



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 11, January to March 2006

OUR FAITH (taken from our website)

We believe that:

- everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves.
- the fundamental tools for doing this are your own life experience, your reflection upon it, your intuitive understanding and the promptings of your own conscience.
- the best place to do this is a community that welcomes you for who you are, complete with your beliefs, doubts and questions.

We offer:

- liberty of conscience and freedom from imposed creed, confessions and dogmas.
- a fellowship where people come together to worship; to share times of celebration and trial; and to help each other in the quest for a faith to live by.

We affirm the universal values of love and compassion, peace, truth and justice.

We welcome all who come to us in the spirit of goodwill and enquiry, regardless of ethnic or religious background, age, gender or sexual orientation.



SERVICE TAKERS FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2006

We meet on 2nd and 4th Sundays, at 10.30 a.m. Except where indicated, service takers are members of the congregation.

8 th January	Frank Field
22 nd January	Maud Robinson, Ministerial Student, Harris Manchester College (TBC)
12 th February	Rev. George Sarmezey, Anglican chaplain (TBC)
26 th February	Jon Small
12 th March	Fiona Boyle
26 th March	Sue & Becky Woolley [Mothering Sunday]

All are very welcome!

The Path Ahead: Adapt to Survive

Now that our Meditation Group has been up and running for a few months, I thought it might be a good opportunity to reflect on some experiences on attending it. The Meditation Group is currently working on a series of Pathworkings, based on the 32 paths of the Kabbalah. The last meeting (August 2005) explored Path 29 from Malkuth to Netzach. I do not want to clutter this article with detailed technicalities of the Kabbalah, they are explained well in many commonly available books and on the Internet. Therefore, I am going to assume people are familiar with the basic structure of the Tree of Life.

The 29th Path is described as the “Corporeal intelligence “. Obviously, corporeal has its origins in the Latin word corpus - body. So, on this path we are considering bodies, and very much bodies in the raw: how they are made and develop both during an individual lifetime and over millennia. Therefore, this path includes themes related to sex and reproduction in their broadest sense. In fact, the author of *Shining Paths* provides a cautionary warning for this path, precisely because it is this side of existence that many of modern religions have had, and are still having problems with – bodies and sex.

Pathworking is a method of detailed active visualisation. We use pathworkings that have already been road-tested from two books: *Archetypes on the Tree of Life* by Madonna Compton and *The Shining Paths* by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki. Before we commence the actual pathworking, an explanation is provided of the symbols associated with the path, including the tarot card, Hebrew letter and astrological sign. The symbols and associations are very profound, and therefore any pathworking is not to be undertaken lightly, and certainly not treated as a parlour game. Also, it is possible to treat activities like pathworkings and meditation solely as an internal private process, but the fascination for me comes when I discover resonance with and relevance to real life.

For example, evolution is the subject of on-going court actions in the US with parents challenging whether Intelligent Design should or should not be taught with equal value in classrooms alongside scientific theories of evolution. The debate is also relevant here in the UK with the increasing number of faith-based academies, some of which would like to adopt a similar approach to teaching evolution.

But, back to the visualisation. It commences in a fern forest with a vivid description of bright green, rotting vegetation under foot. It then proceeds to place the meditator in different scenes that show the development of life on Earth over time, including human social structures and religion. I had an immediate and strong reaction to these scenes, but the reaction felt strangely familiar. After the session, I took some time to track this resonance back and discovered it related to when I read *Symbiotic Planet* by Lynn Margulis. I dug my copy out and took another look. This lady and her work certainly resonate with so many aspects of this path!

Lynn Margulis is an evolutionary biologist. Her view is that many major advances in the development of life have come about through intimate, close interdependent living – symbiosis – that on occasions has led to the ultimate form of cooperation with the two forms being absorbed into one another. In other words, the evolution of life is driven as much by fusion as separation. Her ideas are encapsulated in Serial Endosymbiotic Theory (SET). SET seriously challenges aspects of the current prevailing orthodoxy, Neo-Darwinism, where evolution is considered to be driven solely by random mutations in genes and survival of the fittest. Her ideas when they were first formulated were considered radical, almost heretical. It is now accepted

that the oxygen producing chloroplasts in green plants are the direct descendants of trapped cyanobacteria. Margulis has also been involved with the development of the Gaia Hypothesis with James Lovelock. She works with NASA in the area of Planetary Biology. Her website is www.geo.umass.edu/faculty/margulis.

However, in the week following the session, something else struck me very hard. Where did all the green rotting vegetation of the great tropical forests of the Carboniferous Period go? Over many millions of years, this great biomass was buried, squashed and fossilised becoming what we know as coal, and possibly oil. And isn't the productions of so many of the materials and objects that give us our relatively easy lives in our modern world almost completely dependent upon our use of these same fossil fuels both as raw materials for plastics manufacture and as energy? Where would we be without our wonderful modern products? Where are we going to be when we have used all the raw materials up?

Based on the current state of our knowledge, over the next few years we are likely to see the peak in oil extraction, if it has not already happened. Although worldwide demand for oil is likely to increase, we cannot escape the fact that the wells are drying up. Recently I learnt that the origin of oil is more open to debate than coal. Most geochemists side with a biotic, fossil origin, similar to coal. A minority, however, propose oil is the product of chemical reactions in the Earth's mantle, which may require a biotic component in the form of bacteria. If oil does have a fossil origin then the amount available is finite. However, if oil creation is an inorganic process then it is still being produced. The weak form of the chemical reaction theory suggests only small quantities are ever produced. Therefore, oil can never be produced naturally at rate to replenish the amounts we have extracted so far. My gut feeling is it is fair and realistic to assume the most negative scenarios. So, how will we adapt to survive in the new Post Peak Oil World?

My subsequent reflections have led to an incredibly serious question for us all that I did not expect to be asking when I started out. And it is one that is not going to go away in any of our lifetimes. Sorry to end on such a serious note, but as I said, pathworking is a serious business and this is where this one wanted to go.

This outcome shows another important part of pathworking: trust the process. I do and I hope I have shown it is not so strange and mysterious a process, because the bottom line is **it works**, and for this reason I would recommend people try it out for themselves. Perhaps even with our Group. Good Luck!

Fiona Boyle



A new constitution for Northampton Unitarians

Your Committee is in the process of revising our old constitution, in order to enable us to move forward as a congregation. Permission has been received from the Charity Commission to start the process, and we are currently in the drafting / discussion stage.

We are hopeful that we will be able to present the new constitution to all members, at the Annual General Meeting at the end of March.



MEDITATION GROUP

There is more than one way of making a spiritual journey

Come along to the Meditation Group
Led by Northampton Unitarians

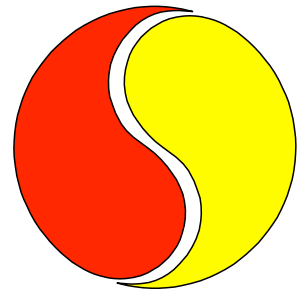
WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

WHEN: 3rd Tuesday of the month, 7 pm to 9 pm

THEMES FOR JANUARY - MARCH MEETINGS

Pathworking through the Qabalistic Tree of Life
The programme for the next few months is to be decided at the January meeting.

For further information, please contact Jon Small at
jon.small@ntlworld.com



SIGNPOSTS BOOK GROUP

It has been decided that this group should be wound up, due to lack of support. However, we are hoping to start up a new discussion group, which will be exploring different world religions and their relevance to Unitarians, from April 2006. Watch this space!

The Committee of Northampton Unitarians would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Peaceful and Happy New Year.



Please send any contributions to Sue Woolley, 5 Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN or via e-mail to sue.woolley@virgin.net