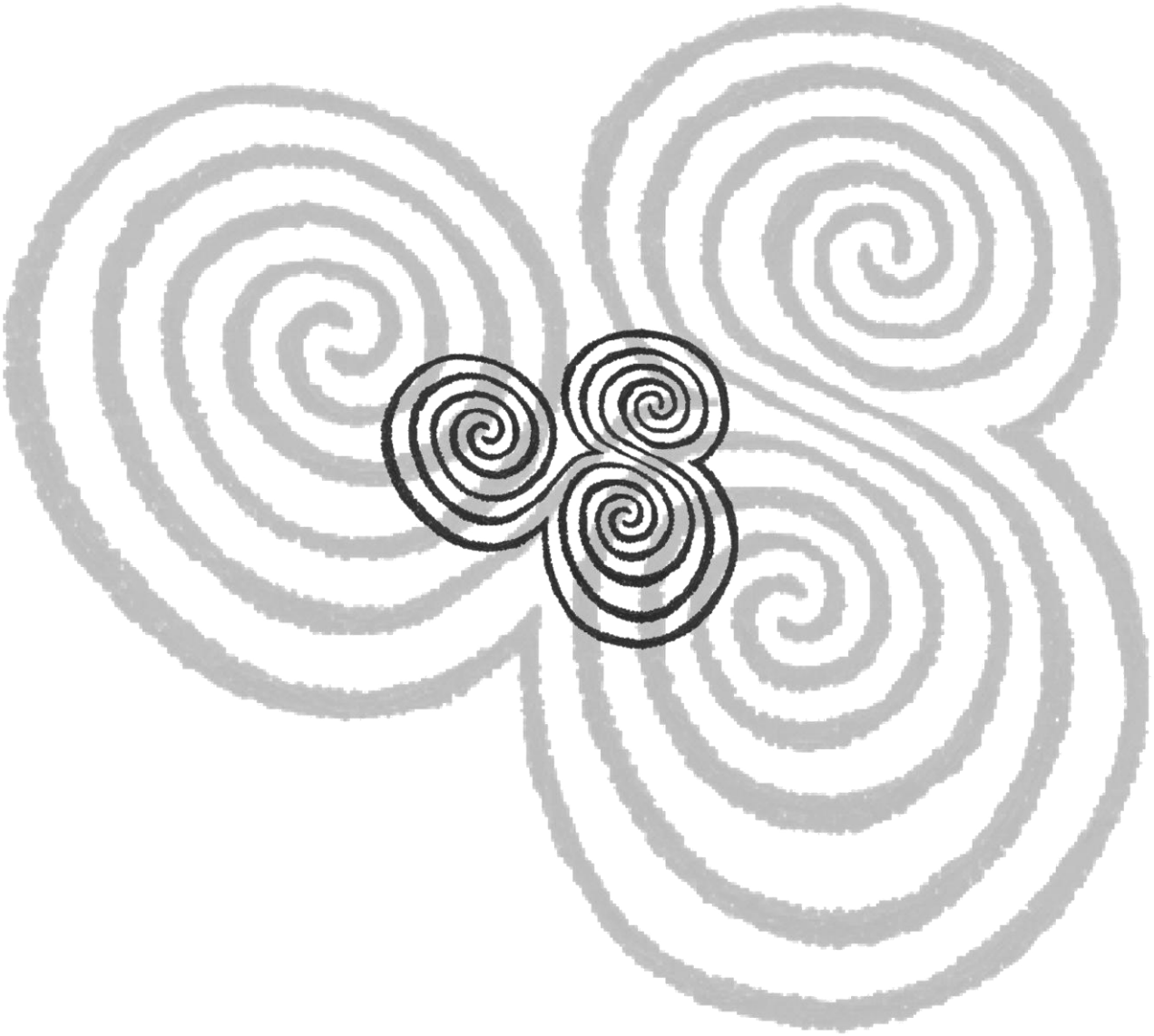
De Numine

The Magazine of the Alister Hardy Trust



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THE ALISTER HARDY TRUST

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EDITORIAL

It was with a little trepidation that I suggested the theme of Unity and Oneness for this issue, especially given the fractured state of the world at the moment. Yet in a way it seemed appropriate to return to this key concept in spiritual teachings to reiterate an important message. We are one human race on one planet with finite resources; to survive the multiple existential threats we face we must overcome our differences and work together.

You will note recurrent sub-themes in the articles on Oneness, although there was no orchestration on my part and the "players" (authors) were not in communication with each other. **Janice Dolley** begins with the insight she gained from her spiritual experience as a child, and draws parallels between the thinking of scientists, space explorers and spiritual leaders on the interconnectedness of all life. **Eleonore Bruyere** spans two millennia of art, philosophy, science, music and spirituality in her search to understand oneness, and describes how trees were the catalyst for her exploration of the concept. **Michael Shearer** likewise starts in ancient Greece, spanning religion, art and cosmology to demonstrate that we are all one. To complete this serendipitous quartet, **Marianne Rankin** delves into the Alister Hardy Archive to bring us a profound experience of oneness that led to a deep feeling of connection with all living things, particularly trees. I'm delighted by the harmonious unplanned connections here, which wonderfully demonstrate what I had intended for this issue.

Continuing our brief look into the AHT Archive, **John Harper** explains the delicate and painstaking work of digitising the individual accounts of spiritual and religious experiences, and how the team are correcting errors that had crept in during transcriptions. We wish all the team well in completing this important work.

A possible new addition to the AHT Archive follows from **Andrew Cort**, who writes of his extended spiritual experiences whilst undergoing major surgery in 2024. Providing the space for people to share such life-changing experiences is what makes the work of the AHT so special.

Some excellent additions to your library are suggested in the book reviews, and online resources to follow up. Many thanks to all contributors.

Rhonda Riachi

ARTICLES

Unity and Oneness

Janice Dolley

We are currently living at a critical time of choice. A narrow materialistic philosophy currently underpins society, and we are now faced with choices. One choice is to continue with a worldview of separation, a materially driven culture involving profit-seeking competition, conflict, wars and even – what the scientist and philosopher Gregg Braden calls 'a battle for the soul of humanity'. Our other choice is to expand our worldview to encompass the oneness of all existence, and co-create a culture infused with the dimension of spirit and a growing unity between the people and nations of today's world.

My own understanding began with an unforgettable peak experience about 60 years ago. I was sitting at the top of our garden in Surrey while my children played on the lawn below with the intention of a quiet meditation when suddenly I was overcome with an amazing lighted energy. This energy shone through me. I could see it also flowing through the shrubs and trees and even through a wasp that was buzzing. It was all encompassing and I knew that this energy was loving and beneficent and that it was what I called God. This deep inner knowing has never left me; as an inveterate initiator I worked with others to set up the first organic farm in England and the first charity for holistic education. I have sustained my sense of wonder at the sacred oneness of all life ever since.

New ideas tend to pop up in different places at first before becoming a movement of some kind. A key thread throughout the years has been the sense of the divine as the energy of Life itself, present within every subatomic particle of creation and awaiting our recognition. If we could strip Christianity from the overlay of orthodoxy imposed by men in the fourth and fifth centuries, then the message of oneness is there; such as: "The father and I are one even as you and I are one" and "Love your neighbour as yourself." This makes sense if we are all one vast family.

This new story of the deep interconnected-ness of all life has been periodically revealing itself. The New Story Summit held at the Findhorn Foundation in 2014 was oversubscribed within the first three days of its promotion and included fifty indigenous elders from every continent and fifty young people with the other two hundred or so participants travelling from many different countries which was an indication a global spread of the same awakening.

Then in 2018 Dr Jude Currivan published her book "The Cosmic Hologram," which presented the oneness of life from both scientific and mystical points of view, and she co-founded a group to disseminate this whole world view. Subsequently she has been presenting this unitive narrative to the United Nations and throughout America and was one of the presenters at a recent symposium on the theme of unity organised by Unity Earth with speakers from across the world. Another speaker that I will always remember was Rocky Gawuni from Ghana who spoke of how our relationship to nature is a fundamental aspect of our oneness and how his culture used to emphasise how trees and rivers were all revered and named. He lamented how this deep spirituality has been overtaken by the economic exploitation of nature. He described how the first church was the Church of Nature, just like the original Garden of Eden, but that the grasping for wealth has been overshadowing it.

Although Albert Einstein first spoke of the energy that I saw in our garden early in the twentieth century it is only now that we are

beginning to understand the many different dimensions of energy that we can experience. Our daily experience is at the third dimensional level of things we can touch, then there is a fourth dimensional level comprising our inner experience and then at the fifth dimensional level, to which we are currently awakening, we are experiencing ourselves as moving towards a visible and invisible synthesis of life which is bringing us further towards a growing realisation of oneness.

This sense of oneness can be experienced by astronauts from space who return with a conviction that humanity shares a single closed system with no backups, no escape route, no second home. A recent astronaut, Ron Garan, now compares our planet to a spacecraft carrying billions of crew members, all dependent on the same life support systems; but many behave as passengers rather than caretakers, assuming someone else is responsible for keeping things running.

He sees from a distant orbit that pollution has no nationality, that climate systems ignore borders, environmental damage in one region ripples across the entire globe and that the divisions we defend so fiercely on the ground simply don't exist from above. He has said that seeing us from space didn't make him feel small but instead made him feel accountable and truly understand that we're riding the same fragile spacecraft and that the idea of us versus them quietly disappears and is replaced by a single unavoidable truth there is only us - we are one family on earth.

So what has this to ask of us today at a time when there is a dissolving of the established systems of government, politics, finance, religion? Is it a time when we are beginning to realise that the lies and distortion that have kept us in a sense of separation, and fearsome duality, are beginning to give way to an evolutionary pulse that is moving us ever onward and upward towards a time of caring about our essential unity and hence a higher consciousness and co-creative rejuvenation of our relationship with all forms of life, human and other than human?

Our work needs to be to use the chinks now showing to let in the light and the love and discover a collective harmony within the oneness on earth and, in our own way, contribute towards 'the more beautiful world that our hearts know is possible' as predicted by Charles Eisenstein. Then our prayer that the higher dimensions that we call the kingdom of heaven can truly be manifested on Earth.

Janice Dolley *BA Hons lectured for 30 years at the UK Open University. She was Development Director of The Wrekin Trust for Adult Spiritual Education for 15 years. Her publications include 'Christian Evolution: Moving towards a Global Spirituality' with Ursula Burton, 'The Quest: Exploring a Sense of Soul' with Joycelin Dawes and Ike Isaacson, and 'Awakening to a New Reality: Conscious Conversations across the Horizon of Death' with Ursula Burton after her death, exploring the continuity of consciousness.*

> *I realized that the story of ourselves as told by science—our cosmology, our religion—was incomplete and likely flawed. I recognized that the Newtonian idea of separate, independent, discrete things in the universe wasn't a fully accurate description. What was needed was a new story of who we are and what we are capable of becoming.*
>
> Dr. Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut and founder of the Institute of Noetic Sciences: https://noetic.org/about/origins/

Thoughts on Oneness

Eleonore Bruyere

What is Oneness? Around 500 BCE the Greek philosopher Heraclitus was quoted as saying: 'for those who are awake the cosmos is one' - as he criticized his predecessors and contemporaries for their failure to see the unity in all experiences. He also coined the word 'Logos' according to which all things are one. Today we would perhaps refer to this concept perhaps as cosmic knitting! He is acknowledged to be the father of modern dialectics (in philosophy it is the process of reconciliation of contradictions either of beliefs or in historical processes).

Two millennia later in 1652 Gian Lorenzo Bernini created his iconic sculpture 'The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa,' a work that transferred into marble the spiritual oneness (her words) this Saint felt toward the great love of God. In her forties St Teresa had settled down to her new spiritual life and while praying and singing the hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus' she experienced the first of her ecstatic episodes that would accompany her for the rest of her life. Bernini was inspired by her writings to create his 'total work of art' for which he designed a special room incorporating sculpture, painting, and lighting effects to showcase his work in a dramatic way. As we view his work even today it is hard not to feel the spiritual or even erotic oneness Saint Theresa felt toward the Divine.

Fast forward now to 1927: in a letter to Sigmund Freud Romain Rolland, a French writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1910, coined the phrase 'oceanic feeling' to refer to the sensation of being one with the universe. According to Rolland this feeling is the source of all the religious energy that permeates in various religious systems, and one may justifiably call oneself religious on the basis of this oceanic feeling alone even if one renounces every belief and every illusion. Freud discusses the 'oceanic feeling' in his 'Future of an Illusion' in 1927 and in his 'Civilization and Its Discontents' in 1929. There Freud deems that this feeling is a fragmentary vestige of a kind of consciousness possessed by an infant who has not yet differentiated himself or herself from other people and things but experiences oneness with all that surrounds him or her.

Fast forward again: in 2010 Dr Deepak Chopra was asked to take part of the group Humanity's Team to petition for a Day of Oneness at the United Nations, he began to think deeply about the concept of oneness amongst other things, he became acutely aware that people's feelings affect us greatly. Just as laughter is contagious so is the opposite also true, we respond to negative emotions as strongly as laughter. We feel a strong sense of people's vibrations, whether we acknowledge them or not. He adds that we are individual expressions of life demonstrating qualities that are aspects of the One. We are separate waves in a vast ocean.

What brought me to explore this vast question of oneness? It all started with the book 'The Hidden Life of Trees' by Peter Wohlleben that I had casually picked up at Waterstone's. Before reading this book, trees were passive greenery around me, I had admired them, felt grateful for their beauty but walked on without another thought. As I read that trees communicated with one another through scent, as we do with language, a whole world opened up before me. I learned about the family life of our trees, of their care for one another, how they welcome hundreds of friendly species while repelling those who harm them through hastily fabricated chemical substances. Trees have inhabited our planet before we came along and they have been our neighbours, helping us to breathe, to read, to sit at our tables, to admire art inspired by them. The *Wood Wide Web* became alive for me as I became alive to it in a profound sense of oneness and awareness towards these beautiful, generous, ingenious species that share this planet with us all.

I became conscious of what was around me in a way that I had not experienced before. This feeling was reinforced when reading an excerpt from D E Harding's book on meditation titled 'On Having No Head' which offers us the

possibility of experiencing the world in a new way. The idea is that as you look around you picture the world as your head. A different kind of awareness jumps at you when you surrender your head to the world. As you forget about your head you open up to the world and the world joins you, becomes you.

You are still aware of individual objects, like trees and flowers and of people and dogs around you, but each are somehow connected to you for the world is no longer blocked off from you by your head. I tried looking at the trees along the Green near where I live, leaving my head behind, and I was overwhelmed by feeling of oneness with those trees. It was pure magic! I sort of became the tree I was looking at, and the tree became me. I then felt a gentle reproach for not having been able to see beyond my 'me' barrier for all those years now gone by. I had always perceived myself as separate from the world around me; perhaps that was why that I had felt disconnected, isolated somehow in my life. When I experienced this feeling of having the world around me as my head, I had the most marvellous sense of finally being deeply connected and in oneness with the world. Now I greet my tall silent friends with smiles and *thank-you's* just for being there.

This experience of having no head was cataclysmic for me as it moved me on to tentatively explore what lay there unseen inside of me. I felt like a student in Micro-Spirit Archaeology 101 as I ventured into the hidden world of spirit life.

I find it amazing that when you really need to move forward in your life, the tools to do so just happen to be there waiting for you. That is what happened when I became aware of a book titled 'Awakening Your Psychic Powers' by Henry Reed, PhD. This book analyses the work and sayings of Edgar Cayce, the most documented psychic of the 20th Century and the father of holistic medicine. As Dr Reed explains, Edgar Cayce repeatedly expressed his concept of Oneness in his readings: 'All and everything is as One.' When he emphasized the law of Oneness he was reiterating what is known as the 'Perennial Philosophy,' a term invented by Gottfried Leibniz, the inventor of calculus and made popular by Aldous Huxley in his book of the same title. The Perennial Philosophy is the core message of all religions that behind all the diverse visible manifestations of the world there lies a unitary Supreme Being – That art Thou. We are all part of the 'Thou.' According to the Perennial Philosophy all creation is inter-connected although everything appears to be separate. In fact, there are no separate entities, as each is an inherent part of the 'That art Thou' concept.

Again we have a reference to the watery world as Leibniz explains that each ocean wave appears to be a separate 'thing' but waves are in fact passing expressions of the ocean. Each wave is one with the ocean. Are we then all waves on the ocean of life? The Perennial Philosophy advocates that consciousness and the material world, the 'inner' and 'outer' are one and the same, and that the Supreme Being, Divine Presence, or the Kingdom of God is within us as well as outside of us and that there is more to us that we might suspect based solely on our sensory impressions of the world around us.

What took centre stage for me at this point was trying to figure out how to become 'One' within my inner self. *Step 1* was meditation, concentrating on my breathing in a generic meditation practice by focusing on the in and out of my breath, relaxing as my breath went out, and as I breathed in I let the word 'oneness' take precedence over anything else, as instructed by Dr Patricia Carrington of Princeton University. This type of meditation is based on common elements of the various schools of meditation. It incorporates the focus on the breath as in Zen meditation, and the repetitive mental focus with the word 'oneness' as used in Transcendental Meditation, but is less fussy and to my mind more user friendly. What I was hoping to achieve was a calm and harmonious place within me through which I could progress in my search. (As we all know meditation is such a huge subject and so very subjective, this is just my take on meditation.)

My continued search led me to think of a very different type of trinity as opposed to the male-oriented Christian model, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, one composed with the

three levels of consciousness, which are the conscious, the subconscious and the superconscious. That was *Step 2*.

The words that came up researching consciousness were: awareness of what is around us, perception, alertness, sensitivity, cognizance, responsiveness - to name but a few; most importantly the awareness of the vibrations that surround us describes the process of consciousness that we live with. Realising that *everything* is out there in our vibrating cosmic universe is a first step toward expressing our unique identity and all that this identity actually contains. What I found fascinating about vibration frequencies is that in some way we are a form of 'radio station'. We tune ourselves to a great variety of different vibration frequencies as we interconnect with different people, with nature, and material things during any given day, and we do this without ever really thinking about it. I like the idea that we can switch to various vibrating frequencies effortlessly.

Edgar Cayce has described the subconscious as the mediator between consciousness and the superconsciousness or universal consciousness. The subconscious concerns that part of our minds of which we are not fully aware, but which influences our actions and feelings all through our lives. It has a seemingly infinite reach capable of responding from the inter-connectedness of all life. The genius of the subconscious seems infinite perhaps because it is in contact with every subconscious mind. It is also subjective as it is a biased perceiver and as such its perceptions are coloured and shaped by the accumulation of suggestions, thought patterns and memories planted in it *ad infinitum* by ourselves and others.

The superconscious mind, realm of the soul's immortality and the Divine, is only active as a guide or an influence when we lay aside our conscious mind to make room for the subconscious. Then when our subconscious mind takes over and becomes in turn our conscious mind, the superconscious can break through in the same way that the subconscious can break through to the conscious mind when it is awake. To access or experience our superconscious level, according to Cayce, we must do more than set aside our conscious and subconscious minds. It is important to be fully aware that we are forever creating the thoughts, the mind patterns (or not!) that we need to realise our aspirations, our goals and ideals, because the superconscious mind is the domain of these aspirations that are all there waiting to be activated on our behalf. The struggle to make our aspirations and ideals into practical reality activates the energy of the superconscious mind. In this way the super-conscious mind forms a level of being in which Oneness and individuality are integrated and synonymous.

Step 3 was to try to make sense of it all on a daily basis. How do we expand our minds to welcome our own trinity within our physical selves? How do we deal with the patterns that we create, and with the vibrations and energy that we are within us and around us? How do we live the life of Oneness? I have the feeling that I will spend the rest of my life trying to figure these things out.

I will conclude with my experience at the Spring Concert of the Oxford High School musical ensemble a few years ago. My granddaughter, who plays the piano and various percussions instruments, was performing. In eager anticipation I sat down on a rather uncomfortable chair. As soon as the music started, I completely forgot my discomfort, as I was transported by the sounds of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, by the Concierto de Aranjuez – second movement, by Rodrigo, by Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor. I looked at these dedicated students and older musicians accompanying them and marvelled at them all, from so many different backgrounds and ages, a few playing more than one instrument in complete harmony with each other and the works they were playing. All I could think of is how much I wanted to be part of this orchestra. But failing that, I became aware through these beautiful vibrations that we are all participants in the oneness of life's tremendous orchestra.

Eleonore Bruyere *is a graduate in English & Art History (Montreal), a screenwriter and artist.*

Universal order

Michael Shearer

There is a type of explanation which involves an awareness of structure, abstract structure. It concerns a desire to find ways in which concepts may be formed and combined to make coherent wholes. These intellectual structures are experienced as beautiful. Sometimes such coherent order turns out to apply to how things function and that's how it provides explanation and possible truth.

This is a recurring mode of consciousness, particularly prominent in ancient Greece and part of the revolution emerging in that period. Some things in nature appear to be able to move themselves; they are animated and so came to be called animals. But some things that appear to be incapable of moving themselves move anyway; things like the sea, the sun and lots more. Something else must be moving these things, they must be animated like the animals, but obviously what is doing the moving must be very powerful. Thus, this is one function of entities called Gods. Many accepted that the gods were different types of energy in the physical and mental world, for example, Poseidon was thought to push water around and make earthquakes. But things popped up in the human psyche (and elsewhere) which we usually don't *do* but we *receive*. We don't do an idea or an impulse, we have it. Thus, Ares was said to make conflicts in the mind, leading to aggression and even possibly war.

Among one of the functions of the god Apollo was to suggest in the human mind structures of abstract order. A person, a group or an entire culture might face a mess of diverse data and varied interpretations of experience but become aware of an overlying form which would make sense and provide coherence. Further, this creative intellectual experience would constitute a beautiful thought and possibly an explanatory truth. The deep notion is that ultimate truth is harmonious and lovely. The Apollonian attitude is at the heart of Platonic philosophy, where beyond physicality is a realm of abstract forms which constitute ultimate truth. It is our task to seek to leave the cave of individuality and find Apollonian order.

This attitude is not just found in philosophy or physics, but also revealed in ancient Greek art. It is a curious fact that ancient Greek temples are remarkably similar all around the Mediterranean. This is because the architects tried to combine the various components (platform, columns, pediment, etc.) into a unified and perfect whole. The buildings are an attempt to put the forms of an architectural temple into a beautiful, harmonious unified structure. They are trying to do in stone what the philosopher does with concepts and logic. (The word "logic" comes from Logos, the Word).

A very similar process happens with ancient Greek sculpture. Overwhelmingly, but not solely, the sculptors produced representations of the human body; however, these do not depict individuals, they are not portraits of a particular face or body. As the architects try to build the perfectly ordered temple, displaying integrated coherence and harmony, so the sculptor produces an ideal physical form. They depict the various components of the human body, including the face, combined to become a representation of the Ideal, of perfection, so this, too, is meant to convey the beauty of ultimate truth. It isn't trying to persuade observers to produce a nice body for themselves - that's just vulgar.

This task is prominent in modern theoretical physics; in the work of physicists such as Newton, Paul Dirac, and Einstein - especially Einstein. Throughout his entire life he spoke with passion of his need to find an overall vision; he was inspired to seek unified structures of concepts and mathematics which successfully ordered the data he had into over-riding, enlightening patterns. He frequently remarked about the joyous and, indeed, spiritual experience of finding a pattern of forms which converts disorder and incoherence into beautiful and coherent order.

It is a revelation.

The most accepted scientific theory for the origins of the universe, as we have observed it, is the Big Bang. Standard views make this an occurrence of over thirteen billion years ago. But these views usually also posit that not only did the Big Bang produce what is required to lead to the material universe we see today, but the conditions required for that matter were also created. So it isn't just the strange precursor of matter which appears in the Big Bang, but, simultaneously, what that stuff needs to be; what must be there to enable what comes out of that first state. When the Big Bang happens Space and Time or SpaceTime is also created. There wasn't a universal space in which the material of the Big Bang appeared. What the Big Bang needed to exist came with the Big Bang. It needed Space and Time so that comes with it. No space before, no time before. It follows that there cannot be a physical cause of the Big Bang.

If there is no space and time then there cannot be anything prior to the Big Bang responsible for it to happen. It cannot be caused by anything prior, there is no prior. There are other theories now which postulate early states before the Big Bang, or multiple universes, but similar problems arise.

Another problem is entropy. The evidence in favour of this concept as part of the way the physical world works is overwhelming. It's not particularly recent in physical theory. Entropy increases in this world. Entropy can be very simply thought of as disorder. Physical events are such that disorder increases. Any situation of ordered material eventually breaks down into disorder. One day the sun will lose its integrated order and break down and no longer be. The same with everything else. If the level of disorder steadily increases with time, it follows that if we trace back to the origin of our universe, that start must have been supremely ordered. So it is not only that the Big Bang (or whatever replaces that theory) must somehow appear out of nothing, but it must have a level of ordered being which is phenomenal.

Furthermore, the nature of what is present in this remarkably ordered start is such that, out of the inevitable breakdown into disorder, there have been pockets of order emerging against that tendency. These pockets are obvious all around. A rising of regularities; natural law, matter itself, single cells, integrated multiple-celled beings, habitats viable for life, complex organisms, brains, consciousness. The sun, planet Earth, the natural environment, must all be possible to evolve out of the beginning, because they have. The Big Bang must have been the sort of beginning from which these pockets of impressive order could eventually emerge, despite the overall tendency to produce disorder. The type of ultimate order in the Big Bang has to have the potential to produce the world we see around us, including the fact that we ourselves exist to see it.

So much for the past leading to the present. What of the future?

Pockets of order emerge and they themselves eventually lose their order while new ordered entities come about. There is evolution. The pockets of order should grow then in the future, and become greater, more ordered. What is order but a coherence of its constituents? We may expect a greater coming together in consistent, regular, integrated patterns of functioning.

If all goes well locally and we don't destroy our species, or even the entire planet, we should expect further beings more functional, with greater interconnection of the components of themselves; species beyond us, greater than us. Even if we destroy humanity, some other species should eventually go further than us. If we don't enable this development ourselves (or our subsequent evolved beings) some other will; statistically there should be somewhere else out there that does, eventually. It may take millions, indeed billions, of years. So be it.

This development should involve not just more complex and highly ordered beings, but also a greater interconnection, both with other beings of the same kind and other kinds.

Following the trends already observed, this would involve a greater consciousness, more complex and thorough, greater knowledge of the functioning of things and closer interconnection with it. Everything becomes more integrated, balanced, more harmonious.

Let's extend this development to its ultimate conclusion. If we have beings becoming more ordered within themselves, more linked with other individuals, species more integrated with other species, more united with the environment, more knowledgeable about all there is, more powerful in the capacity to act - what is the final product of the entire process? Things come together more and more over millions, maybe billions of years. Individuals become more ordered within themselves, they combine within their species, species join into new integrated wholes, creatures link with the environment itself, knowledge of how everything functions becomes bigger and fuller. What you get is a spreading order which incorporates more and more of what there is into a single being whose power and knowledge covers the totality.

So the purpose of this world would be to produce the ultimate being, all powerful, all knowing. And this being can see what is necessary to do. The Being is a master of time and space and so can go from the location in the far, very far, future and return to the start and initiate the Big Bang. Backward causation. Furthermore, the start can include space and time and have both the phenomenal level of order required and the wherewithal to produce the sequence needed for the ultimate product. The Being, which is the final product, induces the origin which eventually produces itself and makes sure that the origin has the nature to result in the sequence it does.

It follows from all this that there is an intrinsic set of desirable actions in life. The world has meaning and purpose "built in". We should try to see that purpose and contribute what we can. This applies to the individual level, the social level, the species level and the environmental level. The task is to encourage a more unified and mutually beneficial whole, which itself needs a greater, over-riding knowledge

The very idea has a glorious, inspirational sense which resembles the being it includes. Similarly, there is a feeling of radiant presence, as if the ultimate being is linked somewhat to consciousness and can initiate the idea.

Our little self is beyond minuscule in this whole, but still not insignificant. We can do our tiny best. This would involve allowing the awareness of the ultimate to influence our individual being. We should try to become more consistent in ourselves in a way which matches the aim. Conflicts, clashes, disorder, aggression, violence, injustice, all become seriously mistaken. We should not just blow our own trumpet but seek to play our tambourine to fit the vast orchestral whole. Harmony.

We can try to integrate our own inner selves, so that our thoughts, feelings, actions, perceptions, no longer clash. A similar order can be attempted in our relationships, with less and less focus on our personal selves. Onward, the various sub-groups of humanity need to find peaceful ways to combine and become ordered. Just look around, if you can bear it, and see the terrible clashes so common in our current world. No simple task, of course, none of it is, but at least we know where we are going. Concurrently, there should be an active intent to go beyond, not only our individual selves, but our categories; our ethnic groups, nationalities, genders, religions and so on. We are all One.

Finally, we should seek knowledge of how the world works and try to find ways in which its components can exist in ways which combine, with no special bias.

This is a vision - and quite beautiful.

Michael Shearer *lectured in Philosophy and Literature for 35 years and was Head of Logic at City and East London College. He published 'Walking a Rainbow,' his story of walking the Camino de Santiago, which he has completed nine times.*

Spiritual experiences of interconnectedness

Marianne Rankin

In the last issue of De Numine, Number 78, Jeff Leonardi introduced the book he edited, 'Environmental Spirituality and Wellbeing', to which Marianne Rankin contributed a chapter entitled 'Spiritual Experiences of Interconnected-ness'. This article is based on that chapter.

Many religious and spiritual experiences (RSEs), particularly those which take place in nature, lead to an enhanced appreciation of the natural world and to an understanding of our interconnected-ness with every living thing. Sir Alister Hardy's youthful experiences of nature mysticism led him to value the spiritual side of human beings, and to establish a centre for the study of the RSEs of 'ordinary' people in Oxford in 1969. Today the renamed Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) maintains an archive of about 6,600 accounts of RSEs and continues to receive new additions as people seek to have their experiences valued and validated.

In this article I select an account of a profound experience of oneness from the RERC Archive to illustrate the positive effect of this altered perspective. I will show how the change from a focus on the individual self with problems of isolation and alienation, to an understanding of our essential interconnectedness can lead to a sense of compassion for other people and care for the natural world, of which we are part.

RSEs are variously named as religious, mystical, spiritual, enlightening, transcendent, peak, intense, paranormal, anomalous exceptional human experiences (EHEs), or more specifically as out-of-body (OBEs), end-of-life (ELEs), near-death experiences (NDEs) or after-death communications (ADCs). The reluctance to accept these experiences as valid is often because they 'are deemed to contravene fundamental principles that have been repeatedly demonstrated in other areas of science.' (Roe, 2020, p. 46). These are the prevailing materialist worldviews; however, there are signs that things are changing.

Spirituality and science

There are many different types of experience in the RERC archive, but of all the various descriptors, that of *mystical experience* comes closest to the theme of this article. In my own research into spiritual experiences in the RERC archive, instead of including William James' four marks of mystical experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity (James, 2002, p. 295), or the seven characteristics of mystical states as expounded by FC Happold (Happold, 1990, pp. 45-50), which were found to be extremely rare, I focused on Happold's 5th characteristic, '*consciousness of the Oneness of everything'.* (Happold, 1990, p. 46. His italics and upper case). Such experiences may also be considered as 'an intense experience of the unity of all things' (Rankin, 2008, p. 16). So in my research, instead of mystical experience I substituted 'awareness of unity and interconnectedness,' which is more widely recorded in the RERC archive.

Such experiences can be linked to the view of the physical world as interconnected on a subatomic level, which is evident in quantum entanglement. This is expressed by John Polkinghorne, a former professor of mathematical physics, who was later ordained. He describes the 'butterfly effect' where 'a butterfly stirring the air with its wings in the African jungle today could have consequences for the storms over London in three or four weeks' time.' (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 55). Another ordained scientist, Arthur Peacock, explains that 'The individual systems of the world are increasingly demonstrated by the sciences to be interconnected and interdependent in multiple ways.' (Peacocke, 2001, p. 54).

This quantum understanding of unity and interconnectedness is beginning to confirm scientifically what the mystics have said for millennia: that we and all phenomena are one. It is a holistic view, which can lead to our own wellbeing and altruism towards others as we

recognise that as human beings, we are all intrinsically interlinked. The theologian and philosopher of religion John Hick refers to 'the transforming awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in a living universe' (Hick 1999, p. 114).

In my research I found an average of about 18% of experiences reflecting a sense of interconnectedness. Hardy found 5.9% reflecting a 'feeling of unity with surroundings and/or with other people' (Hardy, 2006, p. 26).

An experience of interconnectedness

The extracts from the account below describe a life-changing experience which led to a sense of interconnectedness. It is a lengthy and detailed account, which clearly highlights the consequences in the life of the correspondent. It is an early response to one of Hardy's appeals, and the number of the account is given in brackets at the end. For clarity, I have paragraphed the text and corrected typographical errors.

> *23rd. March, 1970. The Director, Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, Oxford OX1 3TD. Dear Sir, I reply to your invitation in the Observer to send details of such personal experience. Age: now 47, Sex: Male, Nat: English; … the 'experience' followed a long period of inner unrest during which nothing seemed worthwhile, … A time arrived when I was left much to myself in a rural setting, and here my unrest became more marked.*
>
> *There was no positive religious inclination and I had no personal belief whatever; I had, however, recently read a life of Tolstoy, who led me to Gandhi, and, directly or otherwise, I had read something of St. Francis, and the local vicar had presented me with a copy of Thomas à Kempis' Imitations in return for some favour, which I thought nice but did not read. Of these I remember being deeply affected by some ideas of St. Francis - simplicity, feeling for nature, etc.*
>
> *A particular moment came when, overwhelmed by what seemed the utter futility of things, I utterly broke down and, in blind desperation (sitting alone by the margin of some field) spoke into space something like, 'Oh, God! You come and see to my life, I can't run it alone.' I did not, of course, expect any kind of response. Following this I sat quietly, feeling exhausted, for some minutes. I was then aware of a curious 'light' which seemed to grow up within me, and which became stronger and more defined as the minutes passed. I cannot now say how long it took to develop, but the 'ecstasy' lasted over roughly three weeks. The main sensation was of being loved, a flood of sweetness of great strength, without any element of sentimentality or anything but itself. The description is quite inadequate.*

This account begins with the correspondent's description of a sense of dissatisfaction and unrest, which frequently precedes a reappraisal of life. Although without any religious faith, he had been exploring spiritual ideas, but without success. His distress intensified, until he found himself alone in the countryside and completely at the end of his tether. He admitted to being unable to cope. A desperate appeal to a God he didn't believe in seemed to trigger an experience of inner light. This is not unusual, as the experience of 'handing over' is frequently found to lead to a spiritual experience. As in this case, many people do not believe that there will be any result from this, but they have simply run out of alternatives.

This is followed by a description of his sense of interconnectedness,

> *I also felt a unification of myself with the external world: I did not lose my own identity, yet all things and I somehow entered into each other, all things seemed to 'speak' to me. I have since read descriptions of this, particularly in F.C. Happold's Mysticism. Something was communicated to me, not in words or images, but in another form of knowing. Towards the end of the period I was aware that the 'light' was being withdrawn.*

Here the experience of light is described as an ecstasy which lasted about three weeks and brought a sense of being loved. The experience seemed to happen to him, he was not in control

but was in the hands of a greater power, reminiscent of James' passivity as a mark of mystical experience. The noetic aspect of the experience was also described, a different way of knowing, again reminiscent of James. This led to him being open to what he might have considered a mere coincidence before, through finding in a previously unread book, a message particularly apposite to him at that moment:

> *An odd happening towards the end of this time must be mentioned. Still astounded and bemused, I found myself saying aloud 'What does it all mean?' I then seemed to hear for the first time a voice, which said, 'Take up and read!' I was standing indoors, and by my hand was the à Kempis. Unable to resist, I opened it, pointedly closing my eyes beforehand in order to prevent myself 'searching', and read, 'Son, neither is it an illusion if (at times?) thou art suddenly rapt into an ecstasy'. In retrospect I have discounted this (manipulation of physical objects) yet there is not another passage in the book, or any other that I know of, of equal significance to me at that time. It does not, in any case, invalidate the experience.*

After the whole experience, he was left transformed, a new person with a connection to everything around him. He felt a sense of wellbeing – not just within himself but including everyone else. This is a clear example of a sense of interconnectedness leading to a new understanding of the individual and of his relation to the world. The change is fundamental and lasting.

> *Although the freshness of the vision has faded, it is clear that my life is quite different as a result. Only positive things are of any significance to me, negative thoughts and actions (whether 'true' or not) give pain, whether relating to myself or not. This is somehow bound up with the unification of myself with the world, 'I' am a different 'I', partly again overlaid with selfish desires, yet with 'self' still extended in some way to include external things, in whose well-being or otherwise I actually participate.*

He then describes the profound, permanent effects of the experience,

> *… The real point is that this is not a matter of adopting a set of intellectual precepts, but of becoming simply a different person in essential nature, of being 'born again', as if a deep well had opened within the depths of the self, and within this depth and in the external world a 'something' is encountered with which a personal relationship is established, and this is based not upon thought, although the intellect is satisfied, but upon emotion or love, as a child reacts to a parent.*

There seems to be no way of describing what has happened other than in religious language, so he links the experience to God. However, he stresses the difference between this overwhelming experience and church services.

> *I identify this experience with 'God'; this is inevitable, as a mere fact of language. I have never, before or since, gone willingly to church; it seems irrelevant. … I still experience a correspondence between myself and natural things, particularly trees and fruit. This 'something' does, against all reason (e.g. tormenting thoughts on decay, undeserved suffering and the ultimate extinction of life etc) yield an absolute knowledge of the value of life; not as a belief requiring 'faith', but as a simple fact of experience. …* [000793]

The connection to all living things remains with him and despite life's challenges, he is convinced of its intrinsic value. The experience has made him a completely different person from his self-description at the outset.

Conclusion

There are great benefits for humanity and the environment of an understanding of our essential one-ness. Some of our deepest experiences seem to bring a recognition that we and the whole universe are interlinked and this leads to love and compassion for our fellows and a deep concern for the environment.

We now have an awareness of the earth as a whole, recently reinforced by stunning pictures from the Orion space capsule. All nations are

affected by climate change, none is isolated. Nature is interlinked – even trees, long thought to be separate entities, are found to communicate beneath the ground through mycelium. Science and spirituality, so long considered incompatible, are being brought into harmony. As quantum science increasingly demonstrates the fundamental interconnected-ness of all life, an awareness of unity is both a mystical experience, and a fact of life.

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Dr Marianne Rankin *is the author of 'An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience', and 'A Quiet Day at Home'.*

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Magnolia in bloom. Image: Rhonda Riachi

Behind the grey door: the riches of the AHT archive of accounts of religious and spiritual experience

John Harper

Down in the basement of the university library building in Lampeter is an unassuming grey door marked 'Stationery Store'. Behind the door is a small room full of archive boxes. These contain the raw materials and working papers of the Religious Experience Research Unit, established by Sir Alister Hardy back in 1969. The 'crown jewels' of that collection are more than five thousand unique personal accounts of religious and spiritual experience (RSE). The majority were gathered between 1969 and 1990; they were the raw materials for the research of Sir Alister and his small team, searching out the essence of the spiritual dimension of being human. That investigation was not conducted through interviews but was based principally on what ordinary people chose to narrate about their unique transcendent experiences and how these had affected their lives.

These personal accounts were simply working documents, the raw materials for that systematic investigation of the unique spiritual nature of every human individual. Their potential importance as a unique collection for wider use by researchers beyond the Religious Experience Research Centre only came to the fore in the later 1990s, when core passages of each account were transcribed and placed on a searchable database.

It's a long way to Lampeter in West Wales even from North Wales, let alone from as far afield as North America or Eastern Europe, where some research into religious and spiritual experience is taking place. The online availability of transcripts of the original accounts of religious and spiritual experience has made it possible for research on them without a very long and perhaps costly journey to Lampeter. However, we have two concerns. One is the fragility of some of the written submissions on paper of varying quality and in ink that is, in some cases, fading already. The second concern is to preserve the collection so that there would be a record should fire or flood or other unexpected event lead to its loss.

So, in November 2025 the Archive Project team began the process of scanning the accounts of RSE, so that each page is saved as a jpeg image. The greater part of this work is being undertaken by Bridget Thomas, who has the advantage of living just across the road from the university library in Lampeter. Bridget brings valuable experience from her earlier career as a professional video editor, including BBC television news. Unpacking each account of RSE from its archive folder and pocket, scanning each page one by one, putting the account back in its folder and pocket, saving and labelling each image, and completing the record sheet represents a series of tasks that need discipline, consistency and a considerable measure of patience. The job can't be rushed. By early April 2026 Bridget had scanned just over 4,000 accounts of RSE – over 20,000 images. There's about another 2,000 accounts yet to be completed.

That is one part of the current work of the Archive Project. The other part is checking the accuracy of the transcriptions of the accounts of RSE, which are available to researchers on the database. Spot checking of some of the transcriptions revealed occasional omissions and mistranscriptions, as well as typos and incorrect punctuation. Clearly a researcher needs an absolutely accurate text. Furthermore, the transcriptions were typed up as unbroken prose. Paragraph breaks and page breaks have therefore been lost, and these can often clarify how the original author has

expressed and articulated what they have to say.

The availability of scanned images of the original accounts of RSE now enables detailed editorial review of the transcriptions to be undertaken. That review began in late February 2026. This is a very big task. It takes between half an hour and half a day to review a single account. It is a slow and painstaking process: by mid-April about 400 accounts have been reviewed. We had planned to complete the work by the end of 2026, but that may prove to be over-optimistic.

The editorial review is being overseen by me, but managed by Rachel Dowd, who has worked with me on the Archive Project for almost four years. Fortunately, we have found two more people to help. Beth Hilton is a member of the AHT and has used the database for her research. She is also a very experienced journalist and sub-editor. Claire Harper is an experienced English teacher at secondary level. We are a scattered team with Rachel in Swansea, Beth on the Isles of Scilly, Claire in Gloucestershire, and me in Denbighshire. Online meetings enabled us to establish editorial standards and processes and enable regular discussion of queries and problems.

Beth and Claire have each provided a short account of their experience of undertaking the first stages of this editorial review. Beth writes,

> In a world long accustomed to type, dealing with handwriting has been a challenge. Some letters are faded with age or contain a scrawl that seems at first glance to consist of indecipherable loops and swoops. Even the more legible ones have their difficulties. Is that an 'm' or an 'n'? A capital letter or lower case? Or – the bane of my life – a full stop or a comma?
>
> For a veteran sub-editor, this is less of a chore than it sounds. I am one of those strange creatures who enjoys fiddling with spelling and grammar, and there is always a slight thrill in figuring out that illegible word, like finding the correct jigsaw piece.
>
> Far more compelling are the stories themselves, and here it is clear what an extraordinary resource the AHT database is. Account follows account – some told for the first time – of experiences that have profoundly impacted people's lives. Sometimes these are isolated events, yet no less astonishing for it: out-of-body experiences, visions, spiritual healing, precognition, or a sudden sense of the unity of all things. Just as often, particularly in earlier records, people write of a higher power guiding their entire lives, directing actions and answering prayers. Some accounts give fascinating insights into the historical and social context of their time; one recounts imprisonment as a Conscientious Objector during the First World War, for example.
>
> Reading these testimonies is often both moving and thought-provoking. Editing can be frustrating, but working with the AHT archive feels like a privilege.

Claire also reflected on the encounter with the accounts of RSE as an editor. She writes,

> The most striking aspect of editing has been seeing how faith has shaped such a huge range and variety of lives. From accounts of the trenches in World War One, through stories of people inspired to work on the other side of the world during the 1930s, through to mid-century factory workers, nurses, clerics and housewives, the archives reveal a cross-section of genuine feeling that has affected people of all stripes. Some letters are concise, some show lengthy reflection, but all are sincere attempts to encapsulate how religious and spiritual experience has been present and helped to form behaviour and shape everyday life and choices for each writer.

These initial responses to editing the accounts of RSE underline the significance, richness and uniqueness of the archive concealed behind the unassuming grey door in the basement of the university library in Lampeter.

Prof John Harper *is Vice-Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust.*

EXPERIENCES

Medical Crises June 2024

Andrew Cort

On Monday 10th June, late at night, I found that the pain from sciatica in my right leg was unbearable, and it had spread to affect my left leg too. I did not know this at the time, but this was / is a very dangerous condition. The condition is called bilateral sciatica.

To cut a long story short, I was rushed to our local hospital in Kirkcaldy, underwent assessment where after an MRI I was diagnosed with Cauda Equina Syndrome, a very rare and dangerous condition, which left untreated can lead to paralysis of the lower body with a whole series of complications. There is a magic window of 48 hours to get emergency treatment before permanent damage of the nervous system in the lower half of the human body occurs. I have never experienced the pain that I was in before the operation, morphine did not touch it, and oxycodone only took the edge off it. I was very, very lucky to meet the right people in the NHS who were able to give me a prompt diagnosis, and to receive immediate treatment.

On Tuesday 11th June I underwent emergency spinal surgery at the Neurology Unit at the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh. The operation started at 9.00pm on Tuesday and ended at 1.00am the following morning. On my way into surgery I gave a very short heartfelt prayer to God. I simply said: "Father, deal with me as you see fit…" (I was in my own way saying to God, 'Let thy will be done.')

I clearly remember the anaesthetist giving me a drug, and he said it was like a "double malt whisky" when it was delivered by injection. I immediately fell unconscious.

I came to four and a half hours later in the recovery room, and I felt very happy. This was not drug induced. I have had four operations on my spine now and I had never experienced before what happened then. As I regained consciousness in the recovery room and my immediate memory, I clearly recalled the following experience which occurred while I was under deep sedation on the operating table.

During the operation I was "standing" with my back to the wall in the operating theatre. I could see the surgical team of 8 people around the operating table with me, my body face down on the table as they operated on me.

There was a golden light streaming down from an aperture above us all; it was the light of God. I knew he was present with us all, the surgical team and myself, and we were all under his care and love. I felt no fear whatsoever. I actually felt happy and joyous at this presence amongst us all.

I was taken away for a few moments by God and shown Heaven. I cannot describe it but I felt an immense sense of peace and love… It was Home.

In recovery from my surgery I was taken to a private room on the Neurology ward where I was being constantly monitored and checked, and this is where further complications started to take place. I developed a lung infection leading to pleurisy (a known complication of surgery in the position I was in for such a long period of time), my kidneys were damaged (but have subsequently healed), I developed atrial fibrillation and my blood chemistry was all over the place. In short, I was very ill.

On Wednesday 12th June the medical teams were concerned and I had medics coming in and out of my room all day along with the nursing staff. Throughout that day I was aware

of a presence in the room with me. She was bright, a bright white light without form, and she was there to keep me company and spiritually care for me. She was there the whole day as I went through my crisis. To me she was a Guardian Angel.

It was a strange experience in that I felt I could not look at her directly. If I did, I had a sense that there would be no way back. Wherever she went, I would go too.

At one point, I fell into a deep altered state of consciousness. I found myself drifting in a most beautiful velvet blackness, my body had a gentle glow to it, a luminescence and I knew that I faced a choice. I felt that this choice was entirely mine, made of my own free will, my free will was sacrosanct. There was no judgement, no encouragement or disapproval either way. God was with me, but as a caring silent guardian.

The choice was simply this: Do I stay, or do I go? I was being given the choice of returning to life or going "Home".

I thought about my wife, family, loved ones and all my close friends, all the people I had met and possibly would meet in life. I thought about how I had fought with life (myself), to do all that I had done. I then realized I had unfinished work, and I did not want to be a cause of pain and grief to my loved ones. During this time I realized that I was responsible for my whole life, everything that had happened. There were no excuses or hiding places. This was a salutary lesson.

I decided to stay.

I cannot really describe the impact that all the above has had on me, never mind the trauma and the healing that my body had and is going through now. But it has changed me and I can feel it. If anything, I am learning to be even more contemplative, live life in the moment and really notice the simple things, give people around more time, and keep silence on my part as I truly try to understand what they are saying or expressing to me.

It is now 20 months since this whole extraordinary experience. It is as clear and sharp in my memory as when it all happened. My faith, or dare I say, my knowledge of God has grown ever deeper. I take each day as it comes and live it to the best of my ability, and I am extremely aware of the impact I have on other people.

I now fully understand and know that "I was born into this World, but I am not of it… None of us are."

I have no fear of death and when the time is called, I look forward to returning Home, our true Home.

Andrew Cort *was born in Lancashire. He describes himself as a "very unorthodox" Christian and feels perfectly at home in many churches and faiths of the world. He trained as a Naval Architect, worked in Defence in Naval Construction and spent 36 years in the Subsea Oil and Gas industry. He is currently in the final year of a PhD in Divinity at the University of St Andrews, has trained in Spiritual Healing, and has a deep interest in the study of Spirituality, Consciousness, NDEs and Orthodox Religion. He is a member of the SPR, CFPSS and the AHT.*

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

'Unity and One-ness' - theme for the Journal's Spring edition - is generally associated with positive ideologies of peace and harmony. Some of the many difficulties faced in attempting to achieve such an idyllic image are diverse personalities, opinions and individual perceptions of life. History repeatedly reveals situations where the concept of 'Unity and One-ness' arises from persuasive rhetoric and/or social circumstances which can have disastrous consequences. 20th Century Germany is such an example, leading eventually to the Second World War. The common bond, or seeming 'Unity and One-ness' in wartime is hate - hate for a perceived enemy; yet both those involved in battle, and communities being attacked (on the whole), claim to be united in a just cause. Sadly, this type of reaction to unrest continues in our troubled 21st Century World.

When 'Unity and One-ness' refers to harmony among all humans; harmony in the Universe, or One-ness between God and humanity, is there any possibility for such a 'Paradise on Earth' to be attained? Freewill and diverse, individual personalities seem to contradict 'Unity and One-ness'. There have been many published studies on the subject of personality, including those of Carl Jung, who wrote in 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections:

> 'My life has been permeated, and held together by one idea, and one goal; namely to penetrate into the secret of the personality. Everything can be explained from this central point, and all my works relate to this one theme' (p232).

Alister Hardy also noted the significance of personality in 'The Divine Flame':

> "I believe we should examine the evidence for the alleged survival of human 'personality' after death" (p186).

Should we just accept that 'Unity and One-ness' in our lives here on Earth holds little promise of attainment? Reports from Alister Hardy Trust records of peoples' lives being changed for the better give cause for hope.

Anne Drysdale

POETRY

One Life

When you look into a stranger's eyes
and see yourself staring back
and they return your gaze, surprised
to see themselves staring back

When you dive into the wild cold ocean
and it absorbs you into its oneness
When you gaze at the sky on a clear spring day
and its endless space shimmers inside you

Then you're no longer a solid separate entity
but a soft and flowing unity
no longer living your own life
but living as part of one life.

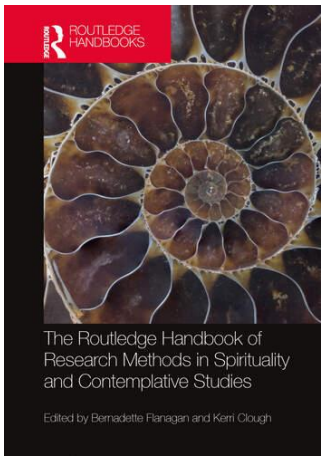
Taken from
Back to Stillness: Poems for Spiritual Awakening by Steve Taylor

www.stevenmtaylor.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Bernadette Flanagan and Kerri Clough (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. 2025. Routledge, New York. £183.75 Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-032-37727-8

The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies aims to define the methodology for a 21st-century "research revolution". The editors argue that researchers must move beyond simply gathering information to engaging in a “transformative praxis” (p.4.) within both the self and society. The handbook’s main goal is to lay the groundwork for a holistic research methodology that connects inner lived experiences and rigorous research methodology. The authors argue that gaining knowledge is not exclusively a rational process; it also involves intuitive, emotional, and somatic dimensions. The handbook, therefore, philosophically steps beyond the Cartesian principle "I think, therefore I am" and follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "embodied" perspective, claiming that the mind and body experience reality in unison. Consequently, the authors argue that education and scientific research must involve intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The handbook presents three frameworks bridging rigorous data collection and inner lived experiences.



One of the main arguments of the work is that the researcher’s “inner world” is a necessary and important field of study. It challenges researchers to leave behind the emotional distancing in favour of authentic engagement with their research subject. Methods such as autoethnography and heuristic inquiry are presented as tools for capturing "intimate truths". Moreover, the application of Eugene Gendlin's concepts of "felt sense" and "focusing" highlights how somatic, pre-verbal understanding can provide a reliable expression of subjective data.

The handbook further emphasizes that researching human experience is most authentic when conducted "with" people rather than "on" or "about" them. It also illustrates how contemplative practices—such as Lectio Divina—can be integrated into dialogue to contribute to and generate "group wisdom”.

Perhaps one of the most provocative contributions of the work is the call to expand empirical research. The authors suggest including "mental perception"—the ability to observe internal phenomena like thoughts and mental images as a form of scientific technology. Furthermore, the book critiques the bias toward material-reductionist methodologies of the Global North. In response, it includes indigenous contemplative perspectives as alternative frameworks, based on "kin relationality" and "ecological belonging”.

The handbook recognizes that in many areas of contemporary research, in education and healthcare, pure rationality is insufficient. The authors, therefore, introduce a variety of cases where the proposed methodology is applicable. For instance, they suggest that because artificial intelligence lacks inner perception, we are called to lean even more deeply into our own. In healthcare, the book introduces the "Wonder Lab" model, which uses a stance of wonder to prioritize the narratives of vulnerable populations, such as women recovering from eating disorders.

While the book excels in applying the novel methodological approach to a variety of fields, in some cases, it underlines the need for careful implementation. For instance, by advocating for a "contemplative turn" in sociology through "Ethno-Zenic experiments," where participants disrupt the social order by "doing nothing" in

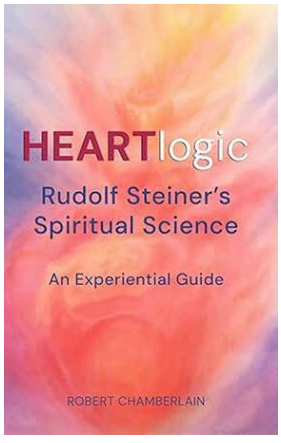
public spaces. This approach is likely to be regarded with scepticism in traditional academic circles.

This book is highly recommended for scholars, qualitative researchers, and graduate students in social sciences, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, because of its accessible tone, it is recommended for general readers interested in how spirituality and contemplative studies can offer tangible, methodological responses to contemporary challenges.

Dr. Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies University of Szeged, Hungary.

Robert Chamberlain, *HEARTlogic: Rudolf Steiner's Spiritual Science, An Experiential Guide.* Michael Terence Publishing, 2025. ISBN 9781800949478. pp. 246. Pbk £9.99. Available from the Rudolf Steiner Bookshop in London: https://rudolfsteinerbookshop.co.uk

If you have ever tried to explore the theories and thinking of Rudolf Steiner, but have found him a difficult read, this is the book for you. Indeed it is sentiments such as those which triggered it. Robert Chamberlain spent decades giving public courses on Spiritual Science for the Steiner Community Arts and Education centre in Sheffield and during those years he was often asked to write a book for beginners. He has finally 'summoned up enough courage to do so'. The book is perfect for those seeking an initial understanding of Steiner's Spiritual Science or Anthroposophy, as it is also known – derived from the Greek *anthropos,* meaning human being and *sophia,* meaning wisdom – literally human wisdom. Throughout the text, readers are given clear references as to where to follow up this introduction in the works of Steiner himself.



At the beginning some basic questions are raised, such as 'Why on earth are we here?', 'Can our life acquire meaning and purpose?' and 'How do we become closer to the ideal of who we would like to be?' The book is for people of any religious persuasion – or none – seeking a spiritual as well as a practical approach to life. It is not abstract and intellectual but speaks to the whole person.

The aim is to bring together 'the head and the heart' (as the title indicates) – 'spirituality and science, the different insights of the world religions, contemplation and action, the individual and society'. It is made clear that Spiritual Science is not a set of beliefs but a way of gaining knowledge and experience. It is to 'inspire our hearts and minds to lead a more flourishing life', which affects not just ourselves, but those around us and the planet. This sums up the essence of Steiner's approach and Robert's book enables us to explore it. Robert stresses throughout, that we readers need to investigate the claims of Spiritual Science for ourselves. This is not a book simply to be read, but it is to be experienced (as the subtitle indicates).

There are exercises and meditations throughout the book. Readers are encouraged to use these to explore their own inner lives, becoming more aware of their feelings and intuitions. The exercises are well explained and if followed, enable us to begin a process of development of our own awareness. This makes the book an interactive journey of exploration.

Robert begins by helping us to understand Steiner's view of ourselves as body, soul and spirit and he illustrates his explanations with helpful diagrams. He suggests that we pay attention to our sense impressions, then to our thinking, our feelings and our will to action. As we read on, we are taken into more complex concepts, with clear chapter headings to indicate the contents – very useful as there is no index. Titles include: *The Human Being Seen in Four Dimensions; The Journey of the Soul from Life to Life; Phases of Life; Evolution of Cultures; Good and Evil; and finally, Useful Information*. Chapters 8 and 9, *Spirit in Action (1)* and *(2)*

explore specific aspects of the world of Anthroposophy. *(1)* introduces outcomes of Steiner's philosophy with which readers may be familiar: Waldorf Education (and Camphill and Ruskin Mill Trusts), Biodynamics, Anthroposophic Medicine, the religious life (the Christian Community), the Arts and the two Götheanums. Social renewal is covered in some detail in *(2)* considering Freedom, Fraternity and Equality, quoting Gandhi '*Be the change you want to see in the world'.*

The chapter entitled *The Journey of the Soul from Life to Life* explains that life after death as envisaged by Steiner, is one of reincarnation, intimations of which appear in Near-Death Experiences, and recommendations for further reading in the field are given. Robert includes his own beautiful poem *Plant and Soul*, reflecting that 'at the basis of all life is rhythm – breathing in, breathing out; waking up and going to sleep; being born and dying'.

Towards the end of the book is a selection of *Material for Meditation*, introduced by a section suggesting that however long we meditate for, its 'mood of awareness' should remain within us throughout the day, enabling a deep inner response to whatever occurs externally. On pages 211 to 216, Robert quotes Steiner's approach to what seems a simple verse, taking it line by line, showing how the text can become more meaningful. Further meditations follow, including on the seasons, sleep and waking, grace before meals, during illness, for friends who have died and finally the last part of 'The Foundation Stone'.

The afterword – a fascinating sketch of Steiner's life – sets all his many achievements into context. HEARTlogic is perfect for anyone interested in Rudolf Steiner, as well as for those already involved in activities based on his principles. It clearly sets out Steiner's thought and offers an opportunity to explore the world of Anthroposophy.

Dr Marianne Rankin

Jonathan Robinson *Rewilding the Liturgy: for Spiritual Renewal*. Libertas Publishing, 2025. Available from murrell.robinson@protonmail.com (£7 plus £1 postage and packing)

This handsomely presented booklet comes with an impressive list of commendations from notable religious people on the back cover, beginning with Rowan Williams. The foreword is by Rt Revd John Pritchard, the former Bishop of Oxford; for me a living saint, if ever there was one.

The body of the text is about presenting a form of Service to meet the needs of the expected congregation, it can be tailored to the existing liturgical tastes of the expected place of worship: some elements can be expanded, other elements excluded, as befits the circumstances. The leader does not have to be Ordained, but as usual that may help! Music, bells and hymns may be used; a quiet, spoken service is also possible.

The opening suggested responsory features the lighting of a candle. "We come together to share the Sacred Mysteries." The opening words are not Christ specific; but they could equally be modified to put him at the centre, if it wished. As a deep believer, I would tend to do that, but perhaps a broader approach is to be welcomed?

I visualise this service taking place in St Peter's church, Burnham, Slough, where I worship. It was dedicated to St Peter, and to Christ, by the universal Catholic church in 1200, and only usurped centuries later by Henry the Eighth, to become part of the Anglican Church, presided over by the monarch, in the 1500s. Eternal light is repeatedly spoken of, hence the need for the candle.

There is a discussion of symbols and their usefulness in the text. Natural objects, such as stones, or flowers, may be brought forward and presented, representing the **earth**. The best way to represent **air**, is to take slow, deep breaths. A further flame may be lit, to represent **fire**. The flame may be elevated in four directions, representing the Holy Spirit, during which a bell may be rung, or a gong chimed. Further symbols presented may be **water**, and (possibly) the **cross**. A wooden or metal crucifix could be

handed around the whole congregation, to be reverenced as each thinks fit.

There follows "Reconciliation" - really the admission of sins, and an Absolution or (as I would do as a Licensed Lay Minister) a prayer for our forgiveness and healing. A meditation follows: a prayer, and silence, and a further prayer would be appropriate here. Readings, reflections and activities follow here; if there is a talk or sermon - brevity is encouraged! Singing or chanting may be useful here too. A circle dance might even be tried?

A time of commitment follows. A responsory is given which begins "We commit ourselves..." and a lovely liturgy of commitment follows.

Intercessory and other prayers follow, then the Peace, and a time for offerings. Then a celebration: several forms are offered up to and including Communion. The differing words do perhaps make the experience more real, and moving; but on the other hand, our traditional Communion Service hits me every time; but perhaps that's just me!

The Peace may be exchanged here, if not done earlier. Receiving the Sacrament follows (if a blessing by an Ordained Minister has taken place) then more prayers follow. Prayers and a final Blessing complete the service.

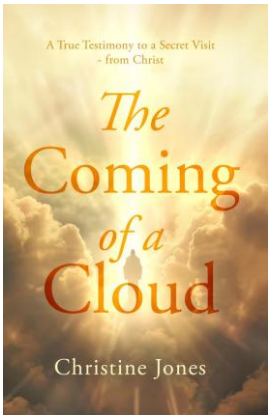
I have found reading through this booklet very moving, but I am not about to press it upon my new, young Vicar. If anything, he is influenced by Russian Orthodox theology, and like all at St. Peter's, has a leaning towards high church. Like most congregations in the Anglican Church, and others in the British Isles, our numbers in attendance are gently growing. Quite inexplicably, really, perhaps the world around us is so unredeemed and depressing, people are coming back to religion for consolation?

Do buy a copy of this lovely book.

Ian Fordyce, *Licensed Lay Minister*

Christine Jones, *The Coming of a Cloud: A True Testimony to a Secret Visit – From Christ.* Troubador Publishing, 2025. pp.144. ISBN 9781836281887. Pbk. £9.99.

This is a most extraordinary book in which the author details a confusing range of unusual



experiences. Disturbing paranormal events are interspersed with powerful spiritual dreams and visions. Christine Jones suffers from ME/CFS (chronic fatigue) and Fibro-myalgia. She and her husband 'G', who is her full-time carer, moved into a semi-detached bungalow in Bromyard, Herefordshire in 2017. The place seemed peaceful at first but they were very soon disturbed by a series of weird occurrences.

Readers are warned in an introductory section that her tale will challenge them but Christine protests that everything in the book is true.

Indeed, she describes events which (even to a long-standing AHT member) at times strain credulity. Odd things began to happen after the couple moved in. One morning Christine heard alarming noises coming from the closed kitchen, 'cupboard doors being opened and slammed shut violently' which stopped as soon as she put her hand on the doorhandle. She did not enter. She had long had an interest in the paranormal and felt that this was a supernatural occurrence. The following morning G woke to see a small man standing by his bed looking at him, who suddenly 'disappeared into thin air'.

Their neighbour, who had recently been widowed, explained that the previous tenants had suddenly left after three weeks, despite initially seeming happy. Christine and G did not mention the anomalous events in their side of the house.

Things began to escalate, with Christine being

woken by bright lights in her room (they slept separately) which frightened her so much that G made up a bed in her front room. But he found that in the meantime one of the sheets on his bed had become soaking wet. It was subsequently found to have dried all by itself, even though there was no heating. Meanwhile as Christine lay in bed, she saw three tadpole-like entities floating near the ceiling. Christine says she remembers thinking, 'this is ridiculous, I am not seeing this! It can't be'.

By now that is rather how the reviewer was feeling. How credible is all this? Amid descriptions of various weird events, small inaccuracies seem to have crept in. The wet sheet, for instance, became a blanket.

The pair then decided that invoking God would offer some protection. Christine had not been interested in religion for many years, although fascinated by astrology and the supernatural and at the time reading a book on previous lives. They contacted the local St. Peter's Church and a retired vicar and curate came round. Prayers were said in the kitchen, and the curate lent them a Bible. Things seemed to ease a little after that, and Christine moved towards a religious understanding of the events. After taking communion, she felt the spirits flee. But she was not ready for Christian commitment and eventually discouraged further visits from the curate.

Despite Christine's prayers of protection, anomalous happenings continued. She became aware of a battle between the forces of good and evil, which she interpreted as her energy level being too low for heaven, which occasionally had difficulties in getting through, whereas the lower levels seemed clearer. But she also received visions from God, including a vivid dream of Jesus and a moving vision of a Celtic cross. Confused, Christine appealed to a Catholic priest, but she rejected his suggestion of exorcism. He left, never to return – admitting to being unfamiliar with visions. Was she, as the Catholic priest or the retired Reverend feared, possessed?

The most overwhelming experience was of a cloud of light bearing down on her, containing the instruction, 'TELL IT TO THE PEOPLE', followed by two visions of wondrous silver stars. Unable to interpret this, she called the curate, who once again listened sympathetically – it was now five years since they had first met. Christine admits that such unusual phenomena were difficult for the church to deal with – as they were for the author and perhaps for her readers too. Christine felt she was being instructed to write a book about her experiences, which were too numerous to record. This is the book.

She looked back over the five years of unexplained phenomena to explore what might have caused the events. Chapter 21 is entitled 'So how am I so sure I'm not dreaming the whole thing?' but what follows is merely an explanation of her light sensitivity troubles and an elaboration on the differences between a dream, a vision and a 'divine manifestation'.

An inevitable question is whether some instances were overinterpreted. For example, a vision of a spinning page-a-day calendar seemed to her to indicate the 'Second Coming'; a dream of a white dove which spoke to her was the Holy Spirit.

The Conclusion offers a change in tone, as it sums up the entire subject matter of the book in the form of a sceptical interrogation. This is satisfying. Fundamental questions are finally addressed, and she admits that she needs help – from people who know more about spiritual matters. She now moves beyond the strange phenomena and discussion of interpretations. We are given a more rational assessment, although still with her own views and her conviction that Jesus came to her. She pleads with the reader to acknowledge the limitations of human understanding, begs us to accept the reality of the existence of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and stresses the importance of prayer. This rings true as the ultimate message behind the upheavals in her life. However, Christine warns us that so much has happened since she completed this volume, that there will be a second. I am in two minds about what to make of that.

Dr Marianne Rankin

Hearing the authentic voice of love

M D Hayden, *Opening the Parables*. Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock, 2024, 240pp, ISBN pbk: 979-8-3852-0030-6, £25.

I wish I'd had this book years ago. I find reading the Bible difficult at the best of times, and I wonder at what has been lost in the process of editing and translation over the centuries.

Hayden deftly brings all her learning and experience to interpret the core message of Jesus' parables for a 21st century readership and does so with an engaging style. This is a book that should be a core text for theology students everywhere yet has a much wider appeal and is far more interesting than a standard college reference work.

The text is structured in three "books". Book I is entitled The search for consistency ("written from my intellect and education "); Book II covers the parables in real life ("from my heart and personal experience"); and Book III the Church, the Quakers and the parables ("from the spiritual understanding and affirmation I found in the writing of Early Friends"). The insight into Quaker practice and thought that Hayden brings in Book III is of special interest to me as I'm also a Quaker. As a Quaker Minister (a role we don't have in the UK) Hayden is well placed to explain differences between Quakers and other Christian approaches to the parables. In the Appendix she explains how the Early Friends interpreted the parables and put them into practice.

The introduction to this book points out that many of Jesus' authentic teachings begin with "The kingdom of God is like…". In her search for the meaning of the parables, Hayden found *The Five Gospels What Did Jesus Really Say?* (1993) to be indispensable. Hayden says at the end of chapter 1 (Influences on this Book) that the key to understanding the parables is:

> All his parables, proverbs and direct statements teach one lesson: in the highest realm we can imagine, compassionate love is all that matters.

Hayden returns the reader time and again to that realisation; parables that appear to be about money and describe people behaving badly or dishonestly and being praised for it, are actually about love: God's infinite love for us, which cannot be counted or measured. For example, the parable of the vineyard workers is explored in Chapter 10. Hayden rightly points out that many of us find it difficult to accept the apparent premise of this parable because of its inherent unfairness: those working all day are paid the same as those who came at the end of the day. She illustrates our human concern with fairness with reference to a letter sent to the New York Times concerning a possible forgiveness of student college debts in the USA (never implemented), which evoked outrage in those who had saved to pay for their children's education.

Hayden points out this parable is not about earth and how we should behave here, but about the kingdom of heaven where "Wages earned are counted in Love. There is no earlier or later in eternity, so all who work for God are equally valued no matter when they work…" She goes on to illustrate the importance of generosity (i.e. love) in binding Christian groups as a community, quoting Tertullian, a Roman theologian from Carthage in 197 CE, and the Madison Place Community in Cincinnati, Ohio. The latter appears to be a somewhat controversial experiment in communal equity, as Hayden says, but is attempting to live a Christian way, although not one she would choose.

This is a book one can readily dip into or read through in its entirety, and it rewards repeated engagement.

Rhonda Riachi

NEWS

Research news

Ecospirituality Predicts Pro-Environmental Outcomes Across Cultures

Article by Matthew Billet and Adam Baimel in *Environment and Behavior* Vol 58 issue 3.

The idea that nature has spiritual qualities is common across cultures. The data from North American samples appear to show a link between ecospirituality and pro-environmental outcomes. The generalizability of this claim to other cultures, however, remains untested. A cross-cultural sample of religious individuals from 15 countries spanning 5 world religions (N = 11,186) was used to (1) estimate the association between ecospirituality and three pro-environmental outcomes: pro-environmental behavioural intentions, policy support, and financial donations; and (2) assess the pathways by which ecospirituality translates to pro-environmentalism.

The analysis showed that ecospirituality positively predicted each of the pro-environmental outcomes similarly across diverse cultural and religious populations. Moreover, the associations between ecospirituality and pro-environmental outcomes were mediated by the same variables across cultures: (1) moral responsibility for nature, (2) gratitude to nature, and (3) self-efficacy over environmental issues. Ecospirituality unites diverse cultural worldviews in motivating care for nature, making it a potentially powerful foundation for global environmental stewardship.

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00139165261421073

Online resources

Beyond the Veil recording

A recording of Dr Marianne Rankin's recent Lent Lecture given at Reading Minster - Beyond the Veil: Spiritual and Near-Death Experiences across Faiths - is now available to view on the Contemporary Religious & Spiritual Experience web site: https://www.crse.uk/beyond-the-veil

Anthony Chene web site updates

Known for his beautiful films concerning near-death experiences, Anthony Chene relies on donations from the public to cover his costs. After a while he makes the films available for free on his site. Two recent films deserve repeat viewing:

- *Renaissance* contains interviews with Eben Alexandrer, Pim van Lommel and Raymond Moody, along with the astonishing NDEs of three people. It's about 2 hours long.

- The recently published interview with Jonathan Ashford is another great example of how Chene allows people to tell their extraordinary stories with minimal distraction.

Watch these and more of this great collection on https://anthonychene.com

EVENTS

AI and Religious Experience

12 June 2026, 2.00-4.00 p.m. UK time (online)

A round table discussion organised by the editorial team of the Journal for the Study of Religious Experience (JSRE) and supported by the Alister Hardy Trust.

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly being implemented within our increasingly technology-mediated world. The "digital turn" means that researchers can make use of digital research methodologies and e-tech to propel the anthropology of religious experience forward. The intersections between digital technologies, ethnography and fieldwork are central to how existing memory archives may shape and provide the lens for AI's application within the fields of religious and spiritual experiences.

This online event is free of charge.

Conference Programme

Online site will open at 1.45 p.m.
2.00 p.m. Welcome
Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre
Prof Leslie Francis, Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust
2.15 - 3.10 p.m. Round Table: AI and Religious Experience
In the Chair: Prof Bettina Schmidt
Dr Mara Steenhuisen, Editor JSRE
Dr Laura Patryas, University of Manchester
Samantha Lee Treasure, University of Virginia
Accursio Graffeo, PhD candidate, University of Turin
Jennifer Uzzell, Independent researcher
3.10 - 3.40 p.m. Open Discussion and Q&A
3.40 - 3.45 p.m. Wrap up & end

Please book on Eventbrite: https://bit.ly/498PQ9C

If the bit.ly link does not work, the full link is:
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/artificial-intelligence-and-religious-experience-tickets-1987936641007

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Please observe the following guidelines when submitting your item.

Copy deadlines:
Spring issue: 28th February
Autumn issue: 31st August

Submit contributions by email (as MSWord, ODT or RTF file) to the Editor: **denumine@gmail.com**

- **Articles:** max 2,000 words
- **Book reviews:** max 1,000 words

If these limits are exceeded, the contribution may be sent back for editing by the author before it can be accepted.

References: please **do <u>not</u> insert endnotes or footnotes**, but mark reference numbers in the text, and give a correspondingly numbered list of references after the text. Include author, date, title, place of publication, publisher, and page numbers.

Electronic references: give the date when the reference was retrieved.

Book reviews: please give the **author, title, place of publication, publisher, date, number of pages, ISBN no. and price** at the top of the review.

Letters, accounts of personal experiences, poems, images, etc., are always welcome.

Please note:

1. **At the end of your submission** give **your full name,** and **brief biographical details** and **e-mail address** if you wish.
2. Priority and time of publication are decided by the Editor, who retains the customary right to edit any material accepted for publication.

Back copies of De Numine: contact admin@alisterhardytrust.org

The illustration on the front cover is taken from the Megalithic Spirals in the Inner chamber of Newgrange, Stone C10. Newgrange is an ancient site in the Boyne Valley, to the north of Dublin, Ireland.

Three lines form three double spirals, two of them an S-scroll, each centre connected to the other by one path and exiting to either side by the other. The S-scroll is enclosed by a line branching into a third spiral to the left to exit.