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**Please email contributions to the Editor at
denumine@gmail.com
- following the guidelines on the back page.**



EDITORIAL

As the nights draw in and autumnal storms sweep across the country, I am reminded of the words of *The Windmills of Your Mind*:

“Why did summer go so quickly,
was it something that you said?”

With a long lockdown in the spring/summer behind us in the UK, we now face another phase of COVID restrictions in the run up to Christmas. It seems as if our seasons and reasons have been terminally disrupted in 2020.

Your autumn issue of *De Numine* features more impressions of the global COVID crisis from our members around the world, accompanied by some intriguing and beautiful images. I am delighted by the creativity, humour, insight and thoughtfulness of these contributions, and encourage you all to record some impressions of what you are undergoing in these strange times. If the lockdown challenges us to reflect more on our actions, that can only be a good thing.

Is the Hardy question in need of a rewrite? - asks Jon Robinson in his article. When attempting to describe ineffable experiences our choice of language can be both an enabler and a barrier to communication, so I am sure many of us will sympathise with Jon’s predicament – and it is not just a generational problem either.

One silver lining of these dark COVID clouds is that more people are seeking explicitly spiritual support; for example, the word “prayer” has been typed into online search engines at a far greater frequency than before, as Mark Fox observes in his article on Coronavirus and spirituality. Mark explores some of CS Lewis’s writings in wartime, when many were dying, and compares that experience with ours now. We can hope that more people will want to speak and write about their spiritual experiences in the months and years ahead, and will find their way to the Alister Hardy Trust and its archive; but we must help them to find it too.

Over the years I have tried various dream “dictionaries” to help me interpret the slippery images produced by my night-time self. Melinda Powell conducted research on the Alister Hardy

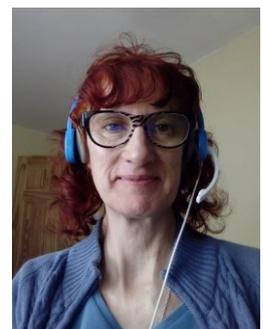
archive to explore experiences of dreams collected, and here she shares the five dream categories she developed in her pilot study. Some of these dream experiences in the archive are truly wonderful and life-changing. Given that all humans must sleep, there is always the possibility that we too will experience something profound and life-changing, beyond merely recharging our batteries for the coming day. If, like me, you find it difficult to remember your dreams, I can attest that writing down the ones I do remember helps me to recall more – a case of getting more of what we focus on.

Congratulations to John Franklin on completing the third edition of the History of the Alister Hardy Trust – see the Notices section for details on how to order your copy.

Just as we go to press we have heard the sad news of the death of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who has been a patron of the Alister Hardy Trust and the Religious Experience Research Centre for 29 years. We are very grateful for Lord Sacks’ support for the Trust. We shall feature a tribute to Lord Sacks in our spring 2021 issue.

I cannot conclude without saying a heartfelt thank you to Jean Matthews for her typesetting of *De Numine*. Jean supported several editors before me, quietly and unobtrusively working in the background, and no doubt putting up with various Editorial foibles and pet-hates along the way. Jean has been both a proof-reader and page designer for us all. Family and health matters have persuaded Jean that it was time to refocus. We shall miss her keen eyes on these pages, and wish her all the best for her retirement.

Rhonda Riachi



IMPRESSIONS OF A GLOBAL CRISIS PART 2

Contributions from AHT members

My spiritual seasons

Since the pandemic broke out I have been praying in my garden every morning grounding myself in life away from a screen.

The spring arrived early alongside the pandemic and blew a scary energy into my mornings like the flowers hurried to burst before the armageddon, exploding in an aggressive blue and far too bright yellow.



Photo: @Pia Daugaard/ILMONDO

Then came a somewhat calmer summer here in Denmark. The restrictions that kept us at home emerged into a joy for the summer landscapes of our childhoods, with soft-coloured flowerbeds and a blue sky with no airplanes but only a few calming clouds.

But our mood changed again recently, as we were told stories of a second wave. My flowers fell earlier than usual - they wanted to hide beneath the ground.

My garden will paint winter, too, but what kind? A kind white cuddle or a frightening, icy wind?

I am not young, 58 years, and my life has been one of dramatic changes, but my spiritual seasons seem to have recreated themselves every time. I see it clearly now in the pandemic. Like my garden is resilient, I am too, when I respect the months it takes for one season to finish before the next one begins.

Charlotte Rørth, Aalborg, Denmark

www.charlotteroerth.dk

Lockdown Lessons Learnt

The COVID-19 Pandemic is not going to be all over by Christmas. The global extend of the virus-caused-crisis and the depth and range of personal, social and economic impacts is, of itself, a big lesson to take on-board.

But put that into the context of the Climate Emergency. If this (or another even more virulent virus to follow) isn't going to get us then some facet of Climate Change will. There is a chance, perhaps a large and growing chance, that humanity will become extinct. That reality seems much more palpable now than before the enforced lockdown.

At the personal level too, there is now another thing that could kill me. Soon. Not that I'm in a particularly vulnerable category, but there's

currently a 1 in 1500 chance of my catching COVID-19. That's just a number. What's more relevant is that I know, through my transcendent experiences, that death is no big deal. Just a change of physical form. The world of energy, or spirit, is eternal. And each mindful moment, each time I commune with nature, I'm reminded of that.

Just as, each time I hear the latest pandemic figures, I'm reminded of my mortality.

I am Nothing, yet All.

Dr Keith Beasley, Bristol



Pandemic solitude - thoughts on William James

From mid-March I began self-isolating as protection for my 92-year-old mother who had begun her dying process. I worked remotely at her bedside while she slept, alternating between work email and news of the spreading consequences of Covid19. I contemplated my mother's perfect timing. She needed her friends with a need I have never experienced. She once said that the worst thing she had endured was a three-day quarantine for the flu in her assisted living apartment. As news emerged of the mental health problems of enforced isolation, I thought of my mother's need for her friends and the suffering she would experience in a long quarantine.

In the months since her death, while many continue in isolation at home, I've recalled American philosopher and psychologist William James and his ideas about solitude, transcendent experiences and relation with the unseen. He defined religion in 1901 as an individual in their solitude standing in relation to what they consider the divine*. I have wondered if those who struggle with enforced aloneness might be helped by James' insights. Are there unexplored pathways toward mental and spiritual health, grounded on inner relation and love, that we might discover in our current pandemic solitude?

Elle Hughes, Arizona, U.S.A.

* *"the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."* - William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

My Aquatic Ape Apotheoses

Lockdown constraints prevented a spring immersion in the sea which I've likened to the elixir of life. As regulations relaxed at the beginning of June, I decided that an essential visit to the bank in Aberystwyth might be combined with a swim. However, the rail journey from Caersws proved complicated and, on leaving Machynlleth, I found myself on a train bound for Aberdyfi. Suddenly, a sensation that I can only describe as pure bliss descended upon me and after alighting at Penhelig station I entered a realm of paradise. The waters of the Dyfi estuary were beautifully clear and calm, presenting a scene of unworldly brilliance. Moreover, the sea was exceptionally warm, reminding me of a transformative visit to Ibiza many years before. In short, I felt spiritually restored and better still the following day when I headed to Aberystwyth again and, following a visit to the bank, enjoyed another glorious swim.

Since then I've been immersing myself – physically, intellectually, spiritually - in the River Severn, fortunately only a short distance walk from where I live. These apotheoses have reminded me of Alister Hardy's Aquatic Ape Hypothesis and I now intend to explore this further.

Janet Mackinnon, Caersws, Mid Wales

Photo: Janet Mackinnon



Open to Receive

Are we open to receive
Or tightly clenched,
Defending ourselves against life,
Locked down
In fearful apprehension?

When just outside
The spring sun shines
Strongly down
On blackthorn blossom branches,
Steadily opens
Each flower in turn –
Five white petals stretch out
Towards the light.
Expectantly await
The roving bee's awakening kiss.

Are you too ready to receive,
Opening from within,
Reaching out
To give, to share a blessing,
Surrendering fear,
Touching one another,
Holding close together
In this one precious present moment?



Photo: David Lorimer

*David Lorimer, Programme Director SMN;
Editor, Paradigm Explorer
St Colombe sur l'Hers, France, 13 March 2020*

Lockdown Hopes - What Next?

The Lockdown experience transported us back for a while to a time without cars or aeroplanes, with less pollution, more blue skies, hearing more bird-song, appreciatively closer to Nature.

Has the time come for a full debate about the need for a Universal Day of Rest (UDR), a renewal of the idea and meaning of Sabbath, given that Covid-19 must have been re-configuring our lives?

Could a UDR support people having one day where they consumed less, drove less, spent more time with each other, appreciated life and nature more, had more time to reflect? A UDR would 'ritualise' these actions, no different in principle to the Jewish and Christian Sabbaths, where the 'Sabbath' is a name for a set of values.

What would it take to encourage people to re-think the value of such a day?

Others who think like this are Jonathan Schorsch, a Jewish Theologian at Potsdam University and his evolving Green Sabbath Project. Others have written about the renewal of Sabbath: Walter Brueggemann, Sabbath as Resistance [to consumerism and capitalism], and Anita Amstutz, Sabbath as Soul Tending [reconnecting with your heart and soul].

This needs discussing now, before the economic drive skews us away from Sabbath opportunities back to the money market. You can find the Green Sabbath Project at <https://www.greensabbathproject.net>.

Getting involved with all this is a huge leap of faith for me and a bit scary, but I am compelled to do this. If you feel likewise, please contact me: lewisherlitz@hotmail.com.

Lewis Herlitz

Locked down?

Instead of going into the prison five days a week, we have been given one day to research. One week I read "The Silence of the Heart" by Robert Adams. He showed how to drop the draining mental chatter and become aware that we are one with all living things.



Photo: Rhonda Riachi

In the park I saw a Pine tree whose leaves were turning brown from the tips and gum was leaking out of the bark. I thought: "That tree is ill or dying". I felt sorry for it, concerned that it was suffering, and broadened my awareness to include it. I felt it chuckling, as if saying:

'Thank you for your concern, but I have lived my expected years. Dying is part of life. We are part of the whole, you and I. I have shared pleasure with many people while I have been here.'

I felt that the tree and I exchanged the warmth of mutual awareness for a while, before my dog drew my attention back to exploring the park, and we moved gently on.

A day later, sitting in a barely converted cell with a senior officer, a mental health nurse and a suicidal man, I became aware again that we are all One, and sought to help that man let go of his imprisoning thoughts and enter the present moment.

Philip Tyers



A moment of magic and peace

On the anniversary of VE Day I went for a ramble, reaching Islip shortly before 11am. As I made my way into the village, I became aware of a couple standing outside their home with heads bowed for the two minute silence. I joined them and as I lifted my head I became aware of a solar halo and took a snap about 10 minutes later (below).

The halo lasted a very long time. Technically it was a 22° circular solar halo formed by the refraction of ice crystals, but I took it mainly as an auspicious sign of peace. Further on along the Oxfordshire Way, I took the other photo in Noke Wood (left). It felt ancient and magical.

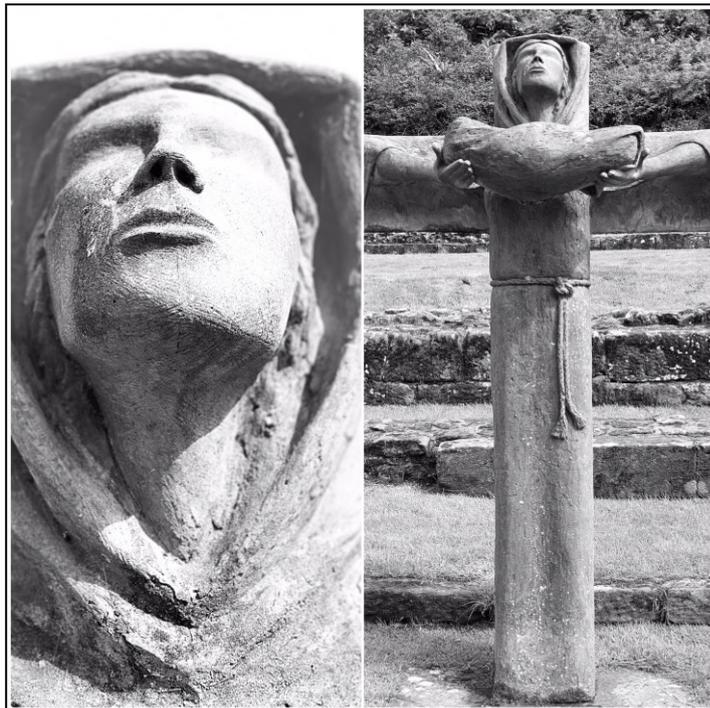
Paul Trafford



Thoughts on the COVID 19 Pandemic

Since my last contribution to the journal we now find ourselves living in a 'new normal' where some restrictions are lifted but others continue and local lockdowns are necessary in areas where the virus is showing signs of rising again. Face coverings are now required in most indoor environments. The virus may be subdued but remains with us as an unseen but deadly threat which we will have to learn to live with for the foreseeable future.

I was able to visit a local abbey which reopened last month. Advance bookings were necessary but this guaranteed a safe environment for visitors. The site is a well preserved monastery in the Carthusian tradition, however my photograph shows a more recent addition. The statue of the Madonna (with child) is located within the nave and although contemporary fits in with the surroundings and is a focal point for visitors. For a few moments at least the tranquillity of the site enables those who visit it to forget about the pandemic and become immersed in the spirituality of this ancient and historical place.



Photos: Andy Burns

Andy Burns
Hon Secretary - Alister Hardy Trust



A photo of this garage in our street in Oxford appeared in the last issue of De Numine, but only recently I noticed that more keyworker roles had been added - Ed.



Newcastle Upon Tyne station clock. Photo: Rhonda Riachi

Portable guides to living

I have a few simple, portable guides to living, including:

Count Your Blessings

- and:

Make the best of it.

So lockdown has yielded some benefits.

The back garden (40 foot square) is now a vegetable plot; we have grown our own tomatoes, sweetcorn, beetroot, etc.

My 10,000 books are ordered into genre and then alphabetical sequence of authors. The same with CDs.

I've fixed the washing machine (overflowing), the laptop (completely blank), got rid of a wasps' nest and learnt how to copy cassettes to computer and thus to CD.

Then I tripped and sprained the thigh and knee muscles in the right leg. Five weeks confined to the upstairs only. It's surprising how many movements involve these muscles. Everything must be done with extreme care.

The result has been a considerable improvement in mindfulness for all action, including meditation.

My wife and I have grown even closer, the adult kids have been supportive. Here in Ingatestone, Essex, the village has organised itself so that every street has helpers for those who need it.

Life is good; slower and deeper. I have become averse to entertainment.

So I have an additional portable guide:

Avoid just passing the time, use it.

Michael Shearer

Reflections on Lockdown

There's nothing like a PhD to make lockdown a welcome period of empty time and space. Not many people find it so helpful to have all other activities cancelled or postponed - leaving blank days in the online calendar. Each day offers the opportunity to settle down to reading and writing – with Amazon delivering fascinating material for study. Well, that's the theory, anyway.

I am hugely fortunate to live with someone who is also working from home, in a lovely country location, with supportive family, friends and neighbours nearby. Nature has taken on even more significance than usual for me, as the glorious summer weather was uplifting and our free-flow garden with its wildflowers has been a joy. We have watched blackbirds, blue and great tits, wrens, sparrows, gold and green finches hatch their young. Woodpeckers hammer on the tree trunks and noisy gangs of starlings invade. I am very grateful and feel incredibly privileged. People everywhere seem to have become much more appreciative of natural world. Let's hope that this will be reflected in new initiatives to preserve the planet, and that we really will change our ways in the future.



For so many people this has been a time of trial and loneliness and although unable to visit, I have tried to be supportive through email, WhatsApp, phone and Facetime. In the village people stop and chat – socially distanced – with caring questions and offers of help. Plants, fruit, vegetables and books are shared, and the village WhatsApp group continues its work of collecting shopping and prescriptions for the elderly. The pandemic has strengthened our community.

The photos show how your *Spring De Numine* came to you, as I found myself supervising the printing and then dealing with the mailing. The suitcases are full of journals too heavy to carry to the post office. We have all had to adapt to a different lifestyle and I wish AHT members well as we all come to terms with the new reality.

Marianne Rankin
AHT Director of Communications

ARTICLES

The Hardy Question – a suggested revision

The Hardy Question was framed over 50 years ago and has stood the test of time as ‘bedrock’ for the AHT:

“Have you ever been aware of, or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?”

Many of us have wrestled with this question and have attempted re-formulations. However, since that time our understandings of the world we live in and what we mean by ‘reality’ has significantly changed. We are increasingly coming to recognise that nothing exists ‘in itself’, in isolation from what is around it. Everything is interconnected. We are not masters of ‘the living stream’: we are part of ‘the living stream’. We exist because we are relational creatures. Nothing exists in separation from the whole, whether ‘the whole’ refers to what is nearby or to the farthest reaches of the Universe, and even ‘presences’ and ‘powers’ are part of the whole! This is why traditional Christianity is in trouble, because it lives and operates in a dualistic imagery which does not accord with modern scientific understandings.

I propose a variation of the Hardy question:

“Have you ever sensed that you are connected with or part of a presence or influence that is more than your individual self?”

Phrasing the question in this non-dualistic way avoids the suggestion that we are individuals claiming those special ecstatic experiences for our individual selves.

A priest-psychologist friend of mine suggested the word ‘sensed’ in this question. I was discouraged from including the words ‘a power’ in the question because my children thought that this word suggests control! We surely need to be sensitive to the way the meaning and implications of words change – and the way the younger generation hear them.

I will be so glad if members would like to respond to this with any thoughts or suggestions. I think this is important because it is so central to what we are about and it is also about our fundamental concern to encourage people to ‘open the door’ to what might be called the spiritual dimension of their lives - experiences that people may have had which can help them to become more aware of who they really are, the hidden possibilities and depths of their existence and what it is that gives meaning to their lives. And maybe a host of new experiences for our archives!

Phrasing the question in this way may also help people to recognise and become more aware of the spiritual dimension of their ‘everyday’ lives as well as recognising any specific ‘one-off’ special experiences.

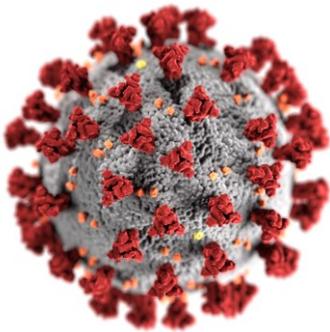
Jon Robinson



Coronavirus and Spirituality

Even on those days when I struggle to string together a single, coherent, sentence, I can usually write *something*. Don't get me wrong: I've known the curse of the blank page. But I'm pleased to say that it doesn't visit me too often. Yet when I sat down to write something with the title 'Coronavirus and Spirituality', I just crashed. 'Crashed' in the sense that nothing would come. Nothing at all.

At first, I couldn't work out why. I'd done the research. Or as much as I could. I'd read endless articles with titles like 'Will Covid-19 be the end of religion?' and 'Keeping the faith: religion amid coronavirus.' I'd seen the stats and read the reports. And some of what I read was very interesting indeed. I hadn't known, for example, that the number of people searching for the word 'prayer' on Google had doubled with every 80,000 new registered cases of coronavirus during the early weeks of the pandemic. Nor that five million people had tuned in via the BBC and Facebook to a kitchen table service led by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the 22nd March: the largest single congregation in the Anglican church's history. Nor that trumpet sounds heard all over the Netherlands since the pandemic began have convinced many that the Biblical last days are here.



So many interesting facts. But nothing which led me to think that Covid-19 was changing the face of the planet's spiritual landscape everywhere and forever. Nothing *new*, in other words. After all, haven't we always known that people turn to religion at times of crisis and that dark days force people to look to the heavens for signs and portents?

Everything which comes around goes around, then. Much like a virus, really. Much like viruses always have. The scriptures had it right after all:

from the harsh beauty of the Book of Ecclesiastes to the timeless wisdom of The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam. Ecclesiastes in particular, with its opening lament that: 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again' and that 'there is nothing new under the sun', leading the writer to the conclusion that all is, essentially, 'meaningless.'

And here was the reason for my writer's block. I could find nothing ground-breaking or original to say about coronavirus and spirituality because it had all been said before. There's nothing new under the sun as regards this pandemic and our reactions to it. Nothing that the writers and sages of ages past haven't told us time and again.

Over the last few weeks, I've been re-reading some of C.S Lewis's reflections on learning during wartime. It seems apt, somehow, because on occasion it has felt like we're in something approximating a military conflict as Covid-19 rages around us. Our language, at least, suggests this. We hear talk of *battling* the virus; we praise those key workers working on the *front line*; we hope that vaccines will enable us to win the *war*, and so on. And, of course, during our various lockdown phases, a lot of so-called 'normal life' has ground to a halt: much as it does during a war. In such a situation, then, how might we learn from Lewis about what the pandemic might be teaching us?

Interestingly, it's the very same lesson we learn from the sages and teachers of long ago: that there's nothing new under the sun. Take, for example, the notion that a war - or a pandemic - creates an abnormal situation. Lewis disagreed. He wrote:

"[Do] not let your nerves and emotions lead you into thinking your predicament more abnormal than it really is...Life has never been normal. Even those periods which we think most tranquil...turn out, on closer inspection, to be full of crises, alarms, difficulties [and] emergencies..."

It is tempting to disagree with Lewis here. Surely a war or a global pandemic is *very* abnormal. Don't such awful things mean that lots of people will die who otherwise wouldn't have done? This sounds like a damning objection, until you hear Lewis's response to it:

“There is no question of death or life for any of us; only a question of *this* death or *that*... It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.”

This may sound bleak - even callous - but surely Lewis is right. Daily we hear of infection rates and thousands of Covid-19 deaths in hospitals, homes and nursing homes around the world and yet, alas, the death rate for all of us is and has always been 100%.

Despite this obvious fact, it is *still* tempting to object: thousands of deaths every single day and this fact makes *no* difference?” Indeed, writing about the war, Lewis was forced to admit: “War *does* do *something* to death.” But then he qualified this:

“It forces us to *remember* it. The only reason why the cancer at 60 or the paralysis at 75 do not bother us is that we forget them. War makes death real to us: and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past. They thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality. I am inclined to think they were right. All the animal life in us, all schemes of happiness that centred in this world, were always doomed to a final frustration. In ordinary times only a wise [person] can realise it. Now the stupidest of us knows. We see unmistakably the sort of universe in which we have been living all along, and must come to terms with it.”

In the light of this, what of coronavirus and spirituality? The picture appears bleak, but this may not necessarily be the *complete* picture. If Lewis is right, our current *travails* offer an opportunity to peel back the accumulated layers of evasion and falsehood in order to allow us a glimpse - or perhaps a longer look - at ourselves as we are and always were. And this, as many sages have made clear, is where genuine spirituality begins: with the stripping away of illusions and the recognition of *who* we are and *where* we are. In addition, Lewis - and many other thinkers - would part company with the Book of Ecclesiastes in its assertion that ‘everything is meaningless.’ In fact,

even the writer of Ecclesiastes didn’t go that far: many of our translations simply make it appear so. The Hebrew word for ‘meaningless’ is *hevel*: ‘smoke’. Something here today and gone tomorrow; curling upwards and becoming most visible even as it begins to dissipate and disappear.

For Lewis, as well as many others, that disappearing is not the *end* of the smoke: merely the beginning of its transformation into something else.

Not all would agree, of course. Particularly within those ostensibly secular societies in which the pandemic has raged most fiercely. For many - perhaps the majority - of persons in these societies, the end of the smoke really is the *absolute* end. In which case, the fight for survival becomes key. However, Lewis is worth listening to again here. In his essay *On Living in An Atomic Age*, he wrote:

“Nothing is more likely to destroy a species or a nation than a determination to survive at all costs. Those who care for something else more than civilization are the only people by whom civilization is at all likely to be preserved.”



What might this *something else* be? At the end of the day, the simple recognition of that question might lead the one willing to ask it into a quest for a reality which truly transcends that which is doomed to disappear. Or, at least, for the *possibility* of that reality. The end of that quest may well be the beginning of wisdom; for some, the beginning of true spirituality. As Lao Tsu famously said: the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. There can be no endings without beginnings; no journeys without departures. Indeed, perhaps the journey itself is the place where wisdom and spirituality might be

found. Betwixt and between, and not at the end of the trail.

Of course, much comes down to how we define 'spirituality'. If we see it in terms of practical action leading to human well-being, there is much that coronavirus has taught us; much, even, to be thankful for. Many instances of oppressions, injustice, poverty and inequality have been exposed since the pandemic began. When the plight of the homeless becomes a health risk to others, it begins to be addressed. When it becomes clear that some sections of the community are at disproportionately greater risk of succumbing to the virus than others, there is ample catalyst and impetus for change. It is tragic that it should come to this, but at the very least it is - or should be - evidence that Covid-19 has taught us *something* that goes to the heart - or soul - of what it is to be human.

There is a wider picture, though; even than this. Sages ancient and modern have told us in various ways the same thing: that this life is not all that there is and death is not the final word. Concurrently, they have drawn a bigger picture for *this* life: holding up a mirror to observers in which a true reflection is revealed. Perhaps this is what Covid-19 has done. Or *could* do. If so, how might we respond? Could this be the beginning of genuine spirituality?

Mark Fox

Mark Fox is an independent researcher and writer. He can be found at www.markfox.co.uk



The Importance of Dreams in Religious or Spiritual Experience

My interest in the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre archive goes back to 2002 when I first learned of the collection during my post-graduate studies in the Psychology of Religion at Heythrop College, London. Sir Alister Hardy's efforts to establish a 'scientific natural theology' (1), describing the nature of human spirituality, greatly inspired me. Given my personal and professional interest in dreams, I looked forward to one day undertaking research on the archival accounts of spiritual or religious experiences in dreams, which I felt sure would be included. But only fifteen years later was I able to do so.

During the ensuing years I qualified as a psychotherapist, ran the charity Help Counselling Centre for ten years in London and co-founded the Dream Research Institute, which I directed for seven years and in which I continue in an advisory role. The DRI was founded to promote research into the connection between dreams and well-being, as well as to raise public awareness about the benefits of dreaming and therapeutic dreamwork. Prompted by the example of the RERC archive, the DRI hosts an online survey to collect 'Spiritual or Religious Experiences in Dreams'. (2)



In the autumn of 2016 I attended the 20th Annual conference of the British Psychological Society's Transpersonal Section, chaired by Dr Chris Roe, where he and graduate student, Pauline Linnett, shared the findings of their study 'Spontaneous cases of psi within accounts submitted to the Alister Hardy

Religious Experience Research Centre'. Many of the psi phenomena reportedly took place in dreams.

Hardy, in his own review of the first three thousand submissions sent to the archive between 1969 – 1970, noted that dreams appeared on average 88 times per thousand. (3) Although Hardy listed 'Dreams' as one of twelve main categories of experience appearing in the archival reports, he stopped short of further classifying the dream accounts because he felt that, given the diverse nature of dream data on hand, an analysis of the varying states of consciousness evident could not be undertaken. Nonetheless, he observed: 'Clearly a proper study of this material will require a critical follow-up which will be made with many more examples. Of the importance of dreams to many individuals concerned as a channel for religious experience, there seems to be no doubt.'(4)

'The Hardy Question' used to prompt people to submit accounts to the RERC archive asks: 'Have you ever experienced a presence or power, whether you call it God, or not, which is different from your everyday self?' In 2018 I carried out a pilot study of the first 1,000 personal accounts in the RERC archive, focusing on those containing the word 'dream' and found 51 dream narratives sufficiently detailed to warrant further study. I then looked at how the sense of spiritual 'presence' manifests in these dream accounts. The results of this review, which I will now briefly outline, were published in *Dreams: Understanding Biology, Psychology, and Culture*. (5)

Five thematic categories emerged from the dream data:

1. Auditory phenomena: 8 %
2. Concrete phenomena having extraordinary properties: 12%
3. Ideal personifications of human spiritual potential: 12%
4. Abstract phenomena: 30%
5. Human personifications of a Transcendent Reality: 33%

In the first subset, auditory phenomena, dreamers reported hearing an unforgettable voice with little or no reference to a dream setting or context. For instance, one respondent wrote: 'Whilst asleep one night, I heard a solemn, drone like voice which said, "Come with me"'. (6)

The second subset involves concrete phenomena having extraordinary properties such as a rope, book or flowers, in an unusual context and with unusual properties. One respondent, who had suffered a recent bereavement, described a dream account in which she was swept down a river to the sea. Fearing she would drown, she cried out for help and a rope appeared hanging from the sky, accompanied by a reassuring voice that told her to take hold of it. (7) Touchingly, she shares how after the dream she bought herself a piece of rope to remind her of the comfort that the dream gave her.

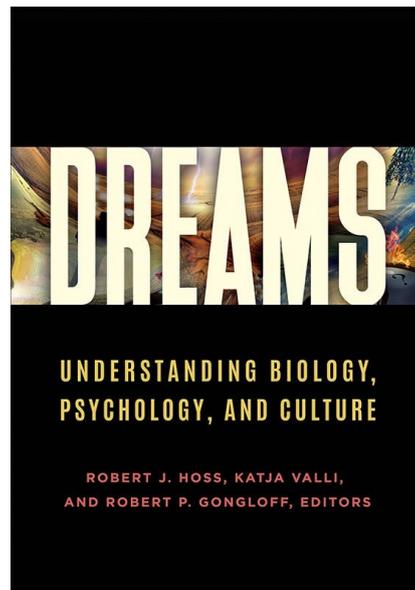
The third subset includes personifications of human spiritual potential through an Ideal Being. This may take the form of a famous person or a Divine Being – religious or non-religious – with powerful cognitive and/or affective qualities. The following RERC account describes such an experience:

I saw in my dream a famous poet - Ghalib. He is an Indian poet of great fame and his poetry in Urdu has great depth and beauty.... He came and recited a poem of his.... I am writing them down with their general translation in English. Translated [from Urdu] literally it means: The string or reed that has not played the music for a very long time . . . Let us bring it to life and by its music, let the whole world be brightened and as if, brought to life. (8)

This dreamer, a scientist, shared that after the dream, he began to write poetry, becoming a recognised poet.

The fourth subset features abstract representations such as light, space, a vortex or void that communicate powerful and memorable qualities or powers. Here is one example:

I was one with eternally pulsing light.... Nor was I by any means alone: I was communicating with infinite wisdom, not as an individual but as an entity; this wisdom was in me and flowed through me and yet was also outside me.... I seemed to be part of some mighty essence, some ultimate, unknowable reality. (9)



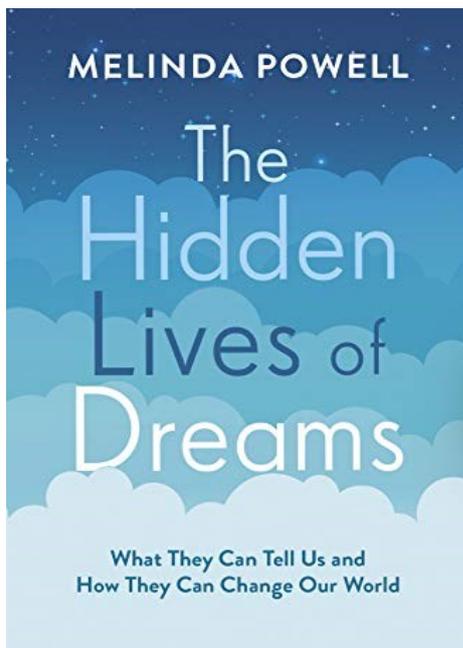
The fifth and largest subset, Human Personification of a Transcendent Reality, involves a close friend or relative who is deceased or who, shortly after the dream, becomes injured or dies. In such dreams, the sense of 'presence' develops from the dreamer's recognition – either in the dream or after waking – of a dislocation in ordinary space-time, attributed to a non-temporal, Transcendent dimension.

For example, one respondent reported that his dream presaged his cousin's tragic suicide. (10) A woman who dreamt of her deceased husband wrote: 'it is always with the same wonderful feeling of love and security that he generated in life. I always awaken with an awareness that I have actually been with him.' (11)

These preliminary investigations suggest that no matter whether the manifestation of presence in a dream appears in an ordinary or extraordinary way, or in a religious or non-religious context, such dreams provide deeply

felt spiritual values and generally prove to be positive, life-changing experiences.

In 2019 I was invited to write a book on dreams and well-being by Bonnier Books UK, which was published in March 2020. I am grateful to have been given permission by the RERC to draw on dream accounts from the Hardy archive. *The Hidden Lives of Dreams* brings together the art and science of dreaming, including lucid dreaming, for therapeutic benefit and psycho-spiritual development, both within dreams and in waking life. The book explores the role of light, colour, space, healing presence and lucidity in dreams, dispels common misconceptions about dreams and addresses the fear of nightmares. Using case examples and sample dreams – six from the RERC archive – I show how to tap into our dreams as a source of guidance and inspiration to enhance our wellbeing and to discover a healthier, more balanced approach to life.



Since the book's publication coincided with the onset of the global pandemic, I have also been invited to talk and write about 'pandemic dreams'. Rather than seeing such dreams as merely symptomatic, I view them as offering us a way forward for addressing what ails us, individually and collectively. Acknowledging

the feelings aroused by pandemic dreams, and working with them therapeutically, has the power to harness the emotional energy that can help bring healing to the troubled mind.

It means a good deal to me that, through *The Hidden Lives of Dreams*, spiritual experiences shared in the RERC accounts continue to touch people's hearts. I hope that the dreams that appear in my book will create interest in Hardy's research and archive. I am currently writing a book specifically on lucid dreaming and I look forward to again including dreams from the RERC collection.

I wish to thank the RERC and the Alister Hardy Trust for both maintaining this unique archive and for permission to access and quote the material. May others, like me, be inspired by Sir Alister Hardy's lifework and may it encourage all of us who support it to follow the guidance provided by our dreams.

Melinda Powell

Melinda Powell is a UKCP psychotherapist, Co-founder of the Dream Research Institute, London, and author of *The Hidden Lives of Dreams*.

- 1) Alister Hardy uses this term in his book *The Divine Flame* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), 9–33.
- 2) www.driccpe.org
- 3) See Hardy's *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 145.
- 4) *Ibid.*, 79.
- 5) vol. 2, Melinda Powell, née Ziemer, 'Metaphoric Presence in Spiritual Dreams', edited by Robert J. Hoss, and Robert P. Gongloff, 628–633. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2019).
- 6) RERC Account 000678.
- 7) RERC Account 000128.
- 8) RERC Account 000008.
- 9) RERC Account 000266.
- 10) RERC Account 000782.
- 11) RERC Account 000687.

EXPERIENCES

Experiences of colour

Excerpt from a talk by Janis Waterhouse entitled “Colour”, introduced by Mary Cook at the AHT South Wales Group Meeting, Llantarnam Abbey on 5 March 2020

Our subject for the year is “The Visual Arts, the artist’s inspiration and spirituality”, so what follows acted as an apt introduction.

Janis gave a well-illustrated talk on many aspects of “colour”, beginning with “what is colour?” She explored how the eye perceives colour and related how her fascination with eyes is linked with eye problems early in life. She encouraged our participation and we learned how words used in different languages could describe even the delineation of colours in undefined ways as though colour itself is not recognised as being a clear-cut attribute (see the Welsh word for blue *glas* – or does it also verge onto the green-side?)

I leave Janis to share her colourful spiritual encounters. (MC)

The brain stores sentient memories, visually and emotionally. We can immediately recall exactly the time and place of these events whether personal or not.

My own mental archive has stored two visual and spiritually important events happening ten years apart. Both were projections in an oval format and focused on the ‘third eye’. Both were presented in vivid colour and were fleeting. Both were gone in thirty seconds.

During a longish illness I was presented with a virtual bunch of bright flowers with the intensity of a colour transparency or a stained-glass window. We do give flowers to those who are recovering. Where did this bouquet come from?

Some ten years later, in good health, relaxing after a yoga session, another virtual portrait was presented, again vivid in colour (red, white and black) and in an oval format. This was the beautiful face of a Japanese geisha girl. She stayed for 20/30 seconds. Who was she?

Nothing similar has happened since, but the experiences have turned into treasured memories, and a search for their meaning. They are more than colourful pictures.

Janis Waterhouse



Rydal Hall gardens, Ambleside. Photo: Rhonda Riachi

REPORTS

Report from the Director of Communications

If ever there was a job which disappeared as a result of the current coronavirus pandemic, it is that of a DoC. So far this year, all I have done in relation to events, is to cancel or postpone them. But we do hope that 2021 will see a return to real gatherings rather than virtual ones.

There have been so many Zoom meetings taking place that I have hardly been able to keep up, with online events arranged by organisations all over the world on offer. I forward a selection of these to an anonymous publicity list. If you don't receive those mailings yet and would like to be kept informed, please let me know. Alternatively, if you feel that you are getting too many notices, your name can be removed. In a strange way, this has brought far-flung people together in a new way, as physical distance becomes irrelevant.

This year communication between members has been through *De Numine*. I was involved in printing and distributing the spring issue – quite a challenge during lockdown, but it is hugely satisfying to know that AHT members all over the world received a beautiful bright red journal to cheer them during this time. The colourful illustrations were most welcome too. Many congratulations to Rhonda in Oxford, aided by Jean in Spain, for producing it. I'm sure that reading the reflections of members on the current crisis brought us all together in an unusual, but meaningful way.

Andy and I do hope to be able to arrange at least a couple of gatherings in 2021 but for now, things are not clear, and we must all be patient.

Marianne Rankin
AHT Director of Communications

Report from the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Lampeter

The last few months have been a strange time for all of us. When the University moved to lockdown and closed the campus in March, the RERC office was also shut down. Tom continued work but from home. In preparation for the possible closure we discussed the move and decided on which work he should focus. In addition to looking after any email enquiries from members, he took home several accounts of experiences and transcribed them (though it is not possible to upload them outside the campus). He also continued working on the online Journal and is currently copy-editing the special issue of the Journal with papers from last year's conference. He also took home some of the old audio recordings in order to begin digitising them.

We hope that in the autumn the office can open again. The University is currently preparing to open the campus again and we

expect students (and staff) back on campus in September. But any decision depends on the advice from the Welsh government and, of course, the development of Covid19.

Meanwhile the work did not stop. In addition to the special issue with a selection of papers from last year's 50th anniversary conference we are working on three other issues to be published in the coming months. Teaching continued, too, though online. Ten students took the module on Religious Experience last year, some of them will write their dissertation on a topic related to religious experience. Two more students from the MRes Religious Experience graduated recently, Aaron Moratz and Barbara Doubtfire. Barbara is continuing her research on PhD level while Aaron is currently working on a book chapter for an edited volume based on his MRes dissertation. Another student has had her viva (online) recently and waits now for the official report

of the examination board. Four students are currently writing their MRes dissertation and two are currently in their last module and will move to part 2 (the dissertation) in October. We also received several enquiries about the MRes and three applicants have already received an offer for a place for October (more might follow over the summer).

The closure of the campus affected the research of our visiting professor from Brazil in Lampeter, Marta Helena de Freitas. While she continued her work on some articles, the closure of the campus meant she was unable

to work with the David Hay material in the RERC office as planned. Fortunately, her university has just approved an extension of her stay in Lampeter until November.

We cannot predict what will happen in the coming months. But whether we can open the centre or will continue to work from home, please be ensured that the RERC is looked after well.

Prof Bettina Schmidt
Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter



Photo: Dave Sherwood

Oxford & Cotswold Group Report

To Zoom or not to Zoom...

Following our last face-to-face meeting in March we, like so many other groups, were in for rather challenging times. Tea, biscuits and friendly socializing were regrettably no longer an option! Whether we wanted to or not, we had to grasp the Zoom experience to stay connected. It was not all smooth sailing. Some of us opted not to Zoom, so there were few of us for our first get together. But we valiantly pressed on.

The main problems for our participants were technical. Some of us were in shadows, others had problems with the audio levels on their

computers so they could not be heard easily. Then there was the mute/unmute factor which was stressful. Then came the raising of a hand to signal that we wanted to speak, just like going back to school. No spontaneity there whatsoever!

But we overcame these problems and carried on with a series of inspirational and informative talks, and new members have joined the group. Having said this, I can't wait to get back to face-to-face meetings!

Eleonore Bruyere

The Oxford & Cotswold Group meetings so far this year:

March (our last face-to-face meeting):

Don Mason presented on "What we can learn about ourselves from studying the Paranormal," quoting from his book *Science, Mystical Experience and Religious Belief*.

April: A general chat on Zoom, discussing the CANA newsletter and books we were reading.

May: We shared titles of books that have been sustaining us during the lockdown:

- Only a Thought Away by Angela Howard
- Fitzgerald's Salaman and Absal by A J Arberry
- The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of the Early Church by J K Elliott
- A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths by Dr John Barton
- Testimony of Light by Helen Greaves
- Ways to go beyond and why they work by Rupert Sheldrake
- Spiritual encounters with unusual light phenomena by Mark Fox

June: Rhonda presented on the new anthology of spiritual experience, *The Life That Never Ends*, compiled by the Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies. This collection of Quaker spiritual and psychic experience features contributions from our own group (including Mahalla and Don Mason, and Rikky Rooksby).

July: An Introduction to the Kabbalah, with Joanna and Kurt Lapage-Brown of the Kabbalah Society (our best attended meeting to date with 23 participants online).

August: A practical guide to the Tree of Life (the Kabbalah part 2) presented by Rikky Rooksby.

The Oxford & Cotswold Group Meetings are usually held on the first Saturday of each month.

To join the Oxford Group Zoom meetings, please email: alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com



Photo: Rhonda Riachi

AHT South Wales Group Report

Remotely – via email and texts, 18 June 2020

Ken Davies prepared a very thoughtful “presentation” in tune with our theme for the year of “Art and Spirit”. What follows is a taster which shows how he draws from his experience of his life in merchant shipping:

“Seascapes, Mysticism and Gnosis

I am going to consider a **seascape** any image that includes both sea and a ship. No view of one without the other ever was ever really complete for me. The view of Cardigan Bay from my Harlech window used to bore me for want of a ship. Similarly, a ship alongside a quay told only part of a story. It was a scene of potential, incomplete, yet laden with anticipation. Is there something mystical about the relationship between people, ships and the sea?

Mysticism is the state of being laden with mystery, that glorious thrill of not knowing, of being full of unanswered questions, and endless possibilities. For example, this painting hung on the wall of my childhood living room. It was of one of the ships my father had sailed in, painted by Reuben Chappell.”

Having recently written a novel (‘Chasing the Tide’), Ken also quoted liberally from it.

Members of our group, having read Ken’s talk, were then asked to send their observations to me to be forwarded to Ken. They were circulated within our group, and are being responded to where appropriate, by Ken.

Here is Alan Underwood’s contribution:

Thanks Ken for that engrossing insight into your life on the ocean waves. It is a life that most of us cannot begin to comprehend, for as you point out it is a life shorn of nature’s everyday reality. It is another world. And perhaps that is the point. It offers - insists on - a new view of reality that leads those so inclined to look at the world with a fresh eye, to open the mystery and experience of gnosis. There are, of course, other situations than being tossed about on the briny that will set off this course of events. I can imagine your experiences Ken, but I cannot know them. We all have journeys, and with luck we all come to know the one knowing Now: Gnosis. Not to be imagined, only experienced. Thanks Ken for a lovely evocative piece. I enjoyed every storm-tossed moment.

The responses proved that Ken had touched each of us at a very deep personal level. Here is my basic thought: Mysticism provides a Way of seeing the world and beyond - the vessel. Gnosis is an arrival, a docking: more than merely the port, a deep grounding.

Ken is at the moment responding to individuals’ comments. There is no immediate plan to circulate his responses, but we will have to see how the conversations develop. It proved a very successful experiment in meeting as a group remotely.

Mary Cook



POETRY

To hear God laugh

Kate Smart

In times of reflection it is hard to put aside self interest
And see life for what it truly is. The rush of things
Often stifles the faith within
But on rare occasions I will find an instant of stillness and
There you are laughing at my glimpse of you

I feel your pleasure at my instant recognition
At my momentary pause in self obsession
This chink in my armour that lets the light in
The perspective is uniquely aligned
As a standing stone on the solstice

From no other view point can the perfection be admired
Except to the one blinded and dazzled
In this grace and profound instant
All is apparent, all is expressed and your
Laughter and love make me ring and sing for eternity.



Rydal Water. Photo: Rhonda Riachi

A different perspective

Jon Robinson

Is it really true that we are separate creatures
Encased within our particular spaces in the world?
Do we exist and have our being
In lonely isolation, doomed to tread the corridors
Of time, until time itself does close upon us?
Must we steer this vessel of ourselves, make our passage
Across the short-lived landscapes of this darkened universe
Until these landscapes are themselves no more?
Or are these boundaries of our seeing
The near horizons of our human ignorance,
Illusions of the mind, and short myopic vision?
Is consciousness an aspect of the brain,
Another piece that fits within the body's curtilage,
Or is consciousness not brain-tied,
Not encased within this solid substance of our human form,
Not held within the limitations of our human understanding?

If that be true, there are no earthly boundaries
To contain our inner, truer self,
No measurements, no space, no time to hold us.
Our inmost self lies deep, beyond this time-worn thread
And we are echoes of the vast, ethereal whole,
The different faces of the One
Who is our cause, our origin, our Divinity.
We each are players interlinked
In this grand symphony of life that reaches over all,
Reflections of the fire that lights the Sun,
Celestial light, to whom we bow in humble adoration.

Our dearest wish impels us
To gain a glimpse beyond the veil that hides the truth,
To cross the great abyss dividing us, heart from heart.
To find a name to light the mystery
That lies beyond this fading glory.
We are ourselves, yet not ourselves.
There is an instinct in us all, a deep, deep instinct
That wells up from the deep, that longs to turn the key
That confines us in this dense, dense world of separation,
To find again our former cherished understanding,
The truth, the blessed harmony, that shines with brightest light
And holds all things together.
The place beyond the ravages of time,
Our home, our joy, our true belonging,
The sacred place of love.

The Care Plan, 20th July 2020

Dennis Evans

And guess what...?

Out of the blue

My thoughtful doctor rang me to ask:

Where would I like to die?

Would I like to be resuscitated

if I had a heart attack?

'A major one?', I asked.

'Well...', she said.

It makes you happy to be alive, doesn't it?

Or dead.

© Dennis Evans

Dennis Evans is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Eight collections of his poetry have been published by Celebration Press, London including 'Service days' – based on his time in National Service. He is on the Editorial Board of N2 Poetry magazine, and is Tutor for The East Finchley Poetry Writing Workshops. Dennis is available for readings.

dennis.poetry1@gmail.com



After the Ascension and the Assumption

Robert Ilson

1 + 1 = ?

The following poem shows Jesus aware of both his divinity and his humanity. Dwelling on earth, he needed to remain aware of his divinity; in heaven, he needs to remain aware of his humanity. Keeping divinity and humanity in balance is essential to his mission.

“Where is he? Let me see him!” Here he comes.

“Oh, let me look at you. It seemed for ever!
And let’s see your poor hands, your feet, your side.
Haven’t they healed, at least? I’ll bandage them.”
*No, don’t. They’re my reminder of the world
And its of me.* “How thin you are, though! Do
They feed you well here? Shall I make you something?”
*I think you’ll find that hard. But there’s no need.
We are sustained by love. You will be, too.*
“Oh. But there’s cleaning to be done, and mending.
I want to be the handmaid of the Lord.”
*Do you know what you’re called here? Star of the Sea,
House of Gold, Tower of Ivory, Mystical Rose...*
“Is my own name not good enough?”
*I’ve missed you
So much so long! Logos I am and Saviour
And God’s Son for good measure but I am
Your son as well. On earth, I needed Father;
Here, I need you. Oh let me kneel to you
And kiss your hand.*

“But darling, won’t they see us?”

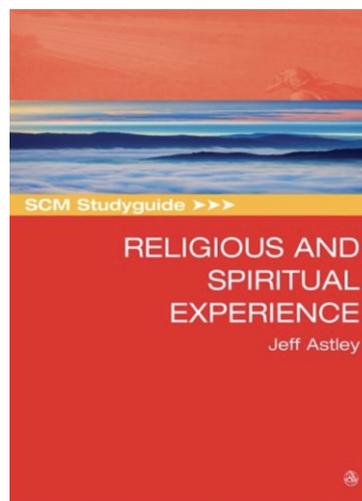
BOOK REVIEWS

**Jeff Astley, *SCM Study Guide to Religious and Spiritual Experience*
London, SCM Press, 2020, 306pp. ISBN 978-0-334-05796-3 (Softback).**

Professor Jeff Astley is one of the Trustees of the AHT and the Alister Hardy Professor of Religious and Spiritual Experience at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln. He is also Honorary Professor in the College of Theology and Religion at Durham University. Ordained in the Church of England in 1970 he also founded the North of England Institute for Christian Education at Durham in 1981. With this experience, and the publication of about 40 books and 150 book chapters and journal articles, he is particularly well equipped to write a study guide on religious and spiritual experience (RSE).

The book is very well structured with a set of thematic chapters that cover the key topics and debates in the study of RSE. Astley also provides a wealth of references for further reading, with recommendations for books and papers at the end of each chapter, helpfully divided into introductory and advanced reading. He also provides exercises, in the form of articles to critically assess, and prompts to encourage the reader to reflect on issues and questions raised by the text. There are extensive footnotes to each chapter which delve deeper into the points raised, and finally a comprehensive reference list and indexes. Prof Astley has also produced a select bibliography on RSE that complements his book, and which can currently be found on the AHT website at <https://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/bibliography.html>

A glance at the contents list of the study guide provides a clear view of the themes and debates covered by the text. Astley clearly describes the present state and consensus, or lack of consensus, in these debates. Although the book is an overview of the study of RSE, Astley does provide his own thoughts and perspectives at various points in the text. He offers his preferred definition of spirituality, "...the beliefs and teachings, but more importantly the practices, capacities – and



(particularly) – feelings, attitudes (including dispositions and values) and experiences that express what a person takes to be ultimate for her or him," and the potentially useful distinction of spirituality along two dimensions or axes: "human-horizontal" and "vertical-transcendent". He also emphasises the importance of the continued sense of the spiritual in religious experiences, their transformational fruits, and the cumulative argument for religious experience in considering its evidential value. However, his presentation of these debates is balanced and he is not afraid to draw the reader's attention to differing or more controversial views, for example, those questioning whether spiritual experiences always result in the moral development of the experiencer and the ongoing debates between essentialists and constructivists.

Astley's book will be of particular relevance for those who are interested in RSE in a Christian context. There is a clear emphasis on the discussion of Christian theology and philosophy in the book. Astley explains at the outset that this is largely due to the fact that the SCM Press is a Christian publisher, so this seems appropriate in that context. In addition, many of the arguments he describes apply equally to other traditions. However, some may still criticise the book on the basis that a

study guide on RSE in general should be broader in scope and draw on more examples and perspectives from other traditions.

The book also tends more towards the philosophical and theological disciplines than any others. Although Astley does include a couple of chapters on psychology and sociology/anthropology (combined in one chapter), the importance of these approaches could have been emphasised more. Finally, the contribution of the field of neuroscience to the study of RSE is relegated to an appendix in the form of a select bibliography rather than being given a chapter to itself. However, it is inevitable that every book will reflect the interests and expertise of its writer, and in this case, these influences make the book highly effective in what it sets out to achieve. A truly comprehensive and balanced book on RSE would require the efforts of an interdisciplinary team, rather than those of a single author.

Finally, it may be helpful to briefly compare Astley's book with Marianne Rankin's *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience* (2008). Both books aim to provide an overview and introduction to the study of RSE and share very similar themes, such as types, triggers, and fruits of experiences. Both books superbly achieve this aim. However, there does seem to be a difference in target audience. Astley's work seems to be aimed at

undergraduate level and above, whereas Rankin's book appears to be aimed at undergraduate level and below, or perhaps is intended more for the lay reader. Also, whilst Astley's book delves deeper into the academic literature and arguments about RSE with some limited use of the RERC archive, Rankin provides far more examples and makes liberal use of the RERC archive to illustrate her themes. Finally, where Astley's work leans heavily towards the Christian tradition, Rankin's book provides a much wider diversity of examples from various traditions. In summary, Rankin's book will probably satisfy the interests of the general reader, whilst both books effectively complement each other for the reader interested in more serious academic study of RSE.

In summary, I wish I knew enough about the study of RSEs to have written this book myself! I also wish that it had been published when I was studying for the MA in Religious Experience at the then University of Lampeter! It is clearly a masterful and comprehensive distillation of a vast and complex field of study comprised of multiple academic disciplines, and should become a go-to textbook for any student of RSE from undergraduate level upwards.

Reviewed by Mike Rush

E-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com

Website: www.talkaboutspiritualcrisis.uk

Photo: Rhonda Riachi



Janice Dolley with Ursula Burton, *Awakening to a New Reality: Conscious Conversations across the Horizon of Death*. Sleepy Lion Publishers, 2020. 526pp. ISBN 978-1-9160012-0-6. £15.

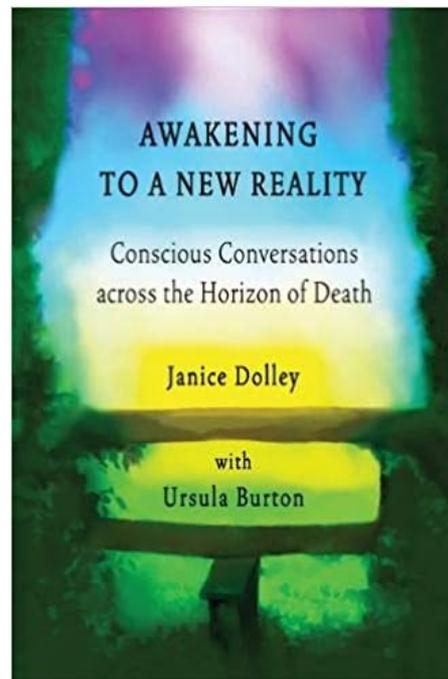
This is one of the most remarkable books I have ever read. Janice Dolley, familiar to many of us through her work with the Wrekin Trust, Findhorn Foundation and One Spirit Alliance, has co-authored the book with her deceased friend, Ursula Burton. They did not write it together before Ursula died, they wrote it afterwards. That is what makes it such an extraordinary read.

We are familiar with end of life experiences (ELEs), near-death experiences (NDEs) and after-death communication (ADCs) but this work explores a relationship which embraces all those categories and crosses the border between life and death. Reading it is a journey of exploration like no other. Both writers are searingly honest, enabling the reader to join them vicariously. Janice even includes a moving Postscript, in which she describes nursing her husband as he died, after sixty-three years of marriage.

Ten years before Ursula's death, she and Janice had co-written *Christian Evolution: Moving towards a Global Spirituality* and they both felt that one day they would collaborate on a book after one of them had died. Ursula died in October 1993 and made contact with Janice just three hours later. Ursula described the pain of dying and her gratitude for the medicine, followed by the liberation of "limitless breath, space, light, purity, freedom, knowing who one truly IS". Ursula found that she could see thought, and they later found a way of communicating when time allowed, between May 1995 and 1997 to work on the book. Then Ursula seemed to move on, although still returning from time to time to encourage the writing of the book. As Janice leads a hugely busy life, this took years.

The book is divided into three parts: the first concerned with dying and our approach to death, which also involves how we live; part two deals with individual transformation and approach to a new reality; part three with the collective shift beyond materialism towards a

recognition of our interconnectedness. Most chapters conclude with informative notes and at the end of the book, Janice suggests steps the reader might like to take and organizations which might be helpful in further exploration. Within the Appendices is a funeral and burial service with inspirational readings, reflecting the awareness of the continuation of the soul.



Janice and Ursula had been exploring a new consciousness before Ursula died and both were highly sensitive to the transpersonal. They were aware of the thin veil that separates pre-birth and after-death dimensions, a veil they found at its thinnest on the Isle of Iona. Janice had seen, 'with outer eyes, not just inner ones – the energy that flowed through all creation' and knew 'with a deep inner knowing, that this energy was loving and beneficent and that this was what God was'. She had experienced connection with the deceased before, including with her own father and had communicated with her grandchild before conception. In the face of scepticism, they persevered with their explorations and had faith in their experiences. This enabled them to progress beyond the norm.

Yet this book is about more than the link between life and death established by Janice and Ursula. The understanding of this present life within a schema of pre and post death development offers a new perspective on ourselves, our relations with others and all that we do in this life. It is about living in a new awareness of our essential oneness, as described by the mystics throughout the ages in all the major religious traditions and now seemingly confirmed by science. The fundamental unity of all things is being established and the materialist paradigm challenged. Humanity is on the verge of a new understanding of the world as one and a realisation that we need to work together to prevent further threats to the planet. NDEs, in particular, have given us a glimpse of what awaits us after death and as such experiences are increasingly reported, earlier scepticism about them has long ago disappeared. This understanding is having an effect on a personal

and communal level, as Janice writes, 'Removing our fear of death frees us to live more fully now, to open to spirit, align with universal intelligence and contribute to the momentous changes now underway.'

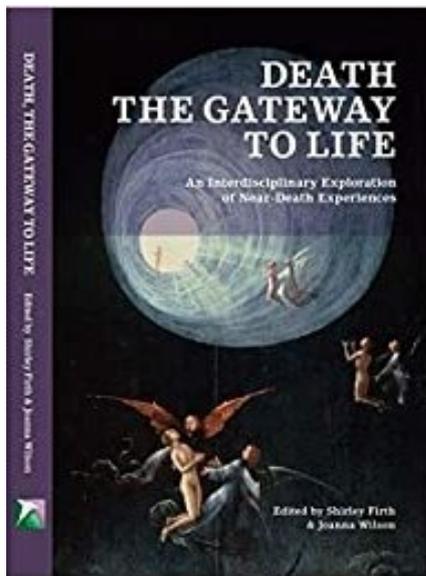
Janice points to a new vision for humanity in a ground-breaking book, where she shares her own journey. The current pandemic may be the much-needed trigger for humanity to take a step into a new paradigm. We need a new vision to save ourselves and the planet and this book opens the door.

*Marianne Rankin
Director of Communications,
The Alister Hardy Trust*

(This review will also appear in *Caduceus*)

Shirley Firth & Joanna Wilson, *Death the Gateway to Life: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Near-Death Experiences*. Winchester, Institute for Theological Partnerships, 2019. 258pp. ISBN 978-1-908532-07-7[pbk]. £10.00

This engaging collection of essays is based on papers presented at the conference *Is Heaven for Real? Significant Implications of Near-Death Experiences* which took place at the University of Winchester in 2016. Eschewing reductionistic, brain-based ‘explanations’ of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), it aims, instead, to present a series of explorations and interpretations of such experiences focussed on their meaning and spiritual implications. To this end it explores issues to do with the nature of death, the essence of consciousness, and the pastoral implications of NDEs. *En route*, it also considers the fruits produced in subjects lives by their NDEs and examines the theological and philosophical implications of such experiences.



The structure of the book reflects its objectives. Part I, ‘The Nature of Consciousness’, includes three pieces examining what NDEs might be telling us about consciousness itself. Pim van Lommel provides an excellent overview of the detail and conclusions contained in his seminal study *Consciousness Beyond Life*, asserting that NDEs contribute to an understanding of consciousness as something that can exist apart from the brain before concluding that “consciousness seems to be our essence” and that “once we leave our body [sic]...we exist as pure consciousness,

beyond time and space...”. Peter Fenwick examines NDEs within the wider context of End of Life Experiences (ELEs), drawing on some vivid and frequently moving testimonies from his own existing studies of both ELEs and NDEs, whilst David Lorimer explores the ways in which NDEs may be seen to provide evidence in support of the concept of the ‘universal mind’.

In Part II, four equally able commentators examine some spiritual and religious perspectives on NDEs. Marianne Rankin explores the nature of NDEs within the wider context of the study of religious and spiritual experiences generally, and in so doing treats the reader to a fascinating overview of the history and aims of the RERC. Paul Badham shows convincingly how NDEs suggest evidential backing for the soul’s immortality, demonstrating how this ‘squares’ with religious – specifically Christian – views of the afterlife. Patrick Gaffney sets out detailed parallels between NDEs and Tibetan Buddhist understandings of death and dying and in so doing reveals how they align with the Bardo states within the Tibetan tradition, whilst Shirley Firth explores what NDEs might be telling us about death and what comes after, examining in the process the small but significant number of negative NDEs which have been reported in the literature.

The study is neatly tied up in an afterword by David Lorimer, in which he succinctly asserts one common finding that runs, thread-like, through the whole collection: the view that NDEs and related experiences challenge the adequacy and completeness of the currently dominant Western worldview of scientific materialism. The package is completed by a series of valuable appendices, in which a number of testimonies from well-known and not-so-well-known NDErs are set out in detail.

The ‘Further Resources’ are useful although the book would have benefitted from the inclusion of an index and there are a small

number of printing errors which the publishers may see fit to amend in any future editions.

The conference from which this study arose was timed to mark the fortieth anniversary of the publication of Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*: the book in which the author coined the term 'Near-Death Experience', thereby kick-starting the whole history of 'Near-Death Studies.' *Death the Gateway to Life*, despite its rather clumsy title, represents a valuable contribution to what is now a vast and growing field, and the reader will find much here to reflect upon. I enjoyed it, but would have liked to have seen a greater willingness to engage with the wider contexts of NDEs: contexts both historical and recent. There was no recognition, for example, that NDE research is but part of a long history of psychical and parapsychological study into life after death extending backwards well into the nineteenth century and which was well established long before Moody's original research was done. How might that earlier research serve to *locate* the study of NDEs? How might it *inform* it? And how might recent and contemporary psychical research throw light on still unresolved issues within near-death research? I am thinking in particular here about how it has proved so

difficult to obtain *experimental* veridical evidence that during NDEs and OBEs something actually *leaves* the body. Is this issue a 'new thing', or have we been here before? Casting the research net in other, related, directions might have proved fruitful and would certainly have been in keeping with the aims of the study. It has recently been done brilliantly by S. D Tucker in a groundbreaking study of poltergeists as Trickster phenomena. Might something similar be done with NDEs to equally beneficial effect? I was also rather puzzled by the chapter on NDEs within the context of the Hardy archive. Given that two studies of NDEs using that very archival material already exist, it was odd not to see them mentioned or referenced.

No matter. The study as it stands is important and timely and it is to be hoped that the next forty years of NDE research will be able to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding which currently remain. As things stand, *Death the Gateway to Life* has much to offer the specialist and interested non-specialist alike and I recommend it warmly, although not without reservation.

Mark Fox

**S.D Tucker, *Blithe Spirits: An Imaginative History of the Poltergeist*
Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2020. 352pp. ISBN 978-1-4456-6728-7**

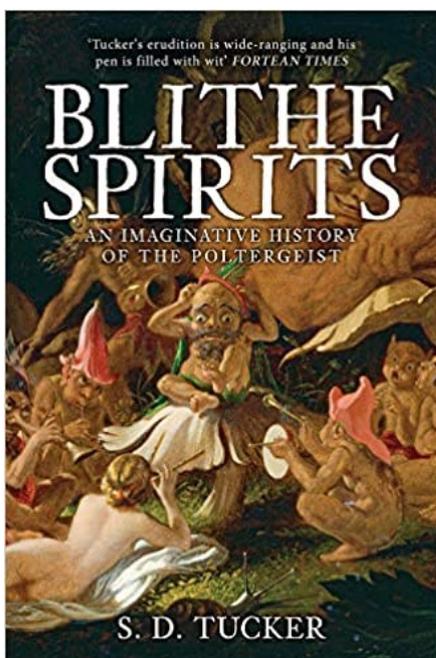
Is there such a thing as a quintessentially English poltergeist? In *Blithe Spirits*, S.D Tucker argues that there is. In 1661 the Wiltshire manor-house of a magistrate named John Mompesson became the scene of a variety of extreme poltergeist phenomena following the confiscation of a drum from an itinerant beggar and busker named William Drury. The details – deafening drumming noises, sulphurous odours, terrified animals, JOTTs, odd temperature changes, and so on - will be known to anybody familiar with the annals of poltergeistery and, in fact, Tucker skims over them very lightly. (If you're interested, you'll find a more detailed description of what happened at Mompesson's house in any number of other studies of poltergeists, including Harry Price's seminal 1945 study

Poltergeist Over England). So what makes Tucker's book different? Simply this: for him, the key to unlock the mystery and meaning of such tales is to be found in the study of Tricksters. Indeed, this is his central thesis, and one which he expounds entertainingly and at length over the 352 pages of this remarkable and comprehensive book. The result is a Fortean study *par excellence*; one deserving to occupy pride of place on any bookshelf devoted to the exploration and study of Fort's 'damned facts'.

For Tucker, the account of what happened at Mompesson's Wiltshire home constitutes nothing less than an archetypal Trickster

narrative, and this recognition is key to an understanding of his thesis overall. For him, poltergeist tales show that the figure of the Trickster – encountered mythologically and elsewhere in the form of Hermes, Mercurius, Loki, King Monkey, Coyote, Wakdjunkaga, and so on – is very much alive and kicking in the twenty-first century: not as an actual being, but as a mythological personification of certain tendencies in the human mind. Tucker demonstrates this via an analysis of the poltergeist's Trickster 'elements': an analysis that is remarkably detailed and well-informed. In fact, *Blithe Spirits* would function as a thorough introduction to the literature on poltergeists for those not acquainted with it. For those who already *are*, it introduces a perspective onto the study of the phenomenon which has long been overdue.

It also works as a thorough introduction to the literature surrounding Tricksters. All of the key texts are introduced and examined: from George Hansen's seminal *The Trickster and the Paranormal*, via the classic studies of Lewis Hyde, Paul Radin, Karl Kerényi and Norman Brown, right the way through to more recent examinations of the Trickster in a variety of other contexts. Tucker is obviously taken with Gef the Talking Mongoose, and references Christopher Jossife's excellent study of him frequently and at length.



The result is a barnstorming study of the polt-as-Trickster. Tucker is careful, though, to make clear from the outset that he doesn't believe in Tricksters *per se*. There is no *real* Trickster, he writes - "Nobody but a lunatic believes in Loki any more" - it is simply that Trickster narratives provide convenient mythological prisms through which to view 'naughty ghosts' such as those that bedevilled Mompesson's home. Thus, Tricksters provide mythological personifications of the cunning and stupidity (and bawdy humour) to be found in the human mind: no less and no more. Here, alas, is the one real weakness of this otherwise excellent book. So *nothing* happened at Tedworth; at Willington Mill; at Enfield; at Humpty-Doo? Or at any one of literally thousands of celebrated and exceptionally well-documented poltergeist cases throughout history and world-wide? It seems to me that *something* did. Something with a specific ontology: however strange. Something outside of the human imagination altogether. Why not an *actual* manifestation of the Trickster? It ticks so many of Tucker's Trickster boxes that I'm surprised he dismisses it so emphatically. At the outset, as well.

Of course, locating poltergeist narratives within the realm of the human imagination is not a massive deviation from what has gone before. Carol Zaleski did the same thing over two decades ago with *Near-Death Experiences*. What is – relatively – new, however, is using Trickster narratives as lenses through which to view poltergeist tales. I have long thought that they may provide keys to unlock the mystery of *Near-Death Experiences* and so was delighted to see Tucker using them to open up a different door. Books like *Blithe Spirits* invigorate their fields, ushering us across new thresholds as we seek to understand the anomalous and the unfamiliar. There should be more like them.

Mark Fox

Dr Fox is an independent researcher, speaker and writer. His latest book, *Cold Inn*, explores spiritual, religious and Fortean themes within a fictional context. He can be found at www.markfox.co.uk

Andrew Seaton, Spiritual Awakening made simple – how to see through the mist of the mind to the peace of the here and now. Alresford: O-Books, 2020. 99pp inc Bibliography and notes. £7.99.

Andrew Seaton writes in a straightforward way. The title and subtitle identify what he means by Spiritual Awakening, and the problem many face. Spiritual awakening is reaching the peace of the here and now. The problem is the mist that the mind puts in the way. The book analyses the mist and cuts through it.

Not only is his title clear, but so are his chapter and section headings, so that you can use the Contents page as a roadmap through the book or to take you to the answer to your own question. There is no index.

God is not mentioned, nor religion. The closest we come is on p.77-78:

‘Many millions of people, in both the East and the West, have spent a lifetime immersing themselves in elaborate “spiritual” techniques, rituals and culture that come out of ancient traditions, in the belief that these things will bring them peace. How many of these people have experienced spiritual peace and awakening? Only a handful... many millions of instances... disprove the belief...’

I conclude that Seaton considers spiritual awakening to be independent of any religion. That does not prevent him quoting appropriate lines from old religious texts or from contemporary individuals to illustrate his points.

Over 40 years Andrew Seaton studied educational philosophy and psychology, working mainly in education. This alerted him to the deep flaws in our understanding of knowledge and how people work. He took two years off to unlearn ‘his education and other conditioning’. Writing the book started for Andrew with a series of experiences in his mid-sixties. It ends with four notes to yourself forming the acronym DAWN (p.91):

‘Disbelieve thoughts...
‘Allow your present moment to be as it is, without judging it.

‘Withdraw attention from your mind by noticing ... your body.

‘Notice sensory objects ... without preconceptions or agendas. Notice also that “I am the one noticing what is happening”.’

Can we trust him? Yes, because he does not insist on our trust, but says early on; ‘Ask yourself if what I have written rings a bell of recognition. Try to hold the ideas in this book lightly...If there is something in the book for which you can’t find an inner echo, ... put it on a mental shelf labelled “maybe Wrong, Maybe Later”. (p.7)

What is spiritual awakening? It is the move from being dominated by your thoughts to tuning in to your deeper self, your heart, ‘your awareness Self’, that language cannot fully express.

Seaton wrote the book because of the ‘clutter error and confusion’ that leaves people feeling frustrated. He notes that the confusion is partly because people throughout the ages have used their particular languages and images to discuss matters that cannot be expressed in words or concepts, and because of the oppressive nature of religious authorities.

The first chapter, ‘the Life you Are’, introduces ‘the inner life within everything’ – a ‘formless awareness’ we can enter any time (pp.8,9). ‘Peace, contentment and connectedness are our nature’ (p.15).

Chapter 2; ‘Your idea of You and the World’, traces the development of our perception of ourselves as separated individuals, constructing our own concepts of life by interpreting and selecting from our sensory data. We create a web of ideas to work with in that it is not necessarily accurate.

Chapter 3, The Life You Are Experiencing , explores how we try to make life the way we want it to be, and fail; hence suffering, which is an invitation to accept life as it actually is.

Chapter 4, Questioning Conditioned Assumptions, helps us falsify our self-formed identity and open ourselves to who we actually are. This is continued in chapter 5: Questioning Your “Idea of Me”, which leads into Chapter 6: Seeing What Is Real. Chapter 7 alerts us to ‘Traps to Be Aware Of’, that keep us identified with our thoughts rather than reality: complexity, thinking of ourselves as ‘spiritual’ or unworthy, or imperfect, or clever, or that we ‘must get it right’. He reminds us that we ‘can drop into the awareness Self in an instant’: we are not our thoughts or our opinions, but the Self that is aware.

The final chapter gives ‘A Few Tips and a Simple Strategy’; DAWN, as we have already seen. He ends:

‘Allow yourself to be led, to be lived by the One Self. Let go of trying to control your life. Let it unfold for you. Live as simply as seems practical and right for you. Allow yourself to be content dealing with the small things or with what is presenting itself to be attended to. Address any matters, large or small, that

you have been avoiding, but which won’t go away. Otherwise, be content being small, being undemanding, being empty.’

This book is a distillation of lived experience, ending with notes proven by the author’s life, and handed confidently to us. From my own experience, through years of research and spiritual practice, and the serendipitous nature of the reading I had done in the weeks prior to this book’s arrival, I commend this brief book to you.

In the early stages of reading this book, I wrote in the cover: Why should anyone want a spiritual awakening? What use is it? My answer would be: In order to make sense of life and live more easily. As a chaplain of prisoners, men imprisoned not merely by the State but by their own false thoughts, I offer the contents of this book as practical solutions to their existential dilemmas.

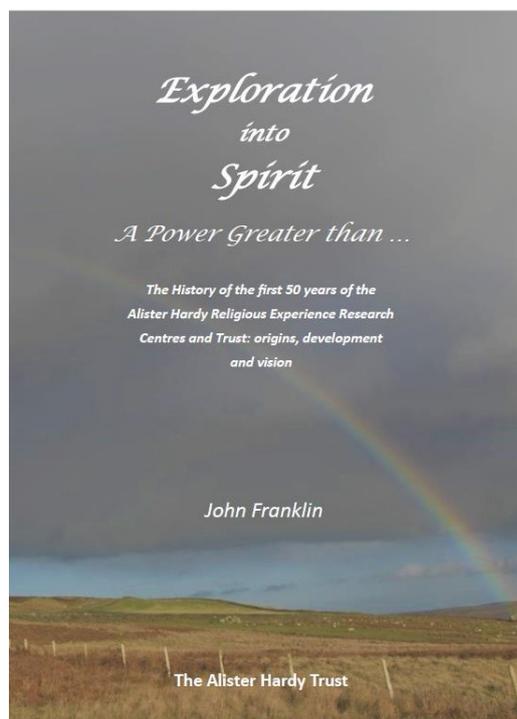
Philip Tyers

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Please email denumine@gmail.com and include your postal address. Once the review has been received for publication, the book is yours to keep.

In the Stillness: poems, prayers, reflections	Elizabeth Mills
The Life That Never Ends: an anthology of Quaker spiritual experience	Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies

NOTICES



Exploration into Spirit 3rd edition

The Alister Hardy Trust is pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of the 3rd and last edition of *Exploration into Spirit: A Power Greater Than...* the history of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centres and Trust. This brings the story up to the end of 2019, concluding with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the RERU by Sir Alister Hardy in 1969.

Copies of the book can be ordered at a special pre-publication price of £12.00.

Cheques made out to **The Alister Hardy Trust.**

Orders to: Dr David Greenwood

Field Cottage

Lower Welson

Eardisley

Herefordshire, HR3 6NB.

Email: D.Greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk

New Post-graduate Certificate in Psycho-spiritual Care

Post graduate training in psycho-spiritual care starts 2021

Level 7 qualification: 60 credits at Masters level



The Oxford Centre for Spirituality and Wellbeing announce the launch of their post-graduate certificate in psycho-spiritual care in partnership with Oxford Brookes University.

Led by the Centre's director Dr Guy Harrison, the course will be taught by clinicians and academics in the field of psycho-spiritual care from Oxford Brookes and Oxford Health NHS Trust. The course is open to all health, mental health, social and allied health professionals from any faith or none.

The first cohort will begin in May 2021.

Deadline for application: **5 February 2021**

Email: mastersmodules@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Phone: 01865 902777

or for an informal conversation contact Dr Guy Harrison, guy.harrison@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

EVENTS

Beyond Flatland – A day on transformative ways of knowing

Saturday 28 November 2020 • 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Full price £15.00; Concessions £7.50

<https://mysticsandscientists.org/index.php/beyond-flatland-a-day-on-transformative-ways-of-knowing/>

This day will suggest ways to recover and evolve a wider, expansive consciousness. It will explore how the power of symbols and synchronicities, divination and everyday intimations of more might be reappraised as forms of knowing that have their own kind of relevance and validity, and help to make sense of our times. These modes of consciousness are crucial in our times. They can reintroduce us to other worlds that are already here.

Beyond Flatland is a partnership event between:

The Scientific and Medical Network
The Centre for Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred
The Fetzer Institute
and
Perspectiva



Scientific and Medical Network Webinars 2020

<https://www.mysticsandscientists.org>

Wednesday Nov 25, 7.30 Dr Jim Garrison, President, Ubiquity University

Wednesday Dec 2, 7.30 David Lorimer, *A Quest for Wisdom*

Wednesday Dec 9, 7.30 Prof Elaine Howard Ecklund, Rice University – *Secularity and Science: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*

Wednesday Dec 16, 7.30 Prof Keith Ward FBA – *Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World*

Recordings of previous webinars are available on the web site.

MYSTICS & SCIENTISTS EXTRA 2020
ONE MIND, ONE PLANET, ONE HEALTH