



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 12, April to June 2006

SPIRITUALITY: OUR NEW CHALLENGE

The following are extracts from Jon Small's *Chairman's Report* at our Annual General Meeting on 26th March. They speak for themselves.

"We started the year with a Unitarian view of Easter by Frank and we have started this year with Sue and Becky's Mothering Sunday. These are both Traditional, Orthodox, "normal" service themes that *could* have come from any conventional Christian Church, but as we know (and this no doubt why we come here!) we ain't conventional! The topics and service leaders offered last year were anything but conventional. Frank gave us an address on Infallibility and Democracy, a celebration of Dag Hammarskjold and an unconventional Remembrance Sunday. Sue regaled us with some of the Mysteries of Tao, and Penny reminded us along with some other things of the achievements of Mo Mowlam. We had our Walk in the Woods and Sue has started on a series of Family Services."

Two recent services, by Frank and Fiona, were on the subject of Spirituality. Jon comments: "I see this as one of the symptoms of a "sea-change" within our Fellowship – a desire to return to the radical nature of our forebears and to break away from the moribund condition ... of Unitarianism in this country at this time. To this end, Fiona's address on 12th March was probably the most important and I was personally impressed by everyone's desire to follow this path laid by Frank the service before and Fiona's motto uttered then and taken up by the congregation:

"It's safe to be Spiritual"

Jon continued: "I see us at a crossroads where we can choose to take up this mantle of Spirituality and go forward and offer what we have to others "out there" or we can continue in the old ways. ... I have said we are off the beaten track here so we have to make more noise. If people don't know we're here they can't come to us so we have to get to them somehow. Even when people do hear of us, we get classified along with all the other churches, chapels &c. We **have** to make people aware; one, that we exist and are here and two, we are not conventional and have something new but very old to offer. ... Perhaps our motto should be Freedom, Reason, Tolerance and Spirit?"

Jon concluded with a quotation from Annie Besant that was read out during the Vernal Equinox Meditation of the Theosophical Society:

'Oh Hidden Life,
Vibrant in very Atom.
Oh Hidden Light,
Shining in every Creature.
Oh Hidden Love,
Embracing all in Oneness.
May each who knows them self,
As One with Thee.
Knowing himself as One,
With every other.'

Secular Religion: a look at what we mean by 'Religion' and how people practise it in their lives, especially when they don't belong to a religious organisation.

This was the title of a fascinating talk given by Kay Millard of the Hibbert Trust at the Midland Union AGM on 25th March. This is a brief summary of what she had to say: In the traditional Christian model of the relationship between religion and the secular world, there is hardly any overlap between the two. In the Liberal Christian model, there is quite a large overlap, in the areas of spirituality and implicit religion. In the non-Christian model, religion flows through the whole of daily life. People may be divided into three types: those who are members of a religious group; those who are spiritual seekers, who operate mainly outside faith traditions; and those who are not interested at all.

The meaning of the word 'spirituality' has changed in recent decades. Traditionally, it defined a life of prayer, meditation and mysticism, usually within a particular faith tradition. Nowadays, spirituality has come to mean that part of the personality seeking meaning in the immanent and transcendent.

Modern spirituality has several characteristics:

- It is an individual thing – spiritual seekers don't generally join a faith tradition, but may join a meditation group or similar. There is a lack of formal community, but much informal networking.
- The nature of the sacred is personally chosen or discovered by the individual rather than being part of any religious system.
- An individual's spirituality is shaped by his or her life experience. The history of each spiritual journey is very important to each individual.
- It borrows from the various faith traditions e.g. Buddhist meditation, yoga, holistic health practices etc. The borrowings may include rituals, ideas, or scriptural books.
- There is an emphasis on 'connectedness' – to other people / nature / animals. The idea of the sacredness of everything.

Religion is becoming democratised with the rejection of top-down dogma, and the embracing of spirituality. It is the job of Unitarians to reach out to the spiritual seekers and respond to them. In the recent book *The Spiritual Revolution*, the authors found that Unitarians were in the best position to incorporate spirituality into their faith tradition.

There is a lot of food for thought for us here – the next 12 months should be interesting! **Sue Woolley**

SERVICE TAKERS FOR APRIL TO JUNE 2006

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

9 th April	Gavin Lloyd (President, Midland Union)
23 rd April	Hindu speaker (TBC)
14 th May	George Sarmezey (Anglican Chaplain)
28 th May	Marc Beaumont
11 th June	Sue Woolley
25 th June	Jon Small

All are very welcome!



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

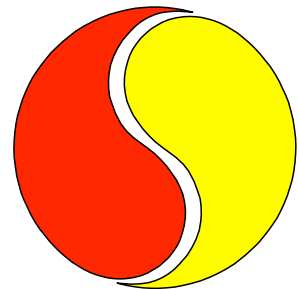
THEMES FOR APRIL - JUNE MEETINGS

April: Netzah – Hod

May: Path 27 The Tower

June: Path 25

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



DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore different world religions in our new
Discussion Group

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

WHEN: 1st Tuesday of the month, 7 pm to 9 pm

THEMES FOR APRIL – JUNE MEETINGS

April: Islam

May: Hinduism

June: Buddhism

For further information, please contact Sue Woolley
at sue.woolley@virgin.net

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