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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our new Assistant Editor!

I am delighted to be sharing this issue with Billie Krstovic (photo below) who was appointed Assistant Editor in August. You may have read articles by Billie in previous issues (e.g. De Numine 63, autumn 2017) and she has contributed an experience (p17) and a book review (p37) to this issue, as well as helping with the layout and images. A review of Billie’s own book, *Using Mindfulness to Improve Learning*, is on p30.

Billie is the founding editor of a magazine, *Berkshire Woman*, now in online format only (berkshirewoman.com), which also carries articles on spiritual topics. It is great to have her on the De Numine team.

Of wisdom and wizardry

Our articles this issue once again cover a wide range of spiritual and philosophical perspectives. Janet Mackinnon’s exploration of the *dynion hysbys* or Welsh Wizards, offers a rare glimpse of this intriguing part of Welsh history and culture. Michael Shearer grapples with spiritual teachings and the nature of the overself, whilst Philp Tyers insists on the primacy of spiritual experience (rather than teachings) to guide us. Ken R Vincent interprets some of the sayings of Jesus taken from the Gospel of Thomas, which may well make you want to discover more about this text, among many to be excluded from the New Testament following the Orthodox Councils in the fourth century AD.

If these or other pieces inspire you to write something in reply, do get in touch and mark your letter for publication. We are pleased to include an expanded letters section in this issue, thanks to the readers who wrote to us. Likewise, do send us your inspiring images, whether photographic or hand-painted like the delightful images included in this issue by Juliet Greenwood.

Synchronicities and shared experiences

A strange aspect to this issue only became apparent to me in the last few weeks. Your editors have both lost family members in the past few months. Then we discovered that we had both lost a family cat as well. So it seems especially fitting that we have included spiritual experiences with family pets this time.

We welcome more of your spiritual experiences, whether old or new, including those with two-legged or four-legged friends and family.

*Rhonda Riachi*
Allowing the Overself

‘Overself’ is a term used by Paul Brunton (among others) which I find usefully free of reference to any particular religious tradition. It refers to that sense we sometimes get of sensing a part of the psyche that seems to hold more than the individual consciousness. Let me tell you about an instance of this where it seemed possible to deliberately make use of this experience.

It was several years ago. I went to a meeting of the local Buddhist meditation group. Towards the end of the session, in the general discussion, the topic of the eight-fold path to enlightenment and, specifically, the component called Right Speech, came up.

Someone asked what exactly this was. How did someone speak rightly? There was some discussion and a variety of opinions. I remember one member saying it was avoiding swearing and being respectful; another suggested it was always speaking with compassion; another contributed that it was simply speaking the truth. This last offering was quickly dismissed as it was clear to us all how much it was necessary to at least modify the truth in the face of the need for social considerations. Does anyone ever give the real reason for not going to some social event that we don’t want to go to? We are all skilful, habitual manipulators of the truth. That wasn’t a complete list; there seemed almost as many views as people present.

I went away still musing over the problem and did so for the next few days. The central difficulty, it seemed, was how to justify the word ‘right’, what was it about some particular way of speaking which made it not just a personal preference but more than an individual choice?

I made little progress and decided to try to bring in the non-conscious levels of the mind by a simple technique I had devised many years earlier. I had adapted this method after reading a book about the psychology of mathematical discovery. It seemed common in other areas too. The core process involved going as far as you can and then just quitting. Sometimes an insight would appear and it was the time to run down the street shouting “Eureka” (nudity optional). So I took a calendar and marked off a day a month ahead and wrote in a time and the topic “Right Speech.”

I then resolved to strictly abstain from thinking about the matter for that month. In due course, the day arrived with the “Right Speech” note on the calendar which reminded me to return to the topic once more.

I found four ideas in my mind waiting for me. The first was the term ‘limiting concept.’ I had a very fuzzy idea what this meant and I thought I might be confusing it with Ideal concepts, but with this technique that doesn’t matter. Its role is to stimulate suggestions. So my, probably faulty, memory provided a notion from ‘O’ level Physics decades earlier, which was that some problems were too complex, so it was sensible to introduce simplifying tactics to try to get an initial solution. The topic of fluid dynamics, for example, liquids in motion, is notoriously difficult. So, said memory (right or wrong), there is introduced the notion of a ‘limiting concept’ of a Perfect Liquid which behaves in a more straightforward way, notably with no viscosity, unlike actual liquids which are usually impure anyway. A result can be calculated which is roughly right, and complicating details may possibly be added later. This worked despite there being no such thing as a perfect liquid. Similarly with a Perfect Gas, a Frictionless Surface, and so on. From this I took the idea that “Right Speech” was a simplification of a complex situation, possibly a perfect notion not actually achievable.

The second idea waiting for me was an image: a picture of a yellow arrow on a tree stump. Yellow arrows are standard symbols across Europe of the way to go on a footpath. Go this way, it says. This is especially true of the Camino de Santiago, which I have walked nine times, but is also true of any old footpath. What I took from this was that “Right Speech” wasn’t an
instruction about what to do now, but rather an indication of which direction to go. It showed a way to proceed.

The third idea was what appeared to be a quotation, though I have never checked it out (and don’t wish to). It sounded like a quotation. It was: “Be Thou Perfect, as thy Father is Perfect.” This sounded not only like a quotation, but a Christian quotation with the words “Thy Father.” However, if so it is more or less blasphemous. No human could be perfect as God is supposed to be. I took this idea to mean that we should strive towards perfection, that’s the way to go, with no guarantee; indeed, the opposite, that the limiting concept could never be achieved.

The fourth idea was also a quotation but I’m pretty sure that, at best, this one is only a rough approximation rather than verbatim. This one purported to come from Spinoza and I knew it to be along the lines of what he concludes. That it is probably not accurate doesn’t matter. These are ideas up from the depths to suggest a conclusion to a problem. That’s all.

Anyway, the final idea, as found, was that we should function less “sub specie individualis” and more “sub specie aeternitatis.” I understood this to mean that we should reduce our tendency to judge from our own personal perspective, seeing things under the category of the individual, and instead try to see things under the category of the eternal, that is to say, from no specific viewpoint. Spinoza distinguishes between the everlasting, which is in time but continues forever, and the eternal, which is outside of time altogether. So we should try to judge matters not from the angle created by the arbitrary facts of our birth and upbringing; our nationality, class, gender, education (or lack of it) and personal experience, but from no biased presupposition.

OK. Now all the found ideas seem to go together rather well. “Right Speech” was the practice of reducing the habits of talking from the position of our own self and our own categories - what I think, feel, want and so on, plus how it seems as a man (or woman), black (or white), American (or whatever). We should seek to transcend ourself and express eternal truth as an ideal, not just how things seem for a creature such as ourself.

As it happens, I have had short experiences now and then a bit like this. I am a retired lecturer, but I never wrote out lectures and read them out, I walked in and spouted, making it up as I went along; 35 years’ experience of that.

Sometimes, not often, I found myself standing back mentally from what was being said. It is a decidedly weird experience. “Oh, yes, I can hear Michael speaking; I wonder what he will say next.” And, for a while the speaking seemed to roll out easily and fluently with my conscious self as a witness rather than an agent. Furthermore, Michael seemed to speak with clarity and relevance. It wasn’t like a sort of anglicised speaking in tongues.

Further questions emerge, of course. Such as, for example, what is the Overself (if it exists)? Each religion might have its own vocabulary: God, the Buddha Mind, Brahman, etc.

Further, I suspect it’s like that with the other seven aspects of the eight-fold path. An enlightened person would allow the Buddha Mind to set the level of effort, the actual action, the job to do, and so on.

But there are obvious dangers and a need for restraints of rationality and morality. We have had enough, surely, of decidedly dubious individuals announcing that they are speaking or acting for God.

Nonetheless, the technique produced a plausible hypothesis about the nature of Right Speech which is not just a matter of personal perspective and opinion. On this account, it is the ideal, the limiting concept, the thing to aim for. Individuality is transcended, the Buddha-Mind (or the Overself) acts through the individual, incarnating in time the eternal truth or, at least, something closer to the eternal truth than simply how it appears from a given angle. Sounds inspiring.

Michael Shearer
Dyion Hysbys: Welsh wizards, cunning folk and wise men past and present

Besides its architecture and its place in the social history of Wales, Llanidloes is also rich in fairy lore... The town was famous for its conjurors and its dyion hysbys or cunning men.


The figure of the dyn hysbys (feminine: menyw/fenyw hysbys) is at once both a very Welsh and universal archetype. Its rootedness within the national and community psyche of Wales explains why the phenomenon has an enduring locus and continued acceptance in certain places, where the so-called paranormal is still experienced as part of everyday life.

The following narrative offers a short overview of famous “dyion hysbys” from the Welsh neodruidic revival of the late 18th century to the mid-20th century, as well as an account of ordinary practitioners from the same period to the present day. In the former category are men such as the acclaimed medical doctor and, according to esotericist John Michell, “natural shaman” William Price together with renowned cunning man John Harries, whose “Book of Incantations” is housed in the National Library of Wales. Also, arguably, in this category are the world-famous pioneers of co-operative socialism, spiritualism and, separately, Freudian psychoanalysis, Robert Owen and Ernest Jones. The global legacy of Welsh wise men partly explains why the heritage of everyday dyion hysbys has become a subject of international scholarship. For instance, a 2019 article by Lisa Mari Tallis in the US academic journal “Preternature” is entitled “Which Craft? Witches, Gypsies and Fenyw Hysbys in 18th century Wales.”(1) Although the author identifies women as “marginalised” cunning folk, this may have arisen more from social status than gender. Nevertheless, the humbler tradition of dyion hysbys still flourishes in the village of Caersws (not far from Llanidloes), where Mid Wales Paranormal founder Rory Evans provides a range of services very much in the spirit of Robert Owen, who was born and died in nearby Newtown.

It will be suggested later that the philanthropic enterprise of Rory Evans tempers the sometimes ambiguous qualities of the dyon/menyw hysbys figure. These are described in a most helpful entry on the subject in “A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology:”

A title rather than a name, [it is] the most common term in Wales for a wizard, known in many districts. The soul of the druid, too imperfect for Christian heaven and too good for hell, inhabits the body of the dyn hysbys. Among the powers of the dyon hysbys is the ability to know and reveal the unknown... There were three kinds... clerics, men who had learned their craft from esoteric books, and those who had inherited the power from their families...(2)

This locates the mythological and historical ancestry of dyion hysbys with characters such as Merlin in Arthurian legend and the Anglo-Welsh Elizabethan magician John Dee. However, the historical dictionary of the Welsh language, Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, traces usage of the expression dyon hysbys only back to the mid-18th century, giving the English translation as “wizard, soothsayer, fortune teller.” Meanwhile, the term menyw hysbys is associated with a “fortune teller, witch.” (3) The descriptive term “hysbys” implies “knowledge, information knowing” with a similar usage to that of cunning folk in parts of England. According to leading historian of folk culture Robin Gwyndaf: “The dyn hysbys tradition was particularly strong in the Llangurig and Ponterwyd districts of Mid-Wales (again near Llanidloes)... (but) seems to have gradually died out in the 1940s.” (4) This widespread decline in traditional British folk beliefs in the first half of the 20th century – and more eclectic revivalism in the second part – also explains why contemporary dyon hysbys like Rory Evans experience a certain discontinuity in their professional lineage and find it difficult to ascribe a particular title to their practice.

Before exploring further the phenomenon of the modern dyon hysbys, it is therefore useful to briefly survey the careers of dyon hysbys from...
the 18th to mid-20th centuries. Of all these, John Harries (c.1785–1839) probably closest fits the mould and his story has inspired a recent short film called “The Cunning Man.” Harries was grammar school educated and may have studied medicine in London before returning to establish a practice in rural Carmarthenshire. According to their National Library of Wales entry, John and his son Henry

.... were famous throughout Wales and neighbouring counties on the English border as highly professional medical practitioners, clever surgeons and skilful astrologers who held an important position in society. They became renowned for their ability to predict the future, recover lost or stolen property, combating witchcraft, and invoking benign spirits, and as a result were severely condemned by the mainstream religious people of the 19th century.(5)

Also very much concerned about the human relationship with the afterlife in his later years, was Robert Owen (1771-1858). (8) Although Owen is best known for his social enterprise, philanthropy and, subsequently, proto socialism, his commitment to progressive causes, including spiritual libertarianism, mirrors that of younger contemporaries like Price. Despite his modest education, Owen demonstrated intellectual precociousness from an early age and his lifelong philosophical leanings, combined with great practical abilities, arguably place him in the higher echelons of dynion hysbys. Notably, Owen was adept in after death communication, dictating “The Seven Principles of Spiritualism” to the medium Emma Hardinge Britten in 1871 and thereby providing the basis of its religious philosophy. Sharing Owen’s prodigious organisational skills, albeit not his spirituality, was the Welsh medical doctor and psychoanalyst Ernest Jones (1879-1958) whom biographer Brenda Maddox called “Freud’s Wizard.” (9) Jones became the Anglophone world’s leading advocate of Freudian psychoanalysis as well as Freud’s official biographer. Like William Price, Jones was something of a sexual libertarian, leading to ongoing controversies about his reputation. (10) However, as a leading psycho-medical innovator, Jones also perhaps belongs with other famous dynion hysbys. For alongside an international reputation, there remained a strong commitment to Welsh Nationalism, cultural and natural heritage. A significant achievement towards the end of Jones’ life was to secure the first British landscape conservation designation of its kind for the Gower Peninsula, where his ashes were later scattered.
A powerful attachment to place in both life and death links all these famous dynion hysbys, as well as their more humble counterparts. Like Harries, Price and Jones, some of these practiced as medicine men and women, whilst others fulfilled a variety of roles associated with so-called magical arts. These included fenyw hysbys or “wise women,” as Lisa Mari Tallis calls them, but “about whom we know very little.” However, Tallis’ use of both “cunning” and “wise” possibly suggests an ethical hierarchy amongst dynion hysbys to which posterity might perhaps give highest title to Robert Owen of Newtown in the 250th anniversary of his birth. Much has thus been written recently about Owen’s worldly legacy, but less about his later religious beliefs, role in the development of Spiritualism and contribution to the subject of after death communication. It is the latter particularly which links Robert Owen to the final dyn hysbys of this article, founder of Mid Wales Paranormal Rory Evans.

Rory also has strong connections with Newtown and describes himself as “a normal person who has been given a gift by something” which he identifies as “the Holy Spirit” and his role as “a vessel” for this “life force.” (11) He combines his Mid Wales Paranormal activities with a full-time job in the food retail sector, along with helping older relatives in the village of Caersws where he has lived for a number of years with his family. Although Rory locates himself within a Celtic Christian tradition, he does not follow church religion and regards the Bible as an expression of “power over people to keep them in their place.” His own spiritual enterprise is philanthropic – emphatically “not commercial” – and has raised considerable funds for a wide range of charitable causes in the local area, from food banks and health care to environmental and heritage restoration projects, including religious buildings.

This contemporary dyn hysbys became aware of his paranormal gift from a very young age and although “scared to begin with” he “kept it back” from family and friends. Childhood experiences included hearing unexplained noises and whispers. Following the death of his mother when he was twenty, Rory’s felt his connection to the presence of spirits increase and likens this to receiving a better “radio wave”. However, Rory emphasises that he is “not a medium,” instead he feels an embodied connection and empathy with the presence of spirits in specific places. Maes Mawr Hall on the edge of Caersws has played a significant role in the development of his paranormal abilities. In the early 2000s, Rory attended an event there involving mediums and a ghost hunt, and in his own words, “I let myself go.” There followed another event at a former Spiritualist centre in Newtown and Rory subsequently embarked on his widely known and well-attended ghost walks around the town. It should be emphasised that his paranormal activities are regarded as entirely normal by the local community where he is something of a showman and celebrity, roles he very much enjoys. People report that Rory brings a harmonious spiritual connection with the past and he does not experience “bad spirits” but those who are “misunderstood” as a result of “being ignored”. Places, houses and objects provide him with portals into the spirit world.

Whilst the renowned historical dynion hysbys surveyed above belong to a learned tradition, particularly associated with medicine, Rory Evans regards his gift as a family inheritance, especially through his maternal line. However, purchase of a black Welsh Bible from a local charity shop fortuitously provided the missing clerical link to a
minister from his paternal side. Although Rory would be the first to acknowledge that he is not a learned person, a conversation with him reveals a subtle understanding of the paranormal from an experiential perspective, combined with a well-grounded and ethical modus operandi. The latter reflects a psychological view that stories of the afterlife can have a beneficial effect for the living.(12) As a part-time paranormal practitioner whose activities are directed towards supporting good works, Rory shares an historical lineage with other contemporary dynion hysbys (although they may not use this title) from Mid Wales towns such as Llanidloes, still very much a focus for alternative medicine, spirituality and lifestyles as well as various radical causes. What seems to distinguish these modern cunning folk, wise men and women, is precisely their “ability to know and reveal the unknown,” recalling Carl Jung’s observation on conventional religion: “I do not need to believe, I know”!

Janet Mackinnon

References


11. Author interview with Rory Evans 25.5.21 and other discussions during 2020-21


Further Reading and Resources

The Secret Teachings of Jesus

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples, “To you it has been given to know the secrets (or mysteries) of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them (i.e., those who require parables) it has not been given” (Matt 13:10-11 NRSV, also Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10). Many ancient religions - Osiris and Isis, Demeter and Persephone, Orpheus, and Mithras - also had mystery components. Their secret teachings were designed to induce a mystical experience and offer a glimpse into the afterlife (Bowden, 2010).

What are the secret teachings of Jesus - the Jesus Mysteries? I am not the first to think that the answer lies in the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas was not favoured by the early Church fathers who excluded it from the New Testament. We first learned of its existence through early Christian writers. In 1898, pieces of it were found in a rubbish heap in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, but the full text was not discovered until 1945 at Nag Hammadi, Egypt (Mattison 2015). About half of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are found in some form in the New Testament, but many of the sayings are not included in the New Testament, and I believe that they are a guide to the secret mysteries of Jesus. What follows are the verses I have selected of his secret teachings, followed by my own brief explanation. Unless otherwise noted, all of Jesus’ sayings are from Mark Mattison’s Gospel of Thomas, Appendix: Literal Translation (public domain).

Saying #62 Jesus said, “I tell my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries.” That is, not to those who won’t understand or don’t care to understand. This echoes Matthew 13:10-11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10.

Saying #17 Jesus said, “I’ll give you what no eye has ever seen, nor ear ever heard, no hand has ever touched, and no human mind has ever taught.”

This wisdom was first mentioned in Isaiah 64:4 and I Cor. 2:9.

Saying #1 And he (Jesus) said, “Whoever discovers the meaning of these sayings won’t taste death.”

This reflects the teachings of the ancient mystery schools that knowledge of the mysteries prepares one for the afterlife, and death becomes merely a passage from one existence to another (Bowden 2010).

Saying #3 Jesus said, “... the kingdom is within you and outside of you. When you know yourselves, then you’ll be known, and you’ll realize that you’re the children of the living Father. But if you don’t know yourselves, then you live in poverty and you are in poverty.”

Realize that God is everywhere and also inside you.

Saying #5 Jesus said, “Know what’s in front of your face, and what’s hidden from you will be revealed to you, because there is nothing hidden that won’t be revealed.”

Gaze at the heavens and the earth and know the beauty of God. This echoes what Sir Alister Hardy told us about his being overwhelmed at times by the beauty of nature (Hardy, 1979). This also speaks to what people who have had near-death experiences tell us about communication in the afterlife; i.e. that communication is via thought and everyone knows your thoughts (Vincent, 2019). That everything that is hidden will be revealed is also in Matthew 10:26, Mark 4:22, and Luke 12:2.

Saying #18 Jesus said, “Have you discovered the beginning so that you can look for the end? Because the end will be where the beginning is. Blessed is the one who will stand up in the beginning. They’ll know the end, and won’t taste death.”
The Kingdom of God is here and now, all around you and within you.

Saying #106 Jesus said, “When you make the two into one, you’ll become Children of Humanity, and if you say ‘Mountain, go away!’ it’ll go.” This is similar to Saying #22, Jesus said to them, “When you make the two into one... then you’ll enter the kingdom.”

This can be a sexual reference to one uniting with their soul-mate during sex (see Matthew 19:5-6, Mark 10:8, Ephesians 5:31, and in a negative way, I Cor 6:16). Sir Alister Hardy found that sex can be a “trigger” for a mystical experience (Hardy 1979). An alternate explanation is that we are to acknowledge what Karl Jung taught that men have a feminine side and women have a masculine side (Campbell, 2004). This is because God does too – the Yin/Yang of God, if you will. God is both masculine (Father, Word) and feminine (Wisdom (Sofia) and Spirit). It should be noted that the word ‘spirit’ is feminine in Hebrew and Aramaic (Lumpkin, 2019).

Saying #24 He said to them, “…Light exists within a person of light, and they light up the whole world. If they don’t shine, there is darkness.”

This echoes Matthew 5:16 and 6:22-23.

Saying #50 Jesus said, “If they ask you, ‘Where did you come from?’ tell them, ‘We’ve come from the light, the place where light came into being by itself, established itself, and appeared in their image.’

“If they ask you, ‘Is it you?’ then say, ‘We are its children, and we’re chosen by your living Father.’

“If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your Father in you?’ then say, ‘It’s movement and rest.’”

God is Light is a description as old as the New Testament (James 1:17, I John 1:5, I Timothy 6:15-16) and as modern as descriptions of spiritual/mystical experiencers and near-death experiencers who describe God or God’s emissaries as “light” or a “Being of Light” (Vincent 2019). Movement and rest mean life and death.

Saying #51 His disciples said to him, “When will the dead have rest, and when will the new world come?” He said to them, “What you’re looking for has already come, but you don’t know it.”

This echoes Luke 17:20-21, as well as many other verses in the Gospel of Thomas.

Saying #70 Jesus said, “If you give birth to what’s within you, what you have within you will save you. If you don’t have that within you, what you don’t have within you will kill you.”

Bring forth the part of God that within us all, and it will save you.

Saying #83 Jesus said, “Images are revealed to people, but the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father’s light. He’ll be revealed, but his image will be hidden by his light.”

Here again, we see God as Light, and the explanations of Saying #50 are relevant here.

Saying #84 Jesus said, “When you see your likeness, you rejoice. But when you see your images that came into being before you did --- which don’t die, and aren’t revealed – how much you’ll have to bear!”

This verse strongly suggests reincarnation, but there is an alternate explanation: part of us always remains with God. Some modern researchers of spiritually transformative experiences believe that consciousness “originates outside the human brain even if it is mediated through it” (Fenwick, 2011). In the Book of Jeremiah we read, “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:4 NRSV).”

This verse is used as a proof text by folks who believe in reincarnation, as well as those who are anti-abortion, and also those who believe in predestination. But a careful reading of the text says we exist in the mind of God or with God before birth. This pre-existence with God is also echoed in Matthew 18:10, Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:36.

Saying #88 Jesus said, “The angels and the prophets will come to you and give you those things that you already have. And you too, give them those things which you have, and say to
yourselves, ‘When will they come and take what is theirs?’” (Lambdin, 1990 translation)

In other words, the Kingdom of God is within you, and you only have to bring it forth.

Saying #108 Jesus said, “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me, and I myself will become like them; then what is hidden will be revealed to them.”

In other words, follow Jesus’ teachings.

Saying #113 His disciples said to him, “When will the Kingdom come?” “It won’t come by looking for it. They won’t say, ‘Look over here!’ or ‘Look over there!’ Rather, the Father’s Kingdom is already spread over the earth, and people don’t see it.”

This echoes Luke 17:20-21 and many of the other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas. The Kingdom of God is in the Here and Now – both within us and all around us.

Conclusion

For me, these verses are a meditation mantra, as is the entire Gospel of Thomas. Since it was written very early, it may very well represent the actual teachings of Jesus.

Dr Ken R Vincent

References


Second-hand religious experience can no longer be our personal base

In the 1870s Emma Harding Britten toured this country and others, announcing a new faith. She was reacting publicly to the Christianity in which she had been raised and teaching a new faith based on her religious experience of meeting the spirits of those who had died and confidently sharing what they had taught her and many others.

“We need no books to learn our facts from; we can gather them ourselves; we want no ‘beliefs’ but truths”. (“The creed of the spirits” delivered at Cleveland Hall on April 30th 1871 on the SNU website).

I have been challenged since the turn of this century to re-examine my faith. This quickly led me to the study of religion through the path of Religious Experience in the MA sponsored by the Alister Hardy Society. In this article, I would like to share the most recent part of this journey. I suggest that our faiths are built on the first-hand experience of others, then argue that we adopt our own first-hand faith. After referring to St. Paul, we will look at a series of examples of experience based revelations,

Behind the beliefs of Christianity lies the religious experience of St. Paul and the other writers of the New Testament. In the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul explains that he got his message directly from Jesus Christ. In Spiritualist terms, he heard directly from a departed spirit. Over many years, he developed his teaching, as others have done ever since. Over the centuries the Churches have continued, taking the Bible as the Word of God, interpreted in many ways. Mystics such as Julian of Norwich brought their own experiential slants onto it, but the authority of the church, both Catholic and Protestant, held it in bounds.

The Spiritualists were part of a series of movements which drew on experience. For example, in the early twentieth century, Alice Bailey penned a series of books dictated to her by ‘The Tibetan’ which revealed a Hierarchy which collaborated for the good of the Universe. Even today the Lucis Trust which she founded with her husband produce material seeking to unite all people of good will in mutual collaboration (see https://www.lucistrust.org).

More recently, from 1995 Neale Donald Walsch published the first of a series of books recording and then reflecting on his ‘conversations with God’. He wrote questions to God then found that he was receiving the replies and wrote them down too. ‘God talks to everyone all the time. The question is not ‘to whom does God talk’, but ‘who listens?’ I have come to agree with the God experienced by Neale Donald Walsch in his Conversations with God, that all truths are subjective, and that the current majority religions have not produced the results we were hoping for. The quality of Truth should be determined by its results, its fruits, in a person’s life, and in the life of Society. By this criteria, all religions have got God all wrong. None of them appear to be working. In his latest book, (The God Solution, 2020, Phoenix Books), Walsch suggests we all ask severe questions of our religions, and together come up with a fresh definition of who God is and what God is like.

I suspect that is a sincere, but forlorn hope. Perhaps that’s my English scepticism overriding Walsch’s American positivity. However Walsch’s earlier writings (e.g. The New Revelations; Tomorrow’s God) lay out some realistic suggestions of what God or Reality – to him they are one and the same – is really like.

He says that ‘we are all one’; Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Atheists; we are a single body, and can converse with different perspectives on a common reality. ‘Ours is not a better way, but a different way’. I was intrigued to find similar sentiments within the De Lucis Trust’s material.

In his earlier books not only does Walsch ask God questions, but writes down the answers. He suggests we do the same, and if our answers are different, that’s fine. He says we do not need to take his writings as authoritative, but weigh them for ourselves, and only accept what we can.

He heard God say that he evolves. Not only is creation evolving, but so is the creator. And not only in our experience, as he traces the religions’
pictures of God through history, but in reality. The Christian view that God is unchanging is here replaced. In my opinion, this is correct. To be perfect is to evolve, and evolution never stops. While there are a few verses in the Bible that claim God never changes, we can also trace the evolution of God through the Bible. In successive ‘revelations’ since then, we can trace further movement.

In his later books, Walsch builds on the answers he received and reflects on them, suggesting they give an agenda for people to follow to build a common collaborative approach to the problems we face. He suggests that it is precisely our visions of God that have distorted our approaches to one another and to the problems our world is facing. Even in Christianity, our God, who is supposed to be love, has been turned into some kind of despot, and many can no longer accept the Church because they know God is no bully. Emma Harding-Britten would concur.

What people knew for themselves often contradicts the official teachings of his church. In the light of this, Bishop John Shelby Spong of Newark, New Jersey, wrote ‘A New Christianity for a New World’ (2001, NY Harper, San Francisco). Here and in successive works he reformulated the Christian faith. This thoughtful recasting into contemporary language was based not on experience but on reflection; a dialogue provoked by his experiences with people, based on interaction with books, culminating in ‘Unbelievable’ (2018 NY Harper One). He writes in acknowledged parallel with Richard Holloway, Primus of Scotland, who retired rather than become the centre of the story of division with the Scottish Episcopal church. Holloway’s thoughtful books leave a trail ending in an agnosticism that has massive respect for and personal commitment to the historical Jesus (e.g. 2020 Stories We Tell Ourselves, Edinburgh 2020 Canongate). For Spong and Holloway, the religious experience of St. Paul is not authoritative. Paul and his New Testament colleagues are historical authors, with whom we dialogue in developing our personal belief and lifestyle.

By contrast, Robert Adams (1998-1997) was overwhelmed as a young teenager by an experience of unity with the universe, which he spent the rest of his life researching within the Hindu Advaita-Vedanta (Non-Dual) tradition, and finally teaching (The Silence of the Heart, 1997, Sedona AZ: First Acropolis Books). To read his teachings is an invitation to enter the experience of unity, which he says can be entered deliberately any time one wants, wherever one is. Christian mystic Cynthia Bourgeault describes the Non-Dual approach as an “alternative operating system” (eg in https://cynthiabourgeault.org/2020/03/01/i-am-not-a-space-that-god-does-not-occupy-part-viii-the-eye-of-the-heart/). I am familiar with the concept of different operating system, because my computer runs Windows, but my Tablet and phone run Android software. They do similar jobs in different ways. Bourgeault observes that we habitually work as if we were disconnected individuals, resident in our own separate bodies, whereas, as Adams and Walsch report, the alternative operating system sees us as being ‘non-dual’; you and I are not entirely distinct entities, let alone We and They and the entire material world. When I meet you, I meet not only a fellow spirit to use the Spiritualist phrase, but a continuation of the true and only Self, whom Christians refer to as God.

I recently encountered the non-dual view through the Three Principle movement, founded by Sydney Banks. During a bout of intense low mood and self-doubt, Sydney, a Scottish welder working in Canada in 1973, told someone his feelings only to hear the reply ‘I’ve never heard anything so ridiculous’. During the ensuing critical introspection, Sydney discovered that his feelings were based on thoughts, and only on thoughts. He came to see that with the passing of time, every event remains only as a thought in our
individual mind. Using thought, we can choose how to react to each event. We can also choose to become aware of The Mind, the universal Self, or Spirit, which is God. This awareness of the Big Mind allows fresh thoughts to arise which lead to new responses to people and initiate unforeseen actions. Instead of delving into our personal past, we can choose to live in the present, and experience the fading of our supposed psychological problems. Initially, Sydney drew around him a community on Salt Spring Island, Vancouver, but soon American Psychologists were drawn to it. They were astounded by the psychological health of the community, and noticed how they themselves changed while with it. Sydney adapted his teachings to their more secular vocabulary, while they used his insights to help others too find genuine psychological health. The experience of Sydney Banks was found to be reproducible, and that is a key test in scientific disciplines such as psychology.

Like Adams, Harding-Britten, or Walsch, let alone St. Paul, Sydney Banks taught not only his experience but the teachings that followed. In my secular terms, they used their intuition, as distinct from the logic deployed by Spong and Holloway. The initiating experience moved on into teaching, which was then adopted by their disciples and passed on, even institutionalised. In Spiritualism, De Lucis Trust, the Three Principle Movement, and the Conversations With God Foundation, we can see in close time the movement from the Founder with the initial Experience, to the System they intuited and then the Organisation which embodied it for posterity. The intuitions of the founder became systematised for handing on. Do we in turn want to hand on these intuitions and systems?

Intuition can be tested in two ways. Firstly, as Banks encouraged, listening not with one’s thinking but one’s emotions. Does this teaching ring true within us? If it does, we can integrate it into our own faith.

Secondly, by asking “Does this teaching work in my life? What are the practical results day by day? Are they sustainable; if I continue to live this way, does life flow more easily?” If it does, we can adopt it as part of our lifestyle.

If I try out the intuition that you are not separate from me, and we both are individuations of the one spirit within which we eternally belong, I will treat you with practical respect, opening up the possibility of true collaboration and ongoing partnership; with a reduction in mutual antagonism. I find this insight very useful when working with prisoners and HMP staff. It becomes part of my ongoing work and experience.

I started the article with a quotation from Emma Harding-Britten. She gathered her facts from the witness of departed spirits. She built these into the creed adapted and adopted by the Spiritualists National Union as their Seven Principles. Recently, their vice-chair Minister Barry Oates wrote a booklet interpreting them for the twenty-first century. It reads as a thoughtful pondering rather than the white-hot extemporisation of Harding-Britten. His interpretations work in a similar way to Spong and Holloway’s translations of historic Christianity. But however white-hot Harding-Britten was, she was passing on second-hand information received from elsewhere.

I’m sorry, but I no longer want a second-hand religion. I suggest that each of these writers actually invite us to drop them, and their systems, but to use their experiences and intuitions as a door into first hand faith, based on our own experience. Our own faith is to our old religions what the New Testament is to the Old Testament of the Bible. It is partly continuation, and partly replacement, of the former religion. Jesus described his teachings as new wine and a new wineskin (Mark 2:22 and parallels in Matthew and Luke). Adams, Walsch and Bourgeault invite us to adopt even now, the new operating system that sees no longer ‘me’ but ‘we’, that lives each moment in the presence of Reality, which we may call God, and to accept this as our ongoing first-hand Religious Experience. While Walsch wants each of us to have a wonderful experience of God, and our Archives record many varied encounters, none of us can guarantee ever having one. More reliable is the adoption of the non-dual system.

Philip Tyers
EXPERIENCES

A very special dog

“You love dogs, don’t you, Mrs. Cook? I’ll leave her with you when I go.” Thus Cleo came into our lives. On the first evening I took her back to where she was found, but she refused to get out of the car. I registered her with the police, and took her home. Overnight she was free to go away at any time. But in the morning she was still outside our kitchen door in a passageway where we had improvised sleeping quarters for her. I won’t describe her health problems, but they were challenging, and it soon became apparent she would be a challenge in other ways too.

We had her for ten years, during which time she showed remarkable intuition. If she detected that someone was low, she would look at them with love, and cheer them up. Even a stranger in the park! She soon learnt, when on the lead, to pull very gently to help me up a steep hill.

In my Quaker meeting, I would place her folded blanket in the corner, and she would settle down for the hour. If I was playing the organ in church, she would settle by the organ and not move – except for one Easter Sunday. It was a village church, and the family of the local “lord of the manor” sat on the second pew – the first pew being where that family placed their prayer books. It was during the long prayers just before the sermon when I noticed the vicar’s voice changed its intonation, as though he was smiling. I opened my eyes, to see Cleo was sitting on the front pew gazing at the congregation between the heads of the first family! Then when she was ready, she very gently descended, made her way back to the organ, and settled down. The vicar told me later that he had noticed the congregation were elbowing each other, and pointing. So much for the sanctity of the Easter prayers. Yet it all felt right.

Mary Cook
Some years ago I found myself ‘between houses’. The place I was going to move into suddenly cancelled and I found myself temporarily with nowhere to go. I stayed with one of my old friends for a couple of months. She had no spare bedroom free so I slept in her kitchen on a rather comfy sofa. I wasn’t however the only creature claiming this piece of furniture. There was my friend’s old black cat, Buster.

Buster the cat, as I called him, to begin with found me rather irritating and wanted me off his sofa. He lived on it for years, curled up at the ‘head end’ on a soft cushion. Now my head was there every night on a rather large pillow instead. He really did not like this. Being a newcomer I felt I needed to be nice, so I spoiled Buster with lots of attention and occasional treats. I learned one can make friends with a cat quite quickly if one is prepared to share dinner! Buster and I eventually became really good friends. I stopped minding too much about flea bites while he settled in to sleeping by my feet at night. He really was good company and had a knack of purring in such a way that just listening to it I fell asleep very quickly, even at the end of a very busy and stressful day.

One day I moved out into my own accommodation and was rather sad to kiss Buster and say goodbye. A few weeks later, as I was packing my bags to go away, I received a call from my friend. She was in tears and it took a while to understand what she was saying through the loud sobs. Buster was very ill and their Vet said that if he made it through the night he would be ok, but he didn’t have much hope that this would actually happen. To make things worse the other cat in the house, who usually hated Buster and fought with him frequently, now sat in Buster’s basket licking him as if saying good bye. This in turn had upset her two small children and now they were all crying. She wondered whether I wanted to pop in and say goodbye. So I did.

When I arrived Buster looked a bit like an old empty bag made of fur. With his eyes sunken he just sat there. He looked at me with a little bit of interest and was clearly enjoying the strokes but I could tell he was not himself at all. I stayed for a few hours, and when I judged that my friend and her two children were a lot calmer I left. I also promised that I would come back if they phoned me in an emergency, no matter what time of night that might be. I went home and fell asleep.

In the morning I phoned them and was told Buster was ok, he was eating and all seemed to be well. That evening I went away to Europe on a two-week trip.

Three weeks later, now back in England, I was returning from work, walking with my handbag and my hands full of books. In those days we had no mobile phones so I popped into the nearest phone box to phone my friend. She picked up her phone and I said: Put the kettle on, I am coming over. She laughed and said she was cutting hair (she is a hairdresser and has her salon in the basement of her house) and that the children would let me in. She was aiming to finish the haircut by the time I arrived.

I arrived at the door and rang the doorbell with my elbow, as my arms were busy holding all these books. I could hear someone running down the stairs and soon enough the smiling face of a boy appeared at the door. Grinning, he let me in and ran straight back up the stairs. I was left to slam the door with my foot.

As I turned from the door I saw Buster the cat sitting on the table. I thought he looked so much better, almost completely his old self! Bushy tail, shiny fur with his round body relaxing on his tucked in paws. A picture of health. I had a little chat with him and praised his good looks while he just sat there looking at me. I knew he was happy to see me although a bit aloof.
Burdened by the heavy load in my arms I made my way down the stairs. As I reached the last step my friend appeared with scissors in her hand. I could see a reflection of a man with half cut hair in the mirror. **Who are you talking to Billie?** she said. **To Buster! Wow, he looks very well. What did you feed him? Last time I saw him he was a right bag of bones.** She looked at me with a puzzled look in her eyes. She opened her mouth to say something then she closed it again. Then she took a deep breath and said: **Billie, Buster died while you were away. We buried him ten days ago.**

For a moment I couldn’t quite grasp what she was saying. **Dead? No. I just saw him.** Those were my first thoughts. Then I dropped my books on the floor and ran back up the stairs. As I reached the dining table he was no longer there. I looked under the table thinking I scared him with running like mad and making such a racket but he was nowhere to be seen. I called and called and looked through the back door. He had just disappeared. I was confused, very confused!

As I turned around I saw my friend behind me in tears, still with scissors in her hand. What she had said started to sink in. Well, just a little. Buster died? Hmm. **But he was here! He really was, I just spoke to him! He was here, Vanessa, he was!** I did not believe he was dead. How could he be?

To my surprise I suddenly burst into tears. I was unsure whether or not I was crying because it was dawning on me that he really might be dead or because I was so frustrated that I could not find him again. I could feel a hand on my shoulder. My friend was looking calmly at me now. **Its ok, we hear him too, we hear him getting into his basket every night after everyone has gone to bed. I hear him, the children hear him. He is still here.**

I made a coffee and waited for her to finish the poor man’s haircut. He was not prepared for all this. He said ‘sorry about the cat’ to me as he left.

We sat drinking coffee. Part of me was still not quite believing any of it. **He died. You buried him. But I saw him. I mean, I really saw him! With my own eyes. Nobody told me he was dead. So I didn’t know, is that it? What would have happened if I did? Would I still see him? And Vanessa, what would have happened if I hadn’t had all those books in my arms? If I had reached out to touch him? What would have happened then? What??**

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*Billie Krstovic*
New publications from QFAS

The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies (QFAS) aims to explore evidence for survival of death. The new volumes explore a range of first-hand accounts of spiritual experiences.

*Living in the Mystery: Between Head and Heart* by Jan Arriens (2021)

A personal account of Jan’s journey towards an understanding of the difference between head and heart knowing, and some of the things which have happened to him along the way.

Jan Arriens co-founded the charity Lifelines, which provides pen friends to people on death row in the USA.

*The Life That Never Ends* by QFAS (2020)

This anthology features experiences and quotations from QFAS members, and from other contemporary and historical Quaker sources.

Both books are £7 each including postage and packaging. Payment can be by bank transfer or by cheque made out to QFAS.

Order from Fee Berry: caliandris@gmail.com
Post: Fee Berry, Sycamore House, Chapel Street, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire LN8 3AG.
LETTERS

AHT conference 2021 feedback

This was a good day. It was a pleasure to hear a traditional, well researched, well delivered, lecture from Jane Shaw...

I have a slight disagreement on the dating of the Anthropocene. Jack Hunter placed this at 1610, a date which I fail to understand, or the 1960’s. I would place it with the prehistoric agricultural revolution when humans (anthropoids) started to grow their own crops and domesticate animals, about 8,000 years ago. Among other results, this led to much deforestation by which man has changed the planet continuously.

The elephant in the room in all this however, is the ever growing human population. I have read countless passages recently, about how we must consider ourselves part of nature like any other species. Then along comes the pandemic and flies in the face of this. Even in the short term, disease in nature winnows a species by attacking the old and the vulnerable, the very people it has been the policy of the present government to protect. Should the priority have gone to the young and strong? I write as an octogenarian but not the only one to have queried the policy. Of course, the vaccine itself is part of the Anthropocene, as is all medicine, including veterinary science.

It has long been the fashion to deride Malthus (1766-1834) in his study of population, because the industrial revolution has enabled us to feed the growing population since his time, but I feel he may well be proved right in the long run, although neither he nor I will be around to say, “I told you so”!

Rowena Rudkin

The Alister Hardy Question

Responding to Philip Tyers’ letter in the last issue regarding the Alister Hardy Question and his request, here is my version of the ‘Hardy Question’ from 2015 based on a previous attempt written in 2008. It was originally to be placed on Sainsbury’s notice board in the hopes of starting a group. But I didn’t actually advertise. I felt that this approach – of taking the initiative to do such an individual thing without consulting the “Powers that be” - would be inadvisable! I would, by 2015, need to change “Society” to “Trust” but I felt that if I were to attract members, this title would feel too official to be inviting. This was a deciding factor in my decision not to advertise. (The text follows.)

The Alister Hardy Society

Have you at any time during your life experienced anything you would describe as a Spiritual Experience? If you have, you would probably feel it too precious to share. Yet within you there may be a deep-down need to share, to know such experience is not unique to you.

The Alister Hardy Society exists to support research into “Spiritual Experience”, and to provide a forum for its members.

Mary Cook

Re: Review by Elle Hughes of The life that never ends (QFAS)

I especially love Elle’s quote: “I have come to realise over the years that we are all made of God”. I’m sure we have all struggled for some information, sometimes just a word that then crops up out of the blue. Usually it seems at the wrong time. But sometimes something entirely new and uninvited pops into the mind, a deep insight that makes a deep sense, and helps our need for understanding in a really profound way.
So part of us is also part of the Whole. Everything is there to be known, but comes at a price because it very likely does not fit in with what we and others have been told, that is believed to be true. Time proves that we have had a foresight of what will be, but our insights cannot be shared. If it is to be, then in the course of time that knowledge could be universal, but if the time is not right, that which we have been given will remain unique to us. After all, to God, Time is Eternity, so when things are given is Immortal (sic).

Nevertheless, being connected to the Whole, does not necessarily mean that we are made of God but it goes without saying that our substance emerges from the material whole, but whether or not that includes the Spiritual, may depend upon ourselves to connect. But then we can try too hard. Thus creating a barrier to what is already there – that we are in fact “all of the Spiritual”.

Mary Cook

Comfort and companionship

How wonderful that you should make contact with us all tonight. I have just been going over earlier issues of De Numine and finding such soul-companionship and comfort, as well as huge interest and resonance.

Please pass on my enormous thanks to all concerned.

I so look forward to the next edition.

Judith Pidgeon

Mary Cook

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Judith Pidgeon

Mary Cook
Basílica
(Bom Jesus de Matosinhos)

‘In a sea of hills,’ you said.
Above iron-red earth.

Elevated, set against palms.
A place of chapels, and of sculptures.

A place of miracles, and none.
I wept to see the cripple
on the Basílica steps.

A place to live,
and a place to die.

Stations of the Cross,
and the love of Christ.

The spirit of Aleijadinho* surrounds us.
The Way of the Cross and prophets,
brought to life by his hand.

The heat of Jerusalem
and Golgotha hangs over us.

*Antônio Francisco Lisboa da Costa, sculptor,
architect and builder. Known as ‘Aleijadinho’
(little cripple).

Congonhas do Campo, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

© Dennis Evans
Damage limitation

for survivors

I

‘You’re a hard man’,
his companion had said in the billet.

Deep inside the hard man feels like jelly,crying silently at night under rough service blankets.

II

Now in civilian life,
he hides his grief in the bathroom
where he had run as a child.
His parents numb with confusion.

III

They are all voluntary patients
in this particular bedlam.

‘The only way to remain a gentleman here
is to have a bath every morning’, the elderly émigré says.

A child is exposed to lysergic acid.
‘Treatment’, they say.

In the grounds of the hospital
he talks with the child -
petrified, and distressed.
‘Treatment’, they say.

A beautiful woman,
abused by the Sister-in-Charge,
talks of a glass wall between herself and the world.

IV

He sees his friend’s sister left with a half-life,brain-butchered in the surgery of fashion.

Damaged and confused by analytical theory,they are comforted by kind-hearted nurses.

V

The Resettlement Officer proffers a ‘green’ card,
says it will help with employment.
His salary would be halved,so he works ‘undercover’
with a fear of discovery.

His evenings light up like mornings,
and the depression lifts.

He knows he is damaged,
tries to love his depression.

His life becomes his metaphor.
He navigates the mist,
searching for clarity

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REPORTS

Report from the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Lampeter

*Originally presented to the AH Trust Board meeting, May 2021*

This report is overshadowed by the loss of Tom Pitchford. After a very short illness he passed in March this year and left a huge hole at the RERC. Due to the severity of his illness, there was no time to say goodbye and to thank him for his outstanding work over the years. In our last conversations we spoke about the work on the Journal issue and other work related things. We even discussed how to proceed with the opening of the campus, not realising that he would not be alive at that time.

While the situation around Tom has taken most of my time this year, there are a few other updates to report. Two issues of the *Journal for the Study of Religions* came out recently, the first with papers from the 2019 anniversary conference and the second is a special issue around the topic Spirituality and Ecology, guest edited by Jack Hunter, honorary research fellow at the RERC. The third issue which contains the Festschrift in Honour of Peggy Morgan, former Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, edited by Andy Burns, Wendy Dossett and me, is delayed but we hope will have been published by the time this issue of De Numine has come out.

Another event was the 2021 annual conference which took place online this year. Over 90 people registered though not all attended (we had around 60 attendees at the first session and approx. 50 at the second). Prof Jane Shaw, Principal of the Harris Manchester College, Oxford, gave an excellent presentation for the Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture, in which she reflected on the revival of mysticism at the beginning of the 20th century and linked it to Alister Hardy’s work. In the afternoon Prof Marta de Freitas spoke about the fruits of religious experience with regard to mental health and Jack Hunter spoke about ecology and spirituality and introduced his special issue of the Journal. I have started preparations for the 2022 conference which will focus on mysticism.

Teaching also continued. By the time this issue of De Numine appears, one MRes student will have graduated (she just submitted the corrected dissertation for approval to the examiners). Two more are in the final stage and will hopefully submit in 2022. The two students who started last October have moved now to the dissertation and two (or perhaps three) new MRes students will start in October. The module on Religious Experience has been included in another MA programme, hence will be offered now to students across 5 different programmes, from study of religions and theology to philosophy and now spirituality and ecology.

To conclude, it has been a very difficult time. As you all know, I worked very closely with Tom and will miss him very much. My special thanks go to the Trust and its Board members for supporting me during this time. I hope that the Trust continues to support the position of a librarian of the RERC. We still have books from the David Hay collection as well as the Paul and Linda Badham collection to process before they can be used by AHT members and other researchers. Tom was also more than a librarian, as he was the main face of the RERC and dealt with inquiries of members, students, and the public.
Report from the Director of Communications

On and on goes the pandemic, but the AHT is continuing its activities nonetheless. Research projects are proceeding and events are held online. Other organisations also host online conferences and lectures and I forward details to all who are interested. Please let me know if you’d like to join the publicity list for information about such events held by other like-minded groups.

Changes

Margaret West has retired as Membership Secretary after three years. We are hugely grateful to her for all her hard work dealing with new and renewing memberships. She has handed over to me, as nowadays I undertake many of the administrative aspects of the AHT. Over the years, as Director of Communications I have already been receiving enquiries about membership, which I used to pass on to Margaret. Now I will deal with them myself, arranging new memberships and reminding members of annual payments (which is much easier if you arrange a Direct Debit please), working with our Treasurer, Dr David Greenwood.

A replacement for Jean Matthews has been found, as Rhonda has explained, but so far we are still waiting to hear exactly how Tom Pitchford will be replaced.

Events

2021 has continued the pattern of online Zoom meetings and we are all now getting familiar with the format. We are most grateful to Mike Rush for hosting the online events. Although we do miss real interaction, these meetings enable us to include members and attendees from all over the world, which is a huge bonus.

Earlier this year we enjoyed a number of online book launches. In July Professor Bettina Schmidt arranged an excellent Annual RERC Conference on Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences with over 90 attendees from places as far flung as Hungary, China, Brazil and USA. The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture was given by Prof Jane Shaw of Oxford University, Principal of Harris Manchester College, where Sir Alister Hardy founded the research centre more than 50 years ago. Prof Shaw’s lecture was entitled Religious Experience and the early twentieth-century Revival of Mysticism. Speakers in the afternoon were Dr Jack Hunter, Honorary Research Fellow, UWTSD on Listening to the Land: Other-than-Human Voices in the Anthropocene and Prof Marta de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia on Religious Experiences and Mental Health: Psychological implications. We are working to make recordings available if you missed the event.

Members’ Day this year will also be a Zoom event, on October 16th 2021, 10.30am to 4.00pm, with a break for lunch. Dr Steve Taylor is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University, Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology section of the British Psychological Society and a prolific author on psychology and spirituality. He will give the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in the morning on Extraordinary Awakenings - Spiritual Transformation in the Midst of Suffering. We very much look forward to Steve’s take on this timely topic. As Steve is also a poet, after delivering his lecture, he will read a few poems and lead us in a short meditation before taking questions.

We plan to make the afternoon more interactive, with reports of ongoing research projects linked to the AHT. Speakers will be Geoffrey Ahern on completing work begun in the later 1980s; Mara Steenhuisen on her work on orbs; Mike Rush on spiritual crisis/ emergency, and I will speak about my PhD research on the fruits of religious and spiritual experience. There will be time for questions.

For online events, please include Mike Rush: mikerush@virginmedia.com

Details of Members’ Day will soon be sent by email to everyone and I look forward to seeing you all onscreen then.

Marianne Rankin
South-East Wales Group Report

Presentation by Alan Underwood entitled “Blake, artist and mystic”

“I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.”

Not so very long ago we could meet as a group. And now, at last, we each felt happy to do so once more.

Thankfully the unpredictable weather held fair. I was uncomfortable about the problems involved with social distancing and the use of masks and spending some time indoors, albeit in a large, ventilated room, in order to see selected art-work of Blake on screen. Alan had previously circulated quotes (one of which is quoted above) together with his talk, which he had also printed out for this occasion.

We were to learn how William Blake had experienced spiritual revelations from a very early age, from which he had built his unique, fascinating theology.

It had occurred to me over the years that few (if any) spiritual experiences tally with accepted religious proclamations, and that most ‘experiencers’ endeavour to understand (struggle with, more likely than not) the spiritual glimpse that we have witnessed. It becomes the central piece in our personal “theological jigsaw”, or more exact, “Spiritual Spectrum”, because what we have experienced is the most meaningful part of our being. And being unique to each, and for the most part not to be shared, each could find ourselves isolated, BUT NOT FROM SPIRIT. This remains our reality - our very core. As it was with William Blake.

(Blake also wrote his own music for ‘Jerusalem’, which has, sadly been lost.)

Mary Cook

Oxford and Cotswold Group Report

Since the spring we have enjoyed the occasional Saturday Zoom meetings hosted by the national group, and I led a session on Zoom about the spiritual aspects of food in April.

Having managed Zoom meetings for a year, we were happy to meet in person again at our usual venue in Kidlington at the end of July for a general chat and catch-up. In October we were calmed and inspired by a guided meditation session, led by Clare Phillips.

Sessions planned for the autumn include a look at Dowsing, also to be held in Kidlington.

Contact alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com to find out more.

Rhonda Riachi
RERC Conference Report

Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences
Saturday 10th July 2021 on Zoom

The conference welcome was given by Prof Bettina Schmidt, RERC Director of Research, and by Marianne Rankin, Alister Hardy Trust’s Director of Communications. One of the joys of Zoom (ok, the only joy!) is that many people can attend meetings from anywhere in the world at the touch of a few buttons. One of our speakers ‘beamed in’ from Brasilia, and one attendee was in China. Our peak attendance was just under 60 people.

The keynote lecture was given by Prof Jane Shaw, Principal of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, on “Religious Experience and the early 20th century Revival of Mysticism”. Prof Shaw spoke first about the origins of Christian Mysticism at that time. By 1899 the traditional Christian Churches were being increasingly questioned. Popular books were written, and sold well, describing how deep prayer led to contemplation of the infinite, and to mystical experiences. This was described as ‘the religion of personal experience’.

In 1907 Evelyn Underhill experienced a powerful vision, and wrote a book about the experience, and how she achieved it, which became a best seller. Her approach to personal mysticism was primarily typified as ‘kind and gentle’. Dean Inge also wrote on Christian mysticism, and his books were influential. The writings of St Teresa of Avila gave a Catholic, 400 year old, perspective.

In 1912 Bertrand Russell, an atheist, published an essay on religion, entitled “The Quality of Infinity”. Individual experience was increasingly respected, as church hierarchies were not. Church attendance peaked at the end of the 1st World War, then began a long decline during the 1920s and beyond. Prayer groups became an increasing practice during this time, and training for spiritual directors began, and unusually, women were not excluded.

Somerset Ward was an influential spiritual director and mystic. He suggested that the purpose of mystical experience was ultimately to take its fruits out into the world. A deeper love of God and the Christ was central to his thinking.

Aldous Huxley in the 1960s tried the path of spiritual contemplation and mysticism in the hope of achieving visions, but it didn’t work for him, so he took LSD instead!

Religion has increasingly become a private matter. The self-description of ‘spiritual but not religious’ is now thought to have begun in the 1960s, but in fact it began in the 1900s.

During the question and answer session June Boyce-Tillman meditated on the efficacy of music as a trigger to mystical experiences. She referenced Madeleine Liddle, a musician from South Africa, who experienced ecstatic spirituality, but did not relate that with her musicality.

Prof Marta de Freitas, speaking from the Catholic University of Brasilia, opened the afternoon session with a talk entitled “Religious Experiences and Mental Health: Psychological Implications”. She said there had been many changes in the treatment of eccentricity during the past half century. For three centuries people had been mainly locked up, and removed from society. Latterly they had mainly been given electric shock therapy.

In the second half of the 20th century other therapies had proliferated: meditation, art therapy, pharmaceuticals, psychoanalysis. In Brazil things were further complicated by shamanism, Portuguese Christianity, and traditional African religions. Two North American doctors had analysed the therapeutic effects of faith, and had come out with two conflicting books. “The Healing power of faith” by Koenig, had been positive. “Blind Faith” by Sloane, had been negative. Most studies had been strongly positive, finding comfortable explanations, pastoral help, and a sense of belonging. On the negative side were
conversion therapy (now illegal in the UK), domination and prescriptiveness.

Prof de Freitas research had taken a phenomenological approach – going back primarily to personal experiences themselves. She had applied ‘teleology’, understanding the fundamental purpose served, and spirituality rather than religiosity. She had found in spirituality, a sense of existential meaning. In religion she had found systems and doctrines, which primarily offered answers. A useful metaphor she found was that if spirituality was the water, then religion was the cup. De Freitas had conducted research with women having difficult pregnancies, and found that 93% had found their religion helpful, while only 7% found it unhelpful.

Jack Hunter spoke last, from his home in Wales, on the subject “Listening to the land: Other than human voices in the Anthropocene”. He has an MA in ecology and spirituality from Lampeter. Jack recently edited a book “Greening the Paranormal”. His approach to ecology was that we should ‘listen to the land’. He pointed out that Alister Hardy had been a biologist by training, so was an early pioneer in combining biology and spirituality.

‘Anthropocene’ is a term applied to the present, in terms of a geological epoch, in which the effect of humankind is the dominant factor in the development of the world. It perhaps began in about 1610, when major international trade began, and continued perhaps until 1964, when the first international treaty to limit the spread of nuclear power was signed. We are in the sixth mass extinction now, which is increasingly limiting not only biodiversity, but also psychodiversity. Plants can learn, and can store memories. Socially learned culture can be handed on by birds, whales, fish, and bats.

There is a new ‘animism’, an ontology of non-human beings. All animals are social beings, and may be moved to mysticism. Stace argued that extrovert mystical experience showed an interconnectedness in all phenomena. Monica Gagliano PhD, wrote “Thus spoke the plant” after sleeping with trees, whilst eating only their bark.

Aldo Leopold, an American conservationist in a National Park, stopped killing off wolves when he realised that not only the wolves, but also the mountains, disapproved of his actions. He had four mature elm trees in his back garden, and felt that when he hugged one, they somehow responded to him.

Jack Hunter did research with old farmworkers and countrymen. He noticed that when a builder of dry stone walls was working, he would refer to each new stone added as ‘him’. Once an old farm worker was cutting trees for fence posts, and said “Ah, he’s a good one.” He found that farmworkers often live in a state of participatory contact with nature.

Hunter concluded that most people living now are disconnected from nature. Someone who has this connection with nature might now be thought abnormal or even aberrational. Such a person would be in a natural, empathetic relationship with his living surroundings, not pathological, or paranormal.

Ian Fordyce
This book will feel instantly familiar to any member of the Alister Hardy Trust. The methodology is ours. The author put an advert into a newspaper and quarried the results. He invited readers of the Church Times to share their own experiences of hearing spiritually significant voices, then classified the results. In this book he selects examples from several different classes, some short, some long. The classifications reflect the role the voices had in the life of the listener. Sometimes a voice came in the context of conversion, sometimes in a call to ministry, sometimes to guide through a crisis, or to comfort under pressure. Sometimes the voice would confirm or clarify a decision, sometimes it would act as a companion, perhaps over years. We learn of a voice that was malign, and developed discernment in the listener. We also learn that schizophrenia does not necessarily invalidate an experience.

The three stories under the heading Communication, are all about suffering. The first helped the hearer re-order her relationships and give a renewed sense of purpose. The second was an experience of hearing multiple voices articulating anxiety and pain, which led to an awareness that suffering is part of the fabric of any human life. The final experience became a continuous sound of wailing, screaming voices, that the listener identified as African women ancestors. To each of the listeners, the voices were spiritually, theologically and psychologically significant. They gave guidance and insight.

I particularly related to the chapter on Conversational prayer. It starts by referring to Biblical dialogues with God, then Julian of Norwich ‘Revelations of divine Love’. It continues with a quotation from Joyce Huggett (1986) Listening to God, saying that Listening does not necessarily include words, but a Presence, an awareness of Love. There are then three stories of individuals’ experiences, including how they question whether the voice is their own, or that of God, and receive light touch answers. I have read the Neale Donald Walsch series of Conversations with God, where he asks God questions and receives radical answers. The conversations Cooke records are more theologically “normal” than Walsch; they are personal. “Julia” records that conversations often end with God saying ‘STOP fretting. I will deal with that.’ (p.102).

The following chapter, Conversational Voices, starts with reflections on how we all use an inner dialogue; we think in words, and mentally talk things through. We imagine dialogues with other people and prepare for future conversations. Thoughts arise unbidden. Some we know are ours, others come from somewhere beyond us. The first witness Cook calls discovered he had ‘multiple personality disorder’, and how he coped with it by talking to his ‘alter’. A further chapter explores coping with malign voices, and then a testimony about a long relationship resolved by the relationship with God the experiencer developed.

Before the final chapter, on Clinical and Pastoral Practice, there is a generous and kindly chapter on discernment. ‘The apparently demonic voice may be a traumatic consequence of sexual abuse, warning me that I need help. The
apparently divine voice may reflect merely what I would like God to be saying, an avoidance of God’s actual demands on my life. The thought that seems like ‘my’ idea may be divinely inspired, the voice of God within, prompting me, changing me and challenging me to fulfil my unique and God-given Christian vocation’ (p.166).

The final chapter suggests the following principles:

1. The person who heard the voice is the expert on their own experience.
2. Different interpretations should be respected.
3. Questioning is helpful; confrontation is not.
4. Pay attention to feelings.
5. Discernment takes time.
6. Reassurance has professional boundaries.
7. Collaborative working is nearly always helpful and essential sometimes.

Here Cook particularly suggests collaboration between mental health professionals and chaplains or clergy, in complex cases where there is significant distress. Cook refers to current clinical research and, among others, cites research showing that two thirds of schizophrenia patients ‘identified spirituality or religion as important in coping with their illness’ (p.177). Finally, he discusses exorcism, and concludes that it is usually unhelpful for those hearing demonic voices.

I found this a warm and insightful book that helped in understanding Christians who hear voices from a variety of perspectives. I thoroughly enjoyed Christopher Cook’s approach, both clear and self-effacing, drawing on personal and academic sources to reflect pastorally on a common, though hidden, human experience.

Philip Tyers


Billie Krstovic has over 30 years’ experience of teaching. She is Head of Social Sciences at a secondary school, teaching psychology and mindfulness.

This book appealed to me, initially because of the subject and I found her style of writing very readable. Her compassion and ability to draw from her own wealth of experience in life, as well as in teaching mindfulness, is evident.

The book is in two parts. Part one covers education and well-being, and part two is a very comprehensive set of guided thematic meditations, each followed by detailed suggestions of activities for students individually, or as a group, relating to the theme of the meditation.

Part one includes a personal account of the author’s early childhood fascination with Yoga, love of learning and strong sense of searching for answers. The fruits of her quest are apparent throughout this book as she addresses
topics such as ‘Young people and their spiritual development’, ‘Happiness in schools’, ‘Who is responsible? The role of beauty and positive narrative in young people’s development’. These issues may seem somewhat idealistic considering the many demands on students, and for staff to meet basic educational needs and be aware of students’ behavioural problems or anorexia, bullying, self-harming etc. However, the author provides strong justification for mindfulness sessions to be part of the school timetable, not just to help anxious students but also to benefit stressed teachers. De Numine readers will be interested to see that the work of Sir Alister Hardy is mentioned, and the research by Dr David Hay and Dr Rebecca Nye on spiritual awareness in children.

Her definition of mindfulness was refreshing, one of the best I have found; “it is a quality within your awareness that gives you the right attention and total awareness while doing it. Mindfulness is not a tool, but a result.” She asserts that it is not learned in a short time but is a gradual process, and that it is not a permanent state either, and is “a spontaneous state of being, but it has to be worked on as we would on a car or machine for maintenance”. This is where what she calls “the magic ingredient of grounding” is needed to produce a self-aware life. It is unfortunate that the same term is used with a very different meaning, i.e. parental curtailing of a young person’s freedom! The original usage, and that of the author, stems from our link to the ground, stability, not just physically but also in the mind. The disciplines of Yoga, martial arts and Eastern forms of meditation are all based on this concept. Sadly too often when an ancient Eastern practice is transplanted to the modern Western world the basic precepts are lost, as the activity becomes “a quick fix” or “the latest fashion”. It was reassuring to read the author’s detailed guidance on how to facilitate grounding, in the original sense of the word, in different situations. This basic element is often given insufficient importance especially when mindfulness has been packaged as a ‘therapy’, and enthusiastically introduced into psychiatric clinics, schools and prisons. Billie Krstovic explains groundedness in detail, emphasizing the literal feeling of the feet in contact with the Earth that in turn brings a sense of calmness, awareness of the physical experience of the moment. She writes, “our feet are our connection to the Earth and they are our mental health lifeline. “Along with grounding she emphasizes joy, the pleasure in being alive and also gratitude.

In the second part of the book she gives a very detailed script for grounding as the start point for each of the 40 guided meditations, which focus on particular topics such as “I am organized” or “I can create anything and achieve anything”. Almost every situation one can imagine that individuals, especially students or children may face, is covered with a full script for the teacher to read and even the places and length of pauses are indicated. There are suggestions for solo or group activities and follow ups too, for example after the creativity and achievement meditation there are issues for students to debate, such as “have we forgotten how special life is? What is the value to us of our ancestors and are we appreciating their investment in us? Activities suggested include looking at Eysencks personality test and seeing similar or different results in traits of family or classmates, and then debating whether personality is determined by genes or environment, researching family history, discussing the factors behind criminal behavior, and looking at the Hindu concept of Karma. The author provides a list of pieces of background music suitable for the meditations until teachers feel confident in making their own choice. Readers of De Numine will be encouraged to find many of the projects include spiritual topics, and linking in subjects such as anthropology, astronomy, ecology----education at its most
truly comprehensive, far reaching, mind
expanding best! Several of the debates the
author suggests for students are those very
debates we should all be having, on the issues
most world leaders seem unable to address!

Finally several verbatim comments from
students are included, a reminder of how open
young minds are to finding and embracing a
spiritual awareness.

There is a very useful bibliography too, and I
was amused but not surprised to find one
reference to an article by a British psychiatrist
in 1992 proposing that happiness was a form of
psychiatric disorder as happy people were
unrealistic!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, sensing the
author’s enthusiasm for teaching and
mindfulness, seeing an answer for stressed
parents, busy tutors, and especially for our
younger generation beset with anxieties about
themselves, their education, the pandemic and
climate change. If we were all to practice being
mindful the world would be a kinder, better
place.

Sheelah James

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Some areas of study, almost by their very
nature, are testimony-driven. Take something
close to home: religious and spiritual
experience, for example. Unless you’ve
undergone such an experience, another
person’s descriptive narrative is pretty much all
you have. Hence, the RERC archive is almost
exclusively made up of testimonies (I say
‘almost’, because for a brief period ‘follow up’
questionnaires were sent out to respondents
too). This is so obvious that it barely needs
stating. It is hard, for example, to conceive of
any circumstances under which Near-Death
Experiencers might return to life clutching
pictorial evidence of what awaited them on the
other side of that strange trip through darkness
(so often intriguingly described as ‘space’, as in
‘outer space’). Indeed, every single one of the
nearly 100 archival NDE accounts that I
examined a while back for a study I was
undertaking was composed of testimony only: a
most unremarkable fact.

If we were to extend the scope of enquiry to
include all anomalous experiences - thereby
creating a massive research range
encompassing everything from UFO encounters
through to sasquatch ‘episodes’ and the like
- what would we find? At first blush, we would
expect an admixture of testimonies and other
evidence. After all, a UFO experience might in
theory be expected to be in some sense visual.
Ditto an encounter with a large, hairy, terrifying
quasi-hominid in the midst of the American or
Canadian wilderness. And this we do find. Well,
sort of. Because in these and related instances,
even after decades of claims, counter-claims,
and scholarly enquiry, the pictorial evidence
remains very patchy and remarkably poor.
Fraud abounds. Even here, it would seem,
testimony-evidence remains overwhelmingly all
we have.
The challenge for any researcher, then, even in our technologically advanced twenty-first century, is to develop ever more sophisticated ways of exploring and understanding good, old-fashioned, first-person narratives. As it has been, so testimony remains: our primary data source for examining a large range of experiences both exclusively spiritual and generally anomalous.

And herein hangs a tale: one wonderfully exemplified by Merrily Harpur’s *Mystery Big Cats*, recently reissued, revised and updated for a 2021 edition. As Harpur acknowledges early on, UK reports of encounters with anomalous big cats - variously described as pumas, leopards, lynxes; even lions - abound. For the years 2001 and 2002, for example, the estimated upper total was a staggering 4,500 and accounts continue to flood in at an incredible rate, a fact amply reflected in the very large number of testimony-extracts presented in her engaging book, of which the following - more recent - specimen is representative: ‘I saw it, I saw it really clearly - it’s just gone off slowly to the left. It just sloped, it didn’t scuttle - it just very confidently walked across the road and disappeared into the woods. I should point out I never knew the stories of a big black cat here. I’m all excited now!’

Merrily Harpur’s book drew me in completely: in part because it was so wonderfully structured. She starts off by presenting a wealth of accounts from the length and breadth of Britain and very soon the suspicion dawns: we are being ‘stalked’ by big cats. The descriptions are so clear, so vivid: the shape of the faces, the sheen of the coats, the remarkable markings, the eyes that glare and shine; even the hisses and growls. But about half way through, another realisation dawns. We’re not being stalked; we’re being, for want of a better word, *haunted*.

To be fair, Harpur doesn’t exactly use this word, but more on that in a moment. For now, let’s return to the question of data. The fact that so many close-up encounters with big cats have been reported for decades might naturally lead to the supposition that there are a great many detailed photographs to accompany the reports: particularly in the present digital age when we all walk around with HD camera phones on our persons at all times. Yet, remarkably, this supposition turns out to be incorrect. To the contrary, as Harpur shows, the photographs are generally indeterminate as regards species, and the videos generally reveal ‘insufficient or anomalous detail.’ As if this wasn’t problematic enough, other data-anomalies abound. The cats cannot be caught or killed in conventional ways. Traps remain unsprung (or, in one delightful example, sprung by the trappers who, themselves, require subsequent rescue). Descriptions - of which we have very many - very often do not match up to actual known species. In fact, as Harpur asserts, only a minority of reports exactly match known species of big cats. Although she doesn’t refer to T.S Kuhn, she might have done: the significant anomalies stack up ever higher until the old ‘actual big cat’ paradigm collapses. Her genius lies in the way she presents her evidence until this truth gradually dawns before becoming inescapable.

What, then, of the new paradigm? An alternative way of accounting for this mass of data in a way that makes sense of it? A significant clue comes on page 130 where she quotes another ‘big cat’ investigator Mark Fraser whose long-running investigations led him to comment that: ‘I sometimes smell a rat; I get the impression that they are playing with us…I occasionally feel I’m being teased…’ Proceeding along similar lines, Harpur devotes the second half of the book to a consideration of where such a recognition might lead and to the development of the thesis that these cats are in fact species of modern daimons, forming a bridge between the visible and invisible worlds. In their ‘this worldly’ aspect, they can interact fully with their physical surroundings: leaving paw prints, visibly displacing the long grasses through which they move; even, on occasion, leaving scratch and bite-marks on terrified witnesses. But, Janus-like, they inhabit another world too: hence they appear and disappear at will and seem oddly elusive when the question of actual, replicable, ‘hard’ evidence arises. For all the alleged sightings of live big cats, Harpur asserts, there never seem...
to be any reliable reports of corpses being found. And, as already noted, the traps remain consistently unsprung; every attempt to actually catch them proving, ultimately, catless.

I enjoyed *Mystery Big Cats* very much and warmly recommend it. The author’s conclusions might not be to everybody’s tastes but the wealth of invariably fascinating testimony–material is worth the price of admission alone.

Mark Fox


Like *Mystery Big Cats*, Tim Marzenko’s *Disembodied Voices: True Accounts Of Hidden Beings* is largely testimony-driven. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, such as the so-called ‘Electronic Voice Phenomena’ recorded on tape by Friedrich Jurgenson and others, our only sources for curious instances of disembodied, apparently supernatural voices are the testimonies of those who claim to have heard them. Marzenko presents his own at the very beginning of his study: an extremely odd account in which the sound of beeping was followed by somebody - or something - calling his name as it attempted to lure him into a nearby forest when, as a twelve year-old, he was practicing basketball outside his home.

Before I started his book, I thought it was going to be much like other overviews of the field, such as Rodney Davies’ own *Disembodied Voices*: a book which remains a classic over twenty years after its initial publication. It certainly is that, but rather more besides, for as Marzenko’s study unfolds so too does his thesis develop: the voices - which frequently emanate from woods, rocks, masks and other odd and unlikely places - act as lures and traps, mimicking human voices in order to lure the unwary away from safe places such as homes and well-worn trails and into wildernesses from which they often never return. To this extent, his book acts as a kind of ‘bridge’: linking the odd phenomenon of voices with no obviously human speakers on the one hand with the burgeoning literature of missing persons on the other. As regards the latter, I’m thinking in particular of the ‘Missing 411’ books popularised by David Paulides and others. These present a consistent mystery: why do experienced hikers sometimes do inexplicable things in lonely places such as US National Parks? In particular, why do they so often leave the safety of the trail? It’s rule number one of hiking, as every experienced hiker knows, particularly in vast and dangerous wildernesses: never leave the path! Yet many seem to: including those who really did know better. Marzenko’s study presents a possible answer to this puzzle: a voice, mimicking a human voice, called to them from the wilderness and, essentially, lured them away, siren-like. We know this thanks to the testimonies of those that heard the voices and, for whatever reason, managed to resist. A name might suffice, Marzenko muses (thinking of his own experience), or a cry of ‘Help!’ A baby’s cry, perhaps. And herein lies the originality of his book, elevating it above a ‘mere’ overview of such phenomena historically and cross-culturally - something it does splendidly - and ensuring that it will remain an important source of reference for some time to come.

Quite apart from its originality, Tim
Marczenko’s study is also one of the best-presented books I’ve seen for quite a while. A handful of typos let it down a little, but credit must still go to Schiffer Publishing - I hadn’t heard of them either - for a superb hardback: well-made, beautifully finished, and fronted by a striking cover. It even came complete with a laminated bookmark. In these days of e-books and other downloads, it’s easy to forget the pleasure that comes from the feel of a quality book in the hand and this one provided a welcome reminder of that.

Dr Mark 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.


Your reviewer first came across the writing of A.E. Waite over five decades ago in a suburban public library. The book caught my eye as it was bound in a somewhat garish pattern. In those days older books in libraries were often rebound in house and returned to the shelves after the original had become weak or worn. Alas, in current times they tend to be discarded to make room for fresh and more fashionable items. The new binding was inappropriate to the contents! I found the text intriguing but largely incomprehensible at the time, but later, as I gained both an education and a love of book collecting I acquired for myself many of Waite’s works which ranged over many aspects of esotericism and spirituality. He also produced several volumes of poetry. A comprehensive outline of his life and labours form the introduction to this new edition of The Way of Divine Union. The book is a survey of mysticism, largely drawing from the Christian tradition, but from Waite’s particular viewpoint. Before touching on this one should say that this volume is not one to be recommended as an accessible introduction to the subject. It was published four years after Evelyn Underhill’s Mysticism, which remains in print, with revisions, to this day. Underhill’s book (especially in its final edition), or, for the novice, one of her less extensive titles, remain relevant and informative for the contemporary reader. Waite and Underhill did work together for a time and refer to each other’s work in their respective volumes. In her later work Underhill had distanced herself from Waite’s approach.

Waite has been criticised for both his style and his scholarship, in some cases with justification. Had he been able to access higher education he might have been helped to develop his written style into more accessible forms. It tended to be over laden with archaisms, prlixity, and the subordinate clause. A past acquaintance who heard him lecture in the 1930s remembers his orotund performance in speech which reflected his written style. This may have served him well in his poetry and ritual work, but less so for a public in the latter part of his life. As an independent scholar working from library sources, mostly in London, his practical and bibliographic horizons had some limitations. His spiritual life was anchored in the texts in which he immersed himself. He had left the Roman
Catholic Church of his childhood, explored Spiritualism and other groups, but was unable to find a home in any mainstream Christian denomination. In contrast Underhill, under the direction of the Catholic Baron von Hugel, was able to maintain an established place within the Church of England, and to exercise a successful ministry as a spiritual director, retreat conductor, and author, in the inter-war years. Waite, in contrast, found himself limited to a relatively small circle of acquaintances, with a larger circle of the readers of his books and his contributions to periodical literature. He eventually established his own fraternity for his spiritual work.

So what does Waite offer us in his exploration of the Christian mystical way? His survey does include the major figures of the Western church, and their thought and practice. He is weaker on those of the Orthodox traditions. He makes few mentions of non-Christian traditions, which he saw as lying outside the scope of this book. A brief excursus touches on the encounter with Hindu schools of thought, which was emerging in the West in the period in which he was writing. He had devoted himself to the Kabbalist traditions within Judaism in books published in 1902 and 1913. These books revealed the limitations of his access to reliable texts. A final version of his work on this subject was published as The Holy Kabbalah in 1929, which received some approval from Gershom Scholem.

He provided, for the diligent reader, a thematic journey though many important aspects of Christian mysticism, and of significant personalities that embodied them. He introduces us to a number of figures, some of them a little obscure, who do not appear in Underhill’s comprehensive survey in her Mysticism. Whether their inclusion add much to our knowledge of the subject is, perhaps a matter of personal taste. Waite’s love for obscure byways of thought and practice, and the dwellers to be encountered therein, is to be found in many of his writings.

The latter chapters of the book do provide the reader with insights that may seem unexpected given the obscurity of the earlier chapters. He examines mysticism in the light of theories of human consciousness, in guidance on the reordination of life and mind, and on living the spiritual life in the world. His criticism of what he regarded as the dangers of extreme asceticism, which still marked much Christian spiritual guidance in this time, strike a surprisingly modern note. In his own life he managed to combine a deep spiritual outlook with and enjoyment of social pleasures, exemplified in his long standing and convivial friendship with journalist and novelist Arthur Machen.

Dr Gilbert, in addition to his valuable introduction, has also updated many references, where modern editions or reprints now provide easier access to some obscure texts. He has added some biographical notes on some of more obscure of Waite’s authorities, and translated references in Latin and French. A guide to further reading is appended. The contemporary world is one in which churches, and other religious institutions, sometimes seem to exhibit ignorance of the riches of their own traditions in spirituality. The nature of spiritual experience is being explored by many outside institutional and dogmatic structures. Some may find Arthur Edward Waite’s guidebook helpful. It is not a lightweight addition to the pilgrim’s knapsack, but would be a valuable addition to the bookshelf of the serious student of the spiritual path.

Kevin Tingay

This review was first published in the Christian Parapsychologist 2021.
Rosalind Smith, *Meditations, Visualisations and Exercises for personal or FFH group use.* 4Thoughts. ISBN 978-1-906654-04-7. To order contact: annemason1958@gmail.com

Rosalind Smith has written a very useful book with 38 meditations, intended either for group work in the Friends Fellowship of Healing or as individual work on oneself.

I really liked the choice she has provided. There are several healing meditations including ones for self and others such as: Meditation for self-healing, Healing for Oneself – A gift of time and space, Exercise - To Analyse one’s symptoms, and Self-Healing meditation on the colours of the chakras. There are also meditations for healers of which I particularly like ‘Three Exercises for Healers’. Apart from two exercises that help with grounding before healing another person, it also contains ‘A Closing Down Exercise’ which is more of an instruction as to how to separate energies after performing a healing session.

While this is a small book packed with meditations it also contains some specific instructions relating to not only healing but also to other spiritual work. In her ‘Guided Visualisation to Meet Your Guardian Angel or Guide’ Rosalind explains the process of ‘meeting’ this specific being. I found this exercise beautiful especially as she reminded me of the idea that ‘this gentle being has been beside you all your life’.

I also liked that the book provides solid grounding instructions from two different angles, the first one for use by anyone, ‘A Grounding Exercise…Being a Tree’, which is different to the one she has later provided for healers on page 43.

On page 60 in ‘A Meditation for Distant Healing’ Rosalind provides detailed instructions how to do a distant healing with help of a candle light. I have not seen this kind of healing technique before and felt this one was very easily used and adapted for any sort of healing work.

‘Rocking Chair Meditation’ uses the rhythm of the chair combined with breathing to either recite a mantra or phrase from Holy Scriptures. I found this rather original and very effective.

After reading each of the meditations and trying some out I was wondering whether this called for yet another book, perhaps with more background information about different procedures written at several points but which are only lightly touched upon. Perhaps this is something the author might consider in the future. If so I would like to read more.

Overall, this book is suitable for anyone who is interested in meditations and healing. I feel that even experienced healers would benefit from several angles that the book provides on chakras, healing with light and personal development.

*Billie Krstovic*
There are many aspects of this volume which will appeal to readers of De Numine. It is so comprehensive that it is difficult to know how to place it but perhaps the sub-title gives us a start: Embracing our ancient bond with forests and nature. I would place this book in the general category of Ecology but it embraces so much more. Wohleben is a German forester who began his life managing woodland as a Ranger for the government. Gradually becoming disillusioned with the modern methods of clear felling and the use of pesticides, he now manages a private beech wood and is very much more concerned with the holistic approach to nature and forestry, recently spending time writing on The Hidden Life of Trees (his first bestselling book) which deals with the way in which trees communicate with each other through their root systems.

The Heartbeat of Trees begins by examining the five senses by which the humans inter-reat with the world and postulates a location within the brain for the sixth sense. He then discusses the long-term relationship between wood and fire discussing such ideas as the fact that the genes of Neanderthals and modern humans differ in a way that perhaps enabled the Neanderthals to cope rather better with the cancer-causing chemicals in wood smoke.

Another fascinating chapter is on the way in which electric fields are generated within a tree. These fields arise from the positively charged ionosphere which is at around 2000KV compared with the earth leading to a potential difference of about 100 /200volts across the first couple of metres from ground – a situation which is only exacerbated during thunderstorms. I would have liked more detail on this subject and whether or not electromagnetic hypersensitivity plays a part in communication between trees and humans. Another fascinating topic is that of thigmomorphogenesis – the study of the effects of touch on plants an example of which is that if you stroke a tomato plant it will grow more slowly and develop thicker stems leading to improvement of the plant.

A longer chapter of interest to Alister Hardy members concerns esotericism and describes an experiment which examines whether or not trees can feel pain and the question of whether or not they can differentiate more than just light and darkness, summarised under the heading of neurobiology. This subject needs much more research funding and could be of great importance in the study of a holistic approach to the way in which all life forms need to live together in harmony. The later stages of the book deal with ecology in general and trees in particular, highlighting for example the successful saving of the Hambach forest from encroaching mining for lignite and the solution to the problems of climate change.

I can strongly recommend this book to all who are interested in an holistic way of living, in harmony with the trees, plants and animals of the natural world. My criticism is that too many subjects are started, whet ones appetite, and then move onto another subject. However, the book is intended for all including non-scientists and is well referenced with nine pages of end-notes that should enable one to follow up any subjects. A good general index is included. As the author says this book invites you to join him “in the forest where we will discover that the ancient tie that binds humans and nature exists to this day and is as strong as ever.”

David Greenwood, Trustee and honorary treasurer, Alister Hardy Trust
OBITUARIES

Edward Baldwin (1938 – 2021)

Edward Alfred Alexander Baldwin was born 3 January 1938 and died 16 June 2021. His father, Arthur, was Earl of Bewdley and his grandfather was Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister between 1923 and 1937. Edward was educated at Eton and went on to study modern languages and law at Trinity College Cambridge. In spite of his privileged background he was gentle and unassuming, although he had very strong convictions which he was prepared to fight for. He had a quick wit and a good sense of humour and was an accomplished pianist.

His career was in education, first as a teacher and afterwards as Area Education Officer for Oxfordshire. He and his first wife Sally James and his three sons lived in Wolvercote, Oxford. On his father’s death he became the fourth Earl of Bewdley and entered the House of Lords as a crossbencher. Edward served as Joint Chair of the Parliamentary Group for Alternative and Complementary Medicine in 1992, and was a member of the Select Committee of Inquiry into Complementary and Alternative Medicine from 1999 to 2000. He sat as a crossbencher until retiring owing to ill health in May 2018.

Edward admired his grandfather and worked to correct misconceptions of Stanley Baldwin’s role in the lead up to World War II. Edward finally achieved his ambition of having a statue of Stanley Baldwin erected in Bewdley in Worcestershire in 2018.

He was a very spiritual person and an enthusiastic member of the Alister Hardy Society, to which he introduced me. After Sally died in 2001 Edward was convinced that she was communicating with him by the flickering and popping of electric lightbulbs, which occurred frequently, both in the Wolvercote house and his next house in Cumnor. Some of his friends were a little sceptical about this. However, one day in his house I admired a picture on the wall and he told me that it was Sally’s favourite. At that moment six lightbulbs flashed and gave a little “pop”, and Edward said: ‘There you are! That’s Sally agreeing with me’. Edward wrote down all the strange experiences he had with lights in both the houses he lived in, and presented some of this evidence to the Oxford Group in September 2011 (see picture above).

In 2015 Edward married Lydia Segrave, a sculptor. She survives him, as do his three sons, Benedict, James and Mark.

Jane Skinner
Thomas Pitchford (1969 - 2021)

We are sad to report that Thomas Pitchford, Collections Librarian at the AHRERC at Lampeter has died. It came as a great shock as he had had cancer but had been in remission for 25 years. Treated in 1996 for Hodgkins Lymphoma, it suddenly flared up again in 2021, and in February Thomas was taken to hospital. This time it was found that the cancer was now in his oesophagus and had spread to his liver. He died on the night of 17 March 2021.

Thomas, known simply as Tom, joined the team at AHRERC Lampeter in September 2014. He had a BA in English Education, with special interest in Religious Education, at Louisiana College, USA and Library qualifications from Louisiana State University. He was responsible for the historic archive of the Alister Hardy Trust containing the records of the AHRERC and AHSSSE, and artefacts held by the Trust. He was also responsible for typing the archive of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences onto the online database and for cataloguing and dealing with requests concerning the Sir Alister Hardy Trust archive. Tom’s main job was to enter the books into the catalogue. Over the last years he worked mainly on the two large donations (David Hay’s library and Paul Badham’s library). He also helped the Director, Prof Bettina Schmidt in the preparation of the RERC online journal, during the shutdown of the University due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, working from home. He was an exceptionally nice person, open and friendly, and will be sorely missed by all who knew him. He leaves a wife, Heather, and our thoughts go out to her.

Remembering Tom

I was very sorry to hear about Tom’s death earlier this year and would like to add some personal reminiscences of him.

I knew Tom through Bettina and his work at the RERC Archive at the University of Wales, Trinity St David’s, Lampeter. We mainly communicated by email and also when Tom sent reports to the Trustees. I met him on several occasions when I was at the university, the last time in July 2019 during a three-day conference hosted by Bettina. Tom was gracious in opening the archive to all the conference attendees. He facilitated several tours so that all delegates could gain an insight into the work of the RERC and see the wonderful items loaned by the Hardy Family. Tom’s manner was always cheerful and friendly, and I enjoyed our ‘chatty’ email exchanges.

On one important occasion Tom alerted me to the fact that two of Hardy’s original water colour paintings had come up for auction. Another Trustee and I managed to acquire the two water colours, and I recall talking to Tom about this later. He was really pleased that we had managed to keep them ‘in the family’, as he put it. I continue to be grateful to Tom for alerting me to the sale.

I will miss Tom’s cheerful manner and dedication to his work at the RERC, and would like to add my own condolences to his family.

Andrew Burns,
Secretary, Alister Hardy Trust

John Franklin
NOTICES

Change of AGM date

The Alister Hardy Trust
Annual General Meeting
will now take place on
Monday 13th December 2021
at 11 – 12.30
online via Zoom

Membership Payment Change

Due to a change of policy at HSBC, the AHT can no longer accept foreign cheques after the middle of October, thus leaving bank transfers as the only method available using our IBAN and BIC:

International Bank Account Number:  
**GB84HBUK40270101234293**
(this number includes our sort code and account number)

Branch Identifier Code: **HBUKGB4136N**
**BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW**

Please email [denumine@gmail.com](mailto:denumine@gmail.com) indicating which titles interest you and include your postal address. Once the review has been received for publication, the book is yours to keep.

Please note some publishers will only send eBooks or pdf copies for review.

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<td><strong>Do Not Tread Upon My Dreams: Poems of Reflection</strong></td>
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Deer in the forest by Juliet Greenwood
**EVENTS**

The Alister Hardy Trust Members' Day

**ONLINE**
Saturday 16 October 2021, 10:30 - 16:00

**PROGRAMME**

10.45 – 12.30
The 2021 Sir Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture

Dr Steve Taylor
*Extraordinary Awakenings - Spiritual Transformation in the Midst of Suffering*

Dr Steve Taylor is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University, Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology section of the British Psychological Society and author on psychology and spirituality. Steve will share examples from his new book, read one or two poems, and lead a short meditation.

12.30 – 13.30 LUNCH

*Research Updates: Presentations by researchers linked to the Alister Hardy Trust*

13.30 Geoffrey Ahern

Geoffrey Ahern is writing the full report of much earlier research into the Alister Hardy Trust archive. In the later 1980s he recruited a team of volunteers and they successfully devised and applied a method for structural analysis of its accounts of transcendent awareness.

14.00 Mara Steenhuisen

Mara Steenhuisen is a PhD student at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Lampeter. Her thesis focuses on the orbs phenomenon.

14.30 Mike Rush

Mike Rush’s presentation will introduce the concept of spiritual crisis, also known as spiritual emergency, and the work of the UK Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN).

15.00 Marianne Rankin

Marianne is nearing completion of a PhD researching the Fruits of Experience in the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Archive.

**REGISTRATION**

Contact Mike Rush, who will forward a Zoom invitation nearer to the time: mikerush@virginmedia.com