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

The Editor



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

Editorial

This year the Reverend Jonathan Robinson takes over from Marianne Rankin as Chair of the Alister Hardy Society. He has written a piece called 'Looking Backward and Looking Forward' to introduce himself to members in his new capacity. You will find this on the next page, and I do hope this will be the first of a regular series in *De Numine*.

A remarkable piece of serendipity appears in Jonathan's piece and the review of Professor Ursula King's book on modern spirituality (p 39). Jonathan talks about '... the perceived move away from institutionalised religion and towards spirituality' (paragraph 5); the review begins with a quote from Professor King commenting on the same phenomenon ... I believe both Jonathan and Professor King have recognised that we are at the beginning of exciting new times when Spirit will be abroad in the world in a way we could only dream of before. Globalisation, a theme familiar to everyone in the context of economy, conflict and, at last and more positively, ecology, desperately needs a unifying spirituality, although there may still be a need for diverse religious institutions, and we still have a very human need for national identities and loyalties. In this context I would like to mention the allusion to the Mayan prophecy about 2012 and reference to the Atlantis legend at the end of Manohar's review of *The Tao of Holism* (p. 45). This may seem to some readers too 'way out' to suspend disbelief; possible criticisms will no doubt be that such things are too 'New Age' for serious consideration, but what are Jonathan, Professor King, and many other serious commentators on religion and spirituality in today's world suggesting when they call for a better way of living with each other and caring for the earth, if not the dawn of a new age? Who are we to say that Mayan astronomy was not up to accurate prediction, or that the threat of global warming today does not resonate with persistent myths such as those about Atlantis and the various legends of great floods, including the Bible version?

As always I am delighted by the quality and variety of submissions, both articles and experiences. As always there is a continuity of theme, in this issue that of a new spirituality for a new age, linking independent contributions to *De Numine*. After five years of editing I am not surprised by this, but I have ceased to regard it as co-incidence. As usual there are contributions from familiar writers and from those who are new to us. A notable newcomer is Dr Joan Howell, whose article on Judge Thomas Troward is on page 5. Dr Howell will be giving the AHS public lecture on the evening of October 26th at Lampeter, so please read her article as a preparation for what promises to be a fascinating evening. Hazel Thomas, who has kindly organized this event, tells me that some of Dr Howell's students will be attending, so AHS members will have the opportunity to meet a new tribe!

Local group reports in this issue demonstrate that the Society is thriving. There is a new group in Bromsgrove led by Sheelah James, and although AHS Wales is still going through turbulent times, an exciting new suggestion has been put forward by Roger Coward, called the 'Mandala Project'. Members in Wales will have received details of this in the recent AHS mail-out, and Roger will be presenting his ideas for discussion at the meeting on October 26th. Please see AHS Events for details.

On page 21 John Franklin presents a Publicity Statement for the RERC and the AHS, and invites feedback, which he will report on in the Spring issue. Please let him know if you would like your comments printed verbatim in *De Numine*.

Patricia Murphy

Looking backward and looking forward

This year we celebrate the 40th year of our Society. It is a time to celebrate our achievements, a time to give thanks for all that so many people have contributed in such a variety of ways, a time to value all that we have received and been able to give which has brought inspiration and enrichment to our lives and those of others – and a time to look forward to the future.

I do hope you will be able to join us at the Open Day on November 7th at Harris Manchester College in Oxford. The Memorial Lecture in the morning will this year be given by Professor Cafer Yaran from the University of Istanbul, and he will be speaking about religious experience research in Turkey already carried out as part of the Global Project. In the afternoon there will be contributions such as reminiscences of Sir Alister and the beginnings of the Society, which we hope will also include some contributions 'from the floor'. So – be prepared! You should have received a leaflet about Open Day. If not, do please get in touch with Anne Watkins at Lampeter.

The founding of our Society to support the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre 40 years ago at Harris Manchester College (then called the Religious Experience Research Unit) was a bold move, bringing many people into a shared enterprise to explore those human experiences which are so profound, uplifting and significant for us. We have gained immeasurably from the different gifts and insights which different people have brought to the Society. We have been able to support and encourage each other in a shared enterprise.

Now we look to the future in a world which has changed dramatically in the last 40 years. I believe the work of RERC and the AHS is more important than ever in our secularised society, which is becoming increasingly aware that it is pursuing a downhill path of no return.

One positive example of this change, however, is in the perceived move away from institutional religion and towards spirituality. 'Spirituality' has become the 'in' word. Ideally, it seems to me, these two areas of human experiencing should not be mutually exclusive. They should be able to support and complement each other. However it does occur to me that many experiences in our archives which have been labelled 'religious' would today be rather perceived as 'spiritual', as they do not arise nor are contained within a religious framework.

RERC's Global Project is of course of huge significance, and we wish it well. But we must not forget that this is our Society – your Society, and the contributions and insights which we can make will shape and determine our future, and, to some extent, our global future. It is in the way of things that structures change, but let us go forward in the belief and commitment that this is a great cause.

Jonathan Robinson, Chair, AHS

Judge Thomas Troward

Thomas Troward was born of English parents in Ceylon in 1847. After completing his schooling in England and on the Isle of Jersey, he passed the Indian Civil Service examination with high honours and returned to India at the age of 22 as Assistant Commissioner. He spent the next twenty-five years as a Divisional Judge in the Punjab, after which he returned to England. In 1904 he delivered his now famous 'Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science'.

He was also an artist whose work won several prizes at exhibitions in England, and for many years was a student of Hebrew scripture and ancient civilisations. During this study a vision came to him of a system of philosophy that delivered not only peace of mind but also physical results in health and happiness. Troward produced a spiritual philosophy that is basic in its principle and is neither occult nor mid-eastern but based solidly on the Bible, and it has proved itself time and again. It is as timeless as a mathematical formula or the alphabet and holds an answer for all who search.

The above is taken from the writings of Troward's student and biographer, Genevieve Behrend, and from an introduction to the following article on Troward's work by Dr Joan E Howell. Ed.

Metaphysical Healing: What we Understand about Healing. The philosophy of Judge Thomas Troward

Dr Joan E Howell

Specific use of the Life Principle

One of the principal things to remember is that Mind Energy already exists. We use this Energy as we do that of electricity, by individualizing It for conscious and specific purposes. We never create Energy. We merely make use of a Power which already exists. The application of this science rests entirely upon the supposition that we are surrounded by a creative Law which receives the impression of our thought and acts upon it.

No one has seen this Life Principle. The very fact that we live proves that IT EXISTS. We use a Power which exists before we make use of it. Through imagination and intuition we feel the existence of Reality and through the directive power of the will we consciously decide what Reality is to do for us.

We may use this Power for helping ourselves or for helping someone else. There would be no difference in the actual use of the Power; the only difference would be in the direction. For instance, if you were to treat yourself you would say, 'this word is for me; I am thus and so.' If you were going to treat someone else you would say the name and proceed in the same way.

If our mental work tends to tire us we may know that we are resorting to some form of mental coercion, some form of will power or compulsion which is a denial of the Divine Presence as Spirit, and of the Law as a medium for the operation of our thoughts. We plant the seed in faith, believing, and the Creative Genius of the Universe produces the plant. By conscious thought we give direction to the Law, which of Itself has no direction but which, once directed, tends always to create an objectification of the thing thought of, and to bring it into the experience of the one for whom it is directed.

Our idea of concentration in mental work is not one of compulsion, nor is it one which would lead us to imagine that we are gathering together forces of which we are to make use. Concentration, from our viewpoint, means mental attention. To think of it from any other standpoint is to suggest to our thoughts that we are dealing with some reluctant power.

The more simple and direct you are in your approach to this science the better results you will obtain. Jesus taught no system of concentration, but rather suggested the simplicity of one's approach to Reality. In the midst of those who proclaimed the powers of darkness and of light, Jesus made this simple statement: Believe, and it shall be done unto you.

The conscious belief must become a subjective acceptance before it can produce a definite result. Hence our belief is not always productive of good. Sometimes we only think we believe. We must have the will to believe and we must centre our attention, which is real concentration, on the thought that our entire being accepts our belief. WE CONCENTRATE OUR ATTENTION. THE LAW CREATES THE FORM.

It is the office of the will to determine what the creative imagination shall undertake, for we certainly are always creating something through the use of our thought. In seeking to demonstrate what we wish instead of what we do not wish, we should remember that we are not dealing with Two Powers, but with One Power, which may be used in two ways. There is a limited way of using this Power, and a less limited way. While there are no degrees to the power itself, there are no degrees in our use of it. To create that which we call big would be no more difficult for this Power than to create that which we call little; and conversely and paradoxically, that which we call little is no less than that which we call more. It is self evident that the Infinite cannot know size, but It does contain the potentiality of all form.

The creative power and processes of our thought go on whether we are aware of it or not. We are always causing something to happen when we think. We should study our mental reactions and see whether we are demonstrating freedom or bondage.

One thing is certain; salvation must begin at the centre and not at the circumference of our experience. We should make every effort to demonstrate peace, poise, power, prosperity and happiness for ourselves. Then from the lamp of this experience we shall more clearly see how to light the pathway of another's thought. Nothing is more certain than that we can give only what we have. Many good and sincere souls have walked down a stony pathway of self-resignation, thinking that in doing so they honoured God. But we ought never to forget that even sincerity may be subject to illusion, and that there is no God who can be glorified by the suffering of any man. The good we desire for others, we should also desire for ourselves.

In spiritual mind-healing then the practitioner sees only the perfection of his patient. Over and over he may affirm this. He may make any statements to himself which will convince himself of this truth. As this inner realisation dawns in his own thought he finds his patient responding.

If we are limited by our own subjective viewpoints alone, and if it is entirely possible to change these subjective viewpoints, then our freedom is within our own grasp. It finally resolves into a question of whether we have the will to believe, the willingness to accept, and the determination to execute, or whether we are content to remain hypnotised by race suggestion. Belief is a mental state and can be consciously induced. If we refuse to create a consciousness of abundance we must expect to remain impoverished. We cannot gather roses from thorns or pick apples from fig trees. The Law of Cause and Effect is never violated.

What we need is a spiritual apprehension of the Universe, a spiritual experience in our own thoughts, a dawning understanding, recognition and realisation of the Divine within us and around us. Then we shall discover that spiritual mind healing is a process of self-awakening. It is a system of mental action based upon conscious belief and definite direction. The reaction to one's thought can never rise higher than the state of realisation created by one's thought. Water reaches its own level without force or coercion and beyond that it will not go. As a practitioner, treat yourself to know that you believe; state that you believe; believe that you believe; affirm that you do believe and deny everything which contradicts true belief.

Dr Howell will be giving the AHS public lecture on Judge Troward at Lampeter on 26th October. See AHS events for details. (Ed.)

Myth and Imagination in the Art of Christine Kinsey. Part II

Christine Kinsey

Since the early 1960's, when I was a student at Newport College of Art, Monmouthshire, I have kept a visual diary in which I have gradually included more written entries interspersed with 'poetry'. Until now I have considered these poems as 'out-bursts,' a counterbalance to the spiritual quest of my paintings and drawings. When I paint and draw I access an inner space of silence, a feeling of being in direct contact with what I perceive as the 'true reality' of a spiritual inner life. When I write I respond to the material world and the issues that occur in my daily life. As part of my touring exhibition '*Ymddiddan/Colloquy*' I structured some of the out-bursts into poems that attempt to link these two worlds by creating a 'conversation' between my paintings, drawings and poetry.

My experiences of growing up female in Pontymoel in the industrial valleys of south Wales, and *cymreictod*, a sense of feeling/being Welsh within a Celtic Christian culture, have been central to the development of my visual and written language; as has the reassessment of the depiction and perception of women in western Christian art. There has been a long shadow cast by men over women participating in many areas of life, and the visual arts are no exception. In early western Christian art women are often portrayed as virgins, martyrs, whores, long suffering victims without a voice enabling and supporting others. In later periods women have mostly been depicted as objects of titillation and sentimentality, as we see up to the present day. In Simone de Beauvoir's view, for women to become the subject, rather than the object, in a male dominated social structure which has power, wealth and acquisition as its driving force, has been a very long and difficult task. The representation of women in art still begs the question: are women objects or subjects?

History tells us that before Christianity became the dominant cultural influence in Europe, a Goddess mythology was embraced by most social groups. Prior to the spread of Christianity women played a major role in both the social and spiritual life of communities. This role continued into the early Celtic Church but as the influence of the Roman Church pervaded Britain, the Earth Goddess culture became a belief in a Sky God. I have studied the paintings of the Annunciation in which the portrayal of Mary indicates the way women are viewed in the western Christian Church. In the majority of paintings of the Annunciation Mary is depicted as a vessel accepting, without redress, the Angel Gabriel's message of the imposition on her life. There are some exceptions; in Sandro Botticelli's painting of the Annunciation

(1489) Mary is attempting to push away, and in Lorenzo Lotto's painting (1554-5) Mary is hiding her face and turning away from the angel, with God as an old man with a grey beard appearing out of the sky. Christianity has traditionally presented the Christian myth from a patriarchal point of view which has influenced the way women are perceived and the way we perceive ourselves. For many centuries the art of Christendom was used to instruct people who were unable to read or write how man was created in God's image. Karen Armstrong in *The Gospel According to Women* (1986) points out that the Church fathers bequeathed that Eve, the first female, 'was the cause of the sin of the man, Adam' and that 'Sin, sex and women were bound together in an unholy trinity.' Armstrong argues that nuns were encouraged by the church hierarchy to put themselves through extreme mental and physical states which included hallucinations, anorexia, bulimia, and self harm and that this encouragement could be viewed as having sexual overtones. Armstrong also suggests that there was a culture of hatred of women in the male dominated church that has led to the exclusion of women playing prominent roles in the church until very recently, and that this hatred extended out into society as a whole and has perpetuated the attitude towards women in the home, work and public life.

My paintings and drawings have been informed by the poems of the poet/priest R.S. Thomas, in particular his poems that search for God. These poems have shown me a way of recognising a direction in my own spiritual search. It is interesting that the language he often uses to describe women is alien to the thoughtful and sensitive language he uses in his poems that explore his personal search for God. What influenced R S. Thomas's comment about women in his literary address titled '*Abercuawg*' at the National Eisteddfod in 1976 when he talked about the meaning of names? He says when he hears the name Branwen he thinks of the 'fairest maiden alive' and continues 'There are still a few Branwens in Wales. Did I not hear the name once and turn, thinking she might steal my heart away? Who did I see but a stupid, mocking slut, her dull eyes made blue by daubings of mascara – a girl to whom Wales was no more than a name, a name fast becoming obsolete.' Were these words said by the poet or the priest?

During my years as a student there were very few women artist role models either teaching in Higher Education or exhibiting professionally in Wales, even though two-thirds of students studying art were women. The social pressure at the time was for women to marry and have children. Perhaps a publication recalling artist's wives would give us an insight into why there are so few women artists acknowledged in Europe and America. Throughout the later 1960s the empowerment of women began to change the way in which women developed their creativity, finding a visual language voice that not only followed the traditional skills but also exploited new technologies in addressing contemporary issues. The instigation of Chapter, an Art Centre for Wales in Cardiff, which I co-founded with Bryan Jones and Mik Flood in 1968 and co-directed until 1976, opened up for the first time in Wales the possibility of making art without the restrictions of an art market dominated by commercialisation. Our aim was to create spaces to encourage artists from all disciplines to produce and present theatre, dance, film, music, poetry and the visual arts and to make these art forms available to a wider audience. In 1974 I promoted an exhibition in Chapter which included a painting by Monica Sjo called 'God giving Birth.' It was a painting of a life-size woman giving birth. The painting caused a furore with local councillors to a point at which the exhibition was under threat of closure unless the painting was withdrawn. With a great deal of discussion and persuasion the painting remained on display. It seemed extraordinary to me that in Christian mythology people accepted God being personified as a man, as in the Lorenzo Lotto's painting or Michelangelo's fresco on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, but were outraged by God being personified as a women. When women artists began to represent themselves it is not surprising that a significant number decided not to enter into the male dominated practice of

painting, but looked for other means of making art through performance and installation art, film, video and other digital technology. The situation is improving in Wales and we are beginning to represent ourselves. The planned book by Dr Anne Price Owen on Welsh Women Artists will be the first book of its kind to be published in Welsh or English in Wales.

In an age of consumerism when freedom means the consumer's right to choose, artists can act as guides into the spiritual and sacred nature within us all. I believe it is important that artists from all disciplines contribute to civil life. Artists should be the conscience of a nation. Postmodernism mirrors who we are, not what we can become, and promotes a fractured, superficial, parodying of society, reflecting a bankrupt culture in decline. Postmodernism courts the meaningless and an art market celebrity culture. If everything becomes art, then art becomes nothing. The language and culture of Wales are under threat and have too often been obscured by a British overview. In both my painting and poetry, *cymreictod* has been central to my search for an identity with the true nature of Wales and Welshness. This is not to do with the narrow view of nationalism, but of nationhood and a preservation and celebration of the difference that exists between nations. We in Wales can choose to follow a different path by developing our innate creative abilities to transform our material life by recognising the 'Divine spark' that exists in all of us. My search for a voice that articulates these ideas in written and visual languages continue to reveal many more questions than answers.

Christine Kinsey has had two national and three international touring exhibitions. She was Co-founder and Artistic Director of Chapter, Workshops and Centre for the Arts, Cardiff. The book 'Imaging the Imagination: An exploration of the relationship between the Image and the Word in Art of Wales' that she initiated and co-edited with Dr Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan was published by Gwasg Gomer in 2005. She is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Art & Design, Swansea Metropolitan University.

See also two poems by Christine Kinsey on page 31.

Jewish Death Rituals. Part I

Gareth Hopkins

In Judaism love is regarded as a very important ethical principle, so that works and duties should be prompted by one's care and love towards others, as outlined in scripture:

You should love your neighbour as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

Not only the living should enjoy the benefits of being loved, but also the dying and the dead. It naturally follows that Judaism is opposed to any form of euthanasia or mercy killing, based on Exodus 20:13 and Leviticus 19:16. Life is regarded as being a gift from God, and God alone decides when that life should end.

In Talmudic times life was considered to have come to an end when there was no longer any sign of breathing. However with modern medical technology that is no longer possible:

Today it is now possible to resuscitate those who previously would have been regarded as dead: thus the modern rabbinical scholar Mosheh Sofer in his reponsum declares that death is considered to have occurred when there has been respiratory and cardiac arrest. Another halkhist, Mosheh Feinstein, however, has ruled that a person is considered to have died with the death of his brain stem. ¹

But why must a person die? The Bible offers two explanations. First, that God made man from dust and to dust he must return (Genesis 2:7) and second, because of sin man's expulsion from Paradise deprived him of Eternal Life (Genesis 3:22-24). So death is the fruit of man's sinfulness.

Every Jew is expected to prepare himself and his family for his death. The dying person ensures that he has made two wills, the one giving details as to who will benefit from his material possessions, and the second, which could be described as an ethical will, is in effect a statement of the person's beliefs and values that he wishes to transmit to the benefactors. When death is near, friends and family members visit the dying person to comfort him and to recite prayers. Another duty Jews take upon themselves before they die is to make all the necessary cemetery arrangements for their burial, excluding, of course, the digging of the grave and the making of the coffin which are forbidden. Jews have a very high regard for life, therefore they are allowed to donate their organs. A dying member of the Jewish faith is encouraged to confess his sins before God in order to secure a place in the afterlife. Although in many respects this practice has been done away with, the Talmud advises:

Many have confessed, but have not died, and many who have not confessed have died. And many who are walking outside in the market place have confessed. By the merit of your confessing, you live. All who confess have a place in the world to come.

As for the confession itself, it takes the following form:

I admit before you, God, my God and God of my ancestors, that my cure and my death are in your hands. May it be your will that you heal me with a complete healing. If I die may my death be atonement for the sins transgressed and violated against You. And set my portion in the Garden of Eden, and let me merit the world to come reserved for the righteous.²

The confession ends with the words, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One'. Then everybody present pronounces the benediction, 'Blessed be the true Judge', and the family members recite the funeral prayer *Tziddukha-Din*. It is thought that a good and pious death will result in the deceased's soul returning to God.

As soon as the person dies, a number of rituals are performed which have a four-fold purpose: to recognise and appreciate the reality of death, to show moderation in grief, to give respect to the dead, and to ensure equality in death. We are mainly concerned here with the observation of rituals in the Orthodox tradition. However, an explanation will be offered where significant and relevant differences exist between the different traditions (e.g., Orthodox, Conservative and Reform).

When death has taken place the deceased's family should contact the *Chevra Kadisha* (burial society or holy society) as soon as possible. Their duties include collecting the body, ritually washing the body and shrouding it.

A main requirement is that the body should be disposed of on the same day as when the person died (Genesis 35:19; Deuteronomy 21:23) or at the very latest, the following day. In the case of relatives living far away, or that the person's death coincides with the Sabbath, or the Day of Atonement, then more time is permitted. So it is with autopsies, although they are not routinely done unless required by law. To delay burial is regarded as being discourteous to the dead person. The first and last days of pilgrim festivals are also regarded as inappropriate times for burials. Most Reform funerals take place within one to three days after the person's death has taken place.

When a person is deemed dead Jewish law states:

The body must then be left untouched for about eight minutes. During this period, a feather is laid across the lips, those present watch carefully for the slightest sign of movement. When death is finally established, the eyes and mouth are gently closed by the eldest son or the nearest relative.³

The body is then placed on the floor and covered with a sheet. The body is not to be left on its own; a *Shomer*, from the root *Shin-Mem-Resh* meaning a keeper or a guard, remains with the body constantly from the moment of death right through to the burial. The *Shomer* cannot eat, drink or perform a commandment in the presence of the dead. This would have the effect of mocking the dead because they can no longer do these things. Mirrors are covered up and water is not allowed to stand in bowls:

These are based on superstitions: in the former case lest the departing soul be trapped in the mirror or lest the corpse be reflected and herald a second death in the household; in the latter case lest the water be contaminated by the spirit passing through it. However modern justifications have been added, such as a mirror being an object of vanity and therefore inappropriate to gaze into when a life has been lost. These customs are not regarded obligatory in Reform synagogues although it is recognised that these can be helpful, as many people feel the need to 'do something' at the time of death to fill the vacuum and the sense of impotence that they experience.⁴

A lighted candle is placed a short distance from the deceased's head, and there is a symbolic gesture of the tearing of an outer piece of clothing by the next of kin of the deceased, usually the lapel of a dress or shirt, or a tie. Sometimes a black ribbon is worn over the heart and it is that which is torn. This practice is called *Keriah* (rending), and is based on Genesis 37:34 and Leviticus 10:6, but is not insisted upon in Reform ceremonies. This is done whilst a person is reciting a blessing and if it is before the funeral it is usually done by the Rabbi who has charge of the service. Its meaning is self-evident; it represents the sadness of the occasion and with the passing of a loved one family members are left broken-hearted.

To sit with the body is thought of as being particularly commendable, because it is a kindness, which the recipient is not able to reciprocate, and referred to as *hesed shel emet*. Whilst sitting it is customary to read portions from the Book of Psalms. Such a person is exempt from reciting prayers and wearing *tefillin* ⁵.

In our modern society all the religious obligations in respect of preparing the corpse for burial are arranged by the funeral director. This is not so in the Jewish Orthodox community. The body is washed thoroughly in warm water by the *Chevra Kadisha*, who take great care not to turn the body over face down, as this would show disrespect. Although Reform Judaism has discarded this ritual, it is very evident in Orthodox Judaism. The practice is based on a verse in the book of Ecclesiastes: 'as he came, so shall he go'. This was taken to mean that when a man is born, he is washed, so too when he dies he is washed.

The body is then usually dressed in a white shroud (*Tachrich*) made from cotton or linen. These shrouds have no pockets, indicating that material goods are completely irrelevant beyond the grave. The corpse is then tenderly placed in the casket to await burial; the period from the moment of death to the burial is known as the *aninut*. If it is felt appropriate to do so, the person is buried in his prayer shawl (*Tallit*) with one of the fringes cut off in order to render it unfit. In some Eastern communities the deceased's *tefillin* are also buried with him. The body is then placed in a simple pine coffin with no metal handles or nails. The casket is held together by wooden pegs. Similarly there are no ornaments or valuable objects. As Jews believe that in death everybody is equal, status and wealth are of no consequence and care

should be taken not to reflect a person's wealth and status in the funeral proceedings. It also frees the bereaved family from having to spend more than they can afford on the funeral. It is allowed to place a small amount of earth from Israel in the coffin in order to emphasise support and loyalty to the land of Israel. It is customary to drill holes in coffins so that the body comes into contact with the earth.

Traditionally Jews have always buried their dead, but there is an increasing tendency in this day and age to cremate the dead. This is especially so among Reform Jews, and Reform Rabbis officiate at crematoriums. Reform Jews also allow embalming and the deceased is usually buried in normal clothing without a prayer shawl. However, in the eyes of many Jews, cremation is thought of as offensive because so many Jews were cremated unceremoniously in the Holocaust. There is no problem with the service at a Jewish cremation, the details of which can be the same as with a burial. As for the ashes, they are disposed of either by scattering or burial. It is permitted for ashes to be buried in a Jewish Orthodox cemetery.

There are several traditional reasons why Orthodox Jews oppose cremation:

1. It is seen as an imitation of a Gentile custom.
2. It is the destruction of one's body and therefore would prevent a physical resurrection of the body with the coming of the Messiah.

Orthodox Judaism insists on burial, regarding the alternative of cremation as a pagan custom, disrespectful to the dead and at variance with the belief in physical resurrections.⁶

3. It is believed that burial is the will of God.

However there are many reasons why Reform Jews allow cremation:

1. Cremations are carried out with the utmost care and reverence.
2. The afterlife is thought of in terms of the immortality of the soul rather than a physical resurrection of the body.

If a body is cremated, the remains should be buried in accordance with the instructions drawn from Scripture that a person's ashes should be returned to the earth.

References:

¹ Dan Cohn-Sherbok: *The Jewish Faith*. London, SPCK, 1994. p. 217

² *Ibid.*, p. 218

³ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 1426

⁴ Jonathan A. Romain, *Faith and Practice: a Guide to Reform Judaism Today*

⁵ also called 'phylacteries'; a pair of black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Bible, bound to the arm and brow of Orthodox Jewish men at prayer. (Ed.)

⁶ J. D. Rayner & B. Hooker, *Judaism for Today*. Hazell Watson & Viney, 1978. p. 163

Burial and mourning customs will be covered in Part II. This is Part I of the third of three accounts by the Revd. Gareth Hopkins of approaches to death in non-Christian groups in his community in the Swansea Valley. (Ed.)

The Blessings of Alzheimer's: Triumph Over Adversity

No one would welcome the news that a friend or relative had this cruel disease but as a family we discovered many blessings as it took a hold of Dad, tightened its grip and eventually crushed him.

We were fortunate that it took us some time to recognise the symptoms, and for deterioration to occur – so there was plenty of time for us to adjust, with Dad, to the changing circumstances. We benefited from Dad's natural characteristics of good humour, politeness, a generous nature and care for particulars, which stayed with him, in some form or another, to the day before his death. He benefited from a very patient wife who persevered with conversation and reading to Dad, when most people would have given up through the frustration of repetition and explanation.

I suppose we siblings first got involved with care when Dad's driving licence was taken from him. Mum had anticipated this and began driving lessons aged 70 but it was a challenge too great for her and we began to give lifts to church, appointments and for the weekly shop.

The demands of caring for someone with reduced mental ability and consequently a loss of independence became greater, especially when Dad started to become a hazard to himself because of his lack of awareness of dangers in the home. We could see the effects of tiredness on our mother, so we began to give more of our time to relieve Mum of some of her household commitments and to give her breaks. My contribution to this was to move into their home most weekends and to spend as much time as possible taking Dad out and about. This was so Mum had time to recover and to get little things done that were neglected whilst she kept Dad safe and entertained during the week, and to relieve my sister who gave daily support mid week.

So where are the blessings in this tale of reduced liberty, commitment and exhaustion?

I'd left home the week after my 18th birthday about 34 years previously. Had Dad not been ill I would never have spent time, on that scale, with him. As he became more child-like, so the inhibitions that limit adults in expression of feeling and emotion were reduced, and we were able to tell each other frequently how much we loved each other, were grateful to one another and to sing and dance as the mood took us. We teased, had little secrets and frequently indulged in chocolate treats. Mum and I learned not to stand back and look at the tragedy of this once capable university catering officer who was no longer able to make even a cup of tea, but to enjoy the moment, living day-to-day and in the latter stages of the illness – hour-to-hour.

I think it was disturbing and humiliating for both Dad and me when he first needed assistance with his personal hygiene but as we both adapted we were even able to joke about his 'beauty sessions' as we chose to call them.

As Dad's recollection of recent events declined and he remembered his past, we were able to go and re-visit his home town, relatives and even ex-girlfriends! I would not have known Dad and his background so well without these years of socialising together. They really were a great pleasure and we had so much fun.

The family's greatest desire was to be able to care for Dad at home. Thanks to my mother's stamina and determination (despite her own age and ill health) she achieved this. After six

years of homecare the final stages of dementia set in rapidly. Dad was rushed to the local hospital – just a 10 minute walk from our home, where for two weeks the nursing staff cared for him more capably and gently than we could have managed ourselves, and allowed us to be with him 24 hours a day.

It has been a long and hard journey, and it is particularly painful to watch life slip away, but we have learnt a lot about human nature and feel we have been blessed in innumerable ways along this difficult road. I'm not sure what enabled us to see through the tragedy to this more positive interpretation of the situation, but I wish all carers well in striving for this gift.

Dad died on 28th May and our lives are already taking on some signs of normality: no chains on the doors to keep Dad safely in the house; sharp knives allowed in the kitchen again, pictures back on walls; full nights' sleep ... but also a massive hole in our lives where our dear old Dad used to be. RIP Dad.

Anne Veronica Watkins, AH Librarian

Experiences

My mother was 90 when she became terminally ill with cancer. At her age and frail condition, even without the cancer, her life could not be much longer. Initially radiotherapy was suggested but the treatment would have necessitated a 30 mile journey in an ambulance. Moreover, the burden of the treatment to my mother would have greatly outweighed any benefit. Transfer from her care home to a hospice was mooted, but we all felt that being moved to a strange environment would be traumatic. Contrary to the care home's usual policy, we managed to prevail upon them for my mother to spend her remaining time there.

Many of the medical staff who helped us at this time had a religious faith that made them want to give loving care to my mother. They were affectionate towards her and had a reciprocal relationship, albeit limited by her frailty and diminished cognitive faculties. They spoke of her courage and cheerfulness. She may not have had what Rachels, Harris* and other secular philosophers would call a 'project' but she still had an 'interest' in being alive and enjoying the company of friends, her daughters' visits, the daily interactions of the care staff, her favourite kinds of food and a glass of wine or sherry each evening. She was able to enjoy these things up until a few weeks before her death, until she was unable to feed herself or even drink unaided.

Previously I had a difficult relationship with my mother, who I had always felt was judgmental and critical of me. Sometimes, I even felt that I hated her! But through the experience of being with her through her illness I came to a feeling of compassion and unconditional love that in the past I did not feel. It also seemed that for the first time in my adult life my mother appreciated me for myself. Without apologising in so many words, my mother told me that she regretted many of the things she had said and done. This was a wonderful reconciliation which, in Christian terms, could perhaps be described as the work of the Holy Spirit, or even the grace of God. Certainly, I saw it as a type of healing. If my mother had been treated in hospital and her death hastened, this would not have come about.

During one visit from the oncology nurse, I recorded a conversation the three of us shared. My mother didn't attend a church and professed a dislike of 'organised religion'. But she always said she believed in 'something' and she felt strongly that our souls are immortal. In this short conversation, she talked about her beliefs; a recording I shall treasure.

Rachels might be of the opinion that euthanasia would be the best for all concerned – an opinion that my sister seemed to share – but he would be mistaken. An old lady might not have 'projects' but the value of her life is not to be determined by its past, present or future 'usefulness'. During the last year of my mother's life, I experienced not only her love, but the loving fellowship of the care home staff, the love and care of the doctors and nurses, and above all the love of God.

My mother was buried in 'Memorial Woodland' not too far from my home. A little guelder rose bush grows at the foot of her grave. Wild flowers and herbs native to Herefordshire flourish there. Overhead, kites and buzzards can be seen. A stream marks the boundary of the meadow. Faintly in the distance, a dog barks and a sheep bleats. My mother was one of those people who are very sociable, but find it hard to relax; and she was often bitter and unhappy. But in that lovely woodland, I feel she has found the peace that always eluded her: she has come home.

Dyana Rodriguez

*James Rachels (1941 – 2003) was an American philosopher who specialized in ethics. William T. Harris (1835–1909). A follower of Hegel, Harris' philosophy of education elevated the importance of freedom and reason, and self-direction .(Ed.)

My Experience

It is the season of resurrection,
Creation proclaims her glorious Exultet to the Risen Lord,
Daffodils, yellow beacons of hope, defy the death of winter,
In the hills, newborn lambs explore and suckle the ewe-sheep,
Obeying nature's thrust to grow and reach their fruition as God planned.

In the village below, a young woman cowers miserably in her lonely bedroom,
Unlike the lambs, she refuses the life forces of nourishment and love,
Nature's drive to grow and thrive, aborted within her.

With the psalmists she laments:
'My life is on the brink of the grave,
I am reckoned as one in the tomb,
I have reached the end of my strength.'

The devil of anorexia grins malevolently as he sees victory in sight and he prepares to chalk up another statistic, satisfied he has reached his targets for another month.

Exhausted, the woman falls into a restless sleep and she dreams ...

'Jesus shines before her, He smiles, extends His arms and calls her by her name. He says it is not her time yet but if she must she can come to Him now. He is a God of compassion and she is in the midst of her own passion. She feels His love and reluctantly turns back to continue her pilgrimage on earth.'

Over twenty years have passed and I am happily married now and I continue to strive to reach my own fruition physically, psychologically and spiritually. I have travelled a long way since I hovered on that hinterland between life and death and I thank God that I chose life. Only within humanity does a creature deliberately deny itself nourishment and life so readily available and accepted by the plants and animals. My wish for the future for each one of us is that one day we each reach our own wholeness of body, mind and soul as God intended.

Karen Anne Govaerts

An Experience in China

Recently I had another of those unexpected and wonderful opportunities. I was invited to teach spoken English in China for a week.

My first regret was that the visit was short and that I would be in the classroom every day and surely not be able to do any sight-seeing. My second regret was that having heard so much about the successful China Project, I would not be having anything to do with religious experience whilst there.

Both concerns were unfounded.

I was fortunate that each day students or friends took me to a place of interest after class. I was able to visit Tia'anmen Square; Zi Zhu Yuan Park; the Olympic Village with the Bird's Nest, Water Cube, Indoor Stadium and magnificent themed gardens; the Summer Palace; Forbidden City and Jing Shan Park. The old palaces and temples that I saw are now maintained and observed almost as museums. In some of the rooms there are statues of Buddhas. What was interesting to me was that, amongst the crowds of tourists, people would kneel in front of the dusty statues with artefacts of decoration and pray.

My classes began late on my final morning and my students were attending a different subject so I ventured to the nearby Wan Shou Temple. Rock gardens are a feature of large ornate buildings. Not as we understand them as stones with lots of shrubbery but areas displaying rocks of various kinds often transported to the location at huge cost and effort.

As I sat looking at the rocky area in Wan Shou Temple I noticed a young woman and child winding their way up the decorative stone on a narrow path that I had not even noticed. They turned slightly to the right, bowed at the door of a small building and the mother turned around to descend. The little girl continued to the top of the path where there was another building and disappeared inside. Her parent followed suit.

After their descent I followed their example. The door at the first level was closed with no windows so I had no idea to what or whom they were showing their respect. I carefully wound my way up to the next level and stepped inside. There were three large statues. This was clearly a living place of worship. The statues were bright, clean and colourful; there was fresh fruit, flowers, and a female 'warden' praying just inside the doorway.

I had no one to imitate so I took myself to the huge statue at the left of the room. It was of a figure riding an elephant. I wished I knew more about this faith and the identity of the person but had to be satisfied with the situation as it was. I knelt on the brightly coloured cushion and prayed the little prayer that reflects my understanding of religious pluralism. I

knelt at the middle statue but think I concentrated more on the sight before me. At the third statue, unintentionally, I moved into quite deep prayer.

As I stood to leave, the lady beckoned me to the door; ushered me out and locked the door behind us. I tried to apologise for delaying her leaving – thinking that she had been waiting for me to finish. She didn't speak but beckoned me again, signing to be very careful. We cautiously descended a short but steep, narrow, uneven, hidden path. She unlocked a door and showed me in. The room was dominated by an even larger statue, in the same colourful style as the ones upstairs. Displayed on either side were numerous small copies of the statues upstairs. It was an amazing sight but more importantly I felt privileged to have been shown into this very special place.

Anne Veronica Watkins, AH Librarian

Station 106

(What follows is true. It happened during the afternoon of Monday the 20th May, 2002 near the village of Grafton Underwood in Northamptonshire. I am writing it up immediately while it is clear in my mind and so that my imagination has no time to embellish the facts or come up with any spurious explanations.)

The road between Grafton Underwood and Brigstock is typical of north Northamptonshire. It cuts through the remains of the once-mighty Rockingham Forest which supplied the bulk of the oak for English men o' war for centuries. Most of the trees are gone now, replaced by fields of cereal and pastureland dotted with stock on this warm, windless afternoon. The road is clear and wide, the sunroof is open and 'Der Rosenkavalier' is playing. Out of the corner of my eye I glimpse a sign beside a broad opening in the hedge on the opposite side of the road. For some unaccountable reason – I can't for the life of me explain why – I feel a need to know what the sign said. So I stop, back up and discover only that 'walkers are welcome'. However, I'm intrigued to see a broad concrete road arrowing off at right angles to the hedge and disappearing in a large wood about a quarter of a mile from where I'm parked. On the spur of the moment I decide to see where this strange, straight ribbon of cracked concrete leads.

I drive slowly into the wood, keeping an eye open for walkers, but I appear to be utterly alone. I follow the road into the thickening wood until I can go no further. I have entered a large clearing some fifty metres in diameter with picnic tables and benches around the periphery of a circular, concrete hard standing. Radiating from this hub are narrower concrete paths leading off into the distance. I drive slowly round until my bonnet is pointing back the way I came. Then I do something completely out of character. Instead of immediately driving back the way I came, I switch off the engine, get out of the car and prepare to investigate further on foot. But just as I'm about to lock the car, a strange sensation comes over me. I'm reminded of that weird *frisson* when a complete stranger brushes one's hand and all one's senses and reactions are instantaneously heightened. One becomes *aware* with an intensity that, however hard one may try to recreate it afterwards, belongs only to that sacred moment. And is then gone forever.

In that still, silent, lonely place I am suddenly surrounded by people and life. I couldn't say I actually *hear* anyone, let alone *see* anyone, but in that instant I know I am not alone. It isn't in the least bit scary: I have no desire to bolt, nor even to understand. It is enough in that

moment to experience something which doesn't need explanation. I'd like to be able to say I'm aware of movement at the extreme edges of my vision, or indistinct whisperings in my ear – something to give a ghostly spin and make it more of a story. But it wasn't like that. And in the nanosecond I start to think about what is happening, rather than let it just wash over me, the whole experience is gone. That's when I felt spooked. Was I going loopy? Was I having a stroke? *Why* wasn't I scared? What was I doing here? So I got back into the car and drove back the way I had come towards Grafton Underwood. It seemed inappropriate to hang around that haunted wood and, truth be told, I was feeling a bit unnerved.

Approaching the outskirts of the village, I hung a right towards Geddington which would get me home in the shortest time as I wanted to write down my little adventure while it was still crystal clear in my mind. However, it was a decision which actually delayed me, but also gave the whole saga a resonance and meaning which I might otherwise never have discovered. I must emphasise this was a road I had never driven down before, and I wasn't expecting to see the handsome, polished black marble monument on the opposite side about half a mile out of the village. The adjacent lay-by was a perfect place to park and gather my thoughts for a few moments, before hurrying back to Market Harborough and my keyboard. I wandered up to the monument to see if it held any clues to the concrete roads in the deserted wood. The memorial was dedicated to the memory of the men of the American 8th Army Air Force who flew from Station 106, Grafton Underwood, between 1942 and 1945. The first sorties were flown by 15 Bombardment Squadron from the airfield within days of the unit arriving from the United States in the late May, sixty years ago. On a display board was a layout of the air station superimposed over a road map of the present day, showing the location of the runways, the control tower, dispersal areas, bomb dumps etc.

Unfortunately, there was nothing to connect this busy bomber station with that deep, dark forest over a mile away. However, with my finger, I idly traced my route back from the memorial, into the Brigstock road. If ever the hair on the nape of your neck has risen with a shudder of anticipation, you'll know precisely how I felt when my forefinger turned off the main road and onto parallel dotted lines which ran as straight as an arrow a quarter of a mile into Grafton Park Wood, where the accommodation, PX, cinema, Garrison Church and the complete infrastructure required to sustain 3000 American airmen had been built. There was a circular piazza at the complex's epicentre. There were side roads radiating out to a hospital, mess halls, briefing huts, armouries, guard room and officers' quarters. This is where I had been not fifteen minutes before. At first I couldn't understand why the living area was so far from the station, and in a wood. But then it became obvious. The trees offered excellent cover from reconnaissance aircraft and strafing by fighter-bombers. But then I saw the date of the handover of the brand new Station 106 from the British contractors, Wimpy & Sons, to the men of the American 8th Army Air Force. It was May 20th. In the three years until the cessation of hostilities, these young men earned two Divisional Unit Citations for Heroism and Dedication to Duty Against Extreme Odds. They had flown nearly nine and a half thousand missions and over fifteen hundred flyers had died in action.

Nothing like the experience I was privileged to live through on that hot English afternoon has ever happened to me before. I don't begin to understand it, nor do I feel the need to.

All I know for sure is that I, who was born during that terrible war and who benefited directly from the supreme sacrifice given by those young warriors, thousands of miles from home, was fortunate to be reminded that their souls and our gratitude will last forever. It's a lesson I will never forget.

Nigel Parry-Williams, 21.05.02

World Congress of Faiths/Alister Hardy Society Joint Event

On 9th July in London, Revd Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faiths and Marianne Rankin, former Chair of the AHS gave a joint book presentation, chaired by Imam Abduljalil Sajid.

Marcus Braybrooke had written *Beacons of the Light, 100 Holy People who have shaped the history of Humanity* and invited me to join him to present *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*. We had both enjoyed each other's books, which had much in common. As soon as I saw the flier for Marcus' book, I realised that we had been keeping the same company. So many figures appeared in both books, which complement each other.

Marcus has given us a treasury of the world's greatest spiritual teachers and a taste of their wisdom. Each of the 100 people is introduced in a short biography, usually with an example of their teaching. Marcus then evaluates the teachers, putting them into what he considers to be their order of importance.

I focus on the experiences of the founders of some major and minor religious traditions, of mystics and well-known figures, but include many examples of the experiences of ordinary people. I also consider triggers, results and interpretation of religious experience.

We are hoping to hold a similar event, featuring both books, sometime in 2010 in Oxford, so keep an eye on the Programme of Events.

Marianne Rankin



Marianne Rankin and Marcus Braybrooke with their books

Marcus Braybrooke, *Beacons of the Light, 100 Holy People who have shaped the history of humanity*
www.o-books.net pp. 681. ISBN 978 1 84694 185 6 £25 .

Marianne Rankin, *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*
www.continuumbooks.com pp. 286. ISBN 0-8264-9821-3 £25

Alister Hardy Society Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Alister Hardy Society will take place on Saturday 7th November at 12.00 pm at Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Road, Oxford, OX1 3TD.

A vacancy exists on the Alister Hardy Society Committee and a further two places are up for election, including the post of Hon. Secretary of the Society. Nominations are invited. Members are cordially invited to send details of themselves and their interests to John Franklin, Hon. Secretary, Alister Hardy Society, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London SE10 9LZ; or e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com. Duties are not arduous; the Committee meets just once or twice a year: information about the Committee and on the duties of the Hon. Secretary can be sent on request. The present Hon. Secretary will be pleased to give advice and all help possible to a successor in working into the post.

Members who might like to raise any issue, or make any suggestion with respect to the running and future of the Society, are invited to communicate the same to the Hon. Secretary at the above address. The last date for receipt of nominations for the AHS Committee and/or comments and suggestions for discussion at the AGM is Saturday 24th October 2009.

*John Franklin, Hon. Secretary,
Alister Hardy Society.*

Alister Hardy Society

OPEN DAY 2009

**Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the
Religious Experience Research Centre**

Saturday 7th November 2009

Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Road, Oxford, OX1 3TD

**Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture:
Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey by Prof. Cafer S. Yaran**

Celebratory Lunch

Reminiscences of Sir Alister and the early beginning of the Society

For details see list of AHS Events, page 57

RERC and AHS Publicity Statement

At the Alister Hardy Society's AGM on 13th December 2008, it was agreed, with respect to publicity, that the Committee look into the possible preparation of a broad outline about our work and activities, which could be used as a guide to individual members in promoting the Centre and Society to local papers/journals etc. The following is a draft of such a possible paper, which has been seen and amended in the light of comments made by the AHS Committee at its meeting of 30th March 2009. Further comments are invited.

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre and Society

'Have you ever felt a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday lives?'

This was the question asked by Sir Alister Hardy FRS when he founded the then Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College Oxford in 1969. Sir Alister was a distinguished scientist, knighted for his work in marine biology, who sought to reconcile Darwin's Theory of Evolution with his own view of man as a spiritual animal. The question was posed in the national press and brought in over 3,000 replies. At the present time there are over 6,000 accounts in the archives of the present Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, now at the University of Wales, Lampeter.

The Centre aims to study, in an objective and as scientific a way as possible, contemporary spiritual and religious experience on a global scale. It is non-sectarian, finding, in support of Sir Alister's belief that spiritual experience is common to all humanity, that indeed people of all walks of life regardless of race, creed or culture, religious belief or non-belief have these experiences. The Centre's archives demonstrate that over half the population may have had some sort of such experience at least once in their lives, and that these are entirely natural, healthy and in the main life-enhancing, even transforming lives. A few accounts of spiritual/religious experiences taken from the archives are given below.¹

I was sitting one evening, listening to a Brahms symphony. My eyes were closed and I must have been completely relaxed for I became aware of a feeling of 'expansion', I seemed to be beyond the boundary of my physical self. Then an intense feeling of 'light' and 'love' uplifted and enfolded me. It was so wonderful and gave me such an emotional release that tears streamed down my cheeks. For several days I seemed to bathe in its glow and when it subsided I was free from my fears. I didn't feel happy about the world situation but seemed to see it from a different angle. So with my personal sorrow. I can truly say that it changed my life and the subsequent years have brought no dimming of the experience. [0071]

In 1956 at the age of 23 my husband and I were walking the cliff path from St Ives in Cornwall to Zennor. It was a bright sunny day in September, bright but not a garish mid-summer sun. My husband was walking his usual forty yards ahead and disappeared over the brow of an incline, so to all intents and purposes I was entirely alone. Although there was no mist the light seemed suddenly white and diffused and I experienced the most incredible sense of oneness and at the same time 'knew what it was all about', 'it' being existence. Of course, seconds later I hadn't the faintest idea what it was all about. However it struck me that the oneness was in part explained by the sensation that the air and space and light was somehow tangible, one could almost grasp it, so that there was not a space which stopped because my human form was there but that my form was merely a continuity of the apparently solid space. The experience was unbelievably beautiful, and I will never forget the quality of that bright white light. It was awesome. [0322]

One night of, I should think, neurotic misery I suddenly had an experience as if I was buoyed up by waves and waves of utterly sustaining power and love. The only words which came near to describing it were 'underneath are the everlasting arms' though this sounds like a picture, and my experience was not a picture but a feeling, and there were the arms. ... it came from outside unasked. No wishful thinking was involved, my unhappiness did not matter if the world was sustained by love in that way. [0356]

People are often reluctant to admit to having these experiences, or to talk about them. To address this, the Alister Hardy Society, which was founded in 1984 to support the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre and disseminate information about its findings, seeks to provide a forum for discussion of these experiences. The Society runs a membership scheme and welcomes all people interested in the subject of spiritual/religious experience. It publishes a bi-annual newsletter, *De Numine*, organises talks and other events and holds an annual Open Day in Oxford with the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture. Members may use the Centre's specialist library of approximately 3,200 books and access the archives. Local Groups exist in London, Wales, and in the Oxford/Cotswold, Chesterfield and Midland areas to hear talks on various aspects of spiritual/religious experience and associated matters and to hold informal discussions. Together with the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, the Society organises residential conferences and pre-conference workshops on spirituality and religious experience and their relationship to science, faith, inter-faith and other concerns in society.

A current major project of the Religious Experience Research Centre is looking into whether there might be a common core to spiritual/religious experience – many people reporting the elements of 'love', 'light' and 'unity'. A major survey and study of religious experience in China has just been completed. Similar research has been done in Turkey, is being organised in Brazil and the USA, and is under consideration in Taiwan, Japan, Russia and India. The Centre runs an MA course in Religious Experience at Lampeter, and publishes its findings in books, articles and occasional papers.

Further information, and details of the Centre's publications, can be obtained from: Anne Watkins, Librarian, Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Tel: 01570 424821; e-mail: a.watkins@lamp.ac.uk Information about the Alister Hardy Society and about the Society's local groups and activities can be obtained from John Franklin at 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ Tel: 0208 858 4750. e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com
Website: www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk

John Franklin, Hon. Secretary, Alister Hardy Society. June 2009

¹ These accounts are taken from those published on the AHT website, www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk



Reports from the Local Groups

Chesterfield Group

The AHS Chesterfield Group is now half-way through its 7th year and is attracting new members. Although still a relatively small and informal group, if this trend continues, we may have to find alternative accommodation to fit everyone in.

Recent talks have included Robert Chamberlain on Rudolf Steiner, myself on images and symbolism from Alchemy, and John Harrison on 'Esoteric Meditation: The Path of Light and Sound'. Discussions have also been had on several interesting topics such as: Sir Alister Hardy's interview, available from the AHS library, entitled 'A Scientific Approach to Religion'; a documentary on the 'History of Spiritualism'; and a lively debate stimulated by Richard Dawkins' 'Slaves to Superstition' video.

The new programme is currently being drawn up and will be available online at: <http://beehive.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/religiousexperience> For any further info please contact me at mike@mikerush.nadsl.net or on 07790 757955.

Mike Rush

Midlands Group

This new group has had two meetings so far. At the inaugural meeting on 24th April 2009 eleven people were present, and after brief introductions and an outline of the aims and interests of the AHS we had a sound meditation led by Clement playing a Tibetan singing bowl. We found this a good way of marking the transition from our everyday world and entering into a more thoughtful state.

We then watched a video entitled 'Visions of Hope' on the subject of near-death experiences. Although rather old it was felt to be still a very useful introduction both to the topic and to the new AHS group. Discussion followed and everyone observed how absolutely credible the experiencers' accounts of their NDE were; this led to some more personal accounts from the group about their own spiritual experiences, and an awareness expressed that reading about an experience was nowhere near having the experience itself!

At the next meeting on 26th June 2009 only seven were present but several apologies were received, and absent members have since borrowed the DVD that was shown. Prior to the DVD we again had a brief sound meditation led by Rodney playing an Indian conch (this is more usually to be heard in Hindu temples). The DVD was one in a series 'Icons of the Field', based on a conference of the same name organised by Lynne McTaggart, a scientific journalist and author with an interest in collating scientific research from many disciplines to support the thesis that there is a sound scientific basis for anomalous experiences.

The program we watched featured the work of Gary Schwartz, a psychologist, on cellular memory and extended consciousness. This culminated in accounts by organ donor recipients of changes, often totally unexpected, in their likes and dislikes following the surgery, these changes being related to those of the organ donor. Lively discussion followed and once again the opinion emerged that although it was interesting to have all this academic material

presented, the personal experience of a religious or spiritual nature meant so much more to an individual.

We have an extra meeting arranged for 11th September when Marianne Rankin is the guest speaker and one on 27th November when the whole evening is on the topic of sound meditation and then, more generally, the relationship of music to spirituality,

We also had two outings and some members enjoyed a trip to Glastonbury earlier this month – mainly to browse in the esoteric bookshops, but two energetic souls climbed the Tor. We also had a visit to the London Mela* where we listened to Muslim devotional music, saw some Indian classical dance dealing with the theme of Good triumphing over Evil, and met some ISKCON** devotees. We had an amazing in-depth discussion on the drive down on the philosophy of Advaita (non-duality) and how this relates to modern life.

Usually our meetings will be on the last Friday of alternate months and we hope to draw up a programme for next year at our November meeting.

Vegetarian refreshments and drinks are provided after the formal part of the meetings. The social outings are rather ad hoc arrangements but members will be circulated when anything of interest is on the horizon

Sheelah James

* A free festival of Asian culture, from the Sanskrit work meaning 'to meet', used in the Asian subcontinent to describe all sorts of community celebrations and festivals.

** International Society for Krishna Consciousness, also known as the Hare Krishna movement

London Group

In March this year, Prof. Bernard Carr spoke to us under the title, *Can Science Accommodate Psychic and Spiritual Experience?* He thought that it could and that parapsychology, with its concerns with the psychological aspects of the paranormal and with its scientific methodology and experiential content, could eventually provide a link between science and religion. He spoke of a bridge between religion and parapsychology – and between parapsychologists and transpersonal psychologists – being a shared interest in transcendental experiences. Whilst there were objections on either side, he thought much might be gained by each side working together. There was also a bridge between science and parapsychology, provided by para-physics, a new science which had grown up in the last 20 years to extend physics to explain psychic phenomena. He discussed how science might take account of the role of consciousness and suggested that many forms of psychic phenomena involved some form of higher-dimensional communal information space which was not the same as ordinary physical space but which interacted with it.

In the evening we attempted a Bohm dialogue* on the subject of the afternoon talk's title, *Can Science Accommodate Psychic and Spiritual Experience?* We were only a small group, just 8 members attending but, with each member taking it in turn to speak addressing the question, uninterrupted, with a pause of a minute between each contribution, some interesting reflections emerged. It was thought that, with some amendments, it might be interesting to repeat the exercise should more members be interested in participating: (around 15-20 people being a better number for a Bohm dialogue).

Our May evening talk this year was given by Eley McAinsh on *Mysticism and Contemporary Spirituality*. Drawing on a number of writers to give a balanced view, she illustrated tensions that existed around this subject and differing understandings of mysticism. She embraced the view of mysticism being a part of an evolving sacred tradition, this being crucial in understanding contemporary spiritual experiences and their expression. She looked at the distinction between false mysticism, a mere hankering after spiritual experience, and genuine mysticism, being more a search for and an opening up to the divine, which could lead to positive fruits of spiritual depth and maturity shown in compassion, generosity and support of justice and the environment. She looked at how mysticism could have a positive impact on today's society. Accepting the differences and divides of the world's religions, she saw on the positive side, religious professionals beginning to find common ground in terms of their approaches to contemplation and meditation; studies showing common elements in physiological states; and from contemporary mystical experience the emergence of a new theology.

On 6th June 2009 we met again with the Oxford/Cotswold Group in a joint one-day conference with the Scientific and Medical Network London Group, the theme being *Understanding Consciousness and Spiritual Experience*. As last year, it was a most successful day, some 90 members and guests attending to hear Dr. Rupert Sheldrake, Prof. Ursula King and Prof. Chris French speak, and participate in an open discussion following the talks.

Rupert Sheldrake in his talk, *The Extended Mind, Morphic Resonance and Spiritual Experience*, classified spiritual experiences into seven categories: immersion in nature; dazzling experiences arising from ingestion of drugs; romantic and family love; music and other arts; meditation; prayer; and religious experiences. Regarding spiritual experience, he referred to three approaches: the materialist approach, where matter is the only reality; 'dualism', in which consciousness lies outside nature; and 'expanded naturalism', which he favoured as setting aside the restricted assumptions of materialism and using a scientific naturalistic approach to considering robust data such as telepathy. He held that mind extends beyond the brain and that, as science now accepts nearly all physical phenomena as 'vibrating activity within fields', so the brain is within the 'morphic field' of the mind. He speculated whether the universe might consist of hierarchical series of consciousnesses and, if so, how much we might be shaped by higher consciousnesses, with nature guided not so much by determinist laws as by consciousness-based 'habits', and suggested that, if consciousness is not merely located within the body, life after death is at least a theoretical possibility.

Ursula King, in her talk *Consciousness and Spirituality: A Mystery at the Heart of Cosmic Evolution*, saw consciousness as a facet of evolution evolving through social organisation and interaction. She mentioned Teilhard de Chardin's postulation of the existence of a 'noosphere', as well as a 'biosphere', that matter is infused by spirit, and that the universe is evolving towards a greater degree of spiritualisation, and also that the idea of a growing and evolving spiritualism is found in many perspectives. She considered important the need for formal training towards greater spiritual awareness and a pluralistic approach, owing to the different approaches to spirituality by the different groups in our global society. The future, she thought, lies not in the 'survival of the fittest' but in the 'survival of the most loving', and the problem is how to develop new practices, ways of thinking and processes of education to achieve this.

Chris French, talking on *The Evolution of Consciousness: implications for anomalistic psychology*, looked at the relationship of anomalistic psychology to consciousness, outlining two separate basic approaches: 'dualism', distinguishing an outer material world from an inner immaterial

world, and 'monism', suggesting either that the physical world or any separate mental world is illusory. He discussed the evolution of consciousness and what evolutionary function it might have, and the evidence for non-material consciousness. In this he pointed to a lack of hard evidence and, setting aside fraud, possible sincere misinterpretations of natural phenomena. Questions of ESP and psychokinesis he thought could be put to one side as, even if established, not having direct implications for our understanding of consciousness. NDEs, said to challenge the materialist view, have been subject to criticism, but he said that the survival of consciousness after death, if established, would overturn materialist assumptions.

Following the talks there was a most interesting panel and open session at which questions and points arising from the talks were discussed.

John Franklin

* A form of free association conducted in groups, with no predefined purpose in mind besides mutual understanding and exploration of human thought (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/18/09/2009>)

CDs of the talks (£5.00 incl. p&sp – £6.00 for CD combining all three talks of the 6th June conference), and 'Notes' of afternoon and evening meetings (£1.50 per set – £2.00 for the June conference notes), can be obtained from: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ – cheques payable to 'AHS London Group'.

Oxford/Cotswold Group

We had a wonderful, well attended meeting on The Modern Hospice Movement in February, and an inspiring study session in April on **consciousness**. Eight of us gathered at Tanya Garland's lovely home to bring our own experiences of consciousness. Discussion ranged widely through out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, clairvoyance/clairaudience, and universal consciousness. I chose the theme of Consciousness in order to get us thinking about the themes of the joint meeting with the London Group on 6 June (see John Franklin's report, page 25).

During our discussion several books and organisations were mentioned. These might be of **general interest to all AHS members**:

- RERC publication: Meg Maxwell & Verena Tscudin: *Seeing the Invisible* – the order form is at http://www.lamp.ac.uk/aht/publications/Book_List.pdf or contact Anne Watkins; tel. 01570 424821, e-mail a.watkins@lamp.ac.uk
- Richards, John, *But Deliver Us From Evil*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974. ISBN 9780232512502. (Out of print). You might be able to find it on Amazon...
- Kenneth Ring, *Lessons from the Light* (Moment Point Press) – a new edition of NDEs and discussion of the lessons learned by those who experienced them and what we can learn as well. Inspiring.
- Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies
<http://www.churchesfellowship.co.uk/Home/tabid/210/Default.aspx>
CFPSS have an online pamphlet dealing with negative psychic influences – see:
http://www.churchesfellowship.co.uk/LinkClick.aspx?link=Downloads%2fCFPSS_OccasionalLeaflet3.pdf&tabid=226&mid=584

- Scientific & Medical Network

<http://www.scimednet.org/>

Plenty of great material here – much of it free.

- Blackwell's enormous *Companion to Consciousness* (ed. Max Velmans) is for anyone seriously wanting to get to grips with this topic – it includes essays by David Fontana.

Information for Oxford/Cotswold Group members:

Our next meeting will be on Saturday 24th October at the Friends' Meeting House in Oxford when Helen Jameson will speak on the theme of Spiritual Healing (See Events, page 56). Helen had her first brush with healing 17 years ago and it has become her passion. She now works as a Trance Healer and Metamorphic Technique Practitioner in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, where she lives. She keeps busy as a Quaker Overseer, practising additional complementary therapies, and exercising a very lively Welsh Border Collie. She is also a member of the Alister Hardy Society. More information about Helen's work will be available on her website from 7th October 2009 at www.helen4health.co.uk.

Please e-mail me if you intend to be at this meeting: AHS@riachi.free-online.co.uk – and let me know if you have a healing experience you would like to share with the group for our discussion after lunch (brief, 5 to 10 min. contributions are sought).

Please also e-mail me if you wish to be included in regular emails about our events.

Rhonda Riachi

AHS Wales

Members in Wales will be aware from the recent AHS mail-out that the group is undergoing yet another reorganisation, as the new chair, Sam Jarman, has had to resign due to personal circumstances. It is hoped that as many members as possible will attend the next meeting on 26th October in Lampeter, when the way forward for the group will be discussed. In the mail-out to members in Wales is a document about the Mandala Project proposed by Roger Coward, who will be at the meeting to present his ideas. Please see AHS Events on page 56 for more details of time and place, and of the evening lecture which will follow the meeting. This will be given by Dr Joan Howell, on the philosophy of Judge Thomas Troward – see her article 'Metaphysical Healing: What we Understand about Healing', on page 5.

For enquiries, please contact Anne Watkins (AH Librarian), 01570 424821; or David Greenwood (AHT Administrator), e-mail d.greenwood@lamp.ac.uk

Patricia Murphy



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Concerning the article 'Quo Vadis?' on pp. 9-10 of *De Numine* no. 46 (Spring 2009):

I was interested to read this article, and I applaud – and agree with – Jonathan Robinson's optimism in spite of the presently gloomy forecast for the 'institutional church' and 'our world today'.

The following comments are a mix of instant response and of fairly rapid reaction, from an agnostic-tending-atheist with no formal training in theology or practice in church attendance; nor do I make any pretence at deep knowledge in the field of church history, politics or even its activities. However, I hope that these notes may be considered as a sincere response from someone well-disposed to what I interpret as Christ's ministry, though sadly disillusioned by the accretions and (to my mind) distortions and 'spin' in producing the Christianity which has come down to us two millennia later.

In the section 'what sort of church would [I] like to see?', I would agree with much of the text, with the following as chief provisos. Of the ten precepts or suggestions, I would not cavil with nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7. For the others, I would comment as follows:

No. 4, 'Christ-centred': for Christ-centred people, this is fine; I'm not against it, but would not want it rammed down everyone's throat as a general principle. In particular would I cringe at issues such as the Trinity and the resurrection (which seem to me to have been invented subsequent to the production of the original lifestory or myth of Christ).

No. 6, 'Bible' etc.: it is debatable how much of the Bible is 'Truth' (however that be defined), so the whole premise may not float on the waters of that text.

No. 8, 'prayer and worship': I feel that one of the few noble and sensible things that humans have achieved is to throw off the shackles of prayer (except perhaps as a form of meditation for some people) and of worship (in the sense of bowing down before a father-figure), though accepting that prayer – in many of its infinite variety of forms – can indeed be a source for good.

No. 9, 'peace' etc.: what exactly is meant by 'the integrity of creation'? I would need a good and believable explanation before feeling able to accept or refute the statement.

No. 10, 'One Human Family in God': I'm far from convinced that, if there is a God, he or she cares a damn about individual humans, so whilst I accept the proposal for 'communion amongst all people of goodwill', I suggest the sentence might end in 'who wish to celebrate a holistic spirituality' (though even here, the word 'holistic' might create problems for some readers).

Finally, a comment concerning the whole document. If the author wishes to involve most people, he may be rather hoist on his own petard, or dragging along his own baggage, by insisting that things be 'Christ-centred'. This is only one subspecies of theism, and the very word 'church' to many of us has overtones of British or European sector interests of this kind. Jonathan Robinson has made a brave ecumenical effort, but it is still Christian based, and therefore only partially acceptable to those of us who believe in a spirituality, but of a much more holistic or universal nature, and without the – to some of us – lurking background of

covert theism. What sort of 'church'? Well, how about a beautiful agnostic building, with plenty of internal light, where spirituality, not religion, reigned? Though here again, words can confuse, since for many people, the whole meaning of 'church' is that of a gathering of people, not just a building.

*Peter Hope Jones,
Menai Bridge*

Dear Paddy,

An extra-ordinary visitor

It was a fairly typical day at the Religious Experience Research Centre and Alister Hardy Library. I had dealt with phone messages, emails, post, returned books, a book sale and even received an account of an experience. I'd popped home for lunch and was engrossed in some proof-reading. The phone rang. It was a voice I recognised. Could I leave the library for an hour? There was someone who wanted to meet me. I took directions and ran home for my car. Within 20 minutes I was on a very familiar stretch of road and as Hazel (former MA student and Local Group member) stood out and flagged me down I realised that her home was a place I had passed numerous times, unusual in a number of respects but I had never noticed it.

Hazel ushered me in. Being the first time there I really wanted to look around and take in the character and atmosphere of what seemed to be a very interesting building. But no time for such luxuries, I was escorted into the adjoining room. How I wanted to observe the detail of the Welsh dresser, the Portmeirion Pottery, the old faded photos, the grandfather clock but those seconds were all I had. My attention was immediately taken by the Tibetan monk sitting in those red and gold robes, now familiar the world over. He was looking comfortable on the settee, and whilst I felt it should be me greeting him, he stood, took a white stole and placed it around my neck. All I had for him was the pack of RERC publicity that I had hurriedly put together.

Then the formal introductions – this was Master of Tibetan Philosophy, Geshe Lama Ahbay Tulku Rinpoche, who at the age of seven was officially recognised by the Dalai Lama as a reincarnation of Lama Ahbay Tuluk Rinpoche the Third. Sitting nearby was Dr Joan Howell founder of The School of Metaphysics Wales.

We moved into the carpeted farmhouse kitchen with its Aga, paintings and tiled table, laden with colourful, natural, healthy food. We were joined by Hazel's children. I couldn't help wondering how her teenage daughter and school-boy son felt about having to wait to tuck into their delicious feast whilst Rinpoche prayed silently, chanted, prayed silently and then blessed the food.

I had read about Rinpoche's visit to Europe and Britain for him to gain an understanding of Western culture. His manner of doing so (whilst giving lectures and enjoying the beautiful countryside and Welsh hospitality) was to engage in warm conversation showing a genuine interest in our activities, beliefs and motivations. He was keen to hear about RERC's participation at an interfaith conference in Punjab where I had met the exiled Prime Minister of Tibet, who is of the same Rinpoche Line. We are hoping that Rinpoche will be able to return to Lampeter and address the Wales Group before he leaves the UK later this year.

Pic of 4 people, cropped as photocopy please

**PLEASE CAN YOU MAKE THIS A
LITTLE DARKER, AS MY
PHOTOCOPY?**

Hazel Thomas, Anne Watkins, Rinpoche and Dr Joan Howell

Hazel, Dr Joan and Rinpoche were having a day to enjoy being together; they had abandoned their watches as time had no importance. I reminded them that I was a working woman and must leave them and get back to RERC, despite being sorry to leave.

As I drove away, I could not help musing on the unlikeliness of the situation. Here in a small village of West Wales, at a family home where normally life was relatively ordinary – sat a Tibetan monk, closely linked with the Dalai Lama, whilst cars drove by and people walked past totally unaware of the extra-ordinary visitor inside! ☺

Yours sincerely,

Anne Veronica Watkins, 26th August 2009



Annunciation

The sign was unexpected,
a sickness that grew in the hollow
of a child who thought herself a woman.

Now sitting in a flurry of white coats
she looked up from the book
left open to answer the call.

The message became clear
as the blue line widened
absorbed along a vertical flow.

She tried to push away to
where the mind muzzled
the clarity of the doctor's voice.

Looking back to her first drink
under the influence of friends,
the faintest memory emerging.

The sleep, her head spinning
drawn down into the vortex
by beckoning angels.

The Gap

Born in the gap,
caught between two countries.
I look both ways into enfolding hills.

Two languages meet
stamp pathways, cross,
run into each other.

Industrial alchemy changed
mines and quarries into tokens
spent only in English.

Welsh walks me to the edge
wrapped in a woollen blanket,
cwtshed in fragile security.

Exposed on each side, words
incised on stone and slate
make good fences.

Christine Kinsey

Give me the Wings

Give me the wings to rise
Above this veil of things,
This corrupting obscuration,
This cloth of being human
That renders seeing to be blinded
By lens of mortal vision
Dividing thou from me,
Making a world beyond myself;
A world of strangeness
Where all things stand apart, without,
And in that self created phantom of division
Bow down to separation,
To choice, decision and exclusion
Where all that is takes on deceiving shape
In narrow bands of space,
And petty chinks of time:
Those fading gods
By whose command
All things pass
And pass away.

Rev. J. Robinson

For Anne

Before understanding,
before crawling,
before smiling,
beyond perception,
a deep connection
of pure love
in boundless
fathomless eyes.

Perhaps Spirit was awaiting
that moment to say
'It's time to come home';
that moment when time
dissolves into timelessness,
not a shattering of barriers
but a gentle falling away
of all that seemed to matter,
not a whimper even,
but the breath at the beginning
of 'hello' or 'halleluiah'.

It's a mystery,
all those sounds in the chord,
all those strands in the tapestry,
marvel at the brightness
illuminating all our endings,
all beginnings,
the soul's winged journey
from light to light.

Dyana Rodriguez

Book Reviews

**Mark Fox, *Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms*
Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2008. 203 pp. ISBN 978 0 7083 2157 7 (hbk). £67.75**

Dr Mark Fox is, perhaps, not an unfamiliar figure to many readers of *De Numine*. He has contributed to the Religious Experience Research Centre's (RERC) list of publications by way of Occasional Papers. He has also lectured to the Alister Hardy Society and students on the associated Religious Experience MA course on numerous occasions. A lecturer in Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Joseph Chamberlain College, Birmingham, Dr Fox has previously authored *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*¹, wherein he includes a study of near-death experience (NDE) cases from the RERC archives. From this and other works in the field of NDE research, as elsewhere, readers and researchers alike will be familiar with reports of people encountering light phenomena. Dr Fox picks up this theme in his new book *Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms*. Here he delves into the RERC archives on another mission: to explore four hundred unpublished accounts in which 'lightforms' have been encountered largely outside of the NDE context. Possibilities regarding their origin, nature and common features are pursued. From the outset Dr Fox asks if we have reason to reject 'conventional' explanations for these phenomena '... and look instead to a higher, stranger, supernatural source: a spiritual world, perhaps, coexisting alongside our own but capable of 'breaking through' to it on certain special occasions.' (p. 3.)

The author's own title for the study was: *Lightforms: Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena*. Now reversed by the publisher, the title seems fitting either way. The historical context of the study occupies the first chapter. It observes, biographically, some of Sir Alister Hardy's own thoughts and involvement in the field of religious experience and what led to the establishment of a research facility and the eventual collating of around 6,000 accounts of religious experience – initially at Manchester College in Oxford, and now housed at the University of Wales, Lampeter. This is a concise and informative introduction to pertinent areas of Sir Alister's life and the RERC, thus establishing provenance for the study.

The following chapter completes the first part of the book by locating the study cross-culturally and trans-historically. Throughout history people have been experiencing religious or spiritual encounters with light phenomena. They have been reported across many religious and spiritual traditions: shamanistic, kundalini, mystical, visitation experiences etc. Manifesting as they do in a variety of ways, it is these phenomena that Fox has dubbed 'lightforms'. At this early point in the book consistency and patterning seem apparent. Although this chapter is adequate for its purpose, the author admits that a single chapter is not enough to show the richness and diversity of experiences of mystical light across cultures and centuries. The book then only touches on this area of which I would have enjoyed further indulgence.

Part II of the book, the study proper, consists of eight chapters wherein various accounts of 'lightforms' are categorised and presented with commentary. People have had solitary and shared encounters. The light has embraced and infused. It has appeared as beams, rays, shafts, flashes, auras, and illuminated landscapes and people. It has also been subject to visionary encounter (as in other-worldly visions). Pattern and consistency emerge more strongly here in Part II, indicating several frequently recurring features: that slightly more often than not these lightforms are encountered at times of crisis. They often establish turning points within the crises, introducing positive feelings, calmness and resolution; positive fruits of transformation frequently ensue, ushering in breakthroughs in belief in God and fearlessness of death. Fox notes the consistency here with early NDE research.

As in his previous book, Fox challenges the critique that religious experience is generated by expectation. He indicates that these experiences are often, and to the contrary, surprisingly unexpected and as such are repeatedly found to be precursors to accommodating changes of attitude and lifestyle. Adding further weight to his argument, he notes that as the pre-1975 NDE-like accounts in the RERC archives pre-date Moody's² seminal work – although consistent with it, they could not have been influenced by it.

In Part III, after two pages of statistical analysis (nothing to be feared by non-statisticians) a model in accord with the common features presented above is presented. Further naturalistic explanations, including some of the foremost, recent scientific research, are analysed in the light of the findings of this study. Theological objections to interventionist interpretations of the phenomena are also examined. Fox's engagement with potential adversaries and his conclusions are both interesting and inspiring throughout. I am left wondering, however, what of the accounts that did not fit Fox's model. I am not supposing that these might undermine the model, but I would be interested to see if they fit into some even larger schema or how they might otherwise be explained. This is an opportunity for a further study perhaps.

This book will be of interest to those studying the field of NDE research, presenting as it does, pre-Moody NDE accounts and similar encounters with 'lightforms' gleaned from a wider context. It reveals other consistencies with NDEs suggesting that NDEs are just one subset of a wider ranging phenomenon. The notion of there being a common core to NDEs and 'lightforms' is raised and supported by this study, though admitting of cultural variation in interpretation. The book will also be of interest in its own right, besides contributing to the wider field of spiritual experience research. It reveals the possibility, if not likelihood, of a benevolent source lying behind these 'lightforms' as they have been variously experienced across cultures, history and accounts in the RERC archive. After three years of investigation Fox takes comfort interpreting these unusual lights as providing proof that this world is not all there is. This will no doubt be viewed as a controversial position, particularly by many prepared to read the likes of this review but not the study itself.

As the author describes it, the book is part biography, part history, part investigation, part discovery – and I would add, overall a scholarly production, including references, bibliography and index. Although the book will be of interest to those specialising in the fields mentioned above, it is nonetheless affable, informative, comforting, and inspirational to the general reader. Fox suggests, 'The pleasure of simply sitting and reading the remarkable experiences that are reproduced in these pages may well be deemed to have repaid the price of admission.' (p. 8.) For those sufficiently interested in the subject he is no doubt correct. Respectfully, however, I cannot help but wonder if he was aware of just how much that admission would cost at £67.65.

Reviewed by Karl Gibbs, AHS member

¹ Fox, M. *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003

² Moody, R. *Life After Life*. Atlanta: Mockingbird, 1975

Paul Badham, *Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying? Voluntary Euthanasia Reassessed*
London, SPCK, 2009. 144 pp. ISBN 978 0 281 05919 5 (pbk). £10.99.

This is a timely and important book. The issue as to whether relatives and friends accompanying those going to Switzerland to end their lives there should face prosecution on their return is unresolved. Although suicide is no longer a crime, helping someone to die is at present still a criminal offence. The latest debate in the House of Lords on assisted dying and voluntary euthanasia took place as recently as July. How a compassionate society best deals with the dying remains a contentious and emotive issue.

This book is a logical, clearly written consideration of the arguments for and against assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia and takes a Christian standpoint on the matter. Assisted suicide, legal in Switzerland and Oregon, is when patients themselves take fatal medication provided by the doctor. In voluntary euthanasia the doctor administers the fatal dose and this is legal in the Netherlands and Belgium. In 2008 both became legal in Luxembourg.

Legislation proposed in 2006 by Lord Joffe in 'The Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill' to legalise assisted dying in the UK was defeated, and unanimously opposed by the Bench of Bishops in the House of Lords. In July 2009 Lord Falconer of Thoroton proposed an amendment which would prevent prosecution of people accompanying loved ones to die overseas. It was not carried.

In general, people involved in palliative care oppose assisted death. Most church-goers support it, whereas theologians and clerics tend to oppose it. Professor Paul Badham is one of the exceptions. In this wide-ranging book, he includes his own personal experience of the deaths of his grandparents and his parents, who were kept alive longer than they would have wished. He would have wished better for them and wants to ensure that he will not suffer the same fate.

He looks at the issue from a Christian point of view, setting our earthly life in an eternal context, with the promise of life in a world to come. Badham also refers to near-death experiences as indicating the possibility of survival, suggesting that needlessly prolonging a suffering existence on earth may not be the wisest choice. He also considers current research into how the societies have developed where assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia have become legal and shows that, contrary to expectations, palliative care has in fact improved. It also appears that the take-up rate of assisted death is low. People seem to want the option, but then often do not avail themselves of it.

The 'slippery slope' argument is the strongest factor in the debates over this issue. Opponents are concerned that liberalisation of the law would put unnecessary pressure on the most vulnerable in society, the frail, elderly and disabled as well as the terminally ill if the option to end their lives was readily available and a generally accepted option. Giving doctors the power of evaluating whether another's life is worth living is something which strikes fear in such people. Baroness Campbell, who has a degenerative disease and is confined to a wheelchair had the horrendous experience of overhearing doctors deciding that, to spare her further suffering, she should be allowed to die. She feels that had her husband not convinced them otherwise, showing them a photo of her receiving her honorary doctorate in law from the University of Bristol thus somehow 'proving' the value of her life, she would have been left to die. The Baroness spoke eloquently against any change in the law to assist euthanasia, saying that the proposed amendment would 'turn the traffic light from red to green on state-sanctioned assisted dying, albeit in another country.' In fact her situation may not have been

affected by the legislation, as her wishes would have had to have been made clear before any termination of life could have been undertaken. Cessation of medical intervention takes place now anyway as doctors are continually faced with the decision as to when treatment should cease or pain relief stepped up, even when that engenders coma and hastens death.

Paul Badham is clear that the 'slippery slope' fears are unwarranted and that legislation can be made water-tight. There are no clear, easy answers to a problem most of us will face sometime, either for ourselves or our loved-ones, and this book is a most helpful guide to reflection, especially for Christians.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

**Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Art of Dying*
London Continuum, 2008. 251 pp. ISBN 978 08264 9923 3 (pbk).£9.99.**

In different times and cultures, death has been handled very differently from today in the West. Instead of sidelining the issue, pretending that it won't happen to us, there have been manuals on how to cope with dying. The ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, *Pert em Hru*, the European *Ars Moriendi* and the Tibetan Buddhist *Bardo Thosgrol Chenmo* or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the full English title of which is *The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States*, are all works which give detailed advice on dying. Part of their wisdom lies in the fact that such practice at the time of death is also applicable to spiritual life.

Elizabeth and Peter Fenwick have written an *Ars Moriendi* for our age. They have recorded the experiences of the dying and those who care for them in their final hours in order to throw light on what actually happens. The accounts are illuminating and very moving and the Fenwicks consider what such experiences mean for our understanding of death, life and the possible survival of consciousness.

Dr Peter Fenwick is a neuropsychiatrist and Britain's leading authority on near-death experiences and Elizabeth has written widely on health and family issues. Their wide-ranging study was undertaken at the Department of Neuropsychiatry at Southampton University with the co-operation of Sam Parnia. They were supported by two researchers, Sue Brayne and Hilary Lovelace, who liaised with hospices, nursing homes and palliative care teams. The result is a comprehensive overview of the dying process, documented by doctors, carers, chaplains, relatives and the dying themselves.

The book is enhanced by intriguing illustrations at the beginning of many of the chapters. These show a patient surrounded by demons and angels, tempting and comforting him during the dying process (unfortunately the captions and translations from German are not always accurate).

The Art of Dying, with its many accounts of personal spiritual experience around the time of death will appeal to *De Numine* readers. As we in the AHS so often find, although these experiences had been of great comfort to the experient, they were not often spoken of – and many in the book were shared for the first time with the researchers. The RERC, the AHS and books like this all help to spread the word that spiritual experience is real, meaningful and may well alter our understanding of life and death. Such personal testimony cannot be dismissed as evidence just because it may contradict a generally accepted paradigm. Science

moves forward reluctantly, but observations such as these experiences around death need to be taken seriously.

The Fenwicks found that time after time, it seemed that people are helped to make the transition from life to death by previously deceased relatives. The research seemed to indicate a continuation of consciousness, indicating that the brain is not identical with the mind/soul/spirit and although the brain ceases to function, something continues. At the moment we have no scientific framework for these phenomena but the evidence increasingly indicates that 'we are more than brain function, more than just a speck in creation, and that something, whether we regard it as soul or consciousness, will continue in some form or another, making its journey to 'Elsewhere'. It suggests that when we enter the light we are coming home, that we do indeed touch the inner reaches of a universe that is composed of universal love.'

When Peter Fenwick spoke at the one-day conference hosted by Parasearch and the Alister Hardy Society held in Worcester on 27th September 2008, *The Art of Dying* sold out quickly. The book is highly recommended, as death is something we all need to come to terms with in order to live a full life.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

**Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Art of Dying*
London Continuum, 2008. 251 pp. ISBN 978 08264 9923 3 (pbk).£9.99.**

Do you know what happens the second before someone dies? Faces of the dying have been recorded to have 'lit up with joy', and they have seemed to 'come alive' prior to death, but is this true? *The Art of Dying* endeavours to answer this question which many want answers to, as death is a universal part of life.

Fundamentally, the book is about end-of-life experiences (ELEs) and the theories behind such experiences. It includes anecdotes and analyses, helping the reader understand what happens at the point of death. Testimonies occur throughout and this is what makes the book so appealing – we have 'proof', as it were, that these events at least occur. There is a variety of interpretation, however, and this is beneficial as readers are left to decide for themselves what they think about experiences such as these.

The ideas are interpreted from many different psychological perspectives and approaches, from such diverse ends of the spectrum as the psychodynamic and biological perspectives. The arguments are coherent, but it could be seen as difficult to validate them successfully because mainly positive experiences of the dying are included. However, this is noticeably not experimenter bias as the authors point out how no one came forward with negative experiences. The arguments are unbiased, although subjective, and used to the writers' advantage. By and large the subject of the book is interesting because a contemporary issue is taken and dealt with sensitively. Nevertheless the chapters are fairly long which can make it tedious in places, and excessive comments on some subjects seem to be unwarranted.

Concerning the layout, the illustrations at the start of the chapters break up the masses of information and spark interest. The quotes below the illustrations make the book sophisticated and professional. Carefully chosen subtitles cause the writing to be exceptionally specific; thus every possibility is addressed.

More specifically in terms of content, Chapter Six: *Explaining Deathbed Coincidences* brings in an objective evaluation which makes a concept some may find hard to believe thought provoking and even plausible to the most rigorous sceptics. A deathbed coincidence happens at the point when someone dies. A friend or relative of the dying feels an often odd sense of enlightenment that someone they know has passed away near the time the person actually dies. For example, people have been known to get chest pains when someone close to them dies. I think the book's biggest flaw is the coincidence scale which tries to show how likely it is that a deathbed coincidence is actually a coincidence. Questions are asked and points are given for each answer, the points are added up at the end and it is judged how likely it is that the experience truly was a deathbed coincidence. Even though the scale is a good idea and makes the notion easier to understand, triviality is implied on an exceedingly serious subject. It applies objective reasoning to subjective experiences reminding me of quizzes in women's magazines!

The book's purposes are extensive, including academic, personal interest or within a hospice setting where death is ever-present. It refers to other books throughout which makes it all the more effective for which-ever of the above it's utilized. Moreover, despite the fact that the topics within the book are personal, they are weighed up with both empathy and impartiality, identifying with believers and non-believers alike.

I believe it is a requisite to indulge in *The Art of Dying* if you come with an open mind, have an interest in what happens when we pass from this life to the next, or are simply curious to know if there is an 'art' to dying ...

Reviewed by Charlotte Deakin

**Ursula King, *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for Meaning and Fulfillment*
UK: Canterbury Press, 2009, ISBN 978 1 85311 942 2 pp 238**

'In the past, spirituality has often been closely connected with institutionalised religion, but today this link is by no means self-evident' p. 40

With this statement, although one finds it some way into the book, Professor King nails her colours to the mast. I first encountered her work while researching religion and gender, and imagined before researching further that feminist theology was her primary area of interest. However, a summary of her published work (www.librarything.com) tells of a breadth of interest and expertise in the study of Christianity – mysticism especially – and spirituality in all its forms which has spanned a lifetime's work. So who better to write this wide ranging book on spirituality in today's world? It is a book which will be of interest to academics, while being eminently accessible for the general reader, both in the text and the extensive bibliography, where notes on the content of each book mentioned are provided.

I felt that certain chapters demonstrated a closer personal involvement than others, for instance that on spirituality and gender. With her introduction to *Religion and Gender* (a collection of essays she edited in 1995) fresh in my mind, I expected no less and I was not disappointed. As she says: 'Women of different faiths are now discovering their spiritual foremothers, so long neglected in the past'. This has led to the phenomenon of 'ecofeminist spirituality', which Professor King describes as 'one of the most exciting developments in spiritual feminism' (p. 136). This concept leads naturally to the theme of embodiment, and eco-spirituality in general, which informs the sections of the book in which Professor King

seems most personally involved. The chapters on 'Spirituality, Nature and Science' in which she describes the philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, about whom she has written extensively, has also an intensity which wakes a new level of attention in the reader. It is here that 'the energy of universal evolution' a concept of Teilhard de Chardin's touched on earlier, is taken up and developed. The whole book is a plea for applied spirituality, so to speak, which could well be a definition of the new ecological awareness this book argues for. In a work so all encompassing there must be some areas closer to the author's heart than others. And in a book concerned in its essence with personal religious experience, it is proper that the personal passion of the writer should at least be glimpsed ...

Having said that, I found Professor King's approach both eclectic and innovative in terms of her appraisal of the wide range of life experiences which are affected by spirituality, but reassuringly situated in a venerable spiritual and academic tradition that includes Fr Teilhard de Chardin, Evelyn Underhill and Sir Alister Hardy. She comes to her subject from the Christian standpoint, but is not contained or confined by this. However, mention of other religious traditions is sometimes just that – a mention, in spite of her plea for diversity within global spiritual development. So when, for instance, she touches on the subject of the Divine Child, and says 'the best known examples are probably the infant Jesus and the Hindu god Krishna as a child' (p. 86) one is left wanting more; to those of us on the Celtic fringes there is the Mabon, child of Light rescued from imprisonment by the salmon of wisdom; in ancient Egypt there was Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, (surely as well known as Krishna) and in Nepal there is Green Tara, the prepubescent manifestation of the Goddess. There are also the semi-divine children, such as Hercules, of the hero myths.

However, the main thrust of the book is not examples of divine spirit manifest in religion and myth, but Spirit itself, and the mystery of its transformative power. She suggests 'the growing edge' be substituted for 'the cutting edge' as a concept, to emphasise the struggle for life that spirit inspires in all sentient creation (rather than a cutting down to size implied by the latter phrase). Like the feminist theologians she refers to in her chapter on spirituality and gender, she is committed to the embodiment of spirit, or the ensouling of matter as the *sine qua non* of spiritual evolution – 'contemporary ecological consciousness relates to profound spiritual insights ... human beings need to listen to the voices of the earth' (p. 42). In her chapter on spirituality, nature and science, in company with Teilhard de Chardin and Sir Alister, she makes it clear she does not see a conflict between the scientific and the spiritual: 'By studying nature, scientists ... may be drawn to a spiritual understanding of the world ...' (p. 159). She quotes Holmes Rolston III 'Virtually all biologists are religious, in the deeper sense of the word, even though it may be a religion without revelation'* (p. 159). Touching briefly on reductionism in science, Professor King says of Richard Dawkins' argument for atheism based on scientific evidence '... this fascinating polemic is brilliantly argued' (p. 229n.), but she only gives him one brief mention in the text (p. 154).

Although Professor King is certainly committed to the importance of immanence for our maturation, indeed for our survival as a species, she discusses transcendence in the following chapter, 'Spirituality, the Arts and the Planet', saying how art and creativity can be a means to transcendence. Her subtitle, 'the arts as gateway to the spirit' (p. 61) is well illustrated by Christine Kinsey in her article (on page 7 in this issue) about her work as an artist: 'When I paint and draw I access an inner space of silence, a feeling of being in direct contact with what I perceive as the "true reality" of a spiritual inner life'. A summary discussion of psychotherapy in the chapter on 'Spirituality, Education and Health' does not in my opinion do justice to the emerging emphasis in humanistic psychology on the transpersonal. Here Professor King speculates on the concept of the 'secular spiritual'. Could this be a step too far, in semantic terms at least?

No doubt other readers will discover favourite chapters for themselves; I have concentrated on the ones which resonated most with me. This does not indicate a judgement in relative terms. For instance, the importance of the subject matter of the chapter on interfaith dialogue cannot be overstated. 'Relatedness', which in various contexts permeates the text of the whole book, is obviously a vital means to survival of our species, if not the planet itself. But it is still when Professor King leaves the safety of the usual pleas for communication and understanding in a global context, and explores the personal experience that must, if genuine entente is to come about, underpin such endeavours, that I am drawn back into the book. Like Teilhard de Chardin, who features so prominently in this book, Professor King is convinced that our enthusiasm for life (she calls it 'zest for living'), if allowed and encouraged to flourish, will drive forward 'the whole evolution of matter, life and spirit'.

'It is in the crucible of life that spirituality is born ... so that human life, and life on Earth, can fully flourish and blossom' (p. 195). This is the end of the book, but I am left with the heartening sense that it does stand, as it is intended to, at the beginning of a new phase in human evolution, and the life of the planet.

Reviewed by Patricia Murphy

*Holmes Roston III, 'Scientific Enquiry', in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter Van Ness, (New York, Crossroad, 1996)

**Andrew Clitherow, *Desire, Love and the Rule of St Benedict*
London: SPCK, 2008. 142 pp. ISBN 978 0 281 05998 0 £ 9.99**

The Revd Canon Andrew Clitherow, formerly Director of Training for the Diocese of Blackburn, is Priest-in-Charge of St Cuthbert's Church and St John's Church in Lytham, an Honorary Canon of Blackburn Cathedral and Chaplain to the Queen (the latter title he shares with 25 colleagues). He has written 3 books before this that in their themes reflect his clerical appointments: on prayer and the call to holiness, on faith and hope for those in ecclesial ministry, and on creative love in tough times.

By 'desire' is meant the natural desires that come along with being human, and that as Clitherow describes, 'we inherit largely through our genes.' He considers that in the past these desires had a function in our survival and self-preservation; furthermore, that they are part of our fallen nature and are 'dark desires'. 'They are the driving force behind our behaviour.' By 'love' is meant the love of God. As we bring the love of God to bear on our desires, they can be transformed. This transformation involves a life-long task and effort. 'It involves prayer, self-offering and service and often needs the ministry of others'.

The book consists of six pairs of chapters. As Clitherow sets out the project: 'the first (of each pair) investigates the nature of the desire in question and the second looks at how the love of Christ challenges, re-shapes and redeems that desire.' For example, chapter 5: The desire for erotic love, chapter 6: The love of wholeness, chapter 7: The desire for hatred, chapter 8: The love of forgiveness. Every chapter contains some quotations of the desert fathers and mothers, and in particular of the Rule of Benedict, that are intended to anchor the text.

I found it rather uncomfortable that throughout the book the author speaks of 'our human and divine natures', as this is theologically not very correct language. For we have a human nature, but not a divine nature. We are called to enter into communion with the divine nature at a personal level, and thus receive deification, but still be entirely human and not divine in

nature. Clitherow's language could possibly instil a dualistic perception as regards the created natural order and the divine, especially in view of the way that the project is set out. Yet, the author cannot be described as a dualist. At one place he describes 'our divinity' as 'our energies for love and life' and on the same page he speaks of the need to control our passions so that 'through them we can recognize and release the Divine self-giving love of creation.' It seems that central to the author's position is John's proclamation that 'God is love' and the idea that our vocation is to let this love flow through us. Love is to turn us away from a search for security and from self-centredness, towards solidarity, acceptance of others, self-giving and communion. While I do not consider that this doctrine or Clitherow's exegesis of the Rule of Benedict constitute his strongest position, there are some very beautiful pages on love within marriage that encompass the physical expression of love. On the positive side, Clitherow is too much of an experienced pastor to see things in black and white. Rather, he often brings in anecdotal stories of situations and persons that he encountered during his ministry. In fact, one would wish perhaps to see more clearly how the chapters are following a line of pursuit. Moreover, the quotations of the Rule sometimes have only very tenuous links with the surrounding text.

As a rather traditional Roman Catholic I hold different views from Clitherow's liberal Anglican assessment that all long-term sexual relationships are equally valid and to be respected. In several chapters his liberal views on homosexuality are briefly presented. It is likely that here his talk about our alleged human and divine natures fits his perception.

The book is obviously designed to serve as reading during a retreat. As such, I think that it can indeed give food for personal reflection and meditation. Every chapter ends with a quotation from the Rule of Benedict, a concluding thought for reflection, an invitation to think about things we possibly can do, a Bible passage and a prayer. This book by an experienced pastor may be a suitable retreat guide for some.

Reviewed by Robert Govaerts, AHS member

Gregory Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife In Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-Death Experience*
London, Continuum, 2009. xvi 238 pp. ISBN 9 780826 440730 (hbk) £65.00

Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations is a very well-written book by a consummate scholar. Each of Gregory Shushan's sentences is pregnant with facts. The book does presuppose a working knowledge of comparative religion, but it should be accessible to most readers because of its clarity.

Shushan begins with an attack on the excesses of post-modernism. In his defense of comparative religion and the quest for universalism within religions, he makes 3 points:

- 1) There is a remarkable consistency among largely unconnected cultures and times regarding belief in life after death.
- 2) The core elements of these religious beliefs are largely similar to the core elements of the near-death experience (NDE).
- 3) These consistent beliefs in life after death contrast with the widely divergent creation myths of different religions.

Next, he makes the case for independence of the ancient cultures included in his study, namely, 1) Ancient Egypt (Old and Middle Kingdoms) before the Hyksos invasion, 2) Mesopotamia prior to the foreign invasion by the Kassites, 3) China prior to Buddhism, 4) Vedic India before Buddha, 5) Mesoamerica prior to the Spanish conquest. Zoroastrianism is excluded because of its relationship to pre-Hindu religion; Judaism is excluded because of its relationship to the old Canaanite religion. Shushan then makes the case for the universality of the NDE from ancient times to the present. He notes the cultural variance of NDE accounts but defends the idea that there is a common core in NDEs across cultures and times.

The author then proceeds to look at the afterlife accounts in each of the five civilizations listed above. He analyzes their universal similarities, as well as their differences in relation to the NDE; he concludes that the differences between the afterlife experiences in ancient texts and the NDE accounts are predominately on the symbolic, culture-specific level but that, 'the NDE itself appears to be a collection of subjectively experienced universal phenomena'. Shushan then lists 9 key elements in the NDE that form the basis for afterlife conceptions in the early civilizations that he has analyzed. They are: 1) OBE /Ascent, 2) Corpse Encounters, 3) Darkness/Tunnel, 4) Deceased Relatives/Ancestors, 5) Presence or Being of Light, 6) Conduct Evaluation/Life Review, 7) Barriers/Obstacles, 8) Divinization/Oneness/Enlightenment, and 9) Other Realms/Origin Point.

Shushan reasserts that others have maintained that mystical experiences are the basis of religion and that the ancient texts of the five independent civilizations discussed and the NDE all share William James' core aspects of religious experience. He goes on to state that the NDE and the texts not only share a phenomenological consistency, but also a common metaphysical meaning and that they point to a 'single experiential "reality" which may or may not indicate a single transcendental reality.'

While Shushan's case regarding darkness and negative NDEs could have been bolstered by Nancy Evans Bush's masterful analysis of 21 studies of distressing NDEs (covering 1829 cases) presented at the 2006 International Association of Near-Death Studies Conference at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, his conclusions are entirely consistent with its content. Shushan's book is a major contribution to the field of comparative religion and near-death studies. It is a 'must-read' for students of religious experience.

Ken R. Vincent, Ed.D., AHS member

Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*

Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999, 293 pp. ISBN 1 57731 149 X, £12.99

This is undoubtedly a book of and for our time. In an extremely engaging, very readable and above all hopeful book, Brother Wayne Teasdale offers the basis for a 'Universal Communal Spirituality' based on interspiritual and intermystic ideas and practices. Drawing significantly from his own mystical journey from traditional Roman Catholic to urban monk, Teasdale relates the ground-breaking work of Bede Griffiths and Thomas Keating (amongst others) as they helped bring together Christianity with, particularly, Hindu faith. With a foreword by the Dalai Lama and key reference from Sufi, Jain and a range of respected Christian authors, this is a book with breadth as well as depth.

Whilst emphasizing both the need for and possibility of finding common understanding between the world's faiths, Brother Teasdale also stresses that this in no way diminishes any

of them. Each religion has its particular culture and focus which has, and continues to be of, huge benefit to many. By opening ourselves to the alternative perspectives of different faiths however, Teasdale argues that we enhance our appreciation and understanding of our own faith. I would have to agree that this has very much been my experience.

What enables us to transcend individual creeds and rituals however is not just an open mind, but a willingness to surrender into the mystical experience that lies at the heart of all religions. This book draws from the writings of mystics of all faiths, clearly illustrating how, in ineffable moments and numinous experience, whether obtained through communion with nature, total engagement with God through the arts, or in a religious practice, the words we use to describe our experiences cease to matter. Such experiences are essential to any path to the divine.

Furthermore we, as readers, are asked to accept that we are each of us a mystic. And, following a mystical path (whichever one we feel right for us) can and will enable us to transcend ego and thus find the divinity within. Each religion may have its own words and practices to make this point (and Brother Teasdale includes many quotes from across all major religions to illustrate this) but the underlying process to unity is shared. By working together in interfaith, interspiritual, intermystic or other communities with this shared world view, so we can find not just our own God within (or nirvana, enlightenment, or whatever our tradition may call it), but express it outwardly in an engaging and compassionate way of living.

Reading and contemplating on this book most definitely enabled profound shifts in my thinking. And it is this expansion of consciousness that all mystics seek and which Wayne Teasdale so powerfully yet humbly calls upon us all to commit to; for not just our personal fulfilment but for the benefit of our whole species and planet.

Reviewed by Keith Beasley, AHS member and postgraduate at Bangor University

**Howard Jones, *The Tao of Holism*
Winchester, O Books, 2008. 361 pp. ISBN: 9781846940804 (pbk)**

I was strongly reminded of Matthew Hollick's *The Science of Oneness*, which I reviewed in Issue 45 [p. 48], while reading Howard Jones' *The Tao of Holism*. Their definitions of Oneness and Holism seem almost identical, so first comes the same comment I made last time:

'... the relentless enlightenment of *The Science of Oneness* [and now *The Tao of Holism*] raises a suspicion – everything ugly is excluded. Religious diversity is welcomed but what about religious bigotry, repression, anti-science, the dark side in general? Is *The Science of Oneness* [and *The Tao of Holism*] ... the latest in the endless series of human attempts to achieve comfort and relief from fear by reorganizing the external world, by persuading everyone else to behave well, by eliminating everything nasty? That seems as vain a hope today as it ever was, yet humans concentrate on the out-there world with forever-modernised intellectual ingenuity, so as to ignore the real seat of their fear – within. Hollick's [and Jones'] oneness doesn't seem to be the Advaita oneness of Paula Marvelly's *The Teachers of One* (Watkins, 2002) nor the all-accepting proto-Zen oneness of Lao Tzu, marvellously quoted [by Hollick]:

The best way to run the world is to let it take its course – and to get yourself out of the way of it! (p. 52)'

Maybe Holism was never meant to be Oneness in that sense, so what is this book? Just as *The Science of Oneness* is an erudite source-book of science, on the broadest definition, so *The Tao of Holism* is a wonderful source-book of the human condition, on an equally broad definition. Both books are clearly the distillation of the lifetime wisdom of enlightened minds voracious for knowledge. Every page of *The Tao of Holism* is a dense but readable torrent of thumbnail histories, philosophers, poems, scientists, social research, factoids, and Jones' own beliefs and interpretations. All the material quoted and referred to is footnoted so we have no doubt that he's read and understood all of it.

It's about everything that makes humans tick, at their best, with all the proof to back that up. It's even more about what we've made go wrong, and the proof of that too. Chapter 1, The Body, is a catalogue of such wrongs. The chapter on Mind complains a little about the materialistic effect of advertising; that on Spirit warns of fundamentalism; that on Myths and Traditions hardly complains at all. The chapters on Society, Economics, Environment and Education return to 'impending disaster' mode. And then it's over – no conclusion, no final summary. The panorama is breathtaking; nothing to disagree with, but the book somehow has no message. Why?

The Tao is the path or Way of spirituality that leads to enlightenment – how to live holistically in the world and persuade others to do likewise by example and wisdom teaching, but never by commandment or claimed authority ... Taoism directs its teaching to disciples to learn by example from what they see and hear in the external world around them: but they must find the Way for themselves. (p. 128)

It seems we're left hanging, deliberately. Yet the book is not quite so free of proscriptive message as it seems. For a start, far from directing 'disciples to learn by example from what they see and hear in the external world', we are spoon-fed someone else's experience and interpretation (but no conclusion). That's OK; rules are to be broken.

More significant, and the source of my unease, is a recurrent language pattern that I think reveals Jones' true belief, which we're all so used to buying into. Particularly in the Summary to each chapter: 'it is incumbent on each one of us to ...'; 'we need to use every opportunity to ...'; 'these ideals ... need to be introduced to ...'; 'we need once again to live in harmony with ...'; 'adults need to be convinced that ...'; and 'unless we can act now as a society and internationally against these damaging influences, the future for humankind in the 22nd century ... is bleak'. Clearly, Jones is giving a call to action, but as a good Taoist isn't spelling it out. Clearly, the call is to All of us. Just a few won't do; we All have to draw the 'right' conclusions and take action. Having put that word 'All' into his mouth, I hope not unfairly, I shall proceed to object to it.

To every thesis there will always be very many serious sceptics, frightened deniers and self-interested rascals. So when someone says 'We must All otherwise ...', it's a non-starter, but nevertheless, as a belief, provides the moral basis of every murderous self-righteous crusade, from the seizing of the Promised Land through all the Judeo/Christian/Islamic spasms that followed, to the bloody revolutions of modern time. As a belief, it's unrealistic, dangerous, and characteristically endemic.

On the other hand, when someone talks of 'A growing number of us ... critical mass ... infectious', then I take interest. If 'critical mass' rather than 'All' is sufficient for the 'success' of a thesis, then that's do-able. 'All' is necessary when the idea relies on 'reorganising the outside world ... to achieve comfort and relief from fear', as outlined in the first paragraph above. Minority 'critical mass' is all that's needed when the idea is instead 'to achieve comfort and relief from fear' by changing one's inner landscape, while the outside world continues its

merry way. Even then, 'critical mass' relies on the infectious nature of group energy, and some of us are in a hurry for 2012.*

World-changing Utopias-for-All have long been best-sellers (the principal 'alternative') in the materialistic West – a valuable and necessary tradition. By contrast, world-accepting Inner-change, often 'critical mass'-aided, though big in the spiritual East, is still but a growing newcomer to the West. Chalk and cheese – I can't recall where they have ever really met – certainly not in either of these two books. In other journals, it would be churlish to criticize these worthy works on the grounds of an all-accepting Zen philosophy that they do not pretend to cover – though their 'enlightened' tone does appeal to the 'spiritual' in us. In this journal of religious experience, though, I want to express my longing for a bringing-together of out-there scientific and social utopia, with in-here spiritual awareness of an everywhere-home that is infinitely bigger.

Both modes are equally essential to humans; both are 'what we do'; and there is our dark side as well. These define our humanness; yet they seem to be contradictory, incompatible. Because humans, particularly where reinforced by western 'science', find consistency – new-agey 'congruency' – comfortable and secure, but ambiguity and paradox scarily insecure, we choose either/or – in the West, most live practical, out-there lives; in the East more choose a spiritual in-here life. To live both to the full, alternately or even simultaneously, to ride the paradox which never promises to resolve, to thrive on the creative tension, to by-pass the pressure to be 'right' or consistent, is a rare still skill in both East and West. But it is possible; a growing 'critical-mass' of light, courageous, happy people do it; many others, like me, don't quite get it but are heading that way.

I would love to read a book that whole-heartedly straddles this divide. I want the world, science and society in full measure, including our dark side, in full awareness that it's all a great game that we enjoy, as if from afar. *The Tao of Holism* is valuably, readably encyclopedic, but it's not that – it didn't set out to be. If, and it's a big if – 'last time' it was an either/or – half the Atlanteans ascended somehow, leaving the benighted rump to straggle via Egypt through the disasters of worldly western religion and science, then maybe 2012 and all that is about finding that 'this time' a critical mass of us are now ready to do both/and.

Reviewed by Manohar (aka Tom Foster), www.space-and-light.co.uk

* Pacal Votan (603-683 CE), Mayan magician of Time, prophesied the closing of this World Age Cycle on December 21, 2012 AD. As this date approaches, we are collectively in a transition phase of the old world dying and a new world being born. www.13moon.com (Ed.)

**Frank Parkinson, *Religion without Fairy Tales, Science with Soul*
An essay from Frank Parkinson, *Science and Religion at the Crossroads*.
Exeter, Imprint Academic, 2009. vii 162 pp. ISBN 978 1845401511 (pbk)**

This small booklet of just thirty pages is a little nugget of wisdom. It presents an account of a new holistic attitude to science and religion that is emerging in contemporary society that, if only it were widely accepted, may help heal the divisions of the past.

Societal evolution has reached a point where we cannot advance without the mass of people being disciplined enough to ascend to a higher level of learning so that they can grasp the issues involved. This prospect may seem somewhat intimidating in an age of increasing social

disorder, greater classroom disruption and a general 'dumbing down' of education, in order that no pupil should be seen to 'fail'. Civilised society cannot prosper, or perhaps even survive, unless more people understand and acknowledge the crucial problems facing us and act accordingly. We need a *metanoia* – a change in consciousness.

The real significance of the Darwin celebrations in 2009 comes not from looking back at what we once were but in looking forward to what we can become. Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* published in 1859 was itself a revelation, but inspired by observed facts instead of being drawn from human imagination, as with revelatory scripture. Modern cosmology tells us that humankind is but a tiny feature on a planet within a galaxy of a billion stars and that that ours is but one within a universe of a billion galaxies. But planet Earth is *our* universe and the responsibility to care for our environment and for our fellow inhabitants is totally ours.

Even if the 'big bang' was a real event and marked the beginning of space and time as we know them, what, if anything, preceded this we cannot know: perhaps there is a multidimensional, infinite, eternal universe beyond. What St Paul called 'faith in things unseen' has become as important in science as in religion. The logic of scientists and theologians alike suggests that there exists a higher source of energy beyond human sense, which is the origin of everything in our universe. But science represents its world view in mathematics while religion presents otherwise inaccessible spiritual truth in myth and allegory – a situation that the Islamic philosopher, Averroes, described as the Principle of Double Truth.

Thomas Aquinas was the first prominent Christian theologian to challenge this and maintain that there was only one truth; but truth is defined by the paradigms of religion or science, each with its own language. The unwillingness of all mainstream religions to question, let alone abandon, their founding myths represents a kind of universal denialism. As such religions evolved long before the advent of science, Parkinson describes them as 'flat earth theologies'.

Scripturally based religion and the constantly emerging world of science present radically incompatible world views. Only a major epochal change, and most of it within religion, can produce any form of resonance between the two. However, fundamental scientific concepts will need to change too and the rebuilding of science on new principles that include the spiritual is becoming urgent. It will need to be a science of being (ontology) and of knowing (epistemology), for science too is now asking radical questions about how reality is to be defined and recognised. The possibility of an infinitely dimensioned universe of primal energy is being mooted in science with the concept of dark energy. The objective standards of science that have become a part of our everyday lives have led to a demand for factual and historical truth in all that we do. The whole basis of western religion would have great difficulty in meeting these criteria. To demand that scripture be accepted as literal truth is simply dishonest.

We are now at the beginning of a new Axial Age. The first requirement of any new religion will be honesty and not living with self-delusion. A second condition for a new religion is that it should generate a new awareness of the power of the cosmic spirit that many would identify with God, and that this creates in us a new sense of self. But this sense of self cannot emerge without greater social cohesion and mutual respect. A third criterion for a universal religion is that it must transcend all present-day divisions, both those within different faiths and those that exist between scripture-based religion and science. At present, each faith believes and acts as if it were a universe, and that is where some of the world's most grievous ills begin. The aim of the universal religion will be not only to create individual spiritual

comfort but also to allow humankind to fulfil their potential by developing a habitual sense of oneness with the Divine. This is a doctrine that all great religious teachers of both east and west have preached.

Science's story of creation deals with historical fact and rational hypothesis based on verifiable empirical observation. It is a dynamic and inspirational story in that it reveals the natural wonder of creation, which seeks the experience of oneness with the creative spiritual energy. A new concept of religious leadership will be needed where mutual help at grass roots level, perhaps monitored by inspirational leaders, must replace top-down authoritarianism, a community in which individualism is cherished and in which self-learning and self-discipline will combine through mutual support and guidance: individual and community are equally important, servants to one another in love as St Paul described it. Science points us towards a creative consciousness of which each one of us is, as it were, a holographic fragment, along the lines of Whitehead's process theology. We need to create a global family by telling an awe-inspiring universal story that transcends all the tribal mythologies of the past.

Planetary survival now depends upon transcending the existing group thinking of nations and religions from which we take our identity and acquiring instead a cosmic spiritual consciousness. This theme is explored in greater detail in the book *Science and Religion at the Crossroads* by the same author.

Reviewed by Dr Howard A. Jones, AHS member, author of The Thoughtful Guide to God and The Tao of Holism which is reviewed on page 43.

**Frank Parkinson, *Science and Religion at the Crossroads*.
Exeter, Imprint Academic, 2009. vii 162 pp. ISBN 978 1845401511 (pbk)**

The way ahead in the science and religion debate?

The title of this book, though accurate, does not do justice to the scope of the material within its pages. The 'science' embraces physics, cosmology, biology and neurology, while the 'religion' includes both social and psychological aspects and its interrelation with science. It is a collection of essays with the overall aim of trying to forge attitudes within both science and religion that will lead to some kind of meaningful dialogue that enhances human life.

In the first essay, the author is urging a metanoia, a change of consciousness, through both religious and scientific education, properly directed towards cohesion and holism, instead of reinforcing fundamentalism and division. In The Dawkins Phenomenon essay, the author points up the shortcomings of this attitude of scientism – strangely more prevalent in the life sciences than in physics – that only the criteria of scientific investigation can give us meaningful knowledge of the world, even of the human world. The next essay presents the other side of the dichotomy. Any intelligent, honest survey of religion accepts that the whole basis of Christianity is founded on a succession of myths created by the Church Fathers. If scripturally based religion is to be respected it must take account both of its historical origins and of the discoveries of science over the past four hundred years. For example, to insist on a six-thousand-year-old Earth in the face of more than a century of geological data is just nonsensical.

The final part of the book comprises two essays, the first of which, *From Pantheism to Entheism*, discusses the notion of 'the death of the self', found perhaps most strongly in Christianity and Buddhism. 'Entheism' is a neologism coined by the author to express his concept of the unifying spirituality within that needs to replace the concept of a vengeful God without, who needs to be obeyed and praised. Such a spiritual energy or consciousness is entirely compatible with the science of mind as we know it today and with the deity of many religions. The final short essay is a summary of the main thesis of the book.

There is a combination of a breadth and depth of learning here that is rarely found in academic books today because of the demand for specialisation. That said, this degree of learning does not make the book in any way difficult to read. On the contrary, the author has a very approachable literary style as befits a teacher of linguistics and the book's several ideas are all clearly explained. It is to be recommended to any student of the science and religion interface.

Reviewed by Dr Howard A. Jones

(This review previously posted on the Amazon website (Books))

Swami Dharmananda & Santoshan, *The House of Wisdom: Yoga Spirituality of the East and West*

Winchester, O Books, 2007. ISBN 978 1 84694 024 8 (pbk), £11.99

As a description of the 'real' Yoga, the book is immensely valuable and interesting. It comprises several sections, starting with the search for spirituality; goes on to discuss the various subspecies of Yoga (listed in summary on pp. 141-2); describes some of the yogic exercises (those illustrated are mainly to do with breathing); and concludes with Appendices on Hindu, Christian and Buddhist wisdom. There is a valuable bibliography (pp. 201-9) and a helpful list of further reading (pp. 219-23). Part 1, 'Reflections for Travellers', is particularly useful in helping the searcher towards an understanding of Yoga as an important part of universal wisdom, and in sketching out the individual's potential contribution to, and gain from, its spirituality.

For those in the west, for whom the rather restricted selection of Hatha Yoga is viewed and practised primarily as a secular activity, the book may be seen more as a didactic treatise concerning the theistic side of yoga as a religious system. The pushing of what comes across as a Christian God seems to grind somewhat as an interpretation of the original Divine in Yoga, and may be off-putting to a western yoga-follower steeped in a more secular, agnostic spirituality. But, as usual, everything depends on what one means by 'spirituality'.

This book is both challenging and inviting, with two phrases indicating the breadth and attraction of the topic, and showing the scope for one's own interpretation: 'the true meaning and aim of yoga – to unite the whole of our being with the Divine' (p. 102), but also 'yoga is not necessarily about religion or God' (p. 137). I was intrigued, stimulated and educated.

Reviewed by Peter Hope Jones (AHS member)

Andrew and Angela Donovan, *The Hidden Oracle of India: The Mystery of India's Palm Leaf Readers*
Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: O Books, 2008. 139 pp. ISBN 978 1 84694 074 3.
£9.99; US\$ 19.95.

This engaging volume tells of how a couple based in the UK, in the course of a visit to India, had the story of their present and past lives told to them by a family of palm leaf readers in Delhi. Andrew and Angela Donovan provide between them a thought-provoking first-person account not just of the strange things that transpired during this couple's visit to the palm leaf readers, but also of their rather different reactions to the encounter during, and long after, the visit. The aim of the book is to share these experiences, make readers aware of the palm leaf tradition, and to enable interested persons to seek out their own life stories as recorded in these ancient palm leaves.

Palm leaves were the earliest medium in which most of India's ancient treatises in Sanskrit and Tamil – dealing with diverse subjects ranging from anatomy, medicine, architecture and astronomy to mathematics, music, poetry and sculpture – were written down and preserved. These were passed down through family lines for generations, and held in private collections. Not many of these written records have survived the upheavals during and after the colonial period; many have been dispersed far and wide, been destroyed, or have simply decayed over time. It is only recently that public as well as private concerns have taken an interest in trying to locate, purchase, photograph and copy what leaves remain, in order to preserve their contents for posterity.

Among the survivors are a collection known as the *naadi granths*, palm leaves believed to record the life stories of every individual that ever lived or will live. These records are the subject of this book. According to legend, the Hindu great god, Shiva, assumed the role of doctor, Vaidya, in the town of Vaitheeswarankoil in Tamil Nadu, in order to alleviate the sufferings of his followers. The contents of the *naadi granths* are attributed to Lord Shiva in this form, and are understood to have been set out in writing by the Sapta Rishis or seven sages, and thereafter handed down across the generations. In the *granths* (texts), the reader finds information about his/her past lives, predictions regarding this life, a record of good and bad karma, as well as ritual and other prescriptions, understood to alleviate the effects of bad karma from previous lives. The *naadi granth* tradition is thus premised on the Hindu belief in *samsara*, the cycle of birth-death-rebirth, and on the belief that one's actions in past lives influence the quality of this and future lives. It relies on Indian astrology to work out the precise form of the remedial rituals, which in turn form part of a larger ritual complex central to Hindu Brahmanical traditions.

Two communities in Tamil Nadu, those of the Valluvars and Vaitheeswarankoil, are understood to have copied the earlier *granths* in the 13th century, and to be in possession of the limited number of leaf-bundles still in existence. Members of these families offer their services to interested clients; they identify the appropriate *granth* for each individual, explain its contents, and carry out the ritual and other remedies it prescribes for alleviating difficulties experienced by the client. The scope of these *granths* is not confined to persons of particular nationalities or religions. The understanding is that individuals from any background stand a chance of finding complete records of their many lives lived on earth (including the current one), and of benefiting from the prescriptions and remedies detailed in the *granths*.

Identifying the correct *granth* to match each individual is, as the Donovans discover, one of the most arduous aspects of this process. The leaf readers start their search on the basis of the client's thumb impression. Thumb impressions help them identify the larger set of *granths*

which may contain the individual *granth* matching the client's profile. Many clients go no further than this initial stage since it is often the case that the entire set of texts corresponding to a type of thumb impression is missing. For those who make it through this stage, there follows an elaborate question-answer session where the leaf reader thumbs through leaf after leaf, asking questions about the client that require 'Yes' or 'No' answers. Where the answer is in the negative (eg: Q: 'Is your father's name Edward?' Answer: 'No') the particular *granth* is cast aside and another one picked up. It is only when a basic set of some twenty or thirty questions are answered in the affirmative that the palm reader is satisfied that the *granth* identified is the correct one. Once the client has got to this stage (often after the passage of many hours) s/he is then told about his/her past lives, his/her experiences in this life, the instances of bad karma in the past that are obstructing his/her wellbeing in the present, and the exact pujas and other rituals to be performed to alleviate present suffering.

The Donovans explain in a very evocative manner their experience of the *naadi granth* readers and their initial reactions to this encounter. Andrew, who describes himself as having been cynical to begin with, narrates his utter astonishment as the reading got going and the leaves revealed things about himself that he alone knew to be true. His state of shock and surprise was further aggravated when some of the short-term predictions contained in the leaves came true. This encounter, for Andrew, shook him to his core, dismantled the certainties in his life, and left him on rather shaky ground from which to rebuild his worldview. For Angela, who describes herself as 'spiritual', and therefore more open to ideas about alternative realities, the experience was 'uplifting' – it confirmed some of her deeply held beliefs and vindicated her faith in the supernatural.

The Donovans attempt in the book to provide some background information about the *naadi granth* tradition. Relatively little is known about it, and since neither author is a trained historian, the information provided is patchy and piecemeal. There are some highly speculative observations on Angela's part that are, at least from the point of view of this reader, rather too flaky and fantastical to be taken seriously. The main strength of the book, however, is its ability to provide a cogent picture of what to expect if one were to visit the *naadi granth* readers. It provides guidance about where to find them (Delhi or Tamil Nadu), how to get there, and how to prepare for the encounter. For anyone interested to try out for themselves this particular Tamil *naadi granth* tradition (there are others), this book is a useful place to start their search.

Reviewed by Dr Maya Warriar, Senior Lecturer, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter.

R. S. Murrin, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galilee: A Personal and Spiritual Diary of a Journey of a Lifetime* (with watercolour illustrations by the author)

Private, 2008. 67 pp. ISBN 9780906165676 (pbk) £6.00

This delightful book is a must not only for those who have visited the Holy Land and wish to be reminded of time spent in this unique place, but also for those considering the possibility of a pilgrimage but are concerned about travel in Israel and whether this can be done without being part of a group tour.

Bob Murrin, a retired Hospice Chaplain, describes how he and Kate, his wife of 42 years, were both baptised in the River Wye in the 1980s when the seeds were sown not only to follow Jesus but one day to visit Galilee and seek evidence of the 'man from Galilee' Himself. This

finally happened in May 2008 following Kate's recovery from being seriously ill. They were not linked to any official tour but trusted in God's protection to link up or 'hitch' – hence the title of the book – with any international group of pilgrims they met as they travelled by car hired on arrival at Tel-Aviv airport.

Bob and Kate travelled from Tel-Aviv northwards through the Valley of Jezreel towards the Lake of Galilee in which vicinity they stayed for 12 days, followed by 2 days in Nazareth, before returning home. The book is full of detailed descriptions of the sites they visited linked to the life of Jesus, and the contacts with the many nationalities of travellers and local people encountered on their tour. Helpful information on places where they stayed and even the problem of finding public conveniences are all documented for would-be travellers, particularly if stricken by a holiday tummy bug.

In the centre pages, Bob's watercolour pictures of the special places and Christian people he met add an extra dimension to this lovely book. I felt as though I had been there too and met the same people. They met many kind and helpful pilgrims who more than compensated for those who were slightly too officious.

A potted history of the happenings in the Galilee area and the setting up of the Christian Guest House 'Beit Bracha' or 'House of Blessing' where they stayed is provided at the beginning of the book.

Did Bob find the evidence he was seeking of 'the man from Galilee'? You must read the book for yourself to find the answer.

Thank you to Bob for a treat from Galilee.

Reviewed by Hilary Jackson, AHS member

Copies available from Ann Watkins, Alister Hardy Librarian. Half the proceeds will go to the Church in Wales ' Jubilee Fund ' set up to re-equip the Shij'ia Health Centre in Gaza, recently destroyed.

**Joanna Lehmann, *Our Dark Twin: the Paradoxical Saviour Within Us*
UK, Tagman Press, 2005 (x) 154 pp. ISBN 1 903571 56 1 (hbk) £8.50**

Appropriately read in the darkness of solstice (when frozen ice insists on letting go outer world endeavours) this book is about our interior and hidden world and the necessity to journey its terrain, facing its terrors and mining its treasures.

In psychological language, it tells how we need to bring to light and integrate the unconscious. In mythological symbolism it deals with the importance of the journey of the Goddess into the Underworld, or the hero's challenge of facing Medusa. In relation to spiritual development, it is about entering the darkness wherein we face our demons to mine the gold of wisdom, courage and rebirth.

Joanna Lehmann shares some of her revelatory dreams at times of life changes. These led her to know that going into the depths, the crypts of the mind, was the way of her unfolding journey: '... answers and revelations were never found through attempts to rise to the heights of a spiritual place ... they were always found beneath in the depths, at the hub of the blackness'.

She covers a wide range of mythologies, about Innana, Persephone, Appollo and Dionysus, Athena and Medusa, Zeus, and Hades where the interaction of opposite forces, sometimes known as dark and light, passion and reason, drives positive change: 'Even in our most fearsome and loathsome quality lies the basis of our most creative and luminous expression'. Her book has many black and white illustrations to represent her understanding of a parallel shadow underworld.

Part one, 'The Essential Nature of the Dark Twin', looks at the Black Sheep, the Trickster, Dark Force in Nature, How Evil is Born. Part two is 'Venturing into the Dark Twins Realm', taking us on a journey through the threshold, with Helpful Spirits, Wild Tigers, Taking the Plunge, Breaking into the Inner Sanctum and The Return. More mythological emblems, of Beauty and the Beast, Orpheus and Eurydice and others, emerge to give metaphors of the journey. Joanna (who studied Drama, Classics and Ancient Greek Religion) quotes many sources and her subject is clearly well researched.

Somehow, I felt the book was an experience of standing at the entrance or exit of the dark underworld explaining or else giving examples of what it is like, rather than a real initiatory experience. And perhaps the many different metaphors or mythologies quoted were a little confusing and unable to hold me in one clear journey. However, for those wanting initial ideas or useful references for the dark/underworld and all it may hold, this could be a useful beginning.

Reviewed by Pamela Gaunt

Books for Review

The following books have been received for review. If any of our current reviewers, or other interested readers would like to write a review of any of these, please contact David Greenwood, the Administrator, who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours.

Arbachakov, A & L	<i>The Last of the Shor Shamans</i>	(O Books, 2008)
Constans, Gabriel	<i>Buddha's Wife (a novel)</i>	(R D Reed, 2009)
Dark, Gregory	<i>The God of the New Millennium: a search for balance in an age of spin</i>	(O Books, 2005)
Dark, Gregory	<i>The Prophet of the New Millennium: the search for principles in an unprincipled age</i>	(O Books, 2005)
Haeri, Shaykh Fadhlalla	<i>Witnessing Perfection</i>	(O Books, 2008)
Hagger, Nicholas	<i>The New Philosophy of Universalism: the Infinite and the Law of Order</i>	(O Books, 2009)
Halton, Lindsay	<i>The Secret of Home: homesouls guide to abundant living</i>	(O Books, 2008)
Hemingway, Annamaria	<i>Practising Conscious Living and Dying: Stories of the Eternal Continuum of Consciousness</i>	(O Books, 2008)

Henderson, Michael	<i>No Enemy to Conquer: forgiveness in an unforgiving world.</i> [Grass roots reconciliation efforts can influence international affairs]. (Baylor University Press, 2009)
Holden, Andrew	<i>Religious Cohesion in Times of Conflict,</i> (Continuum, 2009)
Matus, Thomas	<i>Ashram Diary: in India with Bede Griffiths,</i> (O Books, 2009)
Robinson, John C	<i>Finding Heaven Here</i> (O Books, 2009)
Rohr, Richard, & friends	<i>Contemplation in Action</i> (Crossroad, NY, 2006)
Rowe, Dorothy	<i>What Should I Believe? Why our Beliefs about the Nature of Death and the Purpose of Life Dominate our Lives</i> (Routledge, 2009)
Santoshan	<i>Realms of Wondrous Gifts: Psychic, Mediumistic and Miraculous Powers in the Great Wisdom Traditions</i> (Gordon Higginson Fellowship, 2008)



Additions to the Alister Hardy Library

Alister Hardy Trust	Trust Deed 1983/Supplemental Deed 2009
Blizek, William L	The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film
Dark, Gregory	The God of the New Millennium
King, Ursula	The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for Meaning & Fulfilment
Lord, John Anthony	The Relevance of Philosophy to Psychical Research: A Critical Examination of Claims & Methods
Moss, E	Contact Points
Nolan, Steve	Film, Lacan & the Subject of Religion: A Psychoanalytical Approach to Religious Film Analysis
Rankin, Marianne	Pack for Speakers (Religious Experience & RERC)
Rawle, Martin	Perceptions of Spirituality & Spiritual Development in Teacher Training
Satya	New Visions: Poems, Vol. 4
Shushan, Gregory	Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism & Near-Death Experience
Skrupskelis, I & Berkeley, E	The Correspondence of William James, Vols. 1-12
Willin, Melvyn	The Paranormal: Caught on Film
Yates, Nigel	From the 'Naughty Nineties' to the 'Swinging Sixties': The Strange Phenomenon of Anglican Ultra-Catholicism; & Lampeter, Wales & the Oxford Movement
Zimmer, Henry R	Integrating the Evil: A Celtic Myth and a Christian Tale

Book Donations to the Library

The Obituary in *De Numine* No. 45 (Autumn 2008) told us that Crawford Knox had been involved with the Alister Hardy Trust for many years, being an active member, Treasurer, author and good friend of the Centre. Soon after his death in July last year, RERC learnt that Crawford wanted the Alister Hardy Library to benefit from his vast and varied collection of books. Crawford was keen for the AHT to have first choice of his library. Due to the complexities of keeping a house lived-in until sold and then the pressure of a very quick sale, this did not happen. Malcolm Knox and Hilary Cox expressed hope that there would still be items of interest to us.

It was early in April 2009 that Joseph Norwood (student volunteer in the AH Library) and I drove from Lampeter to Warminster to make a selection from the thousands of books that Crawford Knox had left. Crawford's library was being stored at Alan Shepherd's home. (Alan was a friend of Crawford's and runs Green Spirit Books and the Schumacher Book Service.) Alan had kindly done substantial sorting before we arrived and got onto shelves the sorts of books he thought would interest us.

We collected hundreds of books to do with religious experience, psychology, dreams, UFOs, healing, mediums: the list is endless. Also, knowing our close connection, during MA Student Residentials, with Indic spirituality and the Body Programme (which results in some of those students becoming members of the AHS and using our library) we also selected some books that overlap there too.

I must say that this job would have been impossible for one person in a day. I am indebted to Joseph who with his love of books and interest in religious experience worked solidly for hours making choices, and to Alan who packed endless boxes of books with expertise as we selected volumes.

***Pic of one person sitting with books, CROPPED AS IN
PHOTOCOPY PLEASE***

One of Joseph's final days working in the AH Library before leaving Lampeter

The work could have been long and daunting so Joseph and I are most grateful to Alan and Mrs Shepherd who made us welcome in their home and kept us going in hot drinks and pleasant conversation. It really was a very long and tiring but very pleasant day.

We are very grateful to Crawford Knox, his family and friends for helping us access this wonderful donation of books

In true ecological fashion we also collected on this trip books and journals kindly donated by Vera Hopkins. A little while later Verena Tschudin gave us the run of newsletters which were printed during her period of *De Numine*.

You will recall that Averil French made a substantial contribution to the library last year. Many of those books were by or relating to Jung. Because of the content of his work Averil included a number of lovely books of fairy tales. These were particularly enjoyed this summer when member Jim Banks came from North America with his young daughter.

Anne Veronica Watkins, AH Librarian



Resource Pack for Speakers on Religious Experience and the Work of RERC

This is a new resource, primarily for use with VI Forms, as Religious Experience is to play an increasingly important role in the A Level syllabus. AHS members may be asked to speak in schools and colleges or to other related organisations. The pack is designed to help prepare such talks.

I compiled the pack with the help of others who had also given talks, and taking feedback from various members into consideration. The result is a set of guidelines and three talks, which may be used as they stand or modified to suit the audience and occasion. These are followed by a set of examples of experiences taken from the RERC Archive.

There is a folder containing the hard copy in the RERC Library and an electronic version on CD. People are also welcome to contact me for an emailed version.

Marianne Rankin Marianne@johnrankin.demon.co.uk

List of AHS Events, October 2009 to June 2010

Friday 2nd October 2009

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group Theme: *Inside the Church of Satan* (video and discussion)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield (contact: Mike at mike@mikerush.nadsl.net or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Tuesday 6th October 2009

- 3.00 pm AHS London Group: *Magic Mountains and Experiences of East Africa Rituals and their Specialists*, by Dr. Ben Knighton
5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
6.00 pm Evening discussion
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Saturday 24th October 2009

- 10.30 am AHS Oxford & Cotswold Group: Theme: *Spiritual Healing*
Guest speaker: Helen Jameson, Trance Healer. Followed by discussion, with members' healing experiences
Please bring your own lunch; tea & coffee provided.
Venue: Oxford Friends Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford (contact: Rhonda on rhonda@riachi.free-online.co.uk 01865 765847 for further details)

Monday 26th October 2009

- 3.00 pm AHS Wales: Meeting to discuss the Mandala Project proposed by Roger Coward; and to consider the way forward for the Group
Venue: Wolfson Room, Old Building, University of Wales Lampeter
Details: contact Anne Watkins, tel. 01570 480733, e-mail a.watkins@lamp.ac.uk
6.00 pm Dinner, in University Refectory
Please book in advance with Anne Watkins, details above
8.00 pm AHS Public Lecture by Dr Joan Howell on *Judge Thomas Troward*, and his philosophy of *Metaphysical Healing*, (see Dr Howell's article, page 5)
Venue: Old Hall, University of Wales, Lampeter
Details: for evening lecture contact Hazel Thomas, tel. 01570 480733, e-mail: hazelthomas26@hotmail.com

Friday 6th November 2009

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *Jesus: A Witch's View* (presentation by Joe Revill)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield (contact: Mike at mike@mikerush.nadsl.net or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Saturday 7th November 2009

- 10.00 am Alister Hardy Society: Open Day 2009 – Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Religious Experience Research Centre
- 10.30 am Annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, *Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey* by Professor Cafer S. Yaran
- 12.00 pm Alister Hardy Society AGM (members only)
- 1.30 pm Celebratory Lunch in the Arlash Hall, with wine and soft drinks
- 2.45 pm Reminiscences of Sir Alister and the early beginning of the Society
- 4.15 pm Departures
- Venue: Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Road, Oxford, OX1 3TD
(Cost; £16 AHS members; £20 non-members; £5 students.
Celebration lunch, £15. Details and booking form from; Anne Watkins, Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. e-mail: a.watkins@lamp.ac.uk)

Tuesday 24th November 2009

- 3.00 pm AHS London Group: *What Near-Death Experiences can Teach us about the Everyday Life*, by Dr. Ornella Corazza
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 6.00 pm Evening discussion
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Tuesday 26th January 2010

- 3.00pm AHS London Group: *Contemporary Religious Experience in Tamilnadu, South India: A Pilot Project*, by Revd. Jonathan Robinson
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 6.00 pm Evening discussion
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Tuesday 23rd March 2010

- 3.00 pm AHS London Group: *'The Cloud of Unknowing' as a Basis for Spiritual Development*, by Revd. Graeme Watson
- 5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
- 6.00 pm Evening discussion
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Saturday 24th April 2010

- 10.00am British Teilhard Association/ Alister Hardy Society: Study Day:
to Theme: *Future of Humanity: A Cosmological Vision*
- 4.00 pm (Cost, £18.00 members of AHT & BTA – £25 for non-members. Further information from Canon Alan Nugent, 18 Minster Yard, Lincoln, LN2 1PX
Tel: 01522 561631 e-mail: subdean@lincolncathedral.com)
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Tuesday 18th May 2010

- 6.30 pm AHS London Group: *Mysticism and the Search for the Authentic*, by Harvey Gillman
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London, W8

Saturday 19th June 2010

- 10.00 am Joint AHS London & Oxford/Cotswold Group Study Day
Principle speaker: Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture. (Details to be announced)
Venue: Oxford

OTHER EVENTS

Saturday 26th September 2009

- 10.00 am Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies: Conference: Theme; to *The Art of Dying – A Journey to Elsewhere*. Sessions led by
3.45 pm Dr. Peter & Elizabeth Fenwick
(Further information from; Angela Howard, Webb's Cottage, Woolpits Road, Great Saling, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5DZ. Tel: 01371 850423)
Venue: Friends' House, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

Sunday 11th October 2009

- 9.00 am Scientific & Medical Network Open Dialogue: *Towards an understanding of the Primacy of Consciousness*
Speakers: Dennis Blejer, Graham Dunstan Martin, Dr. Elizabeth Sahtouris
Venue: School of Economics, 11 Mandeville Place, London, W1U 3AJ
(Cost £55. Bookings; Conference Administrator at above address)

Saturday 31st October 2009

- 9.45 am Society for Psychical Research: Study Day: Theme; *Poltergeist Outbreaks, Then and Now*. Speakers: Guy Lyon Playfair, Mary Rose Barrington,
To Alan Murdie and Dr. Barrie Colvin
5.10 pm
Venue: St. Philip's Church, Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH
(Cost, £38 – £33 SPR members, £3 reduction for concessions. Booking/details: SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London, W8 6LA. e-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk)

Saturday 31st October, 2009

- Anomalous Experiences Research Unit, at University of York
One day Conference: *Exploring the Extraordinary* – interdisciplinary links and discussions regarding the study of spiritual & extraordinary experiences
£15 (£10 concessions)
Venue: W/222, Department of Sociology, University of York
Details & registration: contact Hannah Gilbert at heg104@york.ac.uk

Saturday 21st November 2009

- 9.00 am Scientific & Medical Network: Open Dialogue: *Infinite Potential: The Legacy Of David Bohm*. Speakers: Prof Basil Hiley, Dr. F. David Peat, Leroy Little Bear, Donald Factor, Dr. Mary Cadogan, Lord Stone of Blackheath
- Venue: Clinical Lecture Theatre (Francis Bancroft Building), Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London, E1
(Cost £55. Bookings; Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11 Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF)

Friday 9th April to Sunday 11th April 2010

- Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies: 2010 Annual Conference: Theme: *The Nature of Reality*. Speakers: Very Revd. Alex Wedderspoon, Dr. Roger Straughan
- Venue: The Hotel Royale, Bournemouth
(Further information from: Julian Drewett, Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop, South Road, North Somercotes, Lincs., LN11 7PT. Tel/fax: 01507 358845
e-mail: gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk)

Friday 16th April to Sunday 18th April 2010

- Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference: *Order out of Chaos: Possibilities for Transformation*
- Venue: University College, Sparkeford Road, Winchester
(Cost, £235 residential – £200 non-res. (£220 – £185 SMN members). For further information/booking contact Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF
Tel: 01608 652001. e-mail: info@scimednet.org)

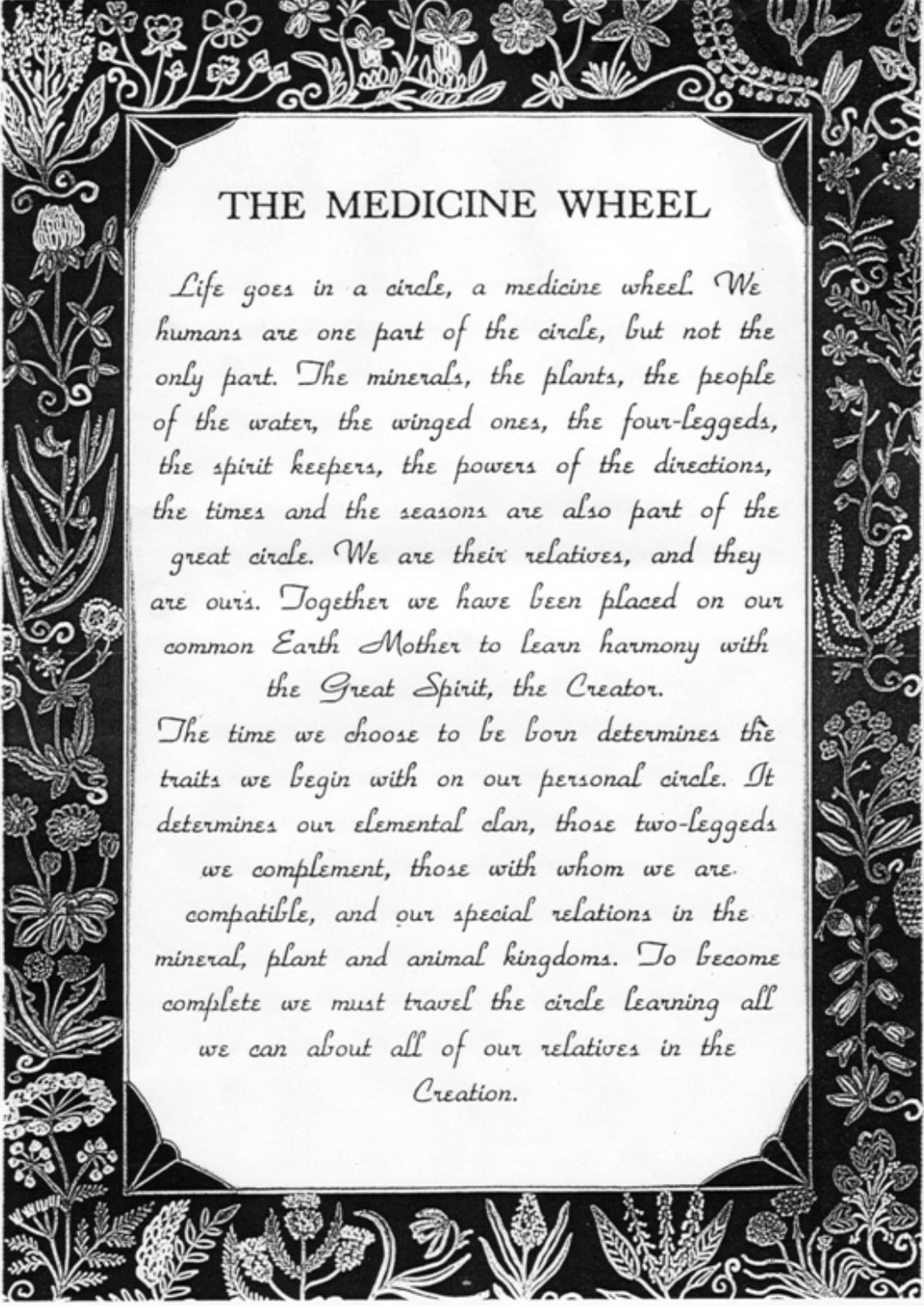
Saturday 17th April 2010

- 10.00 am Society for Psychical Research: Study Day: Theme: *Healers and Healing*
to Speakers: Dr. Anthony M Scofield, Angie Buxton-King, Dawn Redwood,
5.00 pm Sandy Edwards and Margrit Coates
- Venue: St. Philip's Church, Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH
(Cost, £38 – £33 SPR members, £3 reduction for concessions. Booking/details: SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London, W8 6LA. E-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk)



Religious Experience MA Residentials at Lampeter

Autumn Term 2008:	26 th – 30 th October 2009
Summer Term 2009:	24 th – 28 th May 2010



THE MEDICINE WHEEL

Life goes in a circle, a medicine wheel. We humans are one part of the circle, but not the only part. The minerals, the plants, the people of the water, the winged ones, the four-leggeds, the spirit keepers, the powers of the directions, the times and the seasons are also part of the great circle. We are their relatives, and they are ours. Together we have been placed on our common Earth Mother to learn harmony with the Great Spirit, the Creator.

The time we choose to be born determines the traits we begin with on our personal circle. It determines our elemental clan, those two-leggeds we complement, those with whom we are compatible, and our special relations in the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms. To become complete we must travel the circle learning all we can about all of our relatives in the Creation.