



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)
Tel: (02) 9428 2244

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

4 December Rev. Dr Ian Ellis-Jones "The Psychology of Buddhism"

Buddhism is neither a religion nor a philosophy in the sense in which those terms are ordinarily understood in the West. Buddhism is the oldest and most perfectly integrated system of what we now call 'psychology'. Ian Ellis-Jones will discuss the underlying principles of Buddhist psychology and explain how those principles can be applied in one's daily life ... irrespective of whether or not one is a Buddhist.

11 December Laurence Gormley "A Christmas Tale"

18 December *Party.* Poetry, readings, musical interludes, etc. Please bring a small plate of "finger-food" if you can.

Recess for Christmas and New Year

8 January Martin Horlacher "Prove It."

"We all have rights, but what about responsibilities? We're all worthy, but is anyone really special? At least once, every individual must rise to the challenge posed by this life, one that can be expressed in just two words - prove it."

15 January Rev. Steve Wilson "Gay Pride, Rights and Diagnoses"

Forty years ago, homosexuality was removed from being classified as a mental illness. Today, we hear the details of the story, the nuances of that moment. Walk with us as we remember the history of how riots led to rights.

22 January Rev. Steve Wilson "A Faithless Faith?"

Is Religion without a Supernatural Leap Valid?

Is there really religion beyond faith, and if so what? Is faith in God / a Goddess, Jesus or something similar, ...something bigger,... essential for an effective, practical, valuable, contemporary religious/spiritual life? Is belief in something bigger,... essential to religion? Is some leap of faith required?

29 January Ginna Hastings "New year's Resolutions—a rethink."

Intuition

Rev. Jo Lane

Today I would like to speak on the subject of intuition. Intuition is a hot topic at present. A glance at bookshelves in any local bookshop will confirm this. For the cooks and dieters amongst us there is: "The Intuitive Cooking and Eating Guide". If you are a businessperson or investor there is: "The Intuitive Trader". If you are a parent there is "Increase Your Child's Intuitive Potential" and so on and so on. It seems intuition is big business.

Today I would like to explore intuition, its powers, its gifts and its perils.

So what is intuition?

To understand some of what intuition is, let me ask you all some questions.

Have you ever had the experience of arriving at an appointment and realising that you can't remember having shaved or combed your hair? A quick stroke of your face and a dash to the bathroom to peer in the mirror confirms that you indeed have combed your hair and shaved. But you do not consciously remember having done these things. This was your intuitive process working with you.

Have you ever met a person and within minutes had a strong feeling either positively or negatively about them that much later, after weeks, months or years of knowing them has confirmed those early gut feelings? This was your intuitive process working with you.

Have you ever had a flash of creativity come to you in a moment of repose or relaxation, while walking or fishing maybe or washing the dishes or sleeping perhaps? This flash, this idea, when applied to your chosen art or craft or as a practical solution to an everyday challenge proves to be a highly creative contribution to your life, and yet it seemed to come out of nowhere? This was your intuitive process working with you.

Have you ever had the feeling that you have forgotten to do something or you have misplaced something, and as hard as you try you cannot seem to remember what it was that you have forgotten or find what it was that you have misplaced. So, you give up trying, you push it from your mind and move on to another, usually practical, physical task and hey presto, you remember what it was

that you had forgotten, you find what it was that you had misplaced. This was your intuitive process working with you.

Have you ever been deliberating or even agonising over a decision? It may be as trivial as whether to buy the blue dress or the yellow dress in the shop or it may be as important as whether or not to marry someone? Have you ever considered such a decision, weighed up all the rational pros and cons and come to the conclusion that choice A is the right choice, the rational choice, yet, yet, something deep within you tells you that choice B, although not having much to recommend it on paper is the right choice for you? Have you felt this gut feeling, thrown caution to the wind, gone with it and been forever grateful that you did? OR, have you ignored this feeling, chosen the logical option, and regretted it ever since. It you have felt any of these things? They are your creative processes working with you.

I have carefully named this mysterious process, just that, a process, a tendency, a continuum if you like. I like to picture this way of thinking as not a thing, not as static potential, but rather as the dynamic fluid essence that it is.

Professor Guy Claxton, an academic in the field of Psychology and education at the University of Bristol, explains that the brain works in a variety of ways and these modes operate at different speeds. Some of our brain's functions, he says, are performed at lightening speed, others can take seconds, minutes, hours, days or even years to complete their course. These processes take, well, the time they take and they operate toward the intuitive end of the rational, intuitive continuum.

Professor Claxton refers to our rational processes as our conscious mind. This mind, he says is concerned with conscious problem solving. It is purposeful and action oriented. It may involve the impeccable rationality of the proto-typical scientist, with her equations and flow-charts and technical terms. Or it may involve the more common or garden kinds of thinking: weighing up the pros and cons of a decision; talking things through with a friend; jotting down thoughts or making lists on the back of an envelope; trying out arguments over dinner, discussing family arrangements.

The mode of thinking that does not operate out of the conscious mind, the under-mind, as Professor Claxton calls it, is more intuitive in its approach. This form of thinking, this type of knowing is a slow knowing, a kind of thinking that, rather than demanding a rapid response, a lightening quick delivery, favours rather, a mulling over, a slow simmer on the back burner. It does not respond to a demand for answers, but rather, takes as long as it takes.

Professor Claxton compares these two ways of thinking and knowing to the Hare and the Tortoise in Aesop's Fable. We need both ways of thinking and knowing as individuals and as a society. In many situations in life we need the quick wit, the lightening response and the precision of the Hare. Believe me, in a cardiac arrest situation in an emergency room, the slow meanderings of the tortoise have no place, here the hare reigns supreme and so he should. But in other places, the speed and certainty with which the hare operates are not appropriate. In less black and white situations, in a more ambiguous climate, the slow, mulling of the tortoise and the depths he plumbs as he ponders and considers may perhaps prove deeper and wiser than the rapid and sometimes superficial gleanings of the hare.

Intuitive ways of thinking need time. Intuition and the fruits of intuition, namely creativity, require time. They require contemplation, a certain sort of relaxation, a pondering, a mulling, and a musing. You cannot call up the wisdom of intuition in an instant and you cannot produce creativity on demand.

Many if not most, of the world's great thinkers throughout history: writers, artists, scientists, musicians alike all report the slow wisdom of the intuitive process. The ideas of intuition need time to gestate, they need a long and slow incubation period. This incubation period may last for days, weeks, months or years even. But its value is not just confined to long periods of gestation. It works over as short a span as a night even.

It has often been said that the music and lyrics of the beautiful Beatles ballad "Yesterday" came to Paul McCartney in a dream. Allegedly he awoke in the morning and penned the ballad in minutes.

How long those melodies and lyrics were marinating in Paul McCartney's intuitive

under-mind, we can only speculate. What we do know is that they did not come about by any act of conscious will.

The French mathematician Henri Poincare well known for his reflections on his own creative process says:

"Often when one works hard at a question, nothing good is accomplished at the first attack. Then one takes a rest, longer or shorter, and sits down anew to the work. During the first half hour, as before, nothing is found, and then all of a sudden, the decisive idea presents itself to the mind. The role of this unconscious work in mathematical invention appears to me incontestable."

The 1985 Medical Nobel laureate Michael Brown describes how: "As we did our work we felt at times that there was almost a hand guiding us. Because we would go from one step to the next, and somehow we would know which was the right way to go. And I really can't tell how we knew that."

I sometimes have this feeling when I am writing my sermons for Sunday services. I start out with an idea, I research it, I gather my ideas from reading, from personal experiences, from films, music, the radio, talking with people, or the television. I draw up a sermon plan from these ideas and I think my way through the sermon structure and content. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't.

Sometimes I am aware of something else happening.

Sometimes I am aware of an idea emerging seemingly out of nowhere. I go with that idea for a while and then everything stops. Sometimes I panic, but increasingly, I am able to listen to a still small voice that says "Wait", "Go slow", "More is yet to come".

So, I stop, I leave my desk, my study and I make a pot of tea, and I drink it. I pick up my knitting and I knit a few rows. (My knitting basket is now placed strategically between my writing desk and my computer. I walk the dog, and I vacuum the floor (if I am getting desperate). And ever so gradually, the next idea comes to me, and the next idea and the next, until I have the body of a sermon.

Our intuition, if we listen to it and work with it, provides us with many gifts and many treasures, and it is indeed a marvellous tool.

Yet intuition is not infallible. Dr. David Myers wisely points out the pitfalls of intuition in his book "Intuition: It's Powers and Perils." Intuition he says, is not always all it seems.

My geographical intuition tells me that, New York is South of Washington D.C. that Canberra is much further east than it is, that Albania is north of the Ukraine and that Spain is due west of France. All these intuitions are patently wrong. When we drive down the street in North Carolina, our intuition tells us to drive on one side, and rules and conventions of that place demand that we move over to the other side (and quickly).

When I asked you all, those questions earlier in the address, could your intuitive answers to them have been wrong, could they have been dangerous even?

When you have a strong gut feeling about someone is it always the inner voice of wisdom speaking to you, or is it just an unconscious, knee-jerk reaction born out of years of conditioning to prejudices and stereotyping. Could listening to your gut about someone just be plain old judging a book by its cover? Could some of what we call the voice of intuition just be a primitive response of ill thought out prejudices? Would we not be wiser in these cases to energetically measure our intuition against reality and subject our creative hunches to sceptical scrutiny?

**Does it really, matter we may ask?
Does comprehending the powers and perils of intuition matter?**

I contend that it matters greatly.

The intuitions of Judges and Jurors determine the fate of many lives. (Is she telling the truth? Am I convinced beyond reasonable doubt? Will he do it again if released?)

Investor's intuitions affect fortunes. (Has the market bottomed? Is it time to shift into bonds?)

Doctor's intuitions steer their practice. Is he at risk of suicide? (Is that chest pain cardiac in origin, or is it just indigestion?)

Intuitions shape our fears (do we fear things we should or should not). Intuitions form our impressions (Are our stereotypes accurate?)

Just because we feel something strongly, maybe at a gut level, at an intuitive level, does not always or necessarily mean, that it is right. Henri Poincare the mathemati-

cian I quoted earlier said wisely:

"It is by intuition that we discover. It is by logic that we prove."

The under-mind, the subconscious mind, our intuition, accounts for the arrival of ideas both fit and unfit says Professor Guy Claxton in his book "Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind". Reason and logic then act like the environment, putting each of these candidates to the test, and ensuring that it is only the fittest that survive. The poet Amy Lovell echoes the need for intuition and logic to work hand in hand. She says that intuition is:

"A most temperamental ally. Often he will strike work at some critical point and not another word is to be got out of him. Here is where the conscious training of the poet comes in, for he must fill in what the subconscious has left--This is the reason a poet must be both born and made. He must be born with a subconscious factory always working for him, or he can never be a poet at all and he must have knowledge and talent enough to 'putty' up his holes".

Intuition and logic, imagination and reason need to work in tandem it seems, if we are to garner the great wisdom that they both have to offer us. To work well with both kinds of thinking we need to have patience. We need to know how to wait creatively, we need to tolerate the emptiness and quiet of waiting, we need to remember the words of the tortoise in Aesop's fable: "Slow and Steady wins the race", and not settle for the impulsive, superficial lure of the Hare.

To be able to sit with this waiting we need to know what the great religious sages and mystics have always known. We need to pay attention. We need to empty ourselves of preconceived notions and expectations. We need to be quiet and still and slow.

Sages, mystics and monks have achieved this level of mindfulness over the centuries through prayer, meditation, and physical exercises such as Tai Chi and yoga. We can dedicate ourselves to such practices or we can pay attention as we tend to the more rhythmic activities of our daily lives and incorporate more of these rhythmic activities into our lives. Activities such as walking, swimming, knitting, fishing; weeding in the garden, sweeping, washing the dishes and hanging out the washing are all rhythmic ac-

tivities that encourage a reflection and reverie. They all encourage mindfulness of simple bodily sensations, sounds and smells that draw attention away from problem solving and back into the perceptual world. As you immerse yourself in these activities you know yourself to be relaxed, yet watchful at the same time. You feel the spontaneous 'pulsing' of awareness. Now and only now are you ready to receive the suggestions that intuition has to offer and only then can we use our powers of reason and logic to work through and with these ideas.

Johannes Tauler a Dominican Monk who lived and taught in the German Rhineland says of this process:

"This kingdom is seated properly in the innermost recesses of the spirit. When the powers of the senses and the powers of the reason are gathered up into the very centre of a man's being the unseen depths of his spirit, wherein lies the image of God and thus he flings himself into the divine abyss, where everything is so still, full of mystery and empty. There is nothing there but pure God."

In this way, he said: "nature and reason become purified, the head strengthened and the individual more peaceful, more kind and more restful."

To live a full life, a rounded life, a life of depth and texture, a life able to hold ambiguity and uncertainty gently within one's embrace, we all need to learn the value of working both with reason and with intuition.

To do this we need to slow down, to notice, to realise that all is not what it seems, to know deep in our hearts that on the surface things may seem still, quiet, dead even, but deep below a glorious soup of potential treasure is bubbling away. It is bubbling away ready for when the time is right to rise to the surface and work with us and our world, the unknown and the known, the conscious and the subconscious, reason and imagination, logic and intuition together.

I would like to close with some beautiful words, from the Sikh Scriptures. They describe beautifully how when reason has come to the end of the road we need intuition and when intuition has told us all it can we turn back to reason backwards and forwards around in a circle.

"If you want to play to game of love, come down my street and if you set foot on its path come with your head held in the palm of your hand and do not be afraid of public opinion."

The above is a sermon given on Sunday 14 June 2009 at the Adelaide Unitarian Church.

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## **Readings for "Hoping One's Way to Meaning"**

*A recent talk given by Eric Stevenson*

### **Caroline Jones, "An Authentic Life"**

"The choice is ours. If we want to live life to the full, we must find some context for suffering and as constructive way to deal with it. We need a reservoir of reason and courage to accompany us on our trials. Whichever ..... philosophy of life we choose to be our guiding light needs to have the integrity to carry us through.....with a sense of hope."

### **Gordon Livingstone MD on Hope in "Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart" Hachette Press, 2004**

"As we contemplate the inevitable losses that we have had to integrate into our lives, the way we grieve, and the meaning that we assign to our experience determine how we face the future. The challenge is to remain hopeful.

Many people choose a religious basis for their hope. The idea that we live under the guiding hand of a merciful God and are promised life everlasting is a great comfort that answers for many believers the universal question, and shortest poem of human existence: "I, why?" Religion also provides a way of dealing with the uncertainty and apparent randomness of serious loss since it ascribes purpose to all human events and we are relieved of the burden of understanding by a simple acknowledgement that God's ways are both inscrutable and ultimately benign. Those like me, unable or unwilling to relinquish our scepticism about easy answers to large questions, are left with the difficult task of living with uncertainty. Not for us is the comfort of religious formulations. Instead we must struggle to establish some basis for meaning for our lives that does not depend on a belief in a system that requires continual

worship of a deity that created us and gave us a set of instructions, which, if followed will defeat the death that is our common fate."

**Albert Schweitzer** says, "Life in all its forms is sacred. It is therefore to be revered and respected, not just in ourselves but in all living things. This right thinking about life leads to reverence for life, which leads to responsibility for life, which equates with active love and devotion towards life. That being so, my valuing of life becomes the ground for determining what is the best good. i.e. the best good is everything I do which contributes to the furtherance and fullest development of life in all its forms."

**Michael Duffy** in News Review SMH August 20/21, 2011, IN TRUTH WE'RE NATURAL BORN LIARS "...If it were true religious belief is a product of evolution this could explain several features of modern life. One is the apparent rise of mental illness, including depression. David Tacey (in God's and Diseases, Harper Collins) suggests the loss of religious belief is responsible for the rise in these problems. ....We turn our backs on it (religious surrender) at our peril. e.g the idea of the after life, so important in many religions. If "the mind is unable to affirm any such life , we end up in a stalemate which is a source of neurosis in modern times." Duffy concludes, A crude secular version might go like this ; on the one hand our heads, thanks to modernity tell us there is no god; on the other our hearts, thanks to evolution insist we believe in god. Some of us find no difficulty making a choice, and go with head or heart even if for some atheists the choice is a bleak one. But others of us cannot make a choice. .. Our minds tell us our heart is lying but the lie refuses to leave us."

To read Eric's talk in full go to our website blog:

<http://sydneyunitarians.com/news-services/blog/>

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Opera about Michael Servetus

An opera has been written by composer Shauna Beesley and librettist Jean-Claude Humbert, "Le Procès de Michel Servet", or "The Trial of Michael Servetus" (famous in Unitarian history for having critiqued the doctrine of the three person God). The opera played from October 28 to November 5, 2011 in Geneva. It is one of many performances in Europe during this 500th anniversary of Michael Servetus's birth.

For those who can understand French, more can be learned at:

<http://genevox.weebly.com/le-procegraves-de-michel-servet.html>

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### The Grace of Giving

Right and wrong they go about  
Cheek by jowl together.  
Lavishness can't keep in step  
Avarice his brother.  
Virtue, even in the most  
Unusual moderation,  
Seeking for the middle course,  
Vice on either side it, must  
Look about her with the most  
Cautious contemplation.

You'll remember to have read  
In the works of Cato,  
Where it plainly is set forth  
'Walk but with the worthy.'  
If then you have set your mind  
On the grace of giving,  
This of first importance is,  
He who now your debtor is,  
Can he be regarded as  
Worthily receiving?

Giving otherwise is but  
Virtue by repute,  
Naught but relatively good,  
Not the absolute.  
But would you be generous  
With security,  
Have your glory on account,  
Value full with each amount,

PTO

Hesitate no more, but give  
What you have to me.

MS. Of Benedictbeuern

From “**Mediaeval Latin Lyrics**,”  
trans. Helen Waddell, ed. E.V. Rieu

**Contributed by Margaret Armstrong**

**Also from “Mediaeval Latin Lyrics” :**

### **Lament for the Cuckoo**

O cuckoo that sang to us and art fled,  
Where'er thou wanderest, on whatever shore  
Thou lingerest now, all men bewail thee  
dead,

They say our cuckoo will return no more.  
Ah, let him come again, he did not die,  
Let him return with the returning spring,  
And waken all the songs he used to sing.  
But will he come again? I know not, I.

(The ancients did not know our Koel cuckoo with its very determined call, otherwise they may not have been so sad about its departure. JT)



Common Koels. Image  
from: John Gould (1804-81) *The birds of Australia*  
1840-48. 7 vols. 600 plates Artists: J. Gould and E.  
Gould; Lithographer: E. Gould.  
Photo: Research Library Australian Museum

## **Extract from CPRT\* Freedom to Explore Newsletter December 2011**

### **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

*Groups share a meal on the Tuesday at 12.30 and on the Wednesday at 7.00 pm in the Basement, 22 Badajoz Road, Ryde, entrance via right hand side pathway. Visitors welcome! Take the 506 bus from Circular Quay to Macquarie Centre and East Ryde and alight at the first stop in Badajoz Road. On Tuesdays only it is possible to take the same bus route in the opposite direction from Macquarie Place Railway Station to the second last stop in Badajoz Road. Please contact Eric Stevenson on (02) 9888 5361 or 0405 758 116 for more details.*

**DECEMBER 7th and DECEMBER 13th:** -  
“JUNG & THE PSYCHE – ARE WE ALL  
CONNECTED?” The latest DVD recording of  
Lloyd Geering’s June, 2011 lectures on Carl  
Jung presented by Guy Mallam

**PLEASE NOTE- THE SECOND TUESDAY IS DECEMBER 13 (NO MEETING ON THE SIXTH OF DECEMBER). THE GROUPS WILL BE IN RECESS BETWEEN DECEMBER 14, 2011 AND FEBRUARY 6, 2012. We are planning to celebrate the start of the New Year rather than have an end of year Christmas gathering.**

**FEBRUARY 7th and 8th:** - “ABOUT TIME – SOME QUESTIONS FOR PROGRESSIVES”. This is the fourth and final session on the Time topic with Ross Barrie. Ross will summarise the key time concepts explored so far, and some questions on the meaningfulness of a human life within Time or Timelessness, and relationships with a personal God.

**FEBRUARY 21st and 22nd:** - “JUNG & GOD” - Lloyd Geering’s DVD on Karl Jung Part 2 with Guy Mallam. Is God a projection of our psyche or something more?

\*Centre for Progressive Religious Thought  
(Sydney)



Above is our Happy Christmas thought—. Baby Jesus meets a bononbo. Illustration by Marian Brickner.

*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.*

**Please note that Esprit is assembled usually in the last week of the month so longer items should be handed in or sent by the second last Sunday of the month. Items for the Schedule of Services (talk titles etc) should be in by the Friday of the last week. Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.**

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com)  
Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:  
Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595

Please note:  
If space is limited, submissions may be subject to editing.

**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 Candace 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 ring 9428-2244, consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.com](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) 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 Committee.