or a thing of beauty is a mind blowing phenomenon. This is especially the case when the food is health giving and economical or when you make time to smell the roses and gaze into the face of a pansy. Seeing my pumpkin vines searching for damp places in times of drought and reaching for sunlight in cloudy weather is a living parable, the full force of which is not lost on me. Joining the earth's submission to the rhythm of the seasons of the year is a helpful discipline which my garden forces me to observe. But probably the best benefit of all is the opportunity which arises from Nature's prolific response to this, my sacred partnership. I have the joy not only of harvesting something which I have helped her to grow, but also of sharing the fruit of my labours with my loved ones and friends.



Jottings

We have had some of the produce from Eric's garden in the past, not to mention Margaret A's garden and Caz & Peter Donnelly's garden. Looking forward to the day that Sherman can share with us some avocados from his garden—the tree was grown from a seed from one of Margaret's. How's it going, Sherman? Only a few more years before it flowers?

Thanks to Rev. Douglas for the fine book on Unitarian history that he has given to your editor. Of course, any member welcome to borrow it—perhaps for inspiration in developing a talk?

Candace Parks is our “Founding Mother”—if she accepts that term. :-) I was just recalling the other day how much work she put into vetting our Fellowship's Rules, ably helped by Laurence and Ian. **We will be seeing less now of Candace & Laurence than in the past but the ties can never be broken.**

Jan Tendys

Poem of Hope

Martin Horlacher

Oh me, oh my

Oh where, oh how

I do not know which way I'm going

But I know I'm going somewhere

With such dreams to make real

And such fears that so often impede

Where is it?

This light that we search for

Forgiveness and remembering

When shadows from the past obstruct

And light from the future dims

Is there not a way

To make it ours again?

Oh now, now and then

Now and again

Sometimes, waving and drowning

Sometimes, finding something

The sounds of life, ringing in our ears

Under skies, blue, grey, or black

Finding a way forward, or a way back

To a new morning

And a new day and night

When musical flavours play in the air

And there is a new day to be lived

So that happiness and joy can come out
again

And I am whole once more

Oh identity, oh faith

Oh searching, and found

To let nature play the divine note

And let humanity sing in tune

May we all find it

That which we need

In days to come, and those who have passed

Let us strive, and play

The music that matters

The music of today.



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Tenzin Gyatso

The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity, answered, "Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to



the 14th [Dalai Lama](#) (Wikipedia)

recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived."

Contributed by Caz Donnelly

The 14th Dalai Lama (religious name: Tenzin Gyatso, shortened from Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso, born Lhamo Dondrub, [6 July 1935) is the 14th and current Dalai Lama, as well as the longest lived incumbent. Dalai Lamas are the head monks of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, and is also well known for his lifelong advocacy for Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. Tibetan Buddhists traditionally believe him to be the reincarnation of his predecessors and a manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

The Dalai Lama was born in Taktser, Qinghai (also known to Tibetans as Amdo), and was selected as the rebirth of the 13th Dalai Lama two years later, although he was only formally recognized as the 14th Dalai Lama on 17 November 1950, at the age of

15. The Gelug school's government controlled an area roughly corresponding to the Tibet Autonomous Region just as the nascent People's Republic of China wished to assert central control over it. There is a dispute over whether the respective governments reached an agreement for a joint Chinese-Tibetan administration.

During the 1959 Tibetan uprising, which China regards as an uprising of feudal landlords, the Dalai Lama, who regards the uprising as an expression of widespread discontent, fled to India, where he denounced the People's Republic and established a Tibetan government in exile. A charismatic speaker, he has since travelled the world, advocating for the welfare of Tibetans, teaching Tibetan Buddhism and talking about the importance of compassion as the source of a happy life.

Around the world, institutions face pressure from China not to accept him. He has spoken about such topics as abortion, economics, firearms, and sexuality, and has been the subject of controversy for his alleged treatment of Dorje Shugden followers and his office's receipt of support from the CIA in the 1960s and early 1970s.

An example of his social stances: abortion

The Dalai Lama has explained that, from the perspective of the Buddhist precepts, abortion is an act of killing. He has also clarified that in certain cases abortion could be considered ethically acceptable "if the unborn child will be retarded or if the birth will create serious problems for the parent", which could only be determined on a case-by-case basis. According to some, this relatively nuanced and flexible position is a contrast with apparently dominant cultural attitudes in Tibet, where abortion is reportedly disapproved of, and where despite its free availability, women reportedly do not so avail themselves.

Please see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_Dalai_Lama

for the rest of this article and for the references. Remember, that Wikipedia is the work of many contributors and the above is not necessarily to be seen as the final version. JT

As I survey my life, which is coming near its end, I want to set down a few thoughts that might be useful to those coming after. It will soon be time for me to give back to Gaia the nutrients that I have used during a long, busy, and happy life. I am not bitter or resentful at the approaching end; I have been one of the extraordinarily lucky ones. So it behooves me here to gather together some thoughts and attitudes that may prove useful in the dark times we are facing: a century or more of exceedingly difficult times.

How will those who survive manage it? What can we teach our friends, our children, our communities? Although we may not be capable of changing history, how can we equip ourselves to survive it?

I contemplate these questions in the full consciousness of my own mortality. Being offered an actual number of likely months to live, even though the estimate is uncertain, mightily focuses the mind. On personal things, of course, on loved ones and even loved things, but also on the Big Picture.

But let us begin with last things first, for a change. The analysis will come later, for those who wish it.

Hope. Children exude hope, even under the most terrible conditions, and that must inspire us as our conditions get worse. Hopeful patients recover better. Hopeful test candidates score better. Hopeful builders construct better buildings. Hopeful parents produce secure and resilient children. In groups, an atmosphere of hope is essential to shared successful effort: "Yes, we can!" is not an empty slogan, but a mantra for people who intend to do something together — whether it is rescuing victims of hurricanes, rebuilding flood-damaged buildings on higher ground, helping wounded people through first aid, or inventing new social structures (perhaps one in which only people are "persons," not corporations). We cannot know what threats we will face. But ingenuity against adversity is one of our species' built-in resources. We cope, and faith in our coping capacity is perhaps our biggest resource of all.

Mutual support. The people who do best at basic survival tasks (we know this experimentally, as well as intuitively) are cooperative, good at teamwork, often altruistic, mindful of the common good. In drastic emergencies like hurricanes or earthquakes, people sur-

prise us by their sacrifices — of food, of shelter, even sometimes of life itself. Those who survive social or economic collapse, or wars, or pandemics, or starvation, will be those who manage scarce resources fairly; hoarders and dominators win only in the short run, and end up dead, exiled, or friendless. So, in every way we can, we need to help each other, and our children, learn to be cooperative rather than competitive; to be helpful rather than hurtful; to look out for the communities of which we are a part, and on which we ultimately depend.

Practical skills. With the movement into cities of the U.S. population, and much of the rest of the world's people, we have had a massive de-skilling in how to do practical tasks. When I was a boy in the country, all of us knew how to build a tree house, or construct a small hut, or raise chickens, or grow beans, or screw pipes together to deliver water. It was a sexist world, of course, so when some of my chums in eighth grade said we wanted to learn girls' "home etc" skills like making bread or boiling eggs, the teachers were shocked, but we got to do it. There was widespread competence in fixing things — impossible with most modern contrivances, of course, but still reasonable for the basic tools of survival: pots and pans, bicycles, quilts, tents, storage boxes.

We all need to learn, or relearn, how we would keep the rudiments of life going if there were no paid specialists around, or means to pay them. Every child should learn elementary carpentry, from layout and sawing to driving nails. Everybody should know how to chop wood safely, and build a fire. Everybody should know what to do if dangers appear from fire, flood, electric wires down, and the like. Taking care of each other is one practical step at a time, most of them requiring help from at least one other person; survival is a team sport.

Organize. Much of the American ideology, our shared and usually unspoken assumptions, is hyper-individualistic. We like to imagine that heroes are solitary, have super powers, and glory in violence, and that if our work lives and business lives seem tamer, underneath they are still struggles red in blood and claw. We have sought solitude on the prairies, as cowboys on the range, in our dependence on media (rather than real peo-

ple), and even in our cars, armored cabins of solitude. We have an uneasy and doubting attitude about government, as if we all reserve the right to be outlaws. But of course human society, like ecological webs, is a complex dance of mutual support and restraint, and if we are lucky it operates by laws openly arrived at and approved by the populace.

If the teetering structure of corporate domination, with its monetary control of Congress and our other institutions, should collapse of its own greed, and the government be unable to rescue it, we will have to reorganize a government that suits the people. We will have to know how to organize groups, how to compromise with other groups, how to argue in public for our positions. It turns out that “brainstorming,” a totally non-critical process in which people just throw out ideas wildly, doesn’t produce workable ideas. In particular, it doesn’t work as well as groups in which ideas are proposed, critiqued, improved, debated. But like any group process, this must be protected from domination by powerful people and also over-talkative people. When the group recognizes its group power, it can limit these distortions. Thinking together is enormously creative; it has huge survival value.

Learn to live with contradictions. These are dark times, these are bright times. We are implacably making the planet less habitable. Every time a new oil field is discovered, the press cheers: “Hooray, there is more fuel for the self-destroying machines!” We are turning more land into deserts and parking lots. We are wiping out innumerable species that are not only wondrous and beautiful, but might be useful to us. We are multiplying to the point where our needs and our wastes outweigh the capacities of the biosphere to produce and absorb them. And yet, despite the bloody headlines and the rocketing military budgets, we are also, unbelievably, killing fewer of each other proportionately than in earlier centuries. We have mobilized enormous global intelligence and mutual curiosity, through the Internet and outside it. We have even evolved, spottily, a global understanding that democracy is better than tyranny, that love and tolerance are better than hate, that hope is better than rage and despair,

that we are prone, especially in catastrophes, to be astonishingly helpful and cooperative.

We may even have begun to share an understanding that while the dark times may continue for generations, in time new growth and regeneration will begin. In the biological process called “succession,” a desolate, disturbed area is gradually, by a predictable sequence of returning plants, restored to ecological continuity and durability. When old institutions and habits break down or consume themselves, new experimental shoots begin to appear, and people explore and test and share new and better ways to survive together.

It is never easy or simple. But already we see, under the crumbling surface of the conventional world, promising developments: new ways of organizing economic activity (cooperatives, worker-owned companies, nonprofits, trusts), new ways of using low-impact technology to capture solar energy, to sequester carbon dioxide, new ways of building compact, congenial cities that are low (or even self-sufficient) in energy use, low in waste production, high in recycling of almost everything. A vision of sustainability that sometimes shockingly resembles Ecotopia is tremulously coming into existence at the hands of people who never heard of the book.

Now in principle, the Big Picture seems simple enough, though devilishly complex in the details. We live in the declining years of what is still the biggest economy in the world, where a looter elite has fastened itself upon the decaying carcass of the empire. It is intent on speedily and relentlessly extracting the maximum wealth from that carcass, impoverishing our former working middle class. But this maggot class does not invest its profits here. By law and by stock-market pressures, corporations must seek their highest possible profits, no matter the social or national consequences — which means moving capital and resources abroad, wherever profit potential is larger. As Karl Marx darkly remarked, “Capital has no country,” and in the conditions of globalization his meaning has come clear.

The looter elite systematically exports jobs, skills, knowledge, technology, retaining at home chiefly financial manipulation expertise: highly profitable, but not of actual pro-

-ductive value. Through “productivity gains” and speedups, it extracts maximum profit from domestic employees; then, firing the surplus, it claims surprise that the great mass of people lack purchasing power to buy up what the economy can still produce (or import).

Here again Marx had a telling phrase: “Crisis of under-consumption.” When you maximize unemployment and depress wages, people have to cut back. When they cut back, businesses they formerly supported have to shrink or fail, adding their own employees to the ranks of the jobless, and depressing wages still further. End result: something like Mexico, where a small, filthy rich plutocracy rules over an impoverished mass of desperate, uneducated, and hopeless people.

Barring unprecedented revolutionary pressures, this is the actual future we face in the United States too. As we know from history, such societies can stand a long time, supported by police and military control, manipulation of media, surveillance and dirty tricks of all kinds. It seems likely that a few parts of the world (Germany, with its worker-council variant of capitalism, New Zealand with its relative equality, Japan with its social solidarity, and some others) will remain fairly democratic.

More from the master of utopia / dystopia next month. He may not comfort us as the Dalai Lama does; he may in some ways be wrong; but we can learn a lot through studying this last testament of a science fiction writer who had his own distinctive contribution to make to our survival. JT

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.

Just let Ginna or Janine know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

Would you care to join us? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please consult our website sydneyunitarians.org or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the

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 publication.

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Jan by the 15th of each month.

Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD attached to email to jtendys@bigpond.com
Hardcopy submissions can be hand-delivered to the editor (currently Jan Tendys).