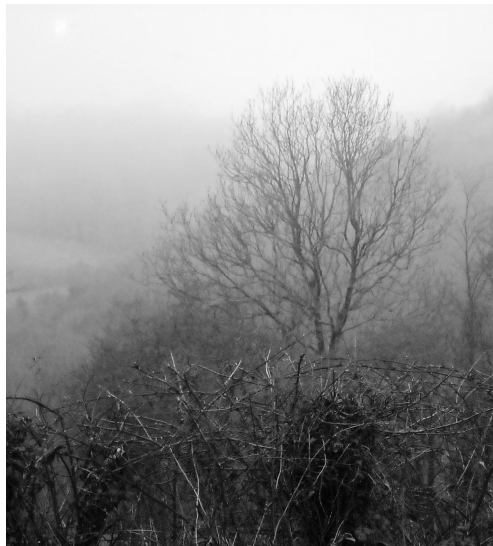


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## Change of name of the Alister Hardy Society

At its meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> April 2012, the Society Committee decided that the Society should have a name that describes its function, similar to the names of such other societies as the Society for Psychical Research, the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies and the Scientific and Medical Network. Since its inception, people have been asking, 'What is the Alister Hardy Society – what's it about?' when the name is mentioned. After much deliberation the Committee resolved unanimously that the following title and emphasis be approved:

The Alister Hardy  
SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

with the title abbreviation AHSSSE in place of the former abbreviation, AHS, and the following descriptive wording contained in the footer of its letter headings: 'Dedicated to the appreciation and study of experiences in the tradition of Sir Alister Hardy FRS and supporting the work of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.'

At the same time it was resolved that the Society's website address should change from [www.alisterhardysociety.org](http://www.alisterhardysociety.org) to [www.studyspiritualexperiences.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org) – the present address will remain in use alongside the new address until the end of the year, but will then be dropped.

The Alister Hardy Trustees gave their approval for the change of name at their meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012.

It is hoped that the Society will be better recognised and appreciated by the general public as a result of the change of name, and members are asked for their support in making the new name known.



The views expressed in *De Numine* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience, or the Religious Experience Research Centre.

*The Editor*

**Information for contributors and contact details are shown on the inside back cover.**

## From the Editor



S'fed

We had arrived in S'fed (*Tsefat*), one of the four holy cities of Israel, high in the mountains of Northern Galilee. We were travelling with an Iraqi/Israeli friend who introduced us to two of his friends who lived in S'fed – one Israeli Arab, and one Israeli Jew. We all sat at a café table on the steep cobbled street. After pleasantries were exchanged, and lemon tea was brought, they each described for us memories from their childhood: the Jew was on a school bus that was ambushed by militant Palestinians, and two of his school friends were killed; the Arab's family had lived in 'a wonderful house' in the town 'but we were driven off by the Jews' and now they live in a slum outside the city limits. They heard each other out, but then they began a heated debate about Israel/Palestine, which developed into a passionate argument; neither could hear what the other was saying any more. They were both saying the same thing: 'It's our land.' We watched.

The men were holding hands, gripping tight, white knuckled as their voices rose. I thought this showed that in spite of all they were brothers, there was an empathy between them, they felt each others pain ... my husband said it was to make sure they kept a grip on each other's knife hand. Neither would let go.

When it all comes down to dust, I will kill you if I must. I will help you if I can. (Leonard Cohen)

This is my editorial, together with 'The Story of Isaac', a poem by Leonard Cohen I have chosen with Syria and the Middle East in mind. You will find the poem on the back page, and also this issue's 'View from the Chair', which is Jonathan's Robinson's poem 'The Righteous Ones'.



## The Broader View

We experience the world at two distinct levels: there is the world of common experience and the world which is known to us only as individuals – our personal world. Only the first of these provides the material for those sciences that are regarded as exact. In these no scientific fact is established unless the observations on which it rests are precisely repeatable by independent workers. For the world of personal experiences no such repeatability is possible and here what is true for one may be heresy for another.

I shall return to this point later but first I shall examine the limitations of science in its provision of explanations of the world of common experience.

### The Physical World

It is a widely held view, not only among the general public but also among many scientists that science provides us with the understanding of natural phenomena. The origin of this misconception is readily found: science has been amazingly successful in explaining, for

example, the fact that the planets in the solar system rotate around the earth in elliptical orbits and that mutation-induced differences in DNA between parent and offspring give rise to phenotypic differences between the generations. One could, of course, quote literally hundreds of other examples. The reason that these explanations do not lead to a comprehensive understanding of the physical world is that they are essentially superficial – they require that so much is ‘taken as read’ before the offered explanation is developed. This limitation seems to be either ignored or not even recognised at all by many scientists but there are some notable exceptions.

It seems to be one of the fundamental features of nature that fundamental physical laws are described in terms of a mathematical theory of great beauty and power, needing quite a high standard of mathematics for one to understand it. You may wonder: Why is nature constructed along these lines? One can only answer that our present knowledge seems to show that nature is so constructed. We simply have to accept it. One could perhaps describe the situation by saying that God is a mathematician of a very high order, and He used very advanced mathematics in constructing the Universe. (Paul Dirac)

Dirac, a Nobel laureate, was of course one of the most outstanding scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His mathematical theory of the electron led to the prediction of the existence of anti-matter before it was discovered experimentally. The above quotation is from something he wrote when he was over sixty; in his earlier years he was a strident atheist. It might be paraphrased by stating, ‘the world is the way it is because that’s the way it is.’ Put in these terms the idea that at a fundamental level science explains anything is exposed for the fallacy that it is. Albert Einstein made a similar point, much more elegantly when he wrote:

I am not an atheist and I don’t think I can call myself a pantheist. We are in the position of little children entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but does not know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being towards God. We see a universe marvellously arranged and obeying certain laws, but only dimly understand those laws. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that moves the constellations.

My religiosity consists of a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little we can comprehend of the knowable world. That deep emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which reveals itself in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead.

A striking feature of these quotations is that both scientists readily recognise the limitations of the human intellect to ‘explain’ the physical world. In passing one may note that not all scientists display such humility. However, it may be recalled that there are thought to be more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the world’s beaches, and the oceans of this world alone contain countless drops of water – but man cannot make one grain of sand, nor one drop of water. A degree of humility would seem to be appropriate.

The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena. (Ludwig Wittgenstein)<sup>1</sup>

### **The World of the Individual**

If we have difficulty in comprehending the world of common experience how much more is this so of our own personal experiences. In the western world where the materialistic paradigm is dominant, individuals are naturally cautious about recounting their own experiences that call into question its validity. This is particularly so where an experience may

be described as religious, spiritual or mystical and those who defend the materialistic paradigm sometimes do so with remarkable vigour.

There used to be spiritualism, there continues to be ESP (extra-sensory perception) ... Where corruption of children's minds is at stake, I do not believe in the freedom of the press or freedom of speech. In my view, publishers who publish or teachers who teach any of the pseudo-sciences as established truth should, on being found guilty, be publicly horsewhipped, and forever banned from further activity in these usually honourable professions.

(Ex-director of the U.S. Bureau of Standards. Published in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists)

There is a famous historic precedent for this sort of reaction to new ideas. One recalls that a charge of corrupting the minds of the young was used by the establishment in ancient Athens to sentence Socrates to death. On a personal note I, like other scientists who choose to write on these matters, have been warned that I put at risk my own scientific reputation.

Consider the following quotation from the American psychologist and philosopher William James:

The sciences of nature know nothing of spiritual presences, and on the whole hold no practical commerce whatever with the idealistic conceptions towards which general philosophy inclines. The scientist, so-called, is, during his scientific hours at least, so materialistic that one may well say that on the whole the influence of science goes against the notion that religion should be recognised at all.

The word 'religion' is a difficult one in that it means different things to different people. Fortunately James gives us his definition:

... the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.

As I have indicated when quoting Dirac and Einstein, James' pronouncement about the materialist attitude of scientists is not universally applicable, and as Poincaré has written,

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful, he studies it because he delights in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing, and if nature were not worth knowing, life would not be worth living.

Despite these very weighty exceptions, one does recognise that for the most part James is correct in his assertion. However, the materialist paradigm does not deal comfortably with those human experiences that are most significant to those who have them. To illustrate this point I shall describe an experience of a small child, recounted in later life.

It was a summer day and I was playing out back of the house, in an alley in the city where we lived. It was one of my happier days, when I had found playmates. A sudden storm came up and interrupted our play. I sat alone out there between garages behind the house waiting for it to end. It was near noon. The rain ended almost as soon as it came, and the sun shone hot and bright once more. All at once I felt as if I were seeing everything for the first time. The light seemed like gold, the smell of the wet foliage was like perfume, with the rainwater shining and running about in little rivulets, the humming and the buzzing of insects and bees was pleasant to my ears. Everywhere I looked there was beauty. In that dirty alley wherever there was a leaf or a blade of grass it sparkled. I was filled with a sense of great comfort and peace. Now I watched a beetle going about its business, and then a small garden spider, and I was glowing with warmth. It was as if all that was outside of me, I felt to be part of it. Then a thought came. It said, 'See! Everything is alive, everything lives. That insect, it has life, the grass, the air even.' And then I felt joy, and with joy, love and then a feeling of reverence.

Such experiences are not as rare as one might suppose. In different surveys in the UK, China, Turkey and India approximately 50 % of people reply in the affirmative to the question 'Have

you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?'<sup>2</sup>

However one may choose to interpret these findings one can say with conviction that experience of the mystical is as much a contemporary phenomenon as it is one found in historical accounts and religious texts. So, what do you think?

*Don Mason*

<sup>1</sup> Cited in: Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers*. BBC Publications, 1987, pp.129

<sup>2</sup> The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

This article first appeared in *Fusion* (Michaelmas 2010), the House Journal for the Dunn School of Pathology, Oxford. The author writes as follows: 'The circulation of *Fusion* is very limited, being confined to past and present members of the Dunn School. The incentive to send it to you was my reading of the very fine article 'After Thoughts' written by Graham Arnold which appeared in the Spring 2012 edition of *De Numine*.' (Ed.)

## **Dreams Spiritual, Dreams Scientific**

In Issue 50 of *De Numine* I briefly described how, over a period of forty years or more, working with my dreams has been a major factor in my own 'spiritual' development. In concluding that piece I suggested that attending to dreams is something that everyone could potentially find a very natural thing to do, and that dreams offer an entirely natural approach to exploring our inner world. In this follow up I would like to amplify this perspective and say a little more about why I consider our dreams deserve more of our attention and consideration than we normally afford them in western culture. But before turning to dreams it will be necessary to indulge in a little scene-setting to establish the context for what is to be said about dreams and our notions of self.

We live, I would suggest, deeply embedded in mystery. It has always been that way. In recent times science has made almost unbelievably successful progress in describing the nature of 'reality'. We have found answers to many of the questions that puzzled our forebears but even in science mystery remains and as we move into the twenty-first century science is facing bigger challenges and bigger questions than it has for some time. This too is a sign of its success, as science is perhaps more about asking pertinent questions than it is about providing final answers, more about achieving an understanding of what can reasonably be said about the world rather than saying what or why it is in any fundamentally fixed or absolute way.

At the personal or societal level mystery is not something we generally seem very happy to live with. We want answers and we want them now, and if someone else will provide them without us having to make too much of an effort then so much the better. In so many cases we insist on making life difficult for ourselves by demanding answers to the big questions and imagining that if we had the answers all would be well, we would be satisfied, we would know. Is there a god? Who or what am I? Who or what is the real me? Is there life after death? Is there a heaven? Reincarnation? What's it all about? For heaven's sake -- Why? The list goes on.

So how are we to make progress, to increase our understanding and appreciation? Well, science has done so by paying close attention to phenomena that happen in the outer world, by asking small questions about specific phenomena and demanding, via experiments, that whatever the outcome, whatever answer emerges, it can be replicated and repeated by someone else.

So far so general, and perhaps so vague. To make things more specific I'll indulge in one further scene setting exercise. Please bear with me, and apologies to those with a science background.

Consider your current condition as you read this article. What can be said about it? Well there is a fair chance that you are sitting down, probably at home. So if I ask you something simple, something objective, such as 'At what speed are you travelling?' you are likely to respond that you are stationary and that you are travelling at exactly 0 mph. Quite clearly you have no speed at all. These are, on any common sense or everyday level, the facts of the matter. However, if we take a step further and insist that this is the universal and absolute truth, that this is 'The Answer' about your speed we would be mistaken. It does not take much reflection to consider that, while comfortably ensconced in your armchair, from other perspectives you are indeed in motion and that you do indeed have a speed. This becomes apparent when you consider the following:

- You are sitting on a rotating earth. To complete one rotation with the earth, at the equator you will be travelling at some 1,040mph; at the latitude of Great Britain about 650mph.
- The Earth is orbiting around the sun at about 65,000mph. That's your speed too!
- The Sun, with the earth in orbit, is travelling around the centre of our Milky Way galaxy at some 486,000mph. Wow! You're going fast!

What can we learn from this? Are there any useful generalisations we can make that we might apply in other situations?

Given this multiplicity of speeds you might well demand to know what your 'real' speed is. The short answer is that you haven't got one. It's not your speed after all. Speed is the word we use for one of the factors that helps to describe your change in position over time, your motion, *in relation to another object*. To speak unambiguously about your speed you must specify in relation to which object you are moving. There is no absolute, universal standard or spatial framework against which to establish a universal or 'ultimately true' speed. You have as many speeds as you choose objects to measure yourself in relation to. That's potentially a lot of speeds. Importantly, the natural state of objects is revealed to be one of constant motion, they always 'have' a speed, and contrary to all our everyday and common sense notions they are never at rest. But you are at rest relative to your armchair, your room, your house and the earth. Call it a 'paradox' if you wish and note in passing that spirituality is full of them.

We could carry out a similar exercise with many other everyday words and concepts such as weight, size and colour that relate to the physical world. In the biological world we might give the concept of a species similar treatment.

This is all well understood in the world of science but what does it have to do with dreaming and spirituality?

To jump right in I would like to suggest that just as you have no 'real, unique and absolutely true' speed there is no 'real, unique and absolutely true' you. I suggest that your sense of 'you' depends very much upon the circumstances, the other concepts, ideas and emotions, the

mental phenomena that you habitually choose to 'measure' yourself against. Your 'you' is not, in the final analysis, yours but arises in relation to the mental phenomena that you choose to attend to. In short we are not single entities from which all else proceeds. Yet just as you appear to be at rest while in your armchair you also appear to be you while engaged in the activities of everyday life.

All of us who drive have surely experienced that unsettling moment when our conscious attention returns to the road and the traffic, only to realise that we have been engaged in some reverie for the previous few minutes. Some other part of our psyche has been behind the wheel and doing the driving pretty competently until an out-of-the-ordinary event, all those brake lights coming on ahead, prompted some other unconscious us to issue a warning so that we resumed conscious control over the vehicle.

There is nothing new here. For 2,500 years Buddhism has been saying something similar. In Buddhism key concepts and ideas about the nature of the world include:

*Dependent origination:* Phenomena arise only in relation to one another. Objects and phenomena are said to be 'empty'; they have no reality in and of themselves.

*No-self:* The self is illusory. It arises habitually and is perceived in relation to every day events and thoughts.

*The constancy of change:* Everything is impermanent, nothing persists, and all is change.

The spirit of personal verification, of experimentation and testing, so central to science is clearly and forcibly present in Buddhism, where it is applied to the inner rather than the outer world. Buddha did not expect others to take his word for it. He expected them to test his teachings personally, to make the path their own, to live it and judge the outcomes for themselves. Buddhists have for the last 2,500 years been experimenting, testing and importantly, repeating observations on their own minds and psyches through practices such as meditation and waking mindfulness, and by constantly questioning and observing their own mental states.

It seems to me that through this they have discovered methods for abandoning or stepping outside the everyday experience of a single unified self to achieve new perspectives on their own subjective experience and a radically different appreciation of the nature of awareness. There is, I suggest, a powerful symmetry, a common ground, that begins to become apparent when we move beyond common stereotypes of science and Buddhism. The inner reality reflects the outer and vice-versa. They are both part of the whole piece, like the one/two side(s) of some cosmic Mobius Strip. In both cases the primacy of objects as independent things gives way to underlying processes and phenomena that facilitate the structured flow of energy and information that is a constant, dynamic unfolding of being.

As with science, Buddhists have accumulated a vast library of knowledge, contrived a host of technical terms, methodologies, spiritual technologies and maps to aid their explorations of mind. As with science, these can present formidable barriers to those whose have not been raised or educated in the various Buddhist traditions, and who are seeking to understand, implement and integrate Buddhist insights into their daily life. Buddhism has been remoulding itself in the West for some time now, so perhaps this situation will improve as contemporary Western approaches appear and Buddhism adapts to a new culture, just as it has done so many times in the past.



We might at this point reasonably ask if there are spontaneous and naturally occurring phenomena that can help to shift us from our habitual, culturally conditioned, common-sense view of the world and ourselves. Is there something most of us experience that, if we attended to it more closely, could help shift our awareness to a new viewpoint, that could help us gain a new experiential perspective, widening our appreciation of the nature of our being? The answer must surely be, yes. We know from Sir Alister Hardy's surveys that many people report spontaneous shifts in consciousness and awareness, which many interpret as spiritual or religious. There can be little doubt about the existence of these phenomena; it is in the interpretation that differences appear.

For me dreams are obvious, regularly occurring mental phenomena that offer the opportunity for spontaneous shifts of conscious perspective. The difficulty is that in our society we are not encouraged to attend to our dreams, or to grant them any particular significance. Children are often told after an unpleasant dream 'It's only a dream'; in other words it's of no significance and can be disregarded. Reality is generally considered to be that which we experience in the waking state and dreams, together with other 'altered' states of consciousness, are regarded as fantasy, imaginary, fictitious, but definitely not real and definitely not something offering worthwhile insights into the human condition. As a whole society takes pride in this stance seeing it a victory of the rational enlightenment, one that elevates us above most other cultures, past and present, which regard dreams and altered states of consciousness as either valuable or real. In cultures where this holds true, dreams are given special regard, and their meaning actively sought. Further, although analytical or depth psychology arose in western European culture, we have not taken to heart the message of its pioneers: that we do ourselves a disservice by ignoring the workings of that larger mind which moves beneath the iceberg tip of our everyday conscious awareness. We do not regard dreams as C. G. Jung suggested we should: a dream should 'be taken in all seriousness as something that has actually happened to us; it should be treated as a contributory factor in framing our conscious outlook'.

At a time when traditional forms of religion and spirituality appear to be in decline I'm inclined to feel that dreams provide a natural and readily accessible means of approaching the inner mystery that life presents to us. I value them because:

- For me much of what is religious has arisen from experiences grounded in dreams or other states of altered consciousness. States of awareness that are experienced in dreams can, I think, also be experienced through other forms of activity such as meditation, religious devotions and pharmacologically or herbally-induced altered states.
- Many traditions have their own version of a spiritual path or progress. I would suggest that Jung's process of individuation is essentially another of these, and that dreams form a central component of this.
- Dreams are both universal and egalitarian. They have been reported though all cultures and times. You can't be blamed or praised for your dreams; they arise spontaneously and are not under your conscious control.
- Dreams are phenomena of nature; everyone agrees they exist. They can be studied and we can compare notes, if we would only agree to grant them significance and talk about them.
- Dreams offer a degree of objectivity when studying the inner world; they offer some degree of repeatability and re-observation. Patterns and relationships can be identified and described as with scientific endeavours.
- Dreams are 'hands on'. You can't make any real progress without getting involved. They are not dogmatic or faith-based. A theoretical or academic consideration of dreaming is

desirable but can only sensibly follow on from individual experience. Dreams are first and foremost experiential.

- Dreams are challenging and fun, fulfilling, illuminating and by equal turns frightening and scary, undermining the mental status quo and therefore potentially transformative. They can take you to the extremes of yourself, completely turning about your conception of your own being.
- Dreams are of many different types and scales. Some clearly relate to everyday situations and anxieties. Then there are 'Big Dreams' that demand attention and stick with you for life. I would suggest that dreams are not of a single type and do not perform a single function.

My interest in dreams has always been driven by their ability to facilitate personal or spiritual development, to guide, map and chart the path of spiritual progress. In my experience they are not passive providers of information to the ego but autonomous agents of transformative, power and energy. It seems to me that in the post-modern age when authority of all types is being brought into question and looked at with a sceptical eye, whether that authority be political, religious or scientific, many people feel the need for a spirituality, however they conceive it, that is present in their day-to-day lives and not partitioned off in some special time or place. Dreams, with the relative regularity of their occurrence, can help and provide a focus for this need; and the more you attend to them, perhaps by keeping a dream journal, the more regular they become.

In short, dreams have for me provided a natural way to approach and have access to 'The Other' or 'The More'. To quote William James:

The 'more', as we called it, and the meaning of our 'union' with it, form the nucleus of our inquiry. Into what definite description can these words be translated, and for what definite facts do they stand? (*Varieties of Religious Experience, a Study in Human Nature, 1902*)

In my experience dreams can unequivocally help address this question.

The only way I can bring things to an appropriate conclusion is to offer you one of my dreams. It is worth remembering that, when referring to dreams, there is the dream as first experienced, the dream as remembered, the dream as told or written and the dream as heard or read. With each iteration there is loss of impact or power.

### **27th November 1993. Bliss Amongst Trees**

I'm walking down an avenue of trees. The leaves are shimmering with yellow golden light. Identification ... then dissolution and spaciousness.

Although this is a short and simple dream it is hard to convey the strength of its impact. The dissolution leaves only an awareness of spacious awareness with no intruding sense of identity. Jung referred to this process of individuation, his 'spiritual path', in the following way:

The whole course of individuation is dialectical, and the so called 'end' is the confrontation of the ego with the 'emptiness' of the centre. Here the limit of possible experience is reached: the ego is dissolved as the reference point of cognition.



And finally, you will recall that you have no true, or ultimately real, speed. In considering this dream experience and others like it, although they are powerful, I would not claim that they are uncovering an ultimate reality or somehow providing the ultimate real answer. What such experiences and dreams can do is prod, push and pummel you to radical new perspectives that go beyond the bounds of intellectual formulation. It has not always been comfortable, but dreams have enriched my life and increased my appreciation of the everyday, which I see as no more and no less real than the experiences of my dreams. Value the ordinary, for beauty and mystery are alive there too.

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For those who might be interested I offer a much larger sample from my dream diaries at [www.openfoot.net](http://www.openfoot.net) where they are accompanied by other reporting formats including sketches, jottings, and some dream interpretation, that further chart my ramblings through internal landscapes.

## **Measuring the Circle**

### **A Unitarian approach to psychical research**

‘One measures a circle by beginning anywhere.’ (Charles H. Fort)

Surely one of the best kept secrets of psychical research must be the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies (USPS). The Society was founded in 1965 by the Rev. G. Stanley Whitby. During his long and distinguished career, he was an examiner in Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and Lecturer in Philosophy and Scientific Method at the University of Sheffield. Published works include articles in the *International Journal of Ethics*, the Maurice Elliott Memorial Lecture 1966 (*The Value of Psychical Studies*) and the Beard Memorial Lecture 1970 (*Philosophy and Survival*). He was also joint editor of *Life, Death & Psychical Research* (Rider, 1973). For 30 years he was a minister of the Unitarian Central City churches in Glasgow and Sheffield, after which he became a minister of the Cotswold Group of Unitarian churches. He was also the Director of Studies for the Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies, Chairman of their Scientific Research Committee and their Education Committee, as well as being Education Officer of the College of Psychic Studies and a member of the Society for Psychical Research.

Today, most people involved in psychical research have never heard of the USPS. In its early days it had some of the great names of psychical research associated with it. Its second president was Professor Henry Habberley Price, Wykeham Professor of Logic, and Fellow of New College. Price was President of the Society for Psychical Research from 1939 to 1941 and President of the Aristotelian Society from 1943 to 1944. Price contributed much intellectual integrity to psychical research. His Society for Psychical Research Presidential Address noted the rarity of paranormal experiences among highly educated people. He was also a supporter of the theory that apparitions were a form of ‘recording’ on the psychic ether.

Another well known figure from the history of psychical research was Dr. Robert Crookall, who served as USPS Vice-President. After taking his Ph.D., Crookall lectured at Aberdeen University before joining the staff of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, specialising in coal-forming plants. He resigned from his geological work in 1952 to devote the rest of his life to psychical research. Today, Crookall is best known for his work on astral projection and out-of-the-body experiences, in such classic books as: *The Supreme Adventure*, *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection* and *Intimations of Immortality*.

Sir Alister Hardy, the biologist and former president of the Society for Psychical Research, was a Life Member and a regular speaker at USPS conferences, which were occasionally held at Manchester College, Oxford. Sir Alister is today best known for setting up the Religious Experience Research Centre, which was housed in Oxford but is now based at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. This is a unique collection of first-hand accounts of religious, mystical and psychic experiences, sadly mostly ignored by many modern psychical researchers.

The USPS organise a conference each year, with some very interesting speakers. In addition, each year they organise a speaker for the Annual General Assembly of the Unitarian Free Church. Past speakers have included leading experts in the field of psychical research -- Professor Archie Roy, Guy Lyon Playfair and Peter Underwood.

So is there such a thing as a Unitarian approach to psychical research? This is a tricky one to quantify. Unitarianism is a liberal and creedless faith, rooted in the Christian tradition, yet on a spiritual adventure in search of truth. Unitarians are a faith community for those on a spiritual journey, for those who believe there is still more to be discovered in religion. They believe in religious exploration – through the intellect and through the spirit. Unitarians are known for their liberal attitudes to spirituality and embrace many different world views. If anything, this is the strength of a Unitarian approach to psychical research. Lack of dogma means that psychic experiences are approached in a truly sceptical way -- with an open mind, following where the evidence leads. And if you hold different views to other members – then that is fine, in fact it is positively encouraged!

Unitarians have a long-standing tradition of contributing to the study of the paranormal. In the nineteenth century, ministers such as Minot Savage and John Page Hopps were active investigators. In the twentieth century, names such as Dr. L. P. Jacks, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford and founder and first editor of the Hibbert Journal and a former President of the Society for Psychical Research, and Professor Stratton, the Astrophysicist and Director of Solar Physics Observatory at Cambridge from 1928 – 47, who was also a past President of both the Society for Psychical Research and the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, spring to mind. It was Professor Stratton who, in his Presidential address to the SPR, pointed out the limitations of laboratory experiments, urging members to report contemporary spontaneous cases. He suggested that it was the job of philosophers to think out ‘a reconciling conceptual framework’ to include both spontaneous and laboratory approaches. To me, this best sums up the Unitarian approach, an openness to go with the individual’s own experience, but also embracing a scientific approach. For many, science and religion cannot sit hand in hand, but in Unitarianism they can; neither is mutually exclusive, rather mutually inclusive!

To find out more about the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies contact:  
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*David Taylor*

*The Alister Hardy Archive was first housed at Manchester College, Oxford, a Unitarian college, in the early 1970s, and the Society still has strong links with Unitarianism. We held our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary Open Day and celebration lunch at Manchester College (now Harris-Manchester College Oxford, see De Numine no 48), and the AHSSSE London Group meets regularly at the Essex Unitarian church at 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, West Kensington, W8. (Ed.)*

## Experiences

### An Experience – and Disappointment – of ‘Enlightenment’

On January 4, 1972, at about 4 in the afternoon, the back of my neck zipped itself into extinction. I was on a 9 month Transcendental Meditation retreat, meditating and doing Yoga for about 8 hours daily. Even though I was hyper-vigilant about inner shifts there, I could not have missed it. Who I was, how I thought, how I saw, even how I would sleep from that night on were now, and would remain ever after, different.

I noticed five effects. The most obvious was that nearly all of the background noise in my mind just disappeared. Behind every moment of thinking, seeing or hearing, there had always been other, fainter thoughts, odd snatches of music, hints of feelings, errands I shouldn't forget, half-formed sentences. But the endlessly burbling background chatter simply disappeared. Oh, I still *thought*. That was the confusing part. Maharishi, our guru, had told us about gaining a perfect focus, a mind without any thoughts at all. So this shift could not be the 'silent mind of enlightenment' for which I, like all 1500 of us there, had been waiting. And what I thought about hadn't changed. What stopped was the inarticulate mutterings, the endless half thoughts *beneath* my thinking. It was as if behind the movie of my mind had been scrims behind scrims of thought, dimmer movies I could barely make out. But that afternoon it was as if the light had suddenly shifted so that the front scrim became opaque and suddenly I was watching just one movie. I was thinking only one thought at a time.

The second effect is harder to describe. If you had asked me before that afternoon who or what I, Robert Forman, was, I probably would have pointed to somewhere on my mid chest and said, 'I'm here, me, Robert!' I'd be trying to get at some vaguely localized sense of a self that I suspect we all have. I, me, Robert, was in there – somewhere. But once that last strand fell into silent openness, my sense of who or what I was instantly changed with it. I was now some strange new bottomlessness. Or rather it, the vast openness, was now *me*. Strangely enough, there was nothing Robert-ish in this new sense of myself for the bottomlessness has nothing to do with this particular guy, Robert. Everything I did, thought about, ate, laughed at, even my anxieties, were now encountered by or from within this strangely endless translucence. 'I' was now this 'It,' this weirdly characterless yet infinite openness.

A third effect: two days later I was standing on the triangular porch off my hotel room, looking through the mist at the white caps dotting the Mediterranean. The sea seemed particularly vibrant, the fog vivid. The drizzle against my bare arms felt unusually cool and crisp. Then it occurred to me: what was different wasn't the scene. It was me. The Mediterranean was so alive, the mist so cool because I was now more alive to them! Standing on that porch, feeling the chilly January air on my cheeks, unlike where I used to be, I was no longer *in* the scene. Rather I was *holding* it, *conscious of* it, *attending to* it. Hindu thinkers talk endlessly about an enigmatic aspect of enlightenment: *sakṣin*, or 'witnessing'. In it, silent consciousness 'is experienced as wholly *separate from activity...*' I had always imagined this *sakṣin*, 'witnessing,' to be some sort of doubled-up consciousness, as if you'd stand back, arms folded, and make yourself watch yourself. But leaning against that cool porch railing, feeling the drizzle on my forearms, was just the opposite. There was no extra work in this experience. This witnessing was, and has remained, utterly effortless. I was conscious and conscious of being conscious, that's all. And seeing like that was astonishingly fresh!

When the weather cleared the next week, I sensed the fourth result. Taking a walk down to the beach, cumulus clouds caught my eye, billowing white and cottony above the wide curve of the Mediterranean, up and up and behind one another. The billows, the ocean and even the light haze above the water seemed to reach backwards more than I'd ever noticed, as if they'd gotten thicker. The whole scene had a surprising depth to it. It was as if I had put on 3-D glasses. I've always seen depth like anyone else, I suppose. But this was categorically different. It was as if everything – thick or thin, tall or short, heavy or cumulus-light – had become strangely thickened, more layered. The world became deep. I liked it. Since then sometimes I've found myself on a drive through the Colorado Rockies and been bowled over by the height above height of a rounded forest hilltop. Or I'll drive across New York City's RFK Bridge and be astonished by the depth of the canyons of glass and steel. I cannot possibly miss the visual changes that began that month.

I became aware of the last effect about a week after that cumulus walk. I woke up one morning certain that, although I'd clearly been asleep, all of me actually hadn't been. Some odd bit of awareness had persisted through the night, awake. I had been fully asleep, for sure, but not quite, not all of me.

The *Bhagavad Gita* describes such an effect: 'Even when it is night for all others,' as the *Gita* put it, 'you remain wakeful.'<sup>2</sup> Wakefulness in sleep must sound positively gruelling! You sleep but lie there wondering when you'll sleep? But witnessed sleep that night, and every night since, actually seemed quite natural. I was awake inside, but the wakeful part was so understated, so unobtrusive and natural that there was nothing at all traumatic about it. Even today, I hardly bother to notice whether I was awake inside, unless like last night (when I was writing this article) I have some reason to notice. But it's there, it's how I sleep. This new sleep pattern has turned out to be probably the most useful aspect of the shift. Before that time I used to wake up bleary eyed and fogged over. When I finally woke up, I'd be all groggy and grumpy. But ever since that morning, when it's time to wake up, I'm just awake. There's no bleariness, no snooze button. I'm just awake. I suppose it's because consciousness doesn't have to switch states, since I was never totally out.

Despite all these changes, big and small, and with all the perspective of an impatient 25 year old, all I felt back then was disappointment. Where were the benefits of the enlightenment we'd heard so much about? My mind hadn't become totally silent, the world hadn't been transformed, and I was still bouncing from anxiety to ecstasy, still often lonely, still unclear about a career. Compared to the end of all suffering for which I was waiting, this was pretty much squat. Ah the impatience of the young! For sitting here, some 40 years later, these seemingly small changes were the beginning. It was an understated earthquake: for the first time in my life, probably for the first time in the life of anyone in my genetic lineage, I now was thinking only one thing at a time. I was conscious and aware that I was, and without effort. And I now knew myself as an empty, spacious consciousness.

Since that time, whatever this strange and effortless otherness may be, it has seeped into so many byways of my life that even today I'm still discovering its ramifications. It would eventually help me rise like Lazarus out of the tomb of anxiety and fear in which I had been long buried. It would eventually lead me to rethink every choice I had made and every belief I had held. It would call me to recreate every relationship I cared about and to a level I could not have even conceived back then. It would cause me to relinquish nearly everything I had held dear or had known myself to be. And slowly, haltingly, but genuinely, in its shadow I would become freer. And ever since, while the rest of my mind and life percolates along in its active way, this new piece and structure are just there, steady as you go. I am happy and it's there. I am sad and it's there. I am bicycling or anxious for reasons I do not know, and it's

there. It is a strangely steady something in an unsteady life, a candle flame in a blizzard. A steady vastness like this so remarkable, so unlike the rest of what I can know or be that my life would eventually have to re-form itself around it (or be lived forever unresolved, bifurcated). Sweet soft water wears down rock cliffs, given long enough, and this empty quiet carries something of such gentle inevitability.

What surprised me about this deep change in what I am, was that it was so much more modest, so different in kind and quality than anything I could have known to expect. The only thing I could have hoped for was something *in* my world, within my repertoire of experience, I suppose. We just have no way to conceive of anything else. I could only look for what I could imagine, hope for something that answered my longings, cured my wounds or made me happier. But this silence, this shift in who I was, was simply outside my repertoire. It was of a whole different kind and quality from anything I knew. And it came of its own accord. I didn't know what had happened to me. It would take me some 10 years of regular meditation, graduate work in religion and study of the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures before I came to understand that what had shifted in my life that afternoon was at least a good chunk of the very enlightenment that the ancient texts had been describing and that I'd been pursuing.

I struggled to understand what had happened to me for nearly a decade. Why I did, and why I'm telling you this, is that what had happened to me wasn't at all like what it had been cracked up to be. It was confirmed, yes, and matched the traditional accounts I learned. But it didn't make me happy. It didn't end the worries and anxieties that had led me into the spiritual path. An infinite silence at my core, yes, but I wasn't better off in any obvious way than I might have been. Enlightenment just ain't what we expected, and it's not what I was after. I'd dare say it isn't what *any* of us on the spiritual path who live post modern, post-Freudian, post true-believer, sexually active, mortgaged lives actually are after either.

Paul McCartney wrote a little ditty about enlightenment, calling it 'such a joy, joy, joy.' Joy, joy, joy this wasn't!

The vastness that established itself in my life that day was neither sweet nor kindly nor angry. It didn't end my loneliness—that took some 10 years. Ending my anxieties would take 15 years. It was not a good feeling, except in a very narrow sense. Nor was it painful. It simply was. And is. It has remained humble, quiet and unassuming in almost every way. But it is real and permanent and of a nature I could not—and still cannot—possibly understand. Folks like me on the spiritual path begin by looking for spiritual party favors. What you get, if you're lucky, is an existential earthquake.

*Dr Robert Forman*

*founding editor in 1994 of the Journal of Consciousness Studies: controversies in science and the humanities. (See the review of Dr Forman's book, Enlightenment Ain't What it's Cracked Up to be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul, on page 49.)*

## References

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> *Gita* 2.69, trans. Ramanada Prasad

## Channelling

*The following two accounts come to us courtesy of the SE Wales local group. The first is based on the talk Ken Price gave to the group in the Spring; the second is by the Group's convenor, Mary Cook, on the same theme. (Ed.)*

I have been asked about the nature of my channelling, in a way which seemed to imply to me some expectation that I may be a 'medium' of some sort, and inviting me to define it. While I can describe the processes I adopt and my interpretation of the resulting responses, any further attempt at definition could, in my experience, limit what seems to me to be quite a limitless natural phenomenon.

For want of a better description, channelling is my means of connecting with the 'Life Force' or energy which I perceive flowing through me; 'speaking' to me in the strange coincidences, dreams and synchronicities in my life. It's a means of entering into the process of life – the adventure of my life – in a meaningful way. The shaman might call it 'stepping onto the wheel of life' and engaging with it carries a 'Health Warning' in that the practice invites change and openness to spontaneity – when I was first introduced to this I was a Chartered Surveyor with a twenty five year history in business. Since 1999 I have been making a living as, amongst other things, a freelance photographer.

My background is what I would describe as a grounded, scientific and secular education with little interest in 'religion', particularly the organised stuff.

I became 'interested' in my life experience following a diagnosis of anxiety and depression in 1996, prior to which it seems I was something of a bystander in the process of my very active business life. The diagnosis, and the subsequent four months 'sick leave' on anti-depressants, was a turbulent, distressing period but one which stimulated quite profound changes of perception which remain, in my view, a gift from the psyche. During this period, and subsequently, I became an avid student of alternatives to drug based solutions to my condition. I read widely, ranging from *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* to self-help/popular psychology books like *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*

I developed a growing interest in the Taoist concept of *chi*, the life force, following an introduction to Tai Chi as a means of stress management. All this was in the interests of finding out what was going on, why I'd ended up where I was. But also during this period I had a strange feeling that there was 'something going on', bordering on paranoia no doubt but also intriguing and fascinating, like I was being looked after and steered somewhere by a quite benevolent guide.

To illustrate: I found myself on one occasion in an enormous shopping centre on the outskirts of Bristol. I was back at work by this time so considered 'safe to be let out' by the medical profession. As an experiment with myself I decided to 'let go' and invite guidance inwardly. I soon wandered in to the nearest bookshop and found myself in the Mind, Body Spirit section where a book attracted my attention, because it was projecting from the shelf at a precarious angle. It was called 'Channelling for Everyone', and as I read, it 'spoke' to me in a way that no other spiritual or religious book did at that time. The author ran practical weekend workshops, and surprise, surprise, there was one scheduled within the next few weeks. And so my introduction to channelling came at West Malvern in 1997; I was not without some trepidation about what I was letting myself in for, I hasten to add.



The first weekend course opened up a new world for me, one where 'strange' coincidences occurred seemingly routinely, where I was encouraged to explore heightened awareness, to meditate and to take inner journeys and indulge my imagination as a bridge to insight. First and foremost, it was – is – an experiential process; while I can describe it and the experiences I have had through it – there is no certainty that others have the same. The spectrum of human sensory perception varies across individuals, some being more visual, others more auditory for example. It seems the senses become dulled, accepted and almost dismissed through familiarity – but they have the potential to be expanded beyond the usually accepted bounds through practice into something quite extraordinary.

So what is my process of channelling? It is simply stilling myself, through practice and relaxation, to a point where my inner 'monkey mind' is calmed. Then, through a process of visualisation exercises, I connect with my 'source' and invite a dialogue of communication. I am open to receiving answers as well as transmitting questions or invitations for advice or guidance. As a metaphor, I find the transmission of electrical current through a copper wire (conductor) seems to work well for me. In physics, this process induces an electromagnetic field around the conductor, an 'invisible force' that is in daily use in our lives in electronic communication and electrical devices. By extension, I imagine myself as the conductor of this 'life force' or energy, which I allow to flow through me in the channelling process. This stimulates my electromagnetic field, attracting resonant energy which 'informs' and guides me in various ways – inspirational ideas, unexpected phone calls with useful insights into problems, vivid dreams, guidance in everyday matters to help me manage this process we call life. It is the way in which I perceive the responses, through the world around me in all its forms, that tells me of the 'inter-connectedness of all things'. I hasten to add that this is my handle on understanding my sensory experiences in a controlled and manageable manner, and not intended as an absolute interpretation of what is going on. It is a useful, working hypothesis until such time as a better explanation comes along.

On hearing my description of channelling, some have remarked that my source is God and that what I am really doing is praying. How the process is categorised becomes less important than the spirit in which it is undertaken. I see channelling as my means of co-operating with life as it attempts to guide me through my experience of the human condition. Since 1997, but I suspect the 'beginning' pre-dates this, this extraordinary journey has continued with synchronous events, profound/prophetic dreams and unexpected/chance meetings taking me on a meandering adventure through life.

*Ken Price*



### **Spring 2012**

The subject for our group this year is 'Channelling'. Ken Price gave a taste of his personal experience of training in channelling, and how his entire life was turned round; a really fulfilling experience. His description is printed separately. A member of that group whose background included Spiritualism had a different concept of the meaning of the word.

### **Summer 2012**

I realised following that session that what I had experienced through life could also be called 'channelling'. To me though, it came about through prayer and meditation used hand in hand, then opening myself to guidance, in this context while using an artistic medium. This I shared in the summer meeting.

Prior to our meeting, I asked a friend who is a very talented artist if she had ever felt that a power was working through her when she was creating a piece of art-work. She hesitated, then said, 'Yes, but not often. But when it does come it is wonderful.' It was an experience she felt she couldn't share in our session. As with most numinous experiences, they are too precious, and their owner does not want them to be devalued by a second party, who might repeat something of what they were told, devaluing it more.

I took as a focus three pieces of art/craft that I still had, though the oldest dates back to the 1960's, that demonstrated how I made myself open and received guidance. I talked about an experience involving clay during a session at Lampeter in 2002 at a pre-conference workshop. A full account of that was published in *De Numine* in Spring 2006, so I will not repeat it. It was called 'The Empty Bowl'. The spiritual and personal insights I gained from that are still evolving, and further aspects of that 'three in one' creation were pointed out to me yesterday, by our group. The intricacies of the help I received were mind-blowing. That had to be a form of mediumship, though I would not have thought of it in that way. *The clay was the medium in more ways than one.*

In the mid-'60's during a meditation at home, I was wondering about the seraphim described in Isaiah, and thought about how anything angelic could manifest six wings. I took up a brush and ink, and let it flow. *The ink was the medium.* Now I know what a seraph looks like!

My third exhibit was my shopping bag that I have been using at least three times a week since I made it in 1980. It carries all my heaviest groceries, and has not complained once yet! I had a pair of handles from an Italian bag of my mother's, a bag that was long deceased. Following finding a book on macramé from the library I bought some twine and a beautiful bag came into being. I knew that macramé is the earliest form of cloth-making we have knowledge of, stretching back into antiquity. I felt connected with this long tradition while making the bag. Each problem I encountered was instantly resolved. *The twine was the connection.*

In 'The Mabinogion', which the All-Wales group is studying this year, we hear that King Arthur and his knights loved nothing better than hearing stories of 'wonders'. These guided examples to me are wonders great enough in themselves; worthy of a wondrous yarn!

I would like to consider what was happening in the three examples just described, together with what others have to offer. I am aware of receiving three different forms of guidance on the three occasions:

- Just having a feeling of connectedness to my roots in The Potteries through the touch of the clay, and absolutely no ideas of what I was going to do – and not realising exactly what it was I had received till after I was home
- A direct answer to prayer: meditatively submitting to receive what I was asking for
- No idea of connecting with anything while making the bag, just that everything went perfectly, in an art medium I hadn't even heard of until a few months before I began the bag re-creation.

There is a postscript, if I may. It refers back to my clay bowl:

Oliver Knowles was talking to his wife during breakfast about 'the labyrinth'. I was sat at their table. Up till then the labyrinth had existed only in its connection to Greek legend. Now it took on a – to me – new meaning, as a spiritual quest. From the left-over clay after the basket/bowl was complete, I had formed a long thin line which, having found its middle, turned around itself into a labyrinth; I placed my labyrinth in the empty bowl. The still

substantial lump of clay remaining I rolled into a thick sausage, which twisted into a knot – a Staffordshire knot. Then at home a friend pointed out that the knot fitted perfectly into the weave of the basket, sitting on top of the labyrinth. This came to represent the love of my birth family from the Potteries. The labyrinth represented the wisdom I was to discover from my quest. In the process of home-firing the clay, one of the ends of the labyrinth broke. But it did not become detached, because a hair had got mixed in with the clay and was keeping it together.

Ten years had passed, and I had read to the South East Wales group my account of the process that resulted in the bowl being made. After the reading, I revealed the bowl and it was passed round. In the process the knot *had been turned upside down* so that its ‘arms’ were no longer embracing the labyrinth and locked in, but pointing upwards and outwards. In the inverting, had the ‘love’ element been transmogrified? A member of our group then made connections that I hadn’t thought of previously. This made me see the journey inward in an entirely new light. He saw the ‘arms’ as the horns of the Minotaur! He also pointed out that the hair that had kept the labyrinth intact was Ariadne’s thread! The inverted knot had become ‘the beast at the centre’ – the strong forces of nature at my centre that must be faced. Theseus had to kill the Minotaur (masculine solution?), but the nature within us has to be acknowledged, tamed, befriended (the feminine way?). The ‘flip-side’ of protective love had become the destructive forces in nature. Two sides of the same ‘knot’. And from another, related spiritual culture -- Kundalini can do great harm, even kill; but when gently awakened can lead to great things.

Wow! What a connection!

The day before our meeting a poem fell out of a pile of papers. It was one written by my yoga teacher and given to me in the early Seventies. I had not seen it since then. It is titled ‘Meditation’, and punctuates the inner stillness of his meditation with:

‘Restless, ever restless, are the winds of my desires’...

His Minotaur was sometimes having the upper hand – the horns of his meditative dilemma. Having tamed and befriended this great, magnificent beast, we together follow Ariadne’s golden hair out of the maze into sweet pastures.

*Mary Cook*

## Reports

### **Spiritual Crisis, Counselling & Psychosis: A Review of Some Recent Events**

On Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April the Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN) held an awareness and training event at Stillpoint in Sheffield. The SCN was founded in 2004 with the aim of acting ‘as a resource providing help and information: for those going through or recovering from spiritual crisis, and for professionals, carers and supporters of those going through or recovering from spiritual crisis’. One of the Network’s founder members is Catherine Lucas, author of *In Case of Spiritual Emergency* (2011; see book review in this issue of *De Numine*, page 46), and another is Isabel Clarke, author of *Psychosis and Spirituality* (2001; 2010), *Madness, Mystery and the Survival of God* (2008), and formerly a member of the RERC Research Committee.

The first part of the day focussed on the question: what is a spiritual crisis? Spiritual crisis is also known as spiritual emergency, a phrase coined by transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof. Several group members, including Frances Goodall, an integral therapist based in Sheffield, who led the discussion, gave personal accounts of their own experience of spiritual crisis. The characteristics of spiritual crisis are discussed in more detail in Catherine Lucas' book but, in brief, they are often triggered by excessive spiritual practice that results in a loss of contact with everyday life. One of the main ways to alleviate this situation is to reduce the amount of spiritual practice, undergo a grounding process, and find a context within which the experience can be normalised and validated by others. Isabel also emphasised that it is not necessarily helpful to concentrate on distinguishing psychosis from spiritual emergency. Although medication may help some individuals in some circumstances, the experience can still be an opportunity for spiritual growth and transformation. A number of people in this situation have felt that the service they received from their health care provider did not take into account the spiritual aspect of what was happening to them. This may have inadvertently made the situation worse. The SCN does not advocate any particular psychological or spiritual framework and volunteers may, or may not, have experienced spiritual crisis themselves.

The second part of the day was for those who wanted to assist the SCN by joining their rota of e-mail responders. The SCN website provides an e-mail address for anyone who has been affected by spiritual crisis to get in touch. A few of the people who attended the morning talk stayed on to receive some basic training in how to respond to enquiries. The volunteers operate on a monthly rota basis and every reply is checked by another member of the group. Although the SCN do not provide a counselling service they do offer a sympathetic ear and can direct experiencers towards literature and other organisations that may be of help.

At present the SCN is very small and relies on volunteers. There are other groups with similar aims, such as the American Spiritual Emergence Network, and networking was encouraged. The SCN may indeed have an important role to play in changing attitudes towards spiritual crisis and mental health, but this will require much hard work, dedication and future development.

A separate, but related, event was held the following week at The Academy: the Sheffield Psychotherapy and Counselling Education centre. Ali Harrison gave a talk to answer the question: *What can Transpersonal Psychology offer to deepen your own Self-Awareness and Counselling Practice?* Ali summarised some of the elements of Psychosynthesis, a psychospiritual model of self-development developed by Italian psychotherapist Roberto Assagioli. Psychosynthesis counsellors use concepts such as sub-personalities and the Higher Self to work therapeutically with their clients. This includes resolving past and current issues and also realising latent potentials. Of particular interest was an online video of Jill Bolte Taylor's experience. Jill is a neuro-anatomist who suffered from a stroke and was thus able to study her experience from an insider perspective. She describes how the stroke caused her left-brain consciousness to shut down at which point she experienced her right-brain consciousness in a way that is highly reminiscent of accounts of spiritual experiences.

Finally, on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May the West Midlands Institute of Psychotherapy (WMIP) held a lecture by Maggie McAlister on *The Dark Side of the Self: Jungian Perspectives on Dissociation and Psychosis*. The main question for me was: how does a Jungian understanding assist in helping those with severe mental health issues? Maggie's answer was that, whilst it did not help in any *practical* way, it did help her to look for the *meaning* within patients' delusions and psychoses rather than dismiss them as merely symptoms of disease. An admirable approach

and one which is in-line with the view espoused by the SCN and other organisations that view spiritual crises and experiences in a more constructive light.

What is very clear from the discussions at all of these events is that spiritual experience is not always a positive experience. The resulting psychospiritual transformation can cause considerable distress. Even if this is not the case experiencers often lack a supportive framework within which they can integrate their experience. It is this gap in support that the SCN aims to fill.

*Michael J. Rush*

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[www.isabelclarke.org](http://www.isabelclarke.org)

<http://www.aliharrison.com/psychosynthesis/Home.html>

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[www.wmip.org](http://www.wmip.org)

### **Could Tai Chi Lead to a Religious Experience?**

The first workshop organised by the Centre for Daoist Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the new Global Yangsheng Association for Health and Longevity, held in Lampeter, on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2012, was, for me, an educational and interesting experience. At this day of Tai Chi, for the first time in my life, I really felt aware of my body. As I am concerned with healthy diet, fitness and personal hygiene, I imagined I knew my body, so it came as a surprise to me when we were led by Michael Henley to think about every single part of our anatomies, which I had never before done.

As an absolute newcomer to Tai Chi, I had thought I was going for a day of exercise. But this turned out to be a totally new concept for me. It was gentle, thorough movement; slight stretching and a deep relaxing of each area of ourselves – from the top of the head to the tip of the toes – by means of self massage on the outside, through a use of muscles and bones in action; to a consideration of organs and even the spaces between them and our various joints! During the session I had the sense that for my whole life I had neglected a huge part of me; that I had been closed and shrivelled. I had the sensation of filling up and out. I felt taller and fuller. I learnt that Tai Chi is so much more than physical movement – as I am used to it. The importance of being ‘open’ was emphasised so that blood and energy could flow through the body; so too was the importance of being ‘rooted’ on the ground so that we, like trees, could receive energy from it. We were also encouraged to feel the space above, in front, behind and around us and to mentally spread out into it; whilst also recognising that each movement of ours, in fact affects the whole universe.

In hindsight, I had probably heard these ideas, in similar forms, before. That notion of ‘being one with the universe’, that experience of ‘not being a separate individual, but being an absolute part of all around’ – is one of the classic spiritual experiences as related in the personal accounts held in the RERC Archive.

Tai Chi is closely associated with Daoist philosophy. During rests, between the practical parts of the class, we learnt about the origin of Dao, the Chi energy and caring for it. The group consisted of academics and practitioners. I particularly liked the many little moments of enlightenment in those who knew the theory but now, being exposed to the practice and its explanations, suddenly understood, in reality, the abstract words with which they are so familiar.

The description of Dao as the 'eternal', 'infinite', 'source which has no beginning or end', 'ultimate energy giver' and Chi energy that 'causes everything', reminded me of ways of talking about the Abrahamic God. I could not help but muse that if Dao and God have the same characteristics, and if the practice of Tai Chi enables us to feel the energy within us, and particularly if the awareness leads to a unity with nature ... whether the practice of Tai Chi could lead to a religious experience?

Perhaps the answer to my question already lies in the Archive of accounts of experiences where a few people relate stories of being so moved, energised or excited by their spiritual or religious experiences that they later went to no end of effort, trying meditation, Yoga, prayer, or re-creating a scene to try and re-capture or to repeat the experience. The passage usually ends with a regretful recognition that the experiencers are in no way able to control or invoke an experience themselves.

This was the very start of a series in the course on Yangsheng Self-Care and Well-Being. It includes reading of the *Dao De Jing*; public lectures by local experts on Daoist understanding of the body, mind and health, as well as a workshop series on Chinese Medicine; Tai Chi; Qigong and Buddhist Meditation. I was particularly looking forward to the session led by AHSSSE Member, Dolly Yang in May 2012. Dolly, having translated some of the ancient texts about self-healing, is now working with local Qigong Healer, Taiga Przibylla to reconstruct physical positions described in *Zhubing Yuanhou Lun*, (諸病源候論, *Treatise on the Origins and Symptoms of Diseases*) that will allow Chi Energy to heal damaged or sick parts of the body. There is more information about future talks and enticing workshops on the websites of the Centre for Daoist Studies: <http://www.trintitysaintdavid.ac.uk/en/daoiststudies> and of the Global Yangsheng Association for Health Longevity: <http://www.gyahl.org>

Anne Veronica Watkins

## **Do I have a Vocation to Work in the Sun? Religious Commitment and Experience in Jamaica**

Perhaps it was greedy of me to try and get a second, two month stint of voluntary teaching in India during one calendar year. However, I had worked well at three short library contracts at the Jesuit College in Oxford; at the library of a Syrian Orthodox Monastery in the Netherlands; and in Dublin at another Jesuit Library. So, I was confused and disappointed when the provisional arrangements for Tamil Nadu in November and Kerala in December 2011 did not materialise.

I began the disheartening task of completing numerous applications for jobs in our locality and received almost as many rejections – or even worse – no response at all.

One morning as I sat in Church and saw a man, who is there every day, I wondered .... 'Should I do voluntary work in Jamaica – as he does?' Incredibly, after Mass, he approached

me and asked whether I had considered going to Jamaica as a volunteer?! And that is how I came to find myself in Kingston.

There was a wonderful welcome at the airport: lines of soldiers in red jackets and lorry-loads of men in army combats. Needless to say the display was not for me, but for Prince Harry just beginning his visit to the island.

I was based in Down Town with a Community of Brothers, 'The Missionaries of the Poor', who supplemented their own effort with a steady flow of volunteer helpers, who mainly come from the United States. The dormitory was full of ♪Young Americans♪ (I couldn't help thinking of David Bowie). One kind student immediately vacated her bottom bunk to save me from struggling to an upper one. That was typical of their little acts of 'giving-up' (a feature of Catholic Lenten practice). We may have joked with the term but the group really was missing and craving for meat, coffee and ice-cream, from which the Brothers were abstaining for Lent. I soon became familiar with their humorous response to every difficult situation .... 'Offer it up'.

The Brothers' ethos is to see and serve Jesus in the suffering. In Down Town Kingston where there is extreme poverty and people live in corrugated iron 'yards', derelict buildings, or unused factories, it is common for those who are old, sick, suffering from a physical or mental disability, have AIDS or mental illness, to be abandoned. The Brothers have set up a number of residential centres to cater for these homeless victims.

Volunteers are introduced to the work gently, by caring for disabled children. It was like stepping back 35 years to my days as a nursing assistant at a 'mental hospital' in Cardiff. There young patients were clean and fed but left in their cots all day with little treatment or stimulation for their twisted limbs and damaged brains. It may seem primitive to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but is a definite improvement on being left in the street to starve or die.

I had considered, whilst planning my trip, that I would not like to work with the AIDS patients. However, when it was explained to us that fear of catching the disease meant that local people refused to work with these residents (so their only contact was with the Brothers), I instinctively felt I must at least pop in and greet everyone. The striking thing was that every morning those who were HIV Positive had something for which to praise or thank God, and as I became a regular visitor I found myself as happy trimming nails there as in other areas.

I soon discovered my 'favourite Centre': 'Lord's Place' for women. I'd like to say I was fond of it because so many of these residents were able to 'respond' in some way. However, I must confess that a large part of it was because, after morning 'duties' and post-lunch, everyone who was mobile in any way at all got up and started dancing. The CDs were all of religious songs. As Jamaica is still a very Christian country this posed no problem; besides, who could object to praise when its musical mediums were reggae, ska, calypso and samba? I was in my element! As we all encouraged each other, smiling, talking, touching, moving, laughing, singing and wheel-chairs spinning in the warm air, I could not help but think how naturally therapeutic this was. I thought of 'our' poor elderly and ill in their safe and clean residential homes, sometimes sitting in stuffy lounges, silent, and staring blankly at television screens.

My responsibilities were mainly face washing, teeth brushing, hair plaiting, feeding, nail cutting and the applying of skin lotion. Because of the unpredictable character of certain residents, volunteers were advised not to insist when someone was reluctant to be cared for. So I had great pleasure when those who had obviously enjoyed their 'treatment' brought a

friend to me, or when a woman who had refused or avoided me on previous occasions asked for something to be done. Funniest of all was when the ladies sat in a row, on a bench, awaiting my attention. Even those who could not talk knew what they wanted, enthusiastically pointing to their feet, head or hands.

The commitment of the Brothers was impressive. Their gruelling routine was sustained by four daily periods of prayer at morning, lunch time, evening and night. I had a favourite venue for prayer too: The Noviciate. There, about 60 young men from Africa, India, Jamaica and the Philippines included as much music as possible in their worship. The hymns were mainly composed by themselves so the lyrics were particularly relevant to the charism of serving Christ crucified, by joyfully caring for the needy. The rhythms reflected their various cultural backgrounds. The 'young Americans' joked that '... a sure sign that the novices were ready to take their Vows was when they knew all the harmonies, the various clapping patterns and actions to all the songs and all the psalms'.

It would be easy for one to imagine that, with the paradoxically exhausting and energising work combined with the inspiring prayer life, this had been an idyllic Caribbean sojourn. It was, but for one massive disadvantage: the caring but over-protective Brothers would not let volunteers out of the compounds or centres. So I was not able to attend Mass at the Cathedral, visit the museums, follow the Bob Marley Trail, bask in the sun, experience a beach sunset, or spend time at my friend's grave in Montego Bay. That loss was near impossible to 'offer up' even though we were rapidly approaching Holy Week.

Have I learnt anything from this trip? Yes. Perhaps I have a vocation to work with the needy but that a religious vocation is out of the question – 'obedience' is just far too restricting! ☺

Anne Veronica Watkins

## **Report on the Alister Hardy Society/Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies One-day Conference**

This year our June one-day conference, again organised by the Oxford/Cotswold and London Groups, was held on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2011 at the Newman Room, Catholic Chaplaincy in Rose Place, St Aldates, Oxford. The theme of the conference was *Assisted Dying and the Afterlife*, and the speakers included Professor Paul Badham, former Director of the AHRERC; the Very Revd. Alex Wedderspoon, President of the CFPSS; and Dr Peter Fenwick, Consultant Neuropsychiatrist and Consultant Clinical Neurophysiologist.

Professor Paul Badham spoke first on *Assisted Dying from a Christian Perspective*, stressing that this term applied only to the terminally ill – not assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia – and he in no way minimised the importance of palliative care. Though Church of England Bishops opposed the concept in a recent House of Lords debate, opinion polls showed a majority of those questioned (80%), including Christians, in favour of Assisted Dying. He argued that: though palliative care is effective in pain relief in 95% of cases, it is not always available and 5% suffer uncontrollable pain; 66% of doctors would welcome Assisted Dying for themselves; Jesus taught we should treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves; compassionate love and welfare of individuals should be above religious laws; the Director of Public Prosecutions recommends non-prosecution of Assisted Dying through the agency of relatives; the OT Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' has never been applied in an absolute sense; and, whilst vulnerable and dependent people must be protected, some are pressured



by family to stay alive when they wish to die, and some are scared that they will be kept alive against their wishes. He argued that Assisted Dying would not usurp Divine prerogative; would not weaken commitment to health care; would not undermine trust in doctors, or weaken hospice care; and would not lead to 'involuntary euthanasia'. He did not consider that Assisted Dying would lead to a 'slippery slope', stating evidence to the contrary. In the question time, there were more examples shared of personal experience than questions raised: the majority of those who spoke were supportive of Professor Badham's thesis, just one person expressing a cautionary note.

The Very Revd. Alex Wedderspoon spoke on *Aspects of Belief in the Life after Death*, approaching this from consideration of the individual in the final stages of terminal illness, who wants help to die. This, he said, is mainly a problem in Western society, brought about by advances in medicine. Earlier, culture deferred to doctors, who 'knew what to do' and simply provided discreet assistance in dying at their discretion in appropriate cases, a practice known and accepted. This attitude has been replaced by a litigation culture – a major reason why legal and moral clarification is now needed. Central is 'the wish of the patient', a wish, however, influenced by the patient's beliefs about death – secular materialists believe that death is simply the end, Christians, generally, do not. The question, he considered, is, 'What support is there for Christian belief in an afterlife?' Christian views on this are very diverse. Belief in life after death is central to Christianity, but now 'resurrection of the body' is thought of as reference to a 'spiritual' rather than a physical body. He referred to paranormal phenomena now being taken more seriously, mentioning David Fontana's and Pim van Lommel's work, and trustworthy cases of 'religious experience' reported to him. He concluded that Christian belief supported the idea of life after death, with rational support for this provided by these experiences, together with scientific arguments arising from quantum physics. The underlying view seemed to be that each individual is in some sense a work in progress; that we continue beyond the transitional stage of death as recognisable individuals; and experience a life review with a self-judgment, as a consequence of which we move to the place we feel to be appropriate – or, are offered an opportunity to reincarnate or proceed onwards. He agreed with Fontana's conclusion, that death is a matter of change, and not a simple end with nothing beyond.

Dr Peter Fenwick, in his talk, *Is there a Natural Metric to Dying?*, reported on research into End of Life Experiences (ELEs). He asked the questions: What do we know and understand about the experience of dying? Is there some sort of metric we can follow? Does sudden death, or suicide, make a difference to the process? What do carers and relatives tell us when we die? His research was based on information obtained from carers and relatives who had reported on pre-death experiences reported to them or had been observed by them; eg. visions of deceased friends and relatives, of distant friends and relatives, good feelings (warmth, light, etc.), moving to a new reality, terminal lucidity, deathbed premonitions and coincidences. The experiences of the dying person and those of the carers could be interpreted as aspects of a spiritual process. He presented comparative data in chart form showing incidence of these experiences in England, Ireland and the Netherlands gathered after radio broadcasts here and in the USA: analysis showing that 10% of people are conscious at death; 50-60% having ELEs. ELEs reported include shapes leaving the body, haze above the body, light at death, radiant death, clocks stopping, alarms sounding, animal response, machines malfunctioning. With reference to Assisted Dying, Fenwick wanted to ask: Will self-induced sudden death alter the process? Will it stop the phenomena that have been observed? Will non-induced sudden death be the same? Sudden deaths occur naturally: 'What we die of' data indicates death by Heart attack 5.3%; Accident 1.5%; Self-harm 0.6% – i.e. 6.8% of deaths are sudden. He went on to ask, Do heart attacks induce a different experience? Probably not. Do suicides induce a

different experience? Apparently not. Do accidents induce a different experience? People who have 'died' in an accident (and resuscitated) seem most disorientated and cling to anyone, not necessarily a relative or friend. He concluded that assisted suicides do not seem to be different, but felt that more research is needed.

*John Franklin*

CDs of the three talks (£6.50 each, incl. p&p (£7.50 for two; £8.50 for all three), or audio DVD containing all talks (£8.50, incl. p&p), are available from, Jean Matthews, Archive Supervisor, Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, The Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Cheques payable to 'The Alister Hardy Trust'. Overseas members may pay by credit card.

## Reports from the Local Groups

### Chesterfield Group

We have heard from two speakers so far in 2012. The first was Joe Revill and his fascinating account of *'Christianity's Illegitimate Child': A Witch Looks at Marxism*. The second was *An Exploration of Psychic Awareness* by David Croft. David led us through a series of simple and entertaining tests for precognition. Afterwards we were able to work out if we had scored better than chance or not (we hadn't!)

There have also been some interesting discussions based on DVDs including: Richard Dawkins investigating complementary medicine in *The Irrational Health Service*, an interview with Carl Jung in *Matter of the Heart*, Charles Tart on transpersonal psychology, and the story of Rosslyn Chapel.

Still to come this year is the first part of the documentary *The Challenge of Rudolf Steiner*, a talk by Rodney Ward on *Wittgenstein on Religion*, and a showing of the film *The Celestine Prophecy*.

The SSSE Chesterfield Group has now been meeting every month for about ten years. Unfortunately, as a result it is becoming more difficult to find new speakers and topics, so from next year the group will be meeting on a bi-monthly basis. This will also free up some of my time to pursue other, related interests.

The Chesterfield Group programme is available online at: [www.esoteric-experience.org.uk](http://www.esoteric-experience.org.uk)  
For any further info please contact me at [mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk](mailto:mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk) or on 07790 757955.

*Mike Rush*

### Midlands group

Feb.17<sup>th</sup>. Revd. Jonathan Robinson, our guest speaker, made a difficult journey to enchant us with his audio-visual presentation *From Darkness to Light*. We had previously enjoyed his *A Glimpse of Glory*, and although both works were created some years ago, and from an Anglican perspective, they have elements that are timeless and with universal appeal.

March 16<sup>th</sup>. Rodney Reeve, assisted by Harry Houghton, had produced a 27-page booklet entitled *Among the Ranks of the Angels?*, a collection of poems by Rilke, and many others on angels. Clement Jewitt displayed a poster illustrating 'The Golden Rule', with key texts from the World Faiths (see the World Congress of Faiths website for a copy). Vandana presented a brief audio-visual item about her Guru. There followed violin music by Rodney for meditation, readings from the automatic writings of *Devi Maa*, a poem on the Archangels and a recording of a radio discussion on Rilke with contributions by Archbishop Rowan Williams and author Philip Pulman. Discussion took an interesting turn, completely de-railing from the subject, and maybe at some point we shall return to Rilke, or to poems on Angels!

April 20<sup>th</sup>. Our guest speaker was group member and professional astrologer Margaret Koolman on *Soul Astrology*. Margaret opened with an invitation to us to meditate on the infinite wonder of the night sky; at this time of the year, as Mercury passed over Uranus, there was the promise of new horizons in receptive hearts. Margaret regards astrology as a tool, one among many, indicating potential in humans whom she likened to shards of a holographic plate, wherein everything reflected everything else. At birth a 'separate' entity comes into being. Margaret believes spirit manifests in the body, but usually has forgotten its spiritual source: 'I think of the soul as that part of us which can never be happy without the touch of spirit' and 'each person is like a star' were memorable descriptions she used.

May 18<sup>th</sup>. *Dance and spirituality*, introduced by Mandy Childs and Sheelah. Mandy stated that 'dance is a vehicle for the spirit' and gave an entertaining account of a dance show she attended in Ireland, 'Womanhood Makes an Appearance', in which women of all ages participated, with many different styles of dancing including fertility dances, belly dancing, and many other dances in traditional costumes. We felt Mandy should have published this account! Sheelah gave some background about the early origins of dance and its relationship with the sacred, the later conflicts between dance – especially women's dance – and religion, and the move in recent times to 'rehabilitate and rediscover' sacred dance, particularly in India and the Middle East. Excerpts from a video of whirling shamanic dance in Brazil and in Korea were shown. Discussion ranged over the effect of certain movements such as whirling on the mind, and whether other species such as birds and insects truly 'danced'.

May 19<sup>th</sup>. Lecture by Dr Bageeshwari Devi at the Balaji Temple, Tividale, West Midlands. This was an interesting talk, mostly in English, on Lord Krishna and *bhakti*.

June 15<sup>th</sup>. *A Typology of Spirituality*, presented by Dr Clement Jewitt. Clement began with a brief sound meditation using a Tibetan singing bowl. He distributed a useful booklet entitled 'The Phenomenon of Western Teachers of Eastern Traditions; A Model of Experiential Comparative Religion'. This is his précis and adaptation from Andrew Rawlinson's *The Book of Enlightened Masters*. Clement explained that Rawlinson had noted that, since the work of Blavatsky and others, Western interest in Eastern spiritual traditions had developed to the point where some Westerners were becoming recognized teachers in the East and in the West. Clement's masterful presentations, and his booklet, were highly commended.

14<sup>th</sup>. July. Outing to the Rollright Stones. Clement co-ordinated this event, selecting an excellent pub in Little Compton as our rendezvous. Highlights included Rodney playing conch and a vuvuzela, and Clement a tenor recorder, in the stone circle.

20<sup>th</sup> July. *Consciousness and Spiritual Growth*, presented by Harry Houghton and Rodney Reeves. Clement performed our sound meditation on a set of Tibetan bowls. Rodney, who has written papers on Jain and Yoga teachings on consciousness, suggested that consciousness was not merely a human faculty. We listened to a recording of a radio programme in the 'Beyond Belief' series exploring mystical states, both spontaneous and drug-induced, then read and

discussed some selected aphorisms from Harry's 'The Golden Sutra', a compilation of 108 'statements of feeling' written over several years following profound spiritual experiences. Rodney closed with aphorism 64, 'My Father's Kingdom, containing the one spiritual way, cannot be perceived by application of intellect, thought, imagination, reasoning, discussion, the reading and study of writings or listening to them, and so on, but simply by personally feeling the instincts for survival given out by my body structure'.

*I am grateful to our scribe, Rodney, for his detailed reports on all our meetings, written in his beautiful copperplate and complete with references. If anyone would like a copy of any of these, please contact me: sheelahjames@aol.com*

*Sheelah James*

## **London Group**

This year's programme commenced with a talk, on 14<sup>th</sup> February, by Marianne Rankin on *Promulgating the work and activities of the Alister Hardy Society and AHRERC*. Marianne kindly stepped in at very short notice due to the sudden illness of the appointed speaker, John Gaynor, who was to have spoken to us on *Experiences and Implications of Oneness and Goneness* (this talk is now to be given on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> February next year). Marianne spoke about the founding of the AHRERC, Sir Alister's thoughts regarding spiritual experience, and the AHRERC archive of more than 6,000 accounts of spiritual experiences over the past 40 years, and still growing. She described how these sudden glimpses of light and super reality occurring to people in their ordinary lives were experienced across many different cultures, mentioning the surveys carried out in China, Turkey and India; recounted a fascinating story relating to Ken Evans, a London cartoonist and self-taught painter; and quoted other experiences, saying the AHRERC archive shows that, whilst each experience is highly personal, a thread of similarity runs through them. She discussed the experiences of the founders of the world's great religions, and said how throughout the centuries saints and mystics had had profound spiritual experiences which changed their lives as well as those of others. She discussed the terms religious and spiritual experience and how spiritual is now taken to mean an experience triggered without any religious influence or element, and concluded by observing that it does sometimes seem that there is a glimpse of something beyond that touches our lives and points the way to a greater understanding.

On 26<sup>th</sup> April we held a 'dialogue', *Personal Experience and Interpretation: working together for better understanding*, with speakers Diarmuid O'Murchu and David Boulton.

Diarmuid O'Murchu spoke on *Evolving Spirituality Taking Shape in our Time*. He said that, in his work, he found a valuable insight of 'spirituality' as a form of energy beyond formal religion, extending not only to human beings but to other life forms and the planet. It linked to 'process' theology, in which there is no individualistic 'I am': rather, the 'I' exists as the sum of my relationships, such that 'I' forms part of 'we'; and there is an awareness that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, an approach different from the older Judaic approach stressing separateness and individuality. His view of spirituality therefore continues to evolve, and the question is how to use this for interpretation of experience today. Spiritual evolution is about growth, change and development and one aspect of this, he saw, was to remove the focus from constant emphasis on difference to a search for commonalities. David Boulton, a member of both the British Humanist Society and the Society of Friends, took a different tack in his talk, *Personal Experience and Interpretation: a Quaker Humanist*

*Approach.* A non-theist, he regarded 'god' not as an existing being or entity, but as imaginary – and from this viewpoint, saw experience itself as more a means of accessing the truth than a method of interpreting written words or ideas. The word 'experience' had altered in meaning over time, from use as a synonym for 'experiment' to signifying 'something which happened to a person', rather than 'something to be tested, tried out, and considered'. From this, he inferred that 'spiritual experience' is not something one can simply cite as authority in itself: it has an active aspect and is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. If so, the process of interpretation involves seeking for meaning. With descriptions of religious experience couched in localised vocabulary and mediated differently in different cultures and different belief systems, it is 'meaning' that is important.

In a fascinating dialogue between the speakers the following points emerged: difficulty distinguishing 'objective' from 'subjective'; dualistic differentiation ('either/or', seem often irrelevant and divisive, 'both/and', could be more helpful); crudity of talking merely in black-and-white terms (thoughts like, 'what do I believe?' considered dead questions today, it being rather a question of 'what do we mean by such language?'); defining religious experience and spiritual experience, and the vagueness of 'spiritual' as a description of experience; and the evolutionary process in spirituality. A general discussion included the following: some have a 'religious' vocabulary, but seem to find little religious experience; tension between actual experience and the mode of describing or narrating it; importance of regarding raw experience as a starting-point; need to see a change to the education system to include an interdisciplinary approach to religious or spiritual experience; and (OK I think) tension between liberal and fundamentalist approaches.

On 16<sup>th</sup> May we had again arranged a double bill, under the topic *Spirituality and Faith*, with Rabbi David Hulbert MS BSC representing the Jewish faith and Fiyaz Mughal OBE Islam. Unfortunately Fiyaz Mughal was unable to come due to ill health -- but we very much enjoyed the talk by David Hulbert, who spoke to us on *The Mystical Tradition in Judaism*. The meeting was held at the Westminster Synagogue in Rutland Gardens SW7, and the event included a buffet supper and a visit to the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum housed within the Synagogue. In his talk, David Hulbert said that at the heart of Judaism lies the encounter with the ineffable Divine, and he spoke of the familiar mystical encounters of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and the Prophets; and took us from the Old testament, through Jewish mysticism tradition up to modern times. The mystical tradition in Judaism is known mainly through the *Kabbalah* – a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between what is unchanging, eternal and mysterious, and the mortal and finite universe, and a treatise on this, the *Zohar*, describing the kabbalistic 'Tree of Life, on which are the '10 Sefirot', spheres of divine manifestation in which God emerges from His hidden abode. A question often asked today is, 'how do we approach God?', and Rabbi Hulbert's answer was that one has to be part of a worshipping – in his case, Jewish – community. There were a number of questions and there an interesting discussion before the afternoon session ended and we moved on to see the Czech Memorial Scrolls. Our thanks to Rabbi Thomas Salamon and his wife, Renée, for facilitating this meeting.

*John Franklin*

*Full Notes and CDs of these talks are available, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, Notes price £1.50; CDs price £6.50 incl. p&p for talk only – £8.00 for 2 CDs with talk and following discussion or for an audio DVD of both talks and discussions – cheques payable to 'AHS London Group'*

## Oxford and Cotswold Group

On 17<sup>th</sup> March Jonathan Stedall, documentary film-maker, spoke about and presented Part One of his two-part film *The Challenge of Rudolf Steiner* at Oxford Friends Meeting House. Part One describes Steiner's childhood as the son of a railway official, growing up in the Austrian countryside, and his student years in Vienna towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The film shows examples of his legacy in the UK, India and the USA. Steiner's particular challenge to modern society concerns the need for people to live in harmony with each other and with nature; he could be described as a prototypical environmentalist who integrated radical educational and spiritual ideas into his teachings. This was a well attended meeting, but unfortunately we were in the smaller Garden Room, which quickly filled to an intimate level!

Jonathan returned to Oxford on 28 July to show Part Two of the Steiner documentary, which deals with the subject of reincarnation and karma, and shows educational, agricultural and therapeutic applications of Steiner's thinking. The film includes a visit to a prison in South Wales, to Ruskin Mill in Gloucestershire (a college for disadvantaged young people) and to other schools and colleges in the USA and England. More about the film can be found on <http://www.rudolfsteinerfilm.co.uk>.

We are looking forward to our Divination Day on 17 November (see the events listing for details) at which we hope to conduct a small divinatory experiment. A Healing Day is planned for Saturday 30 March 2013, and we hope to host this at a lovely venue in Old Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire. More information will follow by e-mail. For information on our events, please send me a message so I can include you on the e-mail list (and you need not live in the Oxford & Cotswold Area to join us). I also include news of events organised by cognate associations, such as the Wrekin Trust.

Rhonda Riachi [ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk](mailto:ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk)

## Wales Group

We are very pleased that Eric Franklin has become the new Convenor of the West Wales Group replacing Marian MacPolin who has moved back to Northern Ireland. This photo was taken at the last meeting with Marian in Lampeter; when Roger Coward thanked her for her work as secretary to the All Wales Group and Convenor in West Wales.



### Spring Lecture:

*The Difference between Psychic and Spiritual Experience* was the subject of our May 1<sup>st</sup> Spring Lecture given by Davina Thomas, a Trustee of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies. The event was hosted by the West Wales group at Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, and marked Eric Franklin's debut as group convenor.

Much of the lecture was based on Davina's own experiences; she first became aware of the reality of psychic communication, and that she was sensitive to it, when she found she had been able to communicate to a patient in a coma. She clarified that the psychic is not spiritual in itself, even though clairvoyance is often spoken of as such; this is a dangerous assumption because the psychic field is subject to good and bad influences. Mediums can pick up malign

influences without realizing it, and the evil and malign can charm us easily and lead to deception and even addiction. She counselled caution, saying the best way to protect oneself is to not do too much psychic work; the psychic is not 'heaven' because it has the other side as well. However, if our motives are pure we will be guided towards the light. Davina has a strong, active Christian faith and is an oblate (lay member) of a religious order. This she said has kept her 'grounded' and aided her in discerning between the psychic and the spiritual.

When approaching disincarnate beings one has to find out why they are still about -- earth bound spirits can hold people back – finer beings tend not to stay close to earth. Sometimes the core of another person is the desire to hurt. That disincarnate lives are much the same after death as in life was fascinating, as was the fact that lives of similar hue and light cluster together -- dark after dark – light after light – making for a kind of heaven and hell. Interesting too that our human names in life last over into the after-life.

Davina evoked the indistinct world of psychic perception and advised sensitive people to ignore psychic phenomena, and stressed the need to attend to our own emotional development and to remain humble -- the psychic sphere can really drain one. In psychic healing you can ask that auras be revealed for healing purposes. She recommended the work of Martin Israel in this connection.

She suggested that the 'spiritual' was the core of us and a psychic experience was a spiritual experience only if the timing was significant in our lives.

*The lecture is available on CD from Jean Matthews: 01570 484821; [j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk](mailto:j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk)  
(Please quote AHCD254)*

### **Annual Gathering, July 6 - 8<sup>th</sup> 2012**

We continued with our pursuit of a local Welsh experience of spirituality with our theme *Sacred Place in Wales – Spiritual & Psychic Wonders – Arthurian Legend* at Llantarnam Abbey, near Cwmbran, where it is possible that our main source for this, the *Mabinogion*, was written down – we learned. It is also only two miles away (by the Bran = Crow [Cwmbran]) from King Arthur's Court, or one of them, Caerleon, mentioned at least nine times therein.

We began with English attitudes to the Welsh on Friday evening, with Roger Coward presenting us with his village

inn sign illustrating a man riding on a goat with a leek in his top hat. This was probably based on 19<sup>th</sup> century lampoons of the Welsh riding to London on a goat and known as 'Poor Taffy.' (The Prince of Wales of the time and St David were also thus depicted). And, more relevant to our theme, so was King Arthur! In a mosaic in Otranto Cathedral dating from 1165, about the time the Cistercians were spreading through Wales, and two centuries before the *Mabinogion* was written down! King Arthur was reputed to be a secular king who could also enter the spiritual world or Annwn. One interpretation is that he rode in diminutive form on a goat to do so.



Rev Jonathan Robinson, Chair AHS; Louis Friedman; Roger Coward, Chair Wales Group; Patricia Murphy, Editor *De Numine*; Mary Cook, Convenor South East Wales Group; Avril Ceridwen Jacques; Valerie Knew; Alan Underwood; Helene McMurtrie.

Roger went on to show how an in-depth appreciation of myth can bring understanding and even be a route to spiritual experience, since images and stories are expressions of the Collective Unconscious (CG Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 1959). This needs to be distinguished from the Personal Unconscious with its centre in the Ego (S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 1899, 1913; *The Joke and Its Relation to The Unconscious*, 1905; *The Ego & the Id*, 1923). 'The Egg Diagram' devised by Dr Roberto Assagioli, (Psychosynthesis, 1965) was used to illustrate a possible synthesis of the relationship between the personal and the collective unconscious with a Higher Self as mediator between the two. Perhaps the centuries-long interest in King Arthur represents a search for the King Archetype or an Ego in appropriate and powerful touch with the Higher Self.

Saturday was devoted to illustrated presentations by Helene Watson McMurtrie and Patricia Murphy based around the Mabinogion story; we have been looking at *How Culhwch won Olwen*. The first session showed how the themes of our story could be found in other Mabinogion stories. Many important themes were touched on during the day: Sovereignty and Renewal; The Quest, Rites of Passage, Other-Worlds, and Meeting with the Guardians of the Gates. Noon brought a guided visualisation seeking a personal quest in the landscape of the Mabinogion. After lunch Helene described the role of King Arthur, cousin of Culhwch, as a kind of saviour king helping his knights (giants and dwarfs in Wales!) to find Olwen and then fulfil the Requirements, like the Twelve Tasks of Hercules, to attain Olwen's daughter Ysbaddaden for Culhwch. After this the day changed and most of us went to the art room to prepare props and banners for the evening enactment for which we had a dress rehearsal after tea. Entitled *The Unification of the Worlds* and written and directed by Helene, it brought together the four directions and the levels of consciousness of each world. Alan Underwood as King Arthur oversaw the proceedings together with Merlin, Roger Coward, and both expressed deep concerns for the world in 2012.



The All Wales Round Table transformed by personal offerings and Mabinogion Hallows in *The Unification of the Worlds* enactment.

The performance after dinner was accompanied by music and incense and a very profound atmosphere as we all played the parts written for us. The enactment was very memorable, taking place around the All Wales Round Table now covered in wonderful coloured cloths, one for each 'world' and with the various Hallows (treasures) laid upon it. It was just perfect. The finale was the Grail Procession, a ceremony that stays in the mind – Helene leading the way with the Holy Grail (a veiled light), Patricia Murphy bearing three

candles bringing up the rear, with the Revd. Jonathan Robinson (Chair of AHSSSE) in the centre position holding high the spear which pierced the side of Christ.

On Sunday morning, Mary Cook surprised us with her *Considering the Supernatural within and beyond the Mabinogion* as she had not only read the whole tome but had summarised the sections of every story which involved the spiritual, supernatural or magical – and typed them up and provided copies – one for each of us! After an introduction we were then asked to read our summary. Alas, this took more time than expected, and so the discussion asking us to look at the occurrence of the supernatural from the framework of our position as part of



the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience was curtailed, despite an extra 40 minutes being allowed. We hope to continue with this next year. The morning ended with our usual walking meditation in the Labyrinth, this time starting at the centre, symbolising all we had gathered in over the weekend, and circling towards the outside, contemplating what we would take away with us.

Our final ceremony took place at The Round Table, now bedecked with all the archetypal Hallows from the enactment as well as the personal objects we had brought to represent our own Inner Guide or Sovereignty; each person said what they had most valued about the weekend. Thanks were also expressed by Jonathan to Roger Coward for organising the Gathering, Helene & Patricia for taking us on such a journey on Saturday, and Mary Cook for her very important contribution as well as helping to prepare the Round Table.

Other main events were a smart wedding in the chapel of the Abbey (we were able to view the bridal party during lunch; they obligingly assembled on the lawn outside the dining room window for the wedding photos) and the Men's' Singles final at Wimbledon, to which certain people paid much attention on the nuns' TV.



We are going to have to become more committed and organised about our Annual Gathering due to improvements at Llantarnam Abbey. The installing of new en-suite bedrooms means they will require us to have a minimum of ten people and pay a larger deposit at an earlier stage. Llantarnam, we should remember, gives us a uniquely low price and high value weekend in a convenient and exquisite location.

### **Mini Group Reports:**

**Swansea:** Patrick Walters & Penny Sartori write:

The Swansea Group meets every month at Swansea University except in the Summer Vacation. The April meeting was a presentation by AHSSSE Member Dr Howard Jones on the theme of his recent book *The World as Spirit* which was reviewed by Marianne Rankin in *De Numine* (Autumn 2011) and which stimulated an interesting discussion.

Other meetings in the last six months were discussion meetings at which each person was asked to bring something of interest to share with the group. A large number of subjects were touched on, including the following: the transcendental quality in the work of the American artist, John Stevens; an article in the *New Scientist* (21st January 2012) entitled 'The Ascent of Life' by Michael Chorost about the astrophysicist Eric Chaisson's theory of energy rate density and cosmic evolution; another article in the *New Scientist* about Neanderthal man and cave art – a cave in Spain has a red spot dated as more than 40,800 years old, thought to be the date of the arrival of modern man; what is it like to be a tree or a fly or a bat? What is involved in a spiritual experience at a sacred site?

Penny Sartori spoke at a Bioethics Forum in America and reported that Dr Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon, who had a dramatic NDE during a coma due to meningitis, suggested that consciousness is the primary reality and this super-real realm can be accessed by spiritual exercises and techniques. He suggested that reality is an extended consciousness. A video

of a conversation from the conference of Steve Paulson can be accessed at: <http://www.btcior.org/bioethics/2012/videos2012/vid3html> Marie Walters showed a method of filming interesting articles and suggested that others might like to make similar collections of interesting articles, pictures, photographs etc to share with members.

**West Wales Group:** Eric Franklin writes:

Having spent long periods away from her homeland, Marian MacPolin, who has been convenor here in West Wales until recently, has now returned to Ireland. We are sorry she has left us, but happy for her, and wish her well.

All the meetings held recently were arranged with the help of the All Wales Group Speakers List before I became Marian's successor, but I have overseen the prior publicity and the events on the day for most of them.

On 24 March Penny Sartori gave us a survey of research and its findings concerning out-of-body and near-death experiences in the hospital situation, in which, of course, she is a researcher of high standing. She ended the very well attended, and very well presented, resumé of her research by quoting one of her respondents who said 'My belief is that if everyone had a NDE there would never be another war, no-one would starve or be the victim of violence and greed would become a thing of the past'. Dr Sartori is about to publish a book on her work.

On 26 May Helene McMurtrie gave an audience of around twenty people the final lecture in a series concerning the Mabinogion which has occupied a great deal of the past year. Her topic was the spirit of Arthur in the early texts of the Mabinogion. Many in the audience were unfamiliar with these texts, so a useful printed handout listing the characters in the Mabinogion stories was provided, and much of the ensuing lecture gave a resumé of the various narratives, with projected illustrations, and readings by Patricia Murphy from a translation of the original texts. There was little time to discover how the Mabinogion might relate to Alister Hardy's search for personal experiences, but the question was raised of whether such a link to the spiritual might be in a more-or-less Freudian interpretation of the events in the stories. Helene agreed that not only Arthur but also modern psychoanalysis is in fact foreshadowed. Perhaps, by such use of psychology, our hindsight sees the content of the Mabinogion more clearly than did its originators.

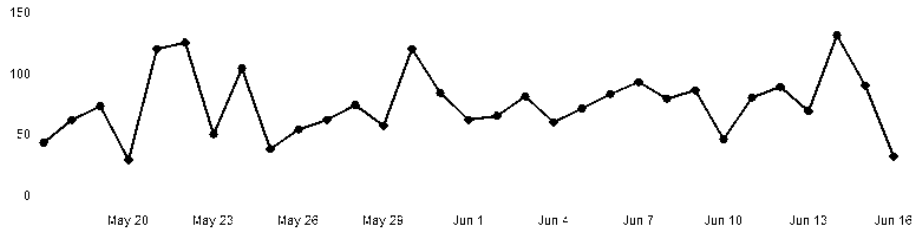
**South East Wales:** Mary Cook writes: The subject for our group this year is *Channelling*. Ken Price gave a taste of his personal experience of training in channelling, and how his entire life was turned round; a really fulfilling experience. His description is printed separately. A member of that group whose background included Spiritualism had a different concept of the meaning of the word.

I realised following that session that what I had experienced through life could also be called 'channelling'. To me though, it came about through prayer and meditation used hand-in-hand, then opening myself to guidance, in this context while taking to hand an artistic medium. This I shared in our Summer meeting. For Autumn Nigel thought that it would be good to possibly experience 'channelling' through *Qi Gong*, and offered to take the session.

*Both Ken and Mary's experiential accounts of channelling can be found in the 'Experiences' section pages 16–19. Please also see Mary's letter on page 35, written as a mission statement for her group, which I asked her to share with us all, as in my view it resonates so well with the aims of the Society; a re-statement for a new era marked by the Society's new name. (Ed.)*

*All Wales report compiled by Roger Coward*

## WebNews: Web Stats



### Top Pages (this month)

Views	Page
370	/
117	/publications.html
76	/contacts.html
59	/401/login.php
58	/personal-stories.html
54	/events.html
44	/whats-it-about.html
40	/lectures1.html
39	/sir-alister-hardy.html
36	/guestbook.html
32	/past-events.html
31	/hardys-art.html
29	/de-numine-50.html
27	/robert-forman.html
26	/membership.html
26	/members.html
22	/links.html
21	/the-society.html
18	/the-trust.html
14	/ahs-london-group.html
14	/ahs-chesterfield-group.html
13	/ahs-wales-group.html
11	/de-numine-48.html
11	/ahs-oxford--cotsword-group.html

### Search Terms (this month)

Views	Keyword
2	Whittington@yahoo.com@hotmail.
2	ahs/cfpss conference in oxford on t
1	email contact of Whittington @hotr
1	deja vu clairvision

### Referring Sites (this month)

Views	Referrer
203	www.alisterhardysociety.org
35	alisterhardysociety.org
19	www.google.co.uk
16	www.facebook.com
14	www.google.com
4	www.google.ch
3	www.scimednet.org
3	www.google.ca
2	uk.search.yahoo.com
2	aol:roadband.search.aol.co.uk
1	zuula.com
1	www.youtube.com
1	www.google.de
1	www.google.com.ng
1	www.123people.co.uk
1	wecftech.com
1	uk.ask.com
1	toolbar.incox.com
1	search.sweetim.com
1	search.ct.com
1	pharp.com
1	du110w.duc110.mail.live.com

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Friends,

### My aspirations for a group

*This was put together on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2002, to form a talking point, a seed, from which an AHS group might grow. At that time the opportunity to form a group didn't materialise. Ten years on, I put these thoughts to the newly formed SE Wales group, and it was approved as our foundation.*

That it would facilitate our search for the truth behind spiritual experience.

That our experiences, and the discoveries and ideas emanating from our sharing would feed back to the religious/spiritual experience researchers.

The only hope we have for understanding something of reality is from our own experiences, not from books, nor from others. Nevertheless, the experience and depth of others' reading and experiences is of great importance when looking for missing pieces in our own 'jig-saw puzzles'.

It is not through religions that the truth is to be found. There is truth there, but so much clouding, dogma, tradition, and interpretation, let alone unverifiable history that it is so easy to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'! We have all read much around religious literature, and found things we may accept and things we may reject. In not thoroughly accepting or rejecting anything, I hope we are open to receive, criticise, argue, all in the search of making sense of what knowledge we already have.

I look, too, to the realms of science, though I find this likewise to have the same limitations. There are built-in blocks to knowledge in every sphere – even scientific – of human striving. I want to demolish some of these blocks.

As Jesus was my first teacher, his mission is paramount in my thinking, though I often want to deny this, mainly because I find myself disagreeing with so much conventional thinking. Jesus said, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven – (also translated, 'spirit') This is where I stand, and what I've always tried to do. This is therefore my baseline for any activity.

I have found in my lifetime a few very interesting people. These helped my search more than anything else other than direct revelations. I hope that in sharing our knowledge, and especially our experiences, we can together make our lives more meaningful, and more fulfilled.

*Mary Cook*

## Remembering Friends

### **Captain Hugh Corbett CBE RN (Retired) (1916 – 2012)**

It is with sadness that we report the death of Captain Hugh Corbett. A Life Member of the Society and one of our earliest supporters, he joined in January 1987 and took an active interest in the work of the Centre. He died peacefully on 19<sup>th</sup> April, and our condolences go out to his widow, Mrs Patricia Corbett.



### **Revd. William A. Simons**

Another much loved member passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> August. Bill Simons was another long-standing member of the Society. Joining in February 1989, he regularly attended Society functions, coming all the way from Northampton to meetings of the London Group. He will be sadly missed, and we send our deep sympathies to his widow, Mrs. Clare Simons.

## Feathers

Two Welsh buzzards, calling, meww, meww, as they do,  
high up on telegraph poles.  
One flew into the sky, then the other:

A little brown-and-white fluffy feather floated, curtseying, as they do –  
Well, I couldn't let it fall to the ground.

I still have it, the feather



Two days later,  
not far from the same telegraph poles,  
there's a twisted brown-and-white feathered corpse  
on the grass at the side of the road.

Strangely, the dog wasn't interested –  
too many feathers perhaps, and one on its own, in the grass –  
sleek, longer, this one, but with some fluff at the stalk end.

And yes, I have this one too.

*Jean Matthews*

## Book Reviews

**Richard Holloway, *Leaving Alexandria: a Memoir of Faith and Doubt*  
London, Canongate, 358pp. ISBN 978 0857860736 (hbk) £17.99**

Richard Holloway will be well-known to many of us through his recent excellent series of talks on Radio 4. This book, although not an autobiography, does contain much interesting and readable autobiographical material. He describes his early life growing up in the downtown district of Alexandria north of Glasgow, with its intensity and deprivation, and takes us through the chapters of his life and ministry in Britain and America, leading up to becoming Bishop of Edinburgh and his subsequent resignation. As the title implies, there is a sense in which he looks deep into a mirror held before the Church into which he had been ordained, and the book is a commentary on what he sees and his human response to this, a wrestling between personal integrity and faithful acceptance, a wrestling between tradition and the real world in which most of us have to live our lives today.

This is not a comfortable book for those who believe in the absoluteness of divine revelation or in the necessity of accepting church teaching. It asks how anyone can claim a complete understanding of the mystery of existence, and how the institution of the Church, which

claims to be the instrument of God's love, can be so prone to cruelty and condemnation. His struggle between personal integrity and the claims of the religious life begins when he leaves his hometown to be educated and trained by a religious order in an English monastery, with its liturgical drama and its call to the self-sacrificing life. Was this a journey to 'reality', or a human ego journey of deception? He feels the call of 'the God who has no voice', the sense of 'latency, the sense of something hidden beyond what is seen ... the sense of a presence, beyond any knowing, that we reach out towards. And it can be experienced as loneliness.' (p. 41) This is the sense of 'more than' which can never be grasped nor actualised in our solid, physical world, the sense that behind the solid reality of our existence there is a whisper which forever evades our hearing. This feeling has always stayed with him, often paradoxically experienced as a sense of absence.

So he turns away from joining the College of the Sacred Mission at Kelham, but destiny leads him to ordination and the priesthood, via a term as assistant to the Bishop of Accra, in what was then the Gold Coast, now Ghana. From there, his early life as a priest finds him back in Glasgow, deeply involved in the joys and tears of the tenement world of the Gorbals, and we hear of some of the wonderful people he discovered and worked with in that district. Richard engages with real people, and he is unable to give off-the-cuff biblical answers to their predicaments. Is this not a predicament of us all, as we seek to make sense of our personal experiences, and their significance? If we are honest, there are rarely easy answers.

This is a deeply honest and reflective book of poetic beauty, which for many of us carries helpful insights into human nature and relationships. It shows the richness, variety and dedication of his ministry. It is a compassionate book which understands the complexity of our lives today. It will give comfort and encouragement to many people. It addresses with great sensitivity some of the issues which have bedevilled the Church of today, particularly in the area of human sexuality: the gay issue and the place of woman in the ministry of the Church.

Some people reading this may find themselves respecting his intelligence and scholarship, but failing to find examples of religious/spiritual experience. I do not agree; for me this is a book which is permeated with a sense of spiritual presence, although not a presence which can be grasped and exhibited to the world, not the more dramatic experience that may find its way into the Religious Experience Research Centre archives. As the sub-title of the book indicates, *A Memoir of Faith and Doubt*, this is a personal journey. He reminds us: 'The opposite of faith is not doubt, it is certainty' (p. 184). This is not a book for evangelicals, although he records how hard he has tried to find a middle way. Again: 'What the evil person lacks is the ability to identify with the other's humanity. It is a lack of imagination.' (p. 177) He sees religion as a human construction. 'I was less sure whether God was also just a human invention, but I was quite sure religion was.' (p. 343)

In summary, this book is generous in seeing the good in life, in people and in religion, but protests against unjustifiable claims and the pernicious use of power that attempts to abuse and control the lives of others. It is an intensely honest book, as he looks to a leaner church which seeks to walk with the upright and the wounded, a church which is a serving church, a church which is willing to discard the detritus of history. But can we be too honest, and fail to do justice to the greatest mystery of who we really are? This leads me to be uncomfortable with his final conclusion. I will leave you to discover what that is!

In short, he appeals for a church which is truly spiritual, and which has shed the trappings of power. I highly recommend.

*Reviewed by Jonathan Robinson*

**Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2012. xvi 158 pp. ISBN 978 0 8006 9897 3 (hbk) £16.99**

Walter Brueggemann is Professor Emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary and a Presbyterian minister in Chicago. His book is a *tour de force*, not in terms of length or complexity, but because it is both passionate and finely tuned. It is a compelling exploration of religious imagination 'as a tool for changing us and our world'.

John Buchanan, in his forward to the book, quotes Brueggemann's delineation of his main theme: 'prophetic preaching is "a sustained effort to imagine the world as though YHWH were a real character and the defining agent in the life of the world"' (p. xiii). The Old Testament prophets took images and metaphors from contemporary life; they used them to fire the imagination of the faithful, to 'open up vistas of possibility', and Brueggemann sees in prophetic preaching today the same imaginative possibilities: '... I propose that the ancient prophets are in fact *imagers*, and those of us who follow in their wake are *imagers* after them' (p. 24). 'By "imagination" he says, 'I mean the capacity to generate and enunciate images of reality that are not rooted in the world in front of us' (p. 25). He explains how prophetic preaching is 'a contest of competing imaginations' (p. 27).

Brueggemann lists the key aspects of the prophetic imagination, contrasting these with the key aspects of the 'dominant imagination' or narrative. The dominant narrative in the time of the prophets was first the Egyptian hegemony, then the Roman Empire; now he sees the ideology of the American military/industrial power structure as the dominant reality with which the modern (American) preacher must contend. He gives examples of alternative versus dominant attributes, such as loyalty versus betrayal, truth versus denial; the latter he says is the way a dominant regime is perpetuated, both the oppressors and the oppressed colluding in the state of denial. Key opposites are hope and despair ... He says not just the content of imagination but 'modes of imagining' are significant, such as 'the refusal of closure and absolutism, the very modes in which dominant imagination specialises'.

Brueggemann gives many examples of how the prophets used metaphors from contemporary life to fire the imagination of their listeners, to bring immediacy to their message by evocation of daily life and often of its physicality: the imagery of the vineyard, the landscape and the flock, family relationships; they would produce images of violence to illustrate the Lord's anger when the Israelites had gone astray: 'I looked on the mountains and lo, they were quaking. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger' (Jer, 4:23-26). The narrative he says must be 'kept alive and persuasive in all its scandalous force ... Does this cry and this dance ring true among us?' (pp. 14-15). He says stories like Exodus need to be continually re-examined to reveal relevance to the present day. 'The end of apartheid in South Africa ... cannot be understood in any way except as an Exodus' (p. 34).

He points out how the narratives of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE before the destruction of the Temple, when the prophets reminded people with violent imagery of the penalties for reneging on the covenant with YHWH, differed from 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE when the covenant is restored: '... I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer' (Isa.54:7-8). But while illustrating his message with many compelling quotes from the Old Testament, he warns that the replication of prophetic utterances in 'our historical-critical "objective" way' will not pass on prophetic 'truth' (p. 25).

To illustrate how prophetic preaching is 'a contest of competing imaginations', Brueggemann takes the example of the General's regime in Argentina, which ruled by fear; he cites William T Cavanaugh (2001) and his example of how the Catholic bishops finally protested

the regime by appealing to “the Eucharistic imagination” ... the contest is not between imagination and the real but between two types of imagination, that of the Generals and that of their opponents’. He also quotes the words of Lawrence Thornton from his novel *Imagining Argentina* to demonstrate the way an alternative imaginative narrative can oppose a fearful repressive reality:

We have to believe in the power of imagination because it is all we have ... so long as we do not let them violate our imagination we will survive. (Thornton 1987)

In a summing up of his message, Brueggeman states that ‘The prophetic task ... is to mediate a relinquishment of a world that is gone, and a reception of a world that is being given ... The essence of alternative imagining ‘is re-deciding about life and death’ (p. 43). ‘The prophetic is not, he says, immobilised by questions about its ‘historicity’. Rather it employs poetic imagination that ‘gives franchise to grief felt and embraced’ and thus frees us to move on in hope towards new possibilities’ (p. 68).

Of course, Pastor Brueggemann intends his treatise on the prophetic imagination for the Protestant denomination in which he has his being, and he deals exclusively with the Old Testament prophets, but I can see no logical reason why his approach should not be applied in other religious circumstances and contexts. The question arises, does there need to be preaching, or could the imagination perform the same function of defining an alternative reality/future for those of other faiths by other means?

*Reviewed by Patricia Murphy*

**Russell A. Butkus and Steven A. Kolmes, *Environmental Science and Theology in Dialogue* New York, Orbis, 2011. 244 pp. ISBN 978 1 57075 912 3 (pbk) £17.99**

This book is a significant contribution to providing insight into the ecological crisis and into the contributions both environmental science and theology can make. It takes the form of a course book and is highly informative of current thinking on the issue. In addition to the book, the authors have made available online information that complements the book, namely at <http://published.up.edu/envscitheobook>. It can be consulted for updated contributions by the authors and others who are using the book in their teaching or study.

Kolmes and Butkus are respectively the director and associate director of the Environmental Studies Program at the Catholic University of Portland in Oregon, where Kolmes has the Chair in Science and has served as a consultant for government bodies and for regional Catholic bishops in preparing a pastoral letter on the environment. Butkus is Associate Professor in Theology and Environmental Studies, and he is one of the editors of the Theology in Dialogue Series of which this book is part.

The authors state in their introduction to the book that the major reason for their book is that ‘ecologically unsustainable human conduct threatens future human and non-human generations.’ The purpose of the book is to ‘propose a practical vision of hope that broken relationships can be healed and restored and that a sustainable future is achievable, *if* we are willing to engage in the practice of right relationships required for the planet and all its inhabitants to flourish.’

The first chapters of the book have required some effort to read and have a rather theoretical character. The reason for this is that the authors place the book on a broad foundation as they discuss the various forms of relationship between science and theology, and as they argue for the need for ‘inter-disciplinarity’. In the meantime we are being informed of the publications



that pioneered the modern dialogue between environmental science and theology. The authors discern three characteristics of the contemporary worldview that arise from this dialogue, namely, that it is clearly 'a scientific worldview'; that 'humanity is at an ecological crossroads in its existence on this planet'; and that 'our world is a torn and divided one, reflecting dehumanizing and egregious social and economic inequalities'. The authors introduce the theoretical model that can be employed in the interdisciplinary search for a valid model for living, namely what they call the iterative-praxiological method, and they stress that ecological literacy is a key requirement of this method. The chapter that follows thus introduces the ecological foundations of environmental science, again briefly discussing publications with which the environmental movement was founded, notable among these is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). We learn about the various concepts of ecological science, including ecosystems, watersheds, biogeochemical cycles, the carrying capacity of ecosystems, and habitats. It is explained that 'imbalanced biogeochemical cycles are now among the most serious threats to our ability to continue as a civilization.' Besides the explanation of terminology in these chapters, there is a significant glossary at the back of the book.

The book next offers two excellent chapters on 'the impact of people on ecological processes', and on 'toxins and children'. After this the book turns more explicitly towards the field of theology. The approach adopted appears to be a balanced one and speaks about the biblical tradition, about ecological or creation spirituality, about original grace (thereby bypassing the controversy of M. Fox's 'original blessing'\*) about moments of ecological grace, and about ecological sin. The overall tone in all this is constructive and not particularly negative or dismissive, even though there is the constant invitation to adopt a more inclusive faith perspective. There follows a chapter of theological reflection on Wisdom, God and Jesus Christ. (A minor correction to be made here is that both in the main text and in the notes a number of times the name of the biblical scholar Leo G. Perdue, the author of *Wisdom and Creation* (1994), is misspelled.) In this chapter the model of Whitehead's process theology is explored through the study of the modern commentator Thomas Hosinski, Jay McDaniel's model of panentheism, Sally McFague's model, written from an ecofeminist and liberationist perspective, and Denis Edwards's model, which is decidedly Trinitarian with an emphasis on the Creator Spirit. As this choice demonstrates, the book adopts a clearly ecumenical approach. The significance of theology is that it can offer a vision of hope, as formulated in the purpose of the book. The authors propose 'the ecology of salvation' as the new paradigm for the future. The final chapter reflects on how we can implement a vision of sustainability to reverse ecological decline and move toward a society that can be admired and that can exist over the long term. They propose twelve steps toward sustainability ranging from the international scale, to the national, local and personal. These are all very well informed and realistic proposals. They do understate the fact that the future for the coming generations looks pretty bleak, given the behaviour of our large institutions: governments for example still mainly think in the short term and for their own interests; greedy corporations (e.g the French firms Suez and Veolia) are commercialising valuable water resources worldwide, and go on polluting, exploiting, and think only of their executives' profit. There is, however, hope in the fact that there are many people from diverse backgrounds who are touched by ecological grace and are working for a change, for a sustainable future.

This is a magnificent book and highly important.

*Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts, affiliated to Glasgow University*

\* Matthew Fox (born 1940) is an American priest and theologian, one of whose most controversial teachings is a belief in 'original blessing', a concept that is in direct contravention of the doctrine that people are born into 'original sin'. (Ed.)

**Jenny Jones, *Healing with the Feminine Principle: Bringing Life back into Balance*  
Whitland, Carmarthenshire, Fairhill, 2012. x166 pp. ISBN 976 0 9568153 1 6 (pbk) £11.00**

This is a book which will appeal to a broad readership, which seems to be the author's intention. It's well written and comprehensive enough to engage readers new to the topic of holism, but will still have something to say to those widely read and/or experienced in the healing arts. Its basic concept, borrowed from Chinese philosophy, may be a less daunting way for some readers to approach the tenets of Daoism\* and the fundamental principles of what balance entails without getting bogged down in the history and mythology of mystical philosophy. Hence it's a practical book, drawn from the author's extensive experience as a healer and her wisdom and life experience in treating patients over decades. For example, in the chapter on 'Living and Enjoying Now', the reader is introduced to 'the practice of 'not doing':

Once we understand that worry and concern about the past and the future are destructive and that the only important part of our life is what is happening here and now, we start to live instead of just existing. If we are successful in changing, we can experience life as 'bliss', which is how Eastern philosophies urge us to live. We become calmer and more in control of our thoughts and our lives so that we can achieve more of what helps us to be true to our souls and gain greater satisfaction.

The author goes on to explain that, 'Part of the Eastern philosophy, the *Tao*\* or 'the way', is to master the practice of *wu wei*. This means 'not doing' but it has nothing to do with being idle. It is the lifelong study of life and the way others respond ... exploring how we use our bodies and finding ways of using the least effort ... being actively engaged in everything. Gradually, we understand more and more about the dynamics of all types of situations which allows us to take the path of least resistance – but with the greatest benefit to us and others. We use our energy wisely by focusing fully on the moment. We avoid over-reacting to anything by accepting all situations and souls as they appear before us. We go with the natural flow of life.'

Part of the feminine principle, the author believes, is responding to the male creative energy with compassion and care. Masculine energy, she says, is about what we perceive we need on a material level. While it extends the boundaries of our knowledge through science and technology to provide a more comfortable and secure material life, it has swung too far in one direction and is now 'rampantly and aggressively manifested ... through a relatively small group of individuals [who] hold a disproportionately large amount of power and ... are doggedly pursuing their business interests to accumulate greater wealth.' How topical this observation is and how right she is in insisting, as so many of us believe, that it's time for us to live differently, by attempting to restore the balance between masculine and feminine creative energies. The very essence of most of the great spiritual teachings, including Daoism, has been to illuminate the complementary qualities of male and female energy and to practise techniques, such as meditation, that keep them in balance.

In the section 'Yin and Yang in everyday living', the author observes that the active masculine energy that constantly pushes economies forward and drives them to return a significantly larger profit each year, with no respite and often very little deep thought or periods of consolidation, is a deeply flawed way of life; it has become *unnatural*. The feminine principle on the other hand sees life as cyclical, such as we see in Nature, which has a natural balance of *yin* (feminine) and *yang* (masculine) energy. When *yang* energy dominates there are periods of strong growth; when *yin* dominates plants hibernate.

As a species, we instinctively know we have to allow ourselves time for relaxation and recreation if we are not to burn ourselves out with constant activity. Our bodies need rest after which we

are much more able to give a peak performance. Everything moves in cycles which we have to respect if we are to continue to thrive.

And she reminds us in her section on 'Healing ourselves with the feminine principle' that although many people today have lost faith in their ability to heal themselves and find it difficult to detach from their dependence on orthodox Western medicine, there are so many ways to trigger that healing ability, beginning with the attempt simply to restore calm and peace through sitting quietly, focussing on the breath.

Our life here is a process of letting go: of our worries, our fears, our egos and our material attachments ... But this needs space to happen. While we are constantly 'doing' there is no space for 'being' [in that space of 'being'] we begin to see how to let go the unnecessary material parts of our lives and the emotions attached to them. The constant process of letting go makes space for us to allow other experiences and ideas to blossom. We are opening ourselves up to awareness of the new and interesting that always arrives at the moment we need it. This is how we maintain our inspiration. We cannot be creative without being inspired.

There is no doubt that we have to change our approach for the sake of the planet and for future generations. To bring some feminine nurturing to restore balance and learning to 'be' is the first step on the spiritual path. For those new to the process, a good place to begin would be with this book.

My one criticism of the book is that it needed a more imaginative layout; too many 'grey pages' without graphics is tiring to the eye. The little 'exercise' boxes did nothing to alleviate this, they were an annoying interruption of the flow of the text and would have been more usefully placed at the ends of the chapters.

*Reviewed by Dr Maureen Lockhart  
(See Events, page 59)*

\* The spelling of Daoism and Taoism are both acceptable but Daoism has become more common.

**Michael Henderson, *No Enemy to Conquer: Forgiveness in an Unforgiving World*  
Waco, Texas, Baylor University Press, 2009. xx 214 pp. ISBN 978 1 60258 140 1 (pbk) £20.99**

This book introduces the reader to many people throughout the world who have lived through extreme circumstances, either as victim or as perpetrator, and who have known how to overcome this; who have taken their fate in their hands and have come to live very constructive lives. Michael Henderson states in his preface 'The aim of this book is not to define forgiveness or to open a theological discussion of the subject. This book is rather a celebration of men and women at their best, some giving credit to their maker, and others directly making clear that as far as they are concerned, religion has nothing to do with it.'

Henderson is no youngster and in this book he draws on his many visits to conflict zones throughout his long career as a journalist. He has earlier written several books, among which some are on forgiveness. The present book is divided into six chapters and it includes accounts of numerous remarkable people who fought or killed, or were victimized or tortured, or lost loved ones, during one of the several wars and political conflicts from World War II onwards, but whose lives have taken on a new lease. At the end of each chapter there is a contribution by a different academic and each of these essays is of high quality. Each of these expositions is given its place, even though they do not completely cohere with each other. Dr Donna Hicks in her excellent essay entitled 'Dignity for All', for example, states,

'Framing the outcome of reconciliation as the restoration of humanity allows for other processes besides forgiveness that may be more appropriate for some people in some circumstances.' There are also contributions by various personalities: the Dalai Lama, who has provided the foreword; Benazir Bhutto, who contributed an essay from a Muslim perspective only months before being murdered; Rajmohan Gandhi, who reflects upon forgiveness from a Hindu perspective; and extracts from books by Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Whereas we hear in the media about the world's conflicts mainly with regard to the politics involved, this book enters into the lives of people at a personal level. It is about people who are peace makers, whereby they stand out amidst the hatred and violence that engulfs their surrounding peoples. They are people who have known how to set themselves above physical and mental suffering, and above a need for revenge. For some of them the turn-around happened as they became aware of the equal humanity of those on the other side of the divide; for others it had more to do with the ability to heal themselves; for still others it was the recognition that answering an act of violence with another act of violence would amount to being captured by violence and being overcome by it. However they arrived at this point they all decided to beat violence by stepping outside the deadly circle of never-ending reciprocal atrocities and by answering it with a desire for reconciliation.

For most people in this book there has been a process, depending on the situation, of mourning, anger, a desire for retaliation, sadness, despair, and all these feelings needed to have their place in coping with what happened. A thought that occurs a number of times is that when someone comes to think in terms of forgiveness or a desire for peace, this need not bypass the need for justice. I certainly could, for example, very much sympathize with the widow whose husband, the late Jewish journalist Daniel Pearl, was murdered. Pearl had been very sensitive to feelings in the Islamic world, yet was taken hostage and was shown on a video while being brutally beheaded. His body, cut into ten pieces, was found in a shallow grave on the outskirts of Karachi. His wife Mariane, a French citizen and a Buddhist, was expecting their first child at the time. As Henderson reports her saying, 'dialogue is the ultimate act of courage, far more courageous than killing someone.' At the same time she would have said that 'forgiveness must rest on a firm foundation of justice.' Indeed, as Henderson explains, 'she called for the death penalty for his killer not out of revenge, but because it represents society punishing someone for murder, and would have been in Pakistan a strong political statement against terrorism.' There are, however, other persons mentioned in the book who have wanted to prevent capital punishment for the murderer of their beloved. I myself appreciate, as Dr David Smock says in his exposition: 'Forgiveness does not require forgetting. An evil offense should neither be forgotten nor excused. In fact, forgetting or repressing memories can inflict terrible psychic damage that could undermine true forgiveness ... Forgiveness should not rule out justice ...'

I have just selected a few examples, but these already show that this is a book that gives much food for thought. This is actually not a book that I chose to read, for it was a book chosen by my wife, but circumstances have been preventing her from doing a review. As I told her, half jesting, 'You know I do not do forgiveness.' Yet, I have been able to appreciate this valuable book. It is of a high quality and I can thoroughly recommend it.

*Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts, affiliated to Glasgow University*

**Steve Taylor, *Out of the Darkness: from Turmoil to Transformation***  
London, Hay House, 2011. xii 268 pp. ISBN 978 1 84850 254 (pbk) £10.99

This is a most worthwhile book on a personal as well as on an academic level to any student of religious/spiritual experience. The wealth of deeply touching personal accounts and Steve Taylor's logical and convincing yet never reductionist conclusions about our approaches to life, death and their inherent capacities for a positive perception will haunt and inspire you.

Steve Taylor is a lecturer of psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University and a researcher in transpersonal psychology at Liverpool John Moores University. He is a member of the Scientific and Medical Network, no doubt known to most AHS members and students, and has also published *Waking from Sleep*, *The Fall* and *Making Time*.

In this book Taylor presents his reader with 33 accounts of *shifters*, people who have experienced a shift to a higher state of awareness within or after painful upheavals in their lives and arrived at a surprisingly positive new 'feel' of themselves and the world. The work is divided into three parts, containing 12 chapters in total, as well as an extensive bibliography and a useful index. In the introduction the author points out his personal involvement in his research and the importance of the experiential side of his work, which remains always at centre. He also provides a solid framework of theory in both psychology and spiritual studies.

Taylor defines *awakening experiences* and the shift to a permanent *wakefulness* as those experiences/states of mind which arise out of various situations/events and mark a transformation – abruptly or in a slower process – of one's perception of the world. This new perception is of more intensity yet serene, an 'aliveness' and connectedness, which can also be experienced as the feeling of being part of an all-pervading energy or a oneness with everything. These descriptions will be very familiar to students of Religious/Spiritual Experience, and Taylor too relates them to the classical and contemporary scholars of this field. He combines these approaches with both theory and clinical research in psychology, but does not give preferential status to either field.

In Part One the reader is acquainted with different intensities of *shifts*, and various triggers – in accordance with the research premises of the book all negative – such as physical and psychological suffering, illness, disability etc. Throughout, the personal accounts are given ample space. In Part Two 'The Great Awakener: Death' Taylor makes a short introduction to the interesting phenomenon of *awakening* accounts, and fully fledged *shifts*, made by many astronauts while in space, and often only reported after they left NASA. Experiencing space seems to be almost as strong a 'trigger' as the direct confrontation with or the threat of death, such as NDEs and life-threatening or terminal diseases which can produce intense and often sudden *shifts*. Part Three, 'The Shifters', details the higher state of awareness achieved by these people and further describes the experiential outcomes of their experiences, which Taylor sorts into 13 main categories: 'greater well-being', 'appreciation', 'intensified perception', 'a sense of connection' etc. The overlap of these with the 'fruits of experience', as known from the field of Religious Experience, are unmistakable.

Taylor goes on to look at possible causes and backgrounds for the shift of awareness in terms of psychology, and offers a framework of favourable personality and coping traits which may enable the process. Throughout the entire book he keeps a balanced approach towards both fields he considers involved in the phenomenon of the *shifting*: the psychological and the spiritual. He applies clinical psychology in so far as it helps to illuminate the processes which

may occur, but never loses sight of the spiritual aspect, especially of the outcome i.e. the higher state of awareness, which he goes on to term 'enlightenment' later in his conclusions.

That he has no reductionist tendencies shows clearly in an interesting chapter on 'Spiritual Teachers' which include the accounts from both unknown and prominent people such as Eckhart Tolle. They have in common that their spiritual world-views were not always strong, or even in existence before their *shift*, but they began studying such themes in order to make sense of what happened to them. People began to be attracted to their 'new' personality, often asking for help. The impulse to pass on their insights, propelled a number of them into the position of spiritual teachers.

This is a most compelling book, not least for its presentation of so many detailed personal accounts, which are supported by a good and well-structured theoretical framework and thoroughly convincing conclusions. After reading it through several times I can still get absorbed into re-reading the accounts wherever I open the book: they are powerfully attractive in their very personal insights into the possibility of spiritual awakening out of the most tragic and devastating situations, which we usually try not even to think of in our day-to-day life.

Steve Taylor concludes that of course we should not seek out suffering, and is careful to emphasise that the *shift* is by no means the typical or the most likely result of turmoil, but that it stands as a possibility. Beyond this, he outlines aspects of the *shifters* personalities and coping processes, and their realignment, which may help us to practise more awareness in our lives and enhance the inherent possibility of this shift in ourselves without the necessity of going through suffering.

I can thoroughly recommend this book for study as much as for personal reading; it will enrich you on both counts.

*Reviewed by Karen Asmuss*

**Catherine Lucas, *In Case of Spiritual Emergency: Moving Successfully through your Awakening*  
Forres, Findhorn Press, 2011, pp. 206. ISBN 978 1 84409 546 9 (pbk) £9.99.**

Catherine Lucas is the founder of the U.K. Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN), which promotes 'understanding and support for those going through profound personal transformation' ([www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk](http://www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk)). The SCN is the counterpart of the American Spiritual Emergence Network ([www.spiritualemergence.info](http://www.spiritualemergence.info)). Lucas also runs courses on mindfulness training and her website can be found at [www.catherine-g-lucas.com](http://www.catherine-g-lucas.com)

The premise of this book is that there is a category of spiritual experience, 'spiritual emergency', that is surprisingly common, somewhat overlooked, and requires a special kind of support. Part One asks 'What is Spiritual Emergency?' Lucas defines spiritual emergency as 'an intensifying of the process of spiritual awakening, a speeding up of the process that becomes unmanageable and often terrifying'. This can result in a confusion of the inner and outer worlds and makes daily tasks difficult to perform. Spiritual emergency can entail extreme mystical or ecstatic states, on the one hand, and depression on the other. Lucas refers to these two polar opposites as 'mystical psychosis' and 'dark night of the soul' respectively. She admits that, when considering spiritual emergency, mysticism and psychosis can overlap.

However, although medication can sometimes be beneficial, it is not necessarily helpful to try to distinguish between the two. The dangers inherent in this process include the risk of physical and mental damage, hospitalization, a feeling of isolation, inability to work, and a misdiagnosis if the process is pathologised. Whilst spiritual emergency is usually an unpleasant and potentially terrifying experience, if managed appropriately, it can lead to profound personal transformation. It can lead to healing, greater wholeness, and help us to fulfil our potential. Lucas lists the key features of spiritual emergency: the experience is very intense, people can have difficulty coping, inner and outer worlds can become confused, there can be pain and problems sleeping, powerful emotions, a sense of loss or ego-death, ego inflation, confused thinking, an enhanced sensitivity towards symbolism and myth, meaningful coincidences, seeing visions of flashbacks or spirits, and feeling strong energies. Spiritual emergency can be triggered by intense spiritual practice, such as yoga, meditation, pilgrimage, or sex. Alternatively, it can be triggered by life events, for example, bereavement or loss, falling in love, drug use, or particular life stages or changes.

Lucas goes on to discuss the history of ideas about spiritual emergency. She starts with Richard Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1969) and William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), then moves on to Roberto Assagioli's *Psychosynthesis* (1965), Carl Jung's concept of archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, and Stanislav Grof's work on psychedelics and Holotropic Breathwork. Grof (1989) suggested four categories of spiritual emergency: Kundalini awakening, Near-death experiences, past-life memories, and possession or obsession states. Lucas points out that the mainstream mental health services have not yet considered the importance of spirituality. She suggests that the two most important factors in aiding recovery are the individual's own frame of reference and whether or not the experience is validated or pathologised. Part Two covers 'Spiritual Emergency Through the Ages' and gives summaries of historical and modern figures who have undergone spiritual emergency. The list includes mystics, such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross; creatives, like Hildegard of Bingen, Vincent van Gogh, and Carl Jung; and modern contemporaries, for example, Eckhart Tolle.

In Part Three Lucas describes the three-phase process of spiritual emergency: coping with the crisis, making sense of the crisis, and finally going back out into the world. She provides a number of techniques that can be used by sufferers or their carers including: grounding, relaxation, non-judgemental support, physical exercise, diet, and creative expression. A helpful framework for the process of spiritual emergency is also provided in the form of The Hero's Journey. This is based on Joseph Campbell's ideas from his study of world mythology in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Lucas suggests using this twelve stage process as a journaling technique to explore the experient's own psychospiritual journey. However, the main technique that Lucas promotes is mindfulness, the meditative skill of being in the present moment or 'in the here-and-now'.

The book is illustrated throughout by extracts from accounts written by people who have undergone spiritual emergency. There is also an excellent resources section at the end, which lists books, articles, DVDs, websites, and places to stay if recovering from spiritual emergency.

One question that remains unanswered is whether or not those who have undergone spiritual emergency, or those who support them, necessarily need to subscribe to metaphysical beliefs. For example, when reviewing the characteristics of 'spiritual emergency' the difference between *spiritual* and *psychological* isn't particularly clear. What makes this experience or process 'spiritual'? Is it simply the context within which it occurs? Many experiences *could* be classed as spiritual, but we should be careful not to spiritualise *every* experience. At times

Lucas seems to uncritically accept certain ideas without question, for example that religious texts can be read as reliable historical accounts of religious figures like Jesus or the Buddha.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the purpose of this book is therapeutic, not investigative. *In Case of Spiritual Emergency* sits comfortably alongside other books, such as SCN co-founder Isabel Clarke's *Madness, Mystery, and the Survival of God* (2008), and *Psychosis and Spirituality* (2010), and provides another valuable perspective on the phenomenon of spiritual crisis. In summary, this book is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the relationships between spirituality, personal transformation, and mental health.

*Reviewed by Michael J. Rush*

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### **Steve Taylor, *Waking from Sleep: Why Awakening Experiences Occur and How to make them Permanent***

**London, Hay House, 2010. xx 271 pp. ISBN 978 1 84850 179 9 (pbk) £10.99**

Steve Taylor currently lectures in psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University and is a researcher in transpersonal psychology at Liverpool John Moores University. He has previously published several books on the theme of spirituality and psychology including: *The Fall* (2005), *Making Time* (2008), and *Out Of the Darkness* (2011), as well as numerous articles in a variety of transpersonal psychology journals. In 2012 he was cited as number 31 in the *Watkins Review* list of the most spiritually influential living people.

In *Waking from Sleep* Taylor argues that higher states of consciousness, a subset of what others may understand as spiritual experiences, were once our normal mode of consciousness. This way of experiencing the world is what he means by being 'awakened'. Adults, in most Western societies, are actually in a state of 'sleep'. In this state other people and the rest of the world are experienced as isolated and separate, objects are experienced as inanimate, reality is experienced as dull and shadowy, and life itself is experienced as meaningless. In contrast, the world is experienced as more immediate, alive or animated, and radiant by someone who is awakened. To them, the world is full of meaning and they feel a sense of wellbeing, compassion and joy. At an even higher intensity of wakefulness people may become aware of an all-pervading 'spirit-force' and the oneness of everything. They may experience a different perception of time and feel a more genuine sense of self-identity and freedom. Many of these characteristics will sound familiar to anyone who has previously read about religious or spiritual experience. Taylor draws on numerous accounts of spiritual experiences to illustrate and support his argument, some of which are drawn from the Religious Experience Research Centre archive.

Taylor then goes on to argue that higher states of consciousness should be accepted as valid experiences of how the world really is, as opposed to the materialistic scientific view. In



support of this argument he relies upon quantum physics, the quality of noetic revelation, and the claim that indigenous peoples experience awakening as part of their normal everyday life. This leads to the question 'Have we lost something which was once normal to us as well? Did something go wrong in our development?' To regain this awakened state, Taylor argues, we can use two methods: disruption of homeostasis using spiritual technologies, such as fasting, sleep deprivation, drugs, and breathing exercises; or various forms of meditation. Taylor suggests that the latter is the preferred approach as it is safer and more likely to result in genuine, inner as well as outer focused, awakening experiences. This is because it allows us to turn off the mechanism that normally desensitizes us to higher states of consciousness. Once this is turned off we can then access the flow of 'life-energy'. Taylor summarises: 'Awakening experiences occur when there is a more intense than usual concentration – and a greater than usual stillness – of 'life-energy inside us'. He terms these 'ISLE states' (Intensification & Stilling of Life-Energy) and lists various triggers including nature, quietness, sports, and love. He states that 'If we know why awakening experiences occur – both in terms of the external circumstances that give rise to them and the psychological changes that these circumstances cause – then we don't have to wait for them'. The book concludes with an overview of different methods to attain and maintain ISLE states such as meditation, yoga, detachment, and mindfulness.

A particularly important point that Taylor raises is that awakening experiences can be both natural and potentially healthy, as opposed to previous perspectives that see them as aberrations and potentially unhealthy. Taylor also situates his ideas in the context of the popular 'common-core' hypothesis, and Perennial Philosophy. In doing so he plays down the more reductionist explanations of such experiences and reintroduces the scientifically controversial concept of a 'life-energy' or *élan vital*. Therefore, those who favour the Perennialist view will probably find themselves much in accord with Taylor's thesis, whilst those with a more scientific view may be left unconvinced. My own view is that awakening experiences can be valuable opportunities for self-discovery, that they can be helpfully interpreted in a Perennialist framework but, at the same time, have physiological and cognitive explanations.

In summary, this well written and very accessible book could be read as a modern version of Sir Alister Hardy's *The Spiritual Nature of Man*. Whilst it does not contain as many accounts of experiences, it does develop similar themes and provides important updates on more recent research into spiritual experiences.

*Steve Taylor's website, which contains a number of interesting essays, videos, and other resources, can be found at <http://www.steventaylor.talktalk.net>*

*Reviewed by Michael J. Rush*

**Robert K C Forman, PhD, *Enlightenment Ain't What it's Cracked Up to Be: a Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul***  
**Winchester, O Books, 2011. xviii 214 pp. ISBN 978 1 84694 674 5 (pbk) £9.99 \$16.95**

What a joy it has been to review this book. I have been a fan of Robert Forman's work ever since I read *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* which he contributed to and edited. That was a riposte to the constructivist view of all mystical experience as conditioned by expectation and belief systems, as expounded in particular by Steven Katz. So I was delighted to hear that for his part, Robert is a fan of the AHRERC and the Society.

As he was in UK this summer, Robert joined us for the joint AHSSSE and CFPSS meeting (see report, page 24) in Oxford in June. Although not a speaker that day, he was able to tell us something about his latest book. It would have been good to have heard more from such a distinguished and lively scholar and I hope that we will be able to arrange for Robert to come and speak to the AHSSSE sometime in the future.

*Enlightenment Ain't What It's Cracked Up To Be* is a far cry from the theoretical work cited above. We join Robert Forman in a chilly meditation hermitage in a snowy winter of solitary retreat. He is there to write this book, which is to take us as the subtitle indicates, on *A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul*. It is a Robert's aim to 'tell the truth, the real truth, about the spiritual life: glories, warts, ecstasies, struggles and all.' He does indeed do just that, with searing honesty and a light, humorous touch.

Robert Forman tells the tale of his life from adolescence right up to the retreat. He charts his spiritual progress, and the lack of it from the early days, when he spends hours doing Transcendental Meditation but fails to get his head together in daily life. Robert eloquently expresses the frustrating difference between what the eager practitioner expects to find and feel and what actually does and doesn't happen. He also looks at some well-known gurus and shows that they did not practice what they preached.

At university Robert Forman experienced deep depression, which ultimately led to a failed suicide bid. What he calls a life instinct saved him from the swirling water beneath the bridge on which he was precariously perched. Kept going by an undefined hope, he tried various ways of making sense of life: therapy, Zen and yoga until he eventually found TM. He then trained as a TM teacher with the Maharishi. But his life was far from the ideal held before him and that which he taught his students. As to spiritual experience, Robert Forman's 'first moment of real peace' was at 87 miles an hour in his MGB sports car.

Later in graduate school Robert studied religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity and their mystical insights. He began to understand them as different systems within which the big questions are asked and answered, different contexts in which to make sense of life. Slowly, he realized that he was changing but not as he had imagined. He was becoming increasingly aware of a real and transformational inner silence.

I couldn't help but feel some sympathy for Robert's partner throughout these searches of his. But he does not gloss over his relationship with Yvonne and keeps to his aim of honesty and openness, telling of the challenges they faced.

We hear of what led to his disputes with Katz and the post modernist interpretation of religious experience. Robert realized that although his preconceptions were often in evidence in new experiences, there are many new experiences which are totally unexpected and unconditioned. He found this to apply in particular to spiritual experiences – his own and those of others. 'That insight became the core of the argument that drove me to write or edit four books between 1982 and 1995, some 30 articles, and deliver more than 50 professional talks ...' So many experiences in the RERC archive illustrate Robert Forman's argument. People are puzzled by the completely unexpected events which occur in their lives and indeed that is frequently the reason why many get in touch with us.

This is a fully-documented, amusingly-written spiritual journey which we can participate in and learn from – a really enjoyable read.

*Reviewed Marianne Rankin*

**Dick Sullivan, *Counter-Cosmos: the Mind of the Mystic*  
Clonmel, Tipperary, Coracle, 2011. 172 pp. ISBN 978 0 906280 88 1 (pbk)**

This is a friendly book full of interest. It is also a mildly eccentric book, fragmented at times and occasionally irritating in its lack of referencing and its proliferation of unqualified assertions.

Sullivan sets out his stall in the brief foreword. 'The first half ... explains what mysticism is and why it's important' ... 'The second half tries to show what low level mysticism can mean in daily life.' He lists the authors on whom he has 'leaned heavily'. They are all well-known names and include Alister Hardy. He has chosen them, he says, because they 'put things over in language we can understand' There is a selected bibliography and a short appendix that gives more detail about the authors referred to.

Ease of understanding and a relaxed relationship with the reader are important to the author. The style is generally informal, conversational in parts, and peppered with interpolations such as 'I'm not so sure'; 'can't be denied'; 'Is that so strange?'; 'I should add'; 'I'd guess'. It is clear that Sullivan is well read and has a broad knowledge of philosophy, the arts, science and the world at large. However, there is no claim to academic authority. Writing about Henri Bergson he says 'Esoteric and exoteric weren't words that he used (as far as I know and that isn't very far)'.

Part One covers a wide range of topics and introduces aspects of the thinking of philosophers, theologians and scientists. The definition of a mystic is unusual: 'anybody who's had at least one spiritual experience – however minor – and acted on it in some way.' A description of the various intensities at which mysticism can be expressed is included and there is a consideration of how experiences might be triggered and how they could be measured. The final two chapters of Part One 'What Mysticism is Not' and 'Nor Is It' distinguish mystical experience from other types of spiritual experience. New ideas are rare in the broad survey which constitutes this first part. His use of the term 'undertones' as a description of 'minor mystical experience' may be original, and his concentration on this aspect of the subject is a welcome boost to the consideration of one its less discussed elements.

In Part Two 'Crossing the Border', Sullivan indulges in a kind of guessing game 'Were they or weren't they?' in which he tries to establish whether a number of well-known people were mystics. Intriguing material, but the reader might be forgiven for thinking the writer is more interested in the life stories of his subjects than their credentials as mystics.

Part Three looks in some detail at the work of William Blake and its likely origin in mystical experience.

The final section of the book contains 68 pieces from a blog written 'throughout the summer of 2010'. They overflow with fascinating information on poets, painters, philosophers, biblical figures, music, and other things. There is rich material here but any common narrative running through the whole is missing. The most comfortable approach is to treat this section like a chest of resources to dip into and out of at will. The author explains that they were 'a deliberate attempt to catch these cursory impressions as they came and went each day'.

The reader looking for logical progression, evidence-based consideration and rational analysis will be disappointed. The book is full of fascinating allusions, snippets of information, and bold assertions, mostly unreferenced and often unsupported. Sullivan tells us that Einstein was a mystic and had said that mysticism is the seed of all art, science, culture and religion 'the most beautiful emotion we can experience'. But we are left in the dark as to where we might find the source of this information. He follows this with the astonishing

conclusion that 'Without it (mysticism) you are as good as dead. It tells us that God is really there, really does exist.' In the next chapter he is expressing a different view: in considering the 'underlying unity' experienced by the mystic, he says 'whether or not it comes from something outside the mind, of course, is impossible to say'. But we are to be re-assured – 'given the oddity of consciousness in the first place, I'm not sure that it matters very much'

Challenging and questionable assertions and opinions crop up throughout the text: 'Meditation usually means staring at something'; 'people of a statist turn of mind can also mistake the mystic's otherworldliness for a wish for state ownership'; 'sedimentary rocks are better, mystically speaking, than igneous'.

His nomenclature is not the most consistent: 'low level mysticism' becomes 'undertones' ('undertones are spiritual overtones') and, in their turn, 'undertones' are equated with 'admanic experiences', this last after Marghanita Laski and her concept of the imagined experience of the Garden of Eden.

Some chapters appear to have made little intellectual progress from their beginnings to their end. The chapter on the poet James Thomson begins with the question 'some of the unlikeliest people can recognise and applaud mysticism in others. Does that mean there's a streak of it in them too?' It goes on to summarise Thomson's life and work and to illustrate his sensitivity to the mysticism of Blake. All good stuff – but it ends where it began: 'Does this mean that, given a better break in life he [Thompson] might have had mystical leanings or even mystical moments?'

The ideas and opinions are not new and this is not a scholarly review of the field. However Sullivan's book is an acclamation of the presence of some degree of mysticism in everyday life and a gateway into a rich if somewhat haphazard world comprising the ideas and writings of philosophers, critics, theologians, scientists, poets and artists. Unless a scholarly treatise is what's required, *Counter Cosmos*, with all its quirks, is definitely worth a read.

*Reviewed by Mike Perks*

**Clarsach, *The Dreams of Clarsach: Dreams of Divine Teaching for the Soul's Healing*. Marion Browne, 2011. (xii) 124 pp. ISBN 978 0 9566854 6 9 (pbk) £7.99 \$12.00**

This book sets out a series of 63 dreams experienced by the author 'Clarsach' mostly in the two and a half year period between December 2007 and June 2009. In addition to the main body of dreams reference is also made to a few dreams from earlier and later dates, going back as far as 1985. These are presented as Introit and Coda to the main body of dreams and, together with other supporting commentary, help to contextualise the work. Context is important here, for although the focus of the book is very much on setting out the dream narratives, the lens through which they are interpreted, meaning assigned and significance given is very much a Christian one.

The Dreams are generally dated and related to the Christian Calendar. A simple and straightforward commentary follows most dreams and gives the author's perspective on the lessons that may be drawn from them. The author's own pen and ink sketches illustrate scenes from 21 of the dreams and although these contribute to an appreciation of the relevant dream it is unfortunate that they are all collected together in one section in the centre of the book. Their impact and appreciation would have been much enhanced if they could have been placed inline with the text of the dream to which they relate.

Clarsach provides little by way of direct biographical material although it is clear that she struggled with depression in her early adult life and sought assistance from psychotherapy, including a Christian Jungian therapist who seems to have provided the vital insight that dreams can be instructive and provide us with opportunities for learning. The motivation for publishing the book is therefore Clarsach's realisation that her dreams 'might help others who are seeking enlightenment as much as they have helped me in my spiritual journey.'

For Clarsach her dreams are very much given by God. The Lord speaks to her and in her dreams she is visited by and holds conversations with Jesus. Such experiences have, not unsurprisingly, greatly strengthened her Christian belief. Many of her dreams reference or take place within churches and cathedrals and speak powerfully of how Christian teachings permeate her waking life. However, this does not prevent her from incorporating or making reference to other aspects of her belief system, which seem to be required to make sense of the phenomena that her dreams present. So we find reincarnation, experience of past lives and the provision of guidance to dead, wandering lost souls as themes emerging from the author's dream life. Not infrequently figures representing other religions including Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam also make an appearance to add to the eclectic mix. Although the value of other religions is granted at some level, Jesus is most definitely the only way, truth and light for Clarsach.

*Dream 13: The Compassionate Sultan*



For anyone who has an interest in the roles that dreams can play in the spiritual lives of individuals this is an interesting and delightful book. However, if this reviewer had experienced these dreams himself he would have been inclined to take a more open-ended, Jungian, or phenomenological approach with their interpretation. For him Clarsach's determination to view her dreams as God-given and to view them primarily through the framework of Christian theology imposes unnecessary restrictions on material that is arising direct and anew from the unconscious. In his view 'new wine' deserves more.

Readers hoping to find a 'modern perspective' on dreaming and spirituality will therefore be disappointed. In my experience, to court, befriend and dance with dreams is to invite them to think, drag, push, shock, fright and love you right outside the 'spiritual' box. For Clarsach it would appear that dreams are that which confirm the religious tradition and beliefs that have been adopted. For those who are content to pursue their spiritual lives through the framework of a traditional religion this may well be an approach that is both satisfying and fulfilling.

As someone who has engaged systematically with his dreams for much of his adult life it is difficult for me not to extend a good deal of sympathy towards the author and her decision to allow us this intimate portrait of her inner dream life. Our inner life, as nightly lived out in our dreams, is not something that we are encouraged to attend to or to take seriously in secular western societies and I, for one, believe that this is much to our detriment. Clarsach is to be thanked for her commitment to journaling her dream experiences and for subsequently bringing them out into the light of public life. If she encourages more of us to take note of our dreams and to share them with others, we should thank her and be grateful for this work.

*Reviewed by Alan Underwood*

## Books Received for Review

The following books have been received for review. If any of our current reviewers or other interested readers would like to write a review of any of these, please contact Jean Matthews (j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk), who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours.

Mary Bowmaker	<i>Leaning on the Invisible</i>	(Courtenbede, 2012)
Marion Browne	<i>Eccentrics, Truth-Seekers or Holy Fools? The Search for a Moral Universe</i>	(Marion Browne, 2010)
L. Cassidy & M. H. O'Connel, eds.	<i>Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation</i>	(Orbis, 2011)
B. Chilton, A. le Donne & J. Neusner (Eds.)	<i>Soundings in the Religion of Jesus: Perspectives and Methods in Jewish and Christian Scholarship</i>	(Fortress, 2012)
Herbert Danby	<i>The Mishnah</i> , tr. from Hebrew	(Hendrickson, 2011)
James W Douglass	<i>Gandhi and the Unspeakable: his final experiment with truth</i>	(Orbis, 2012)
Luke Eastwood	<i>The Druid's Primer</i>	(Moon Books, 2012)
Carol O. Eckerman	<i>Lessons in Simply Being: Finding the Peace within Tumult</i>	(Circle Books, 2012)
R. D. Hecht & V. F. Biondo III (Eds.)	<i>Religion and Culture: Contemporary Practices and Perspectives</i>	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Barbara A. Holmes	<i>Dreaming</i> (Compass Series Christian Exploration of Daily Living)	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Michael G Long (ed.)	<i>Christian Peace and Nonviolence: a Documentary History</i>	(Orbis 2011)
Joseph A Marchal, Ed.	<i>Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods</i>	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Duane Olson	<i>Issues in Contemporary Christian Thought</i>	(Orbis, 2011)
Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer	<i>Authentic Hope: It's the End of the World as We Know It, but Soft Landings Are Possible</i>	(Orbis, 2012)
Gabriel Said Reynolds	<i>The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective</i>	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Stivers, Gudorf, Martin-Schramm	<i>Christian Ethics: a case method approach</i>	(Orbis, 2012)
Connie Ann Valenti	<i>Stories of Jesus: a Gospel of Faith and Imagination</i>	Orbis, 2012)



RERC has an overprinting of *The Divine Flame: an Essay towards a Natural History of Religion* by Sir Alister Hardy – one of his seminal works, first published in 1966. Copies are available to AHS members at the special price of £2.00 & p&p.

Please contact Jean Matthews: [j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk](mailto:j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk) or at the Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. SA48 7ED. Tel. 01570 424821

## AHSSSE Events September 2012 to April 2013

### Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk: *Holy War; Violence and the Bhagavad Gita*, by Dr. N. Sutton. The theme for the evening is war, violence and the spiritual life, drawing on the lessons of the *Bhagavad Gita*
- Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: [sheelahjames@aol.com](mailto:sheelahjames@aol.com) )

### Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2012

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Spiritual/psychical Experience: a Non-reductionist Neurochemical Perspective*, by Dr. David Luke
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 6.00 pm Open contribution to the debate
- 7.00 pm Finish
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8  
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com) )

### Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012

- 10.00 am Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience Open Day 2012
- 10.30 am Welcome and Introductions
- 10.45 am 2012 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, *Deconstructing the Elitism of Religious Experience*, by Dr. William Bloom, followed by the AHSSSE AGM
- 1.15 pm Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)
- 2.15 pm Open Forum: a practical and experiential session on core skills found in all spiritual traditions, led by Dr. William Bloom
- 4.15 pm Tea and Departure
- Venue: Friends' Meeting House, 43 St. Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW  
(Cost: £16.00 AHS members, £20.00 non-members, £5.00 students. Inquiries and bookings: Jean Matthews, Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED  
Tel: 01570 424821. e-mail: [j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk](mailto:j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk) )

### Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: *Ahimsa and the Spiritual Life*. Presentation by Rodney Reeves and Harry Houghton; includes a short recording of an interview with soldiers returning from active service
- Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: [sheelahjames@aol.com](mailto:sheelahjames@aol.com) )

### Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012

- 12.00 pm AHSSSE All Wales Group: lunch: in Refectory
- 2.00 pm Group Meeting, Founders Library, University of Wales TSD, Lampeter
- 4.30 pm Autumn Lecture: *King Arthur versus the Hermit: Temporal and Spiritual Power in the Early Welsh Arthurian Tradition*, by Revd Dr Rhiannon Johnson
- Venue: Old Hall, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter  
(£5.00, Concessions, Students free. Details: Roger Coward: 01597 851021  
e-mail: [roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk](mailto:roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk) )

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2012**

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Wittgenstein on Religion*: Talk by Rodney Ward about the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and his thoughts on religion  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) )

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: *The Golden Sutra; Aphorisms on Spiritual Feeling*, presentation by Harry Houghton. This evening's subject brings together many of the queries raised in the last two meetings and the July session on 'Consciousness'.  
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: [sheelahjames@aol.com](mailto:sheelahjames@aol.com) )

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

- 10.30 am AHSSSE Oxford/Cotswold Group: *Divination Day*: Presentations: Dr Rikki Rocksby on the *I Ching* and Dr. Roger Straughan on using his Arthur Conan Doyle book collection as a divining tool  
Venue: Peace House, 19 Paradise Street, Oxford, OX1 1LD  
(Contact Rhonda Riachi. e-mail: [ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk](mailto:ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk))

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Cosmology and Consciousness: are we 'Co-partners in Creation-ing'?* by Prof. Chris Clarke  
5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)  
5.45 pm Evening discussion  
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *The Celestine Prophecy*: (Feature Film).  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) )

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

- AHSSSE Midlands Group: Pre-Christmas social and planning meeting  
1.00 pm 'Bring and share' vegetarian lunch  
2.00 pm DVD *The Peake Experience*, Anthony Peake in discussion with Margi Clarke. Followed by a planning session for next year: please bring diaries and suggestions for topics and speakers.  
5.00 pm Meal  
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: [sheelahjames@aol.com](mailto:sheelahjames@aol.com) )

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013**

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *In Search of The Great Beast 666*: (DVD)  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) )



#### **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Experiences and Implications of Oneness and Goneness*, by John Gaynor (Re-scheduled talk from 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012)
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 5.45 pm Evening discussion
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8  
(Contact, John Franklin, e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com) )

#### **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

- 10,30 am AHSSSE Oxford/Cotswold Group: *Healing Day*: Presentations and healing demonstrations
- Venue Old Minster Lovell (to be confirmed)  
(Contact: Rhonda Riachi e-mail: [ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk](mailto:ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk) )

#### **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: Religious Experience Seminar #1: *What Is Religious Experience?*
- Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) )

#### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *New Religious Movements and the New Spirituality*, by Dr Eileen Barker
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 5.45 pm Evening discussion
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8

## **Other Events**

#### **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September to Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2012**

- Wrekin Trust *Beyond 2012: Towards a Planetary Consciousness*  
Annual Round Table
- Venue: Hawkwood College, Stroud, Glos.  
(Contact Antonia, Tel: 01452 840033; [office@wrekintrust.org](mailto:office@wrekintrust.org))

#### **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2012**

- Scientific & Medical Network Conference: Speakers: Bernard Carr, Paul Devereux, Brenda Dunne, Robert Jahn, and Rupert Sheldrake.
- Venue: An Grianán Adult Education College, Termonfechin, Drogheda, Ireland  
(View conference website: <http://www.smn-sse.no>: On-line booking form: <https://www.scimednet.org/booking-for-joint-smn-sse-conference>  
Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. e-mail: [info@scimednet.org](mailto:info@scimednet.org) )

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

10.20 am Society for Psychical Research: Study day: *Who Am I? And How Many?*  
to Speakers: Guy Lyon Playfair, *All in the mind – or perhaps not*  
5.10 pm Tricia Robertson, *The eternal question ... and some hard evidence*  
Dr. Graham Kidd, *Ego states and the creative unconscious*;  
Robert McLuhan, *Striking a balance, making a choice.*  
Venue: St. Philip's Church, Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH  
(Cost: £42, £38 for SPR members; £4 reduction for Students/ Benefits/Over 60s.  
Booking: SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London, W8 6LA. Tel: 020 7937 8984  
e-mail: [secretary@spr.ac.uk](mailto:secretary@spr.ac.uk) )

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

7.30 pm World Congress of Faiths: Open Lecture: *Non-stop Turmoil or Global Spring?:  
Changing values for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Jim Kenney  
(Entry £5 – but see below) – this linked with:

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

10.00 am World Congress of Faiths: One-day conference: *Are religious and spiritual values  
to under threat in a rapidly changing world? Are our values changing for the better?*  
4.00 pm *How can the religions cooperate in shaping the future?* Led by Jim Kenney  
Venue: St. Margaret's Church, Lee Terrace, London, SE15 5EA  
(Cost: £10 including vegetarian lunch – £15 for both above events.  
Tickets from Alan Race, [alan.race@ntlworld.com](mailto:alan.race@ntlworld.com) )

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012**

Wrekin Trust, in collaboration with Inka Spirit UK: One-day workshop:  
*An Introduction to Andean Mysticism and the Inka Tradition*: with Peruvian  
mystics Don Juan Núñez del Prado and Ivan Núñez del Prado  
Venue: White Eagle Lodge, 9 St Mary Abbot's Place, Kensington, London W8 6LS  
(Contact Antonia, Tel: 01452 840033; [office@wrekintrust.org](mailto:office@wrekintrust.org) )

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012**

10.00 am World Congress of Faiths: One-day conference: *Are religious and spiritual values  
to under threat in a rapidly changing world? How can the religions co-operate to bring  
4.30 pm social justice and peace?* With Christian and Moslem speakers  
Venue St Philip's Church, Evington Road, Leicester, LE2 1HN  
(Cost: £10, including vegetarian lunch.  
Details: Sonya Brown e-mail: [son.the.rev@me.com](mailto:son.the.rev@me.com) )

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

6.30 pm World Congress of Faiths: Annual Youngusband Lecture: This year's 'Sir  
Francis Youngusband lecture' will have a new format. William Garner and  
Randall Starrett will talk about the new film *Tournament of Shadows* that they  
are making about Youngusband and show clips from the film  
(Refreshments, 6.00 pm).  
Venue: Global Cooperation House, 65-69 Pound Lane, London, NW9 2HH  
(Event free: all welcome. Further details from WCF at 125 Salusbury Road,  
London, NE6 6RG. Tel: 01935 864055 or [www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org) )

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (date and venue to be confirmed)**

10.30 am *Inner Landscape in Yangsheng and Yoga: One-day workshop, for AHSSSE members, those interested in Daoism and students of Daoist Studies, Confucius Centre, University of Wales TSD, Lampeter)*

Run by Dr Maureen Lockhart, author of *The Subtle Energy Body: the Complete Guide* (see review in *De Numine* No 51 p. 51)

Details: Contact Dr Lockhart: [maureen.lockhart@googlemail.com](mailto:maureen.lockhart@googlemail.com)  
or Eric Franklin: [erf678@googlemail.com](mailto:erf678@googlemail.com)

**Friday 5 April to Sunday 7 April 2013**

Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies:

2013 Spring Conference. Theme: *Healing, Wholeness and Hope.*

Venue: The Hotel Royale, Gervis Road, Bournemouth

Details: Julian Drewett, Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies,  
The Rural Workshop, South Road, North Somercotes, Lincs LN11 7PT  
Tel/fax: 01507 358845 e-mail: [gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk](mailto:gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk)

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference 36: *The Nature of Inspiration in Art, Science and Spirituality.* Speakers: Prof. Lord Harries of Pentregarth, Shakti Maira, Ruth Padel, Prof. Paul Robertson, Prof. Bob Turner.

Venue: Warwick University, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Details: <http://www.scimednet.org/the-nature-of-inspiration-in-art-science-and-spirituality/>  
Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. Tel: 01608 652001. e-mail: [info@scimednet.org](mailto:info@scimednet.org) )

## Congratulations



Many congratulations to Trinity Saint David, Lampeter postgraduate students who graduated in July 2012:

Andrew Jennings:	MA Religious Experience
Ester Foss:	MA Death and Immortality
Anthony Roberts:	PG Diploma (exiting from the MA Religious Experience)
Geoff Ward:	PG Diploma (exiting from the MA Religious Experience)
Roger Hill:	PG Certificate (exiting from the MA Religious Experience)
John Osborn:	PG Certificate (exiting from the MA Religious Experience)

## The Story of Isaac

The door it opened slowly  
My father he came in  
I was nine years old  
And he stood so tall above me  
his blue eyes were shining  
and his voice was very cold  
He said 'I've had a vision  
and you know I'm strong and holy.  
I must do what I've been told.'

The trees they got much smaller  
the lake a lady's mirror  
we stopped to drink some wine  
Then he threw the bottle over  
Broke a minute later  
and he put his hand on mine.  
Thought I saw an eagle  
but it might have been a vulture  
I never could decide  
Then my father built an altar  
he looked once behind his shoulder  
he knew I would not hide

You who build these altars now  
to sacrifice these children  
you must not do it any more  
A scheme is not a vision  
and you never have been tempted  
by a demon or a god  
You who stand above them now  
your hatchets blunt and bloody  
you were not there before  
when I lay upon a mountain  
and my father's hand was trembling  
with the beauty of the Word

And if you call me brother now  
forgive me if I ask you  
'Just according to whose plan?'  
When it all comes down to dust  
I will kill you if I must  
I will help you if I can  
When it all comes down to dust  
I will help you if I must  
I will kill you if I can  
And mercy on our uniform  
man of peace or man of war  
The peacock spreads his fan.

*Leonard Cohen 1969 (Songs from a Room)*

## The Righteous Ones

They, who would tear the heart  
out of your humanity,  
destroy your trust,  
make mockery of love,  
spit lies, to feed their pride;  
trample the soft face of innocence,  
anger the gods  
parade their name, for worldly admiration,  
and profit, for their empty selves.  
No matter the immensity of pain  
and broken lives.  
These are the righteous ones,  
self-righteous, self-condemned;  
the chosen ones, power-hungry,  
and lustful for their cause.  
Were your dreams for nought, my friend?  
Why does the wild earth  
run red with blood, and anguished tears?  
Why must the rich earth weep  
and the stars rain tears?  
We, the poor, the powerless and the  
afflicted,  
The broken ones,  
destroyed by little minds  
who invoke the halls of power  
puff their worthy goodness,  
ring fence their own security,  
and crow with satisfaction.  
Where shall we now turn,  
and what fool shall hear our cry?

*Revd Jonathan Robinson, 2011*

## Suicide bomber, 14, kills six outside Nato compound

A boy killed at least six people, including other children, when he blew himself up outside the Nato-led international coalition headquarters in Kabul yesterday.

*09.09.12 The Observer*