



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 24, January to March 2009

BECOMING A UNITARIAN

Sue asked me for some material for the Newsletter and I was going to write something about the medieval Jews in Northampton – but I would rather save this for a Service I'm planning for February.

I have had an idea that may appeal to others who might also write down their experiences for future Newsletters along the lines of: - "How I Became a Unitarian" – here's mine. **[please do – all contributions welcome – Ed.]**

As a kid I was sent along with my sisters to Sunday school. Eventually, having asked too many awkward questions I was thrown out and declared "evil" by the vicar. Already disillusioned by the hypocrisy of the Church I rejected all religion as a total sham. I now know that I was throwing out the baby with the bath-water.

Thanks to a teacher I turned to science, especially natural history and became an entomologist. Later, whilst working in a field, counting beetles I suddenly *realised* the total interconnectivity of Nature and the Universe. I had what could be called a religious experience based on my scientific knowledge (such as it was) and my personal experiences.

I decided that there may be something in this religion lark as I now knew that the Church of England and other Christian sects were not the be all and end all. I spent a long time looking at what lay behind the cant in Christianity and became impressed by the utterances attributed to Jesus. His ideas of Love, Forgiveness and Pacifism appealed to me especially as my scientific knowledge of physics had already led me to become a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The old world faiths were studied, as well as what is referred to as the "Occult" – here I found areas of philosophical speculation that intrigued me. The possibility that the physical Universe might not be all there is. The problem with all sects of Christianity was that they made demands on my rational mind that I found unacceptable. Whereas I could accept the speculation that such things as ghosts and telepathy existed, I could not accept the idea that the Supreme Creator had incarnated as an individual in the time of the Roman occupation of Israel. The idea that the Church could condone war when the Bible says "Thou shalt not kill" and the New Testament quotes Jesus as saying; "Put up thy sword, he who lives by the sword dies by the sword" made the whole thing invalid to me.

The same problem occurred with other world faiths; they required commitments I could not accept. I found Islam refreshing, but not the need to pray so much, nor the concept of Holy War. Hinduism appealed a lot, but at the time I didn't know of the underlying single G-D beneath the many deities. Buddhism I found attractive, but in the end too austere. The only one that really appealed was Judaism, but again it makes demands on its followers that I could go not along with. I like my bacon sandwich! The rules may have been necessary when the Hebrews were a desert tribal nation, but many have no relevance in the modern world. Mysticism was the only area that really appealed and I soon discovered that the mystical aspects of the different faiths were in essence, all speaking the same language.

In the 1980s a branch of the World Congress of Faiths was formed in Northampton and I attended the first meeting. There I met Peter Galbraith, then the local Unitarian Minister. I joined a small band of people who met in a small part of a large church,

that had, like so many others seen its congregation dwindle over the years. I liked the idea of the three “pillars” of Unitarianism; Freedom, Reason and Tolerance. I could join with others and still retain my personal beliefs and ideals, (when three of four Unitarians are gathered together, there will be five or six opinions!) I found a common feeling that has not diminished over the years and seen a small growth in our numbers. Personally, deep down I am a Cultural Christian (can’t help my childhood) and a little bit of a Jew (thanks to a Jewish grandmother, who never told me she was Jewish, so it must have been “cultural osmosis”). However, when people ask – I reply “I’m a Unitarian”.

Jon Small



SERVICE TAKERS FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2009

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

11 th January	Mark Beaumont
25 th January	Sue Woolley
8 th February	Joanne McGeehan
22 nd February	Jon Small
8 th March	Sandy Ellis (Evesham and MU)
22 nd March	Joyce Ashworth (GA President)

We are thinking of visiting the Banbury Fellowship on Sunday 29th March. If you are interested in joining us, please let Sue or Jon know.

All are very welcome!



NORTHAMPTON UNITARIANS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

When: Sunday 12th April 2009
Where: 31, Hazelwood Road, Northampton
Time: after the service

It is later than usual because we have GA President Mrs. Joyce Ashworth leading the service on 22nd March.

MIDLAND UNION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

When: Saturday 21st March 2009
Where: The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry
Time: 10.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Rev. John Harley, National Youth Coordinator

Sue and Jon will be attending – Sue has room for two more people in her car.

Statement of faith taken from Northampton Unitarians website

Unitarianism is a religious movement in which individuals are free to follow their reason and conscience; there is no pressure from creed or scripture. We are open to change in the light of new thought and discoveries.

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.

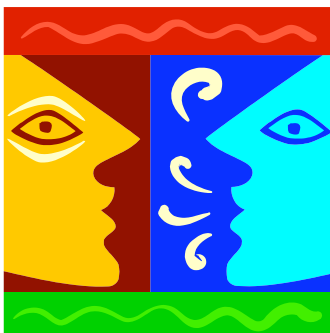
We offer:

- 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.





DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore current / spiritual issues in our Discussion Group

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

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

THEMES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH MEETINGS

January: *Ten Commandments for today*

February: *Are there universal religious truths?*

March: *Lent: what is the purpose of fasting and asceticism?*

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

Meditation for Beginning by Judith L. Quarles

Spirit of life and love:

In this season of beginning

Some of us are hurried and harried.

Some of us feel sorrowful and afraid.

Some of us are not yet ready to step forward into the future.

May we minister to one another with wisdom,

Meeting our friends with open ears, open eyes, and open hearts.

In this season of beginning

Some of us are celebrating triumphs and joys.

Some of us feel whole and happy.

Some of us are eager and excited, curious to see what happens next.

Let us each, as we are able, take part in one another's happiness and enthusiasm.

Quiet spirit of life and love,

Bring us the grace to share wholly and faithfully in the lives of our friends and loved ones.

—Amen.

Please send any contributions to
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2DN or via e-mail to sue.woolley@virgin.net