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## EDITORIAL

### Praying for Ukraine

Lord John Acton (1834-1902) is perhaps best known in our time for saying “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This quotation came to me as Russia invaded Ukraine in February of this year. I have struggled to know what to write about this terrible conflict, which has reopened the wounds of previous wars (particularly as Putin wants us to believe that Ukraine is a “Nazi” state).

The daily wanton destruction reported in news bulletins casts a long shadow over Europe and the whole world. I am moved to pray and meditate more often, sending thoughts of peace and love to Ukraine and all the refugees of this war. Standing and worshipping together for peace, as the religious leaders who visited Ukraine on 12 April did so movingly, has never seemed more important. We are called to do what we can, wherever we are, to counter the tide of injustice, violence and untruth.



Image taken from <https://faithinukraine.com/stream/>

### Mother Earth in peril

Communication with Nature Beings is our theme for this issue, so the research findings published in *Nature* just before Earth Day on 22 April (see link below) felt especially poignant: some of the smallest and most crucial creatures in our global ecosystem are rapidly declining. Insect populations around the world, including the vital pollinators such as bees, have plummeted owing to climate

change and loss of habitats, particularly due to intensive farming. In our lead article, an interview with the anthropologists Juan Nunez Del Prado and his son Ivan Nunez del Prado Murillo, we learn of the deep spiritual connection with the earth that is celebrated in the Andean traditional teachings of Peru. Juan and Ivan combine their scientific knowledge with traditional spiritual teachings to find a new way of being. As has been taught by many faiths, including Christianity, human beings are responsible for protecting the earth; or as Ivan says, “...as the conscious ones...we are the ones who have to take care of it.”

Articles by three students of the Andean tradition follow the interview, by Ali Rabjohns, Debra Delglyn and Sharon Murphy, giving us a flavour of how Andean spiritual teachings have enriched their understanding of the natural world. Further articles provide different perspectives on experiences with nature and how we might communicate with or be sensitive to aspects of the natural world, from dowsing (Kate Smart) to lucid dreaming (Melinda Powell). We hope you enjoy this rich and varied collection and feel inspired to look afresh at your own environment and how you interact with it.

### Farewell to Frances

The Oxford and Cotswold Alister Hardy group is very sad to report the loss of Frances Bird, who died on 21 April in Witney. Her bright, enthusiastic and sensitive presence in our meetings is much missed. We send our condolences to Frances’ family and are grateful for her active participation over the years. We hope to publish an obituary in the next issue.

**Rhonda Riachi**

For a summary of the insect research published in *Nature* go to <https://theconversation.com/climate-change-triggering-global-collapse-in-insect-numbers-stressed-farmland-shows-63-decline-new-research-170738>

## ARTICLES

### Andean spirituality and nature beings

Billie Krstovic interviews Juan Nunez Del Prado and Ivan Franz Nunez del Prado Murillo

I was fortunate to get a long interview with Juan Nunes Del Prado, a professor of anthropology, and his son Ivan Nunes Del Prado. Juan and Ivan are well known spiritual teachers from Cusco in Peru, with students all over the world. I wanted to find out about their background and the phenomenon of communication with nature beings in the Andean traditions of Peru.

**Juan, your father was a well-known Peruvian anthropologist...**

Juan: My father and mother were part of the first class of professional anthropologists in Peru. They graduated in 1945 from the first section of anthropology found in St Antonio the Abad University of Cusco. John Rowe was the founder of this section, and eventually became one of the most noted specialists on the Incas of Peru. My father and mother started there. I was with them on several field research projects. I decided to study anthropology as well.

**You worked as an anthropology professor in Peru. Where and when was this and what were your main interests?**

Juan: I was professor in the University of Cusco from 1974 to 1997. I was head professor in Anthropology fully dedicated to teaching at that time, and later I went to teach at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, USA. I taught Cosmology and Psychology in the Andes for the Honors module at the university, and the Evolution of the Andean civilisation for the grade in anthropology.

**Are any of your papers in English?**

Juan: I think there is one that is very important, 'The Supernatural World of Quechuas of Southern Peru'. It was a part of a book, Native South Americans, edited by Patricia Lyon, Berkeley University California 1974. It's a synthesis of my degree thesis I presented in 1970, and this was the first time I made a connection with the Andean Spiritual Tradition.



The other is a book which was printed recently, a structural history diagnosis of Peru, published by the Andean University of Cusco 2021. It is a theoretical study of Peruvian society from its origin to the present, entitled '*Diagnóstico histórico estructural del Perú*'. It is in Spanish, and an English edition is planned.

**You were trained in the Andean Tradition by Quero teachers who trace their ancestry back to the emperor Huascar Inca. How did an anthropologist come to be instructed in this path and spiritual practice?**

Juan: In 1976 I was working on my Masters in Anthropology in Lima in Peru. I had the opportunity to travel all over Peru because of a government development project. What I found in an Indian community in the area of Cusco was a cosmology that was present all over the Andean area. I received funds to conduct research in Cusco in 1979. I organised a little team, and started a survey on the existence of the masters, and I found them – they were the *Pacos*, and as part of this research I met Don Benito Qoriwaman.

Qoriwaman was my first master, because during the course of the research I asked him to teach me the art. He was a master of the fourth level of the tradition. There are four hierarchical levels, and he was at the top. Don Benito is a member of the Wassau community. He also introduced me to another Quero teacher, and I received the teaching of Don Benito and Don Melchor Deza.

After that I was taught by other Quero teachers - Don Andres Espinoza, Don Manuel Quispe, and Don Marian Alpasa. We worked with three Quero masters, and the spiritual links of these Quero masters went back to the 10th century, related to the Incari, which is supposed to be the first Inca of the Incan tradition – the founder of the empire. The Wassau tradition is related to the last Inca, Huascar Inca, and he probably lived around the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

***The entire tradition has a concept of energetic communication with nature beings. What is the Andean concept of a nature being?***

Juan: You can translate Nature as “Kausay Pacha” which is the living cosmos. For more specific aspects of Nature you can use the word “Pachamama”. In the development project they were trying to translate environment, and they didn't find a word for that. I made the trans-cultural translation, and I identified environment with Pachamama. “Cosmic Mother” is the proper translation, not only “Mother Earth”. The Kausay Pacha is something very peculiar, because the raw material of reality according to Andean Tradition is “Living Energy”, and because of that all the elements of the cosmos are alive. It's a living universe, and the whole universe is personal. This overview opened what we can call a Gnostic approach to reality. Our Western approach is a logical approach to nature. The Gnostic approach to nature implies that you can have a mystic experience with everything in nature, and as a result of that you can establish a personal relationship with every other element of reality, and you can learn from nature directly.

In the logical Western perspective, you cannot learn from Nature directly – you need to use instruments to measure it, so learning from Nature is indirect. In the Andean tradition it is accepted that you can learn from nature directly, because you can speak with all elements.

***And what would this language be? Would this be an energetic language?***

Juan: In the modern world when we say “speak to” someone, we always assume there is a language. In the Andean concept I presume there is no language per se, it's more a direct

experience. It could be a symbolic direct experience, but it could be a real language, and the amazing thing is how these supernatural beings, or nature beings, speak to you in your own language. This is fantastic. So my students speak with my old masters, or they find a way to speak with the spirits of the mountains, the Apus, but they speak to them in English. They speak to me in Spanish, or in Quechua, but you listen to their voice, speaking with true words. You can have visual experiences with them, or symbolic experiences with them. This is the gnostic approach.

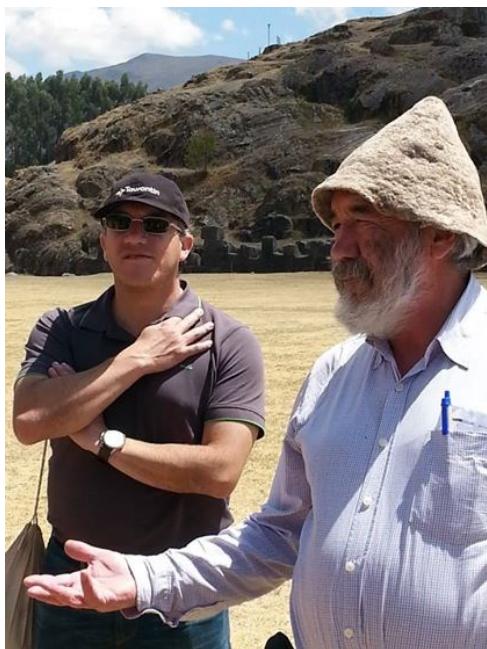
***Would the primary purpose of this be to learn something? For personal development?***

Juan: We western humans, we learn because we need to adapt ourselves to reality and this is the universal purpose of learning. This is the purpose of learning with metaphysical beings. In the Western tradition there are some people who have this capacity, we call them mystics, like St Francis of Assisi. The Pope at the time of St Francis was concerned with rituals, writings, and rules, and the institution. He was the head of the Catholic Church, but he was not able to talk with Jesus, yet St Francis was able to do that. He really spoke with Jesus several times. This is a gnostic, or a mystic relationship. In Western society mystics are the exceptions, and the general people are just logical people. In the Andean tradition it is exactly the opposite. There are some people who relate logically with the cosmos – some intellectuals, but they are the minority. The majority of the people relate directly in a gnostic way with the cosmos.

***Ivan, you work with your father, and you also teach this. How did you get involved?***

Ivan: Well first I am not an anthropologist, so I have not continued that family tradition. I graduated as an engineer. I started my training as a Paco very early. I started when I was 7 years old in 1979, and I was in training until 1991, so I went through a 12-year process of training in Paco studies, to achieve what Juan mentioned before, which is the fourth level. You arrive at the fourth level through training and instruction, and at some point you are initiated into the fourth level. I started to teach soon after my initiation. First

Juan and I shared the teaching then I started to teach by myself. In 1995 I started to teach and share the tradition with other people who seek it out, so I've had 26 years of teaching and sharing the tradition. For the last 15 years we decided to teach together, not only in Peru, but also in different countries, in seminars and workshops about the Andean tradition. What we share is actually the fourth level initiation. We share the degree that we achieved by our own training, and that's what people can achieve working with us.



**You teach your students how to get in contact with nature beings, and how to build these relationships. How do we contact nature beings?**

Ivan: The first thing is to be aware of reality, as a reality that is completely filled with energy, and energies of different kinds that are flowing from here and there, in all directions. We live in a world full of energy. Every being, every part of nature can be reached, can be touched by working with this kind of energy, that we call Kausay. The teaching is about how to see the world in the Andean way. Juan mentioned that the Kausay Pacha is a way to see it, a world made of living energies, and then the teachings about techniques and exercises to learn how to connect directly, and eventually to have an experience of those energies in you. There are exercises and rituals to learn how to connect and relate to reality this way. This will eventually lead to a mystical experience – to have a communion with

nature, and a certain level of awareness of nature that will of course improve your life. The purpose of all the traditions and the techniques is to learn how to adapt yourself to your environment. We learn this through techniques and rituals, and through this image of reality that we have, made of energies, but also about awareness. Those first four steps we mentioned earlier, are the pathway that we are supposed to follow. We call it the *Kanchse Patanyang*, the stairway of the seven levels, representing the seven steps of human psychological development. How far you get in your life depends on how many steps you complete. You are not forced to complete them all, but you have the opportunity to do so.

***Is the Andean tradition based on communication with the entire earth, everything that lives on it, including humans? In his Gaia theory James Lovelock talks about the living planet.***

Ivan: James Lovelock's Gaia theory can be seen as Pachamama, a living being we are part of, and we happen to be the most conscious part of that. In our relationship with the living world our development as human beings is about being conscious of our role; as the most conscious being on the whole earth, it follows that you are responsible for the earth. Our relationship with Pachamama, with the world, is about that. As you grow in consciousness, you become more aware and more responsible for what happens there. The fourth level mission is about being able to see how, knowing what we know and the power we have, we are responsible for taking care of the whole world. It is our home, our only way of survival in the end, and as we are the conscious ones, we should take care of the whole, and take the best steps to maintain it, keep it and save it for ourselves and our children. That's the realisation of the four levels.

***This links to two concepts: the Christian concept of stewardship of the planet, but also the 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on our disconnection from nature. You're saying that this can bring us to a better understanding of what needs to be done on Earth, where we have to continue to live.***

Ivan: It's very clear – there is only one Earth, and that's our home. The survival of every living being that we know about is in this limited space, and

as the conscious ones, we are the ones who have to take care of it. It's that simple. And if every person becomes more aware of that, we will find the best ways to take care of all things. But this is a matter of awareness and education, as you say most people are not aware of that. They are busy with little everyday things, with buying things, and consuming, but they are not aware that we are all on this ship together. Some people say "oh, well, we are in a rich country, so we are safer than others who are in a poor country" – but no, we are on the same ship. There is only one ship. It's not only the nature and the physical environment that we have to clean and preserve, but also the societies and the groups, and the health and the psychology of the whole.

***Currently you are teaching remotely but usually this is in person in Peru. Any particular places?***

Ivan: Some places people will recognise, like Machu Pichu – a world famous place built by the Incas. We work there and in Cusco city, which is well known for being both the capital and the spiritual centre for the whole Incan empire, which covered most of South America until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, so this has always been a sacred city. It is not only a power base, but also a religious and spiritual place of pilgrimage, and still is today, so we work in this area. And of course Titicaca Lake, Tiahuanaco is another stage in cultural evolution just before the Incas. This is the power territory, the core of the Inca tradition.

***Juan, tell us how your book relates to all this. Is this more of an academic book, or for the general reader?***

Juan: It's for the general reader, but it's about the development of the different levels of culture and civilisation in Peru from the beginning to now. We wrote this to explain how these poor Indians were the custodians of so much knowledge. You say "we in the west are not connected with nature", but we are. We are connected with nature through one specific power. Behind me are shelves of books. This is Yachay – intellectual knowledge. Westerners relate to nature through intellectual knowledge. Without this connection you cannot use the Internet. What you see using the Internet is a

result of the western knowledge of nature, but it's one type of knowledge. I was captivated by New Age theology, but in the New Age there is something of a prejudice – we discovered that later – that you need to follow your intuition, set aside your rational knowledge, follow your heart, etc. In the beginning I was attracted to that. I went to visit one of my masters after a year of working, and was very proud that I was not using my intellect, just using my intuition, and following my heart. In the second year of my training the master (Andres Espinoza) told me "You know, you are a fool", and I said "Why?" He said "Because in the beginning you had one half, and now you're jumping to the other half. The thing is to have the whole." It was the most important lesson I ever received. He validates our intellectual knowledge, *Yachay*. The Inca knowledge is on the other side, the gnostic knowledge, and is related to *Munay*, to feelings. But according to our masters, there is value in both sides, and the task is to put them together. From the teaching we received in 1980, we worked to put these two sides of knowledge together. Thank God we were training as scientists, and the *Yachay* was not a problem for us. Putting this together with the gnostic side is what we call the fourth level for us. This is unusual in the Andean tradition: there are people who want to keep the tradition pure, and won't mix the tradition with intellectual knowledge, but the task of Ivan and me, from this teaching of Don Andres Espinoza, a Quero master, was to put together these two sides from the beginning.

***When people say that Andean people worship the mountains, that's not correct, is it?***

Ivan: You mentioned earlier about having a dialogue with nature. In the western tradition to have a dialogue with nature is more like a metaphor. In the Andean Tradition we believe it is possible to have a *real* dialogue with nature. So with our invocation to the spirits of Apus, or Pachamama, or rivers or lakes or the sea, we are in a certain way opening the dialogue, but for us this is *literal*, and as Juan says, if you start to talk with nature, with the Apus and the spirits, eventually they will *talk back* to you. If you have this experience, which is quite normal to have here, then one day Pachamama will talk to you in your own language, and give you a message that

you need to hear for your personal development: advice, guidance, a tip maybe. That's what we mean when we say a dialogue with nature. It is *literal*. If you talk and talk and talk, then one day they will talk back to you, and then you will have to make a decision. If you stay with the Western position you will have to see a psychiatrist because you're hearing voices in your head; or you can move to the Incan way, the Andean way, and continue the conversation, and have a nice talk with Pachamama, or an Apu, or a river. In our tradition that's OK, and it's normal – anybody can do that. You don't need a psychiatric institution. We have to see things in context.



One day I was performing a ritual in Peru with a group in front of the river, connecting with the spirit. It's a female spirit – *Wilka Nusta* means “the princess of the black light”. Suddenly I felt a connection, and saw her. She looked back at me, but along with her came the awareness of the whole territory, of the Inca tradition. She didn't talk to me, but she smiled and communicated something back. Through that connection I received total awareness of the real size of the Inca power, let's say. I have a connection with the territory through that experience, and I am aware of what is there, what happened there, and the history of the place, but this comes from a deep connection through the energy, and through the person I connect with, who happens to be one of these spirits.

***It sounds as if some information was transferred from this river that flows through all of Peru to your own awareness.***

Ivan: It's a form of communication. You receive some knowledge, and you understand a lot of things in a flash, in a split second. That is the gnostic approach. These are the kinds of things that eventually build what we call the fourth level awareness. The fourth level awareness is to have a deep connection with the whole world. That kind of awareness comes to you not by a lecture, but by a direct experience that you receive connecting with the energy. I could try to explain in words what my energy connection was, but I had the energetic connection first, and then I was able to explain it. In the west we work in a different way. We first receive the explanation, we try to understand it, and then we may have the experience. In science that's an experiment. You have your theory and then you apply it to something. You might get confirmation of what you learned before, what you thought was possible. Those are two complementary ways of seeing things. They are both valid, and if you have both, as Juan said, that is better for you, because you have more instruments for adaptation; you will lead a more comfortable and more responsible life, because your awareness grows.

***Juan – is there anything that you wanted to say before we finish this?***

Juan: I think the turning point is your first gnostic experience. Mine happened in my first year of work. Don Benito sent me to do a ritual, an offering, at night. In the middle of the night a voice spoke to me, and said “Finally you have arrived,” and that was all. But after having that experience you know that the mountains can speak to you. And as Ivan says, you have to decide whether you are totally crazy, and you need psychiatric help, or the Andeans were right to use this side of human potential; it's just one side of human potential.

**Billie Krstovic**

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## In the Salkantay and Umantay Mountains

**One of my favourite trips was travelling ten hours in a minibus to Apu Salkantay and Apu Umantay in Peru and climbing up to a turquoise glacier lake, where we made a *despacho* (an offering to the Nature beings). An *apu* is the spirit of the mountain and can be female or male.**

After calling to these mountains, we saw an eagle 20 feet above us. As he flew down to see what we were doing, we could see his amber eyes. Apu Umantay and Salkantay spoke to us here by rumbling and crashing whilst we made the despacho, they showed me bright white rainbow energy like snow, in my mind's eye.

Don Agustin blessed me with his *mesa* (a bundle of healing artefacts of an Andean Paco or priest): giving me a *karpay* (a rite of passage or initiation) from these two mountains here. I perceived a huge rainbow course through my energy body at this point. My heart was so wide open that I felt like crying. Earlier I had asked for a message from spirit and saw plant spirits all around me trying to connect to my energy field. The rocks were alive with images, faces and energy. The clouds were beautiful here and the water in the rivers was so healing for me.

The mountains and in particular Apu Salkantay and Apu Umantay left me with a real sense of strength and tenacity. It is something that I can now call on whenever I need it. After making a despacho with these two mountains, I turned around to say "goodbye" and "thank you" and subsequently received an orb of energy from Apu Umantay in my heart centre, I will never forget this experience. I was also given a *khuya* from this place. (A khuya is a power stone kept in a Paco's mesa, some given by their teachers, some by nature beings. Khuyas are always infused with a special power/energy used by the Paco in his/her ceremonial or healing work.) The mountain was thanking me for visiting. It continued to tell me to use this connection to work with in the future as a healer, to share my light in a way that is needed. As we drove home at dusk, I observed the elemental world come alive with purple and coloured lights all over the land.

Don Agustin had told me that I may receive a dream about the spirit of the mountain, which would be pure white. Later that evening, I dreamt of a barn owl looking at me from a tree and then flying down to eat from my hand. When I awoke, my heart felt pure and full of peace.

It gave me so much determination to carry these teachings with great respect and honour, like a warrior. It has taken me many years to integrate the energy of this pilgrimage into my energy field. It was here that I stepped into my true power, feeling as though I had found my true voice.

## Huaman Lipa - Q'eros

For the last part of our trip, we planned a one-week trip to Don Agustin's village Ccochamocco and his village community. This was an eight-hour trip there (4 hrs in the minibus and 4 hrs on horseback). We climbed high to 16,000 feet and made a final despacho ceremony on top of the pass, before entering Don Augustine's valley. The top of the pass was stunning, that looked down upon a glacier lake. It was like stepping into another world. It was totally unspoiled there, there's no electricity or running water part from freshwater streams. The stars up in Q'eros were stunning, as were the sunrises. The sunsets here were like flames coming out of the top of the mountain.

After nearly a week had passed, Don Agustin made sure that we were ready to receive these transmissions by going early to Huaman Lipa mountain and making an offering to ask permission to give us these special karpays. These karpays would help us to be connected to the mountains of Ausengate and Huaman Lipa. He explained that our mesas would be connected to the mountains, not us. He said that the cords or seques of energy are too strong for our energy bodies to handle but that they are held in our mesa.

At the time, Don Agustin had said that the karpay was like a Great Initiation Rite. Santos Machacca (Don Agustin's son) told me that the Pampamesayoq initiation was our introduction to

Don Agustin's lineage and also connected us through our mesas to the mountain spirits of Apu Huaman Lipa, Apu Macchu Pichu, Apu Ausengate, Apu Salkantay and Pachamama, Mother Earth.

The message for me on this trip was to honour myself. When I honoured myself I would further

my knowledge about this sacred tradition and help to create a group of fellow lightworkers.

### Ali Rabjohns (Shamanic Practitioner)

*First published at*

<https://alirabjohns.com/journey-to-the-apus/>

## Nature as family

**As I stood by the river, watching the waters flowing past, a voice came into my head "You could walk from the source to the sea". Being your typical left-brain western-raised human I assumed this was one of 'my' thoughts. It was in 'my' head so of course I must have thought it, right?**

That was in April 2016. I had recently returned from a month-long visit to USA and Hawai'i to meet and study with Elizabeth B Jenkins, a teacher in the Andean tradition (link to website). It had never ever been in my mind to visit Hawai'i (after all, that's just some kind of expensive playground for rich Americans isn't it?). But I had taken a foundational training in Andean Mysticism with Juan and Ivan Nunez del Prado, then while randomly googling had come across Elizabeth's website, idly clicked on 'Events' and been riveted by her description of a course 'to meet the *Nustas* - the Feminine Healing Spirits of Nature'.

She shared with us a piece of the Andean cosmology that I have not come across in any other tradition, anywhere. We humans are a 'Tawantin' - a harmonious combination of 4 energies. Human mum and dad provide the DNA material and the first years of upbringing, but the Nature Parents connect us to the wider bubble of our human family and hold the keys to our potential. And who are those Nature Parents? Nature Mum or *Paqarina* is the river, lake or body of water closest to where we are born - the earthly womb if you like. Nature Dad or *Itu Apu* is the mountain, hill or promontory closest to and in relation with your Nature Mum. They anchor and support us on this earth-journey.

I'm a Shropshire lass, born in Shrewsbury the county town, and Shropshire is (or was) a largely

rural county on the border where England meets with Wales. I'm one of six kids and no one wants six kids rampaging around the house so we spent a lot of time outdoors: weekdays we'd be in the garden, weekends we'd be driven somewhere and released into the wild to burn off some energy. One of those places was the Mytton and Mermaid at Atcham, Shrewsbury – yes, that's the name of a pub and it has a wonderful garden extending to the river. Mum and dad would sit in the pub garden enjoying a beer while we ate crisps, annoyed each other and made a nuisance of ourselves. And the river? That was the River Severn and the spot I chose to come to in April 2016 was the opposite bank of that river, looking across at the pub garden, the sandstone-built church and the birds overhead. Approximately 50 years lie between those points of the story, and how long had Mama Severn been waiting for me to listen to those words?

In true Andean-style I had come to meet my Paqarina with an offering, a gift to my nature mum of wine, flowers and chocolate and I made prayers and invocations introducing myself and asking for her help and guidance in my earth journey. Walking from source to sea sounded like a great way to learn her lessons so I began researching; it turns out there is a designated Severn Way and a guidebook – wonderful; I love it when projects are simple!

Nearly six years later and I haven't completed the walk; it's 220 miles in total and I've covered about 160, all on foot and mostly self-supporting, carrying all my own kit and sleeping out in a bivi bag. Along the way the lessons have come in many forms, I'm happy to share some but I don't know whether my words can do justice to the direct experience offered by this deeply somatic and present relationship with the Being of a river.

1. Observing the source, what defines a beginning? As marshy puddles come together, does the nascent stream have a sense of what she will become in her journey to the sea - her might, power and life-bringing presence?
2. The course of a stream isn't clear, simple or obvious: it's a series of falls, rocks, twists and turns, none of which stops the river or has her throwing her hands up in despair with "I can't do this!" She flows, over, under, around, through; the imperative is to be in flow and nothing gets in the way for long.
3. I loved the legends she carries: she and her 2 sisters atop of Plynlimon discussing the best way to the sea. Hafren the princess was thrown to her death from a tower of her father's castle and endowed the river with her healing powers. How had I lived alongside this being for 18 years and never heard these before?
4. All her different moods reflect on aspects of my own life, from fearless adventurer to mature space-holder and - hopefully - a bringer of life and wisdom. That's before I even mention the Severn Bore, the tidal flow that extends miles upriver on Full Moons and gives brave souls the opportunity to surf upriver and reminds me to make space for fun and play in my own life.
5. Walking in relationship with my Paqarina, Itu Apu and Guiding Star gave me a direct experience of being located precisely on this planet. I was triangulated at all times. I may not have known 'where' I was, but my presence is known at all times so long as I am present. Imagine how beautifully reassuring that understanding is.

So many individual encounters enriched my experience along the way. The thing is, being in Pilgrimage, mostly alone and at a slow walking pace with no distractions or needing to 'do' anything else, everything is available to be in relation. Birds, plants, clouds, buildings - they all bring their own magic to the journey: I sampled the blossoms of trees and experienced their joyful offerings to life. I allowed mayflies to bring me their message of graceful connection. Mother Mugwort (*artemisia vulgaris*) greeted me on many mornings to remind me that all the wise women, grandmothers and plant spirits were with me and around me. I was never alone, I was connected with all.

All thanks to a few moments of listening to the voice of a Being some know only as a river. Our conditioning invites us to observe a feature of geography, examine her history - ice sheets, rebirth and all, or understood only her role in Britain's Industrial Revolution, her 'ecosystem services' or her capacity to provide water for irrigation. Who is this being in whom we see the reflection of our own understanding and experience?

When I put aside what I think I know, and allow myself to be present with her as her own beingness - then what is possible? Her millions of years of history, deep relation with the land and with all the waters of the world - what more can we learn by meeting the beings of nature on their own terms? Every time I've brought myself into those relationships I can tell you that my experience is one of deep support, holding, nourishing, creative renewal and realigning. I recommend it.

**Debra G Delglyn**

## Leeds to Liverpool canal connection

**In the Andean nature wisdom tradition, the body of water nearest your physical birth is known as your ‘Nature Mother’, your Paqarina. As we grow through life we tend to end up living in many different places, so the body of water nearest to wherever we live becomes our adoptive Nature Mother.**

Unbeknownst to me as a child, growing up in Burnley, the Leeds to Liverpool canal became my adoptive Nature Mother. I was born in Dundee in Scotland on the bonnie banks of the River Tay, but we moved to Burnley (an old industrial town in Lancashire, in the North West of England) when I was three. We lived in a huge newly built complex of high rise homes, called Trafalgar Gardens. This area was known collectively as ‘The Flats’.

Our flat (which incidentally was far larger than many of the homes built nowadays, we even had two toilets!) was on the bottom landing. Our address was 1 Dolphin House and our landing consisted of 5 homes with a ‘cul de sac’ landing, meaning beyond number 5 there was a block wall, so few people walked along our landing. No 1 Dolphin House was literally a hop, skip and a jump away from the Leeds to Liverpool canal. Burnley was an old mill town, which relied on the canal during its industrial hey-day, to transport all manner of goods from coal to cotton. As many of the old mills were built along the canal banks, some parts of the canal felt eerie and foreboding.

Some parts of the canal paths were not places to go walking on your own, as the more isolated corners would attract groups of youths getting up to no good. Glue sniffing became a recreational drug of choice for some youths in the late 70’s and early 80’s when the Punk scene came along (shocking but true.) My older brother got wrapped up in that ‘scene’ and was brutally attacked one night by a gang of lads on the canal bank. I remember that evening vividly; I was about 12 at the time, and it was very disturbing to see my big brother so hurt and distressed.

There were many other incidents along the canal bank and some parts of the canal that were deemed a bit safer, would have all manner of

rubbish tipped in there. There was everything from old shopping trollies to plastic bags with kittens in (again, shocking, but true). The canal and her banks held a deeply unpleasant feel in places. In later years there was a move to clean up the canal and regenerate some of the old mills along her banks.

Fast forward to 2018: I’m now living in the Lake District. My older brother is no longer with us in the physical, he took his own life in the late 80’s at the age of 23. This propelled me on a journey to seek spiritual truth and understanding, a journey which led to a beautiful cleansing of my ‘Doors of Perception.’ I’ve trained with great teachers and gained skills in many healing modalities.

One of my favourite quotes illustrates perfectly my spiritual journey:

*If the Doors of Perception were cleansed,  
everything would appear to man as it is,  
Infinite. For man has closed himself up till he  
sees all things thru’ narrow chinks of his  
cavern. - William Blake, *The Marriage of  
Heaven and Hell**

In 2018 on a visit to Burnley to see my big sisters, I heard some sad news of two drownings in the canal. A man and his grandson, these were weeks apart but terribly tragic. The man was the father of two of my nephews. He had never played a role in their lives once he and my sister split up. Nevertheless, it was quite devastating to hear news of his and his grandson’s passing in such a tragic way. I heard this news from one of my sisters, then went down to visit my eldest sister, who had two sons with this man.

I was still reeling from the shock, and whilst standing on my sister’s front doorstep about to knock on the door, I felt the waters of the canal reach out to me. (My eldest sister lives even closer to the canal than we did at 1 Dolphin House. You can literally see the canal water less than 20 metres away from her front doorstep.)

As I stood there, I felt my heart energy expand and I felt a beautiful gentle flow of energy moving towards my heart to connect with me. I

instinctively knew it was the consciousness of the waters of the canal. I felt this flow and could envision a sort of energy bubble come towards me. (There is a lovely scene in the film *The Abyss*, where the water reaches out to connect with a human, like a huge ‘tube’ protrusion of water; it looked much like that, but in energy form.)

As this elongated energy bubble from the canal gently caressed my heart, a plea for help and support was impressed upon me from the water. The canal asked me to help clear her body of all heavy energy that had accumulated there over the years. This wasn't asked of me in 'words' like we use as humans, it was relayed to me in a feeling way, it's very hard to describe these experiences. I have them often and still struggle to articulate the communication and connection that takes place. As the canal's energy 'merged' into my heart, there was an immediate 'knowing' of what the canal was asking of me.

The connection was very beautiful, but I could feel the traces of heavy energy within the waters through her energy field of connection. I expressed through my heart to the water that I would do all I could in my power to try and help and support her. I got myself together and tried to come back into a less expanded state of awareness and continued to knock on my sister's door and have a lovely visit with her.

That night I thought about all the terrible tragedies that had occurred along the canal banks and on the water, from the point of her construction to now. I also thought about the impact on the lives of all those involved in the industry for which the canal was built. The canal is 127 miles long and was built between 1770 and 1816.

I had an uncomfortable evening of strange dreams and upsetting insights. I chastised myself a little for not having given the canal much conscious thought before. This beautiful body of water had been such a hardworking canal, transporting people and all manner of goods along her watery highway and out across the world for decades, she also worked very hard at trying to maintain a balanced energy body, even though the workload upon her waters had diminished years ago, she still carried traces of

heavy energetic imprinting within her being. (Anyone who is familiar with Masaru Emoto's work will appreciate how water can hold a particular energetic signature.) I saw a vision of huge Black Dragon slowly and stoically moving along the canal bottom.

Over the coming weeks I began to receive insights about gathering together women to create a ceremony along the canal banks to help raise the energetic imprint within the waters. I was told as we raised the energetic imprint of the canal, we would also be helping to elevate the energetic signature of all the towns and cities along her banks.

Around this time I was called to take part in a Sisterhood of the Rose weekend. This was about connecting to the energies of the Divine Feminine. Whilst there, I received a gift during a meditation. A strange green eel-like creature was placed upon my left shoulder from two figureheads representing the Divine Mother. It had flaps on the side of its head. I didn't have a clue what it was or what it meant.

I was later shown that this eel-like creature slipped off my shoulder during the Canal ceremony and into the waters. (I then realised this was an amphibious serpent.) In the water it turned into a beautiful rainbow serpent and sprang around in the water with such joy, emanating its rainbow colours and Light and Love into the water. Very beautiful! So in essence I had received a gift from Spirit to help with clearing the heavy energies of the canal.

I put out a request via Facebook to see who would like to join me in a ceremony in working with the canal. Some beautiful women stepped forward and joined in. One lovely lady told me how stepping forward to help the canal actually became a very profound personal healing journey for herself. This is often the case when we are called by nature: a beautiful two-way gift is shared. In the Andean tradition this two-way gift is called *Ayni*, it means sacred reciprocity.

I've since gone on to engage in deep ceremony with the land and waters in many different ways. Living in the Lake District I am surrounded by beautiful bodies of water. Sometimes I hear their

calling very loudly, other times I sit quietly to tell the waters how much I love them and appreciate them. Our gifts of Love and Gratitude are always well received.

We don't have to make great showy gestures in our connection with the waters. One of the simplest and most sincere ways to make a connection is to just raise a palm to the water, and direct a beam of Love through our hands and say 'I Love You'. I find water to be very playful, so I play in return. I will trace various shapes in Golden Light (and other colours) with my finger over the water. I like to sing to the waters, sometimes spontaneous sounds will rise from within me. I'm becoming less and less self-conscious doing this, just following whatever wants to be expressed in the moment. People can think I'm weird, I really don't care!

A while after creating the collective ceremony for the Leeds to Liverpool canal, I was called to a particular area of the canal one day when I was visiting family in Burnley. I took some vibrational essences I had made and some rose petals. I scooped up some canal water into a bowl and sang to the water then blew lots of wishes and prayers into the Rose petals and placed them into the bowl. Two women a little older than me were walking along the canal path and they asked what I was doing. I explained I was sending my deepest gratitude to the canal, giving thanks and love to her for all the years of hard work she had done since her construction. The women were blown away, they were not dismissive, judgemental or mocking. I asked them if they would like to blow their own wishes into some of the petals, they did so and were actually deeply touched by the whole process. I knew then, that from that day onward every time they walked along the canal path, they would have a different perspective and awareness of the water.

Honouring, blessing and giving thanks to the waters of the earth was a very normal and natural part of everyday living to our ancient ancestors. Water is a loving living being. And of course water deserves the greatest of respect, as it does not take much water to drown in!

Like us, water is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. When communing with a lake or river, I never know on what level of existence I may make a connection. Sometimes I feel the presence of what one could call the 'oversoul' of the body of water. And I can receive a visual impression of what this beautiful being may look like. (But that would be how the image would filter through my own personal inner lens.) Two people may be connecting to the 'oversoul' of a body of water and each person may receive a completely different 'image' as to what that may look like.

Sometimes I can connect with finer dimensional beings that live within the water itself. I'm learning to trust that whatever way I need to make a connection that will be appropriate at that time. One thing I do know is this, the more you send your love and gratitude to the waters, you are setting up a pathway of connection and communion. Perhaps one day a body of water near you may rise up and touch your heart and ask for a little support too.

As we bless the waters of the earth, we bless the waters within our own bodies too. I could write so much more about this, but I need to get out and go and sit at the head of Lake Windermere. I've not sung to her for a while.

May we all bless and be blessed by the Waters of Life everywhere we go.

**Sharon Murphy**



## The ‘Return of the Light’ in lucid dreams of nature beings

**On 21st December, the Winter Solstice, my second book on dreams, *Lucid Surrender: The Alchemy of the Soul*, was published. I was especially pleased since this book takes readers on a journey into the luminous Divine Darkness of spiritual lucid dreaming.**

I approach dreams in general – and lucid dreaming in particular – as a means to soul-awakening, a path I call ‘Lucid Surrender’. The book derives from my experience as a lucid dreamer, my professional work as a psychotherapist and my research into lucid dreaming. My aim has been to show how lucid dreams can open us to the realm of the transpersonal.

In many of my lucid dreams, numinous Nature Beings emerge out of an iridescent darkness I call ‘Black Light’. They may appear as plants, birds or animals to comfort, guide and inspire me. Here, I have selected a few such dreams from *Lucid Surrender* to illustrate such encounters.

The following dream shows me one of my mental blocks in a very literal way, while providing me with its own consolation in the gentle touch of a Nature Being:

*As I become lucid, the dreamscape falls away and Black Light and winds carry my soul into the lucid void. This comes with such a blissful feeling that I get somewhat distracted in wondering how to make this feeling last. Soon after my (now invisible) dream body screeches to a halt a fraction of an inch in front of an obsidian-like wall that reaches beyond my vision in either direction.*

*Like in a slapstick comedy, I abruptly slide down, along the height of the wall, to the ground. There, I find myself with a dream body looking up at the towering wall. Sadness comes over me as I realise that I have not been able, or perhaps allowed, to continue because I had not simply trusted my heart to take me where I needed to go.*

*Then as I turn away from the wall, a garden appears, and I lie down near a lovely, large pink flower. I feel tired so I say to the flower, ‘Please come to me.’ To my surprise, it does so, walking on its roots. Then it leans over, caressing me with one of its petals. With this, I am infused with the*

*sweetness and gentleness of its being, and I awake feeling grateful for the flower’s petal-soft touch.*

In this next dream, which I had two years later, a curiously comic figure helps to guide me on my path:

*Just before waking, I find myself resting in a bed within a dream and realise that the people around me wouldn’t be there if I were truly asleep. This awareness brings lucidity. I feel happy but apprehensive because of my confused state of mind. The dreamscape falls away and my soul remains static in the Black Light.*

*To my delight, a little green, Jiminy Cricket-type figure comes up to me. He puts his arms over his head, palms together, demonstrating what I need to do. I smile, inwardly feeling both charmed and curious about this little creature. I mirror his posture, and with this movement, ecstasy hits me very hard and is hard to contain. Eventually, the bright blackness opens up to immense white rings of light set amidst the dark expanse. I stop to ponder these lights until the Jiminy Cricket fellow appears again and beckons me on with his little green arm and large, white-gloved hand, pulling, or rather, willing me along as the dream continues to unfold.*

Another time a little bird, hopping to and fro, showed me the way. This dream took place when I was going through a divorce and so had asked for dream guidance before falling asleep:

*In the dream I find myself thinking, ‘Now you know this is a dream,’ and at once I become lucid. But I am worried because I feel exposed, somehow not shielded by the Holy Spirit. My soul is carried through a field of pulsating white light, followed by a steep and long descent.*

*I end up in a scene next to a cartoon-like little bird that appears very tired with its wings hanging down listlessly. I realise it is weary from carrying me, though I can’t imagine how such a small bird could do so. To encourage the little fellow, I say, ‘Thank you, Holy bird, for carrying me.’ With this the bird revives and hops about bringing my attention to what appears before us. We seem*

*positioned in a kind of viewing terrace or box at the opera, below a scene plays out in response to my request for guidance....*

In this last dream the ‘Nature Beings’ take on a form that both tests and deepens my trust of the transpersonal Presence at the heart of dreams:

*In the night I awaken and sing. ‘You my God are my heart’s desire and my heart cries out to Thee...’ The Spirit comes with a mighty whirring sound and lifts me onto the black, shining winds.*

*A definite but invisible Being cradles me in its arms and I am filled with ecstasy. After a while, we begin to descend, and I wonder where I will be set down.*

*Suddenly we enter a hall so large I cannot see its end. What appear to be layers of flat hard stones shaped like shale or slate in deep sheens of copper and black are interspersed with immense dark boulders, spread over the hall’s floor.*

*As we touch down, I take on a dream body and the Being becomes visible. He looks very slim or two-dimensional, with a long trapezoidal head and a featureless face that nevertheless communicates strongly felt Presence. His broad shoulders taper down into a triangle-tip waist. He has massive muscular arms and legs, a bit like a medieval knight wearing armour. I am so surprised by his unusual form that at first I feel disoriented. But then I remember he has been carrying me, and I say, ‘Thank you, Holy Being, for bringing me here.’*

*When he moves away, my eyes follow him, and I see a group of three or four unnaturally large, magnificent tigers with evident power and intelligence circling on a large boulder nearest to me. They walk so closely and smoothly together they look almost like flames swirling. Beyond the first cluster of tigers, I now see that on other boulders there appear similar clusters of tigers. The further I look, more tigers materialise against the backdrop of vibrant darkness.*

*For a moment, I feel afraid that the tigers might leap down and devour me. Recalling the Biblical story of ‘Daniel in the Lion’s Den’, I realise that the tigers could easily overpower me if they chose to, so I decide to stay calm. The tigers remain*

*focused on their circling, communicating a steady willpower and creative energy. I begin to sense that these tigers represent celestial Beings that have revealed themselves to me.*

*I wonder what the tigers will do and if they will speak or silently share with me their awesome beauty and contained, instinctual power. At this moment, the knight-like Being appears and carries me back across the Black Light and the dream ends. How I would have liked to spend more time with the magnificent creatures!*



Illustration © Eri Griffin 2021 1

When I awaken, I associate the infinite display of circling tigers with my desire to see small dream groups taking shape in the waking world.

Such Nature Beings communicate an intimately felt sense of Presence, one that offers a sense that we are not alone, that we are loved and part of a Creation more wondrous than we can imagine. They invite us to know the thoughts of our hearts and the guidance of Spirit.

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Melinda Powell co-founded the Dream Research Institute at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education, London. She works as a psychotherapist, teaches Lucid Surrender™ and writes about dreams and dream lucidity. Email: DRImelinda@ccpe.org.uk

## In a wooded quarry

**During the first lock-down I started to read Robert Adams' *The Silence of the Heart*. I took it into the woods on the hill near our house; I can see the treetops to my left through the window as I type. Adams teaches Non-Dualism, and as I walked I tried to let the reality of his teaching become real in my experience, to allow the wood and I to be one.**



I took a barely visible path off the main track into the old quarry, scrambled up through the rhododendrons into an open space with pines below the rock wall and rested by a tree that forms three trunks a metre above the ground. At the bottom of the slope, below the bushes, is an untended pool. Rock faces, trees, water, and sky above us on a sunny summer midday. It feels like centring down, or entering in, or expanding into a larger world. It seems to be saying - nothing, because we have slipped beyond words and every phrase I intuit misses the mark. Is it saying 'Welcome'? 'You've always been part of us; here we are, one with you'? Beyond 'you' and 'we', these words slip out of grasp.

I try to relax into the new awareness, to drop the language: phrases slip through my mind, are briefly watched, and fade into the background. The reality of 'tree' and 'rock' is simultaneously

more immediate and less relevant. It becomes simple awareness of presence, of those I can see and that which I cannot see, which binds all together in unity. Richard Rohr calls this 'Christ'. Is it breathing? It does not seem to be simply static; to be alive and not to move feels wrong somehow. Yet all together, in this hollow, We Are, or I Am, where I is bigger to embrace the All. In this place, to pray is both natural and unnecessary. To be, to become, to be one with so-called distant people, situations, crises, even the Corona virus itself, in a single movement that evolves seamlessly and universally. To be here, to simply be, is to hold the day in joy and pain, as the earth awaits the birth of the next step. One can almost touch the tension; and it has not gone yet.



Ursula Le Guinn wrote about it in the novel Earthsea; the mage Ogion touches the earth with his staff and holds an earthquake from shattering the town and harbour by 'entering in', with his apprentice at the far end of the fault playing his part too. It is a simultaneous holding and relaxing, here among the rocks, or remembering in my chair at home. All is one; the future evolves from the present, or is time too as illusory as space?

**Philip Tyers**

## Medicine walk in February

**On 10 February 2021 I decided to map-dowse the area around my home with the intention of making my medicine walk the next morning at sunrise. 11 February was the new moon and this felt a significant new beginning, even though the weather was sub-zero and the wind from the east.**

Map dowsing clearly pinpointed two or three suitable spots along a little used track about 2 miles from home oriented east west with a mixed wood to the north and an open field to the south. I set off at about 6.50am and decided to take two dogs with me for warmth but forgot my mobile phone. I realised I could dowse the telluric grids when I got there and decided to use the Hartman to align my compass points making a slightly elongated star shape for the cardinal points.

On the way we startled a few pheasants and blackbirds from the hedges but saw no one else. My two dogs; Dottie and Teddy snuffled happily and allowed their senses to guide them to interesting things and so did I. First of all I saw the shades of light in the sky to the east subtly changing as I paused on the track. Every morning this miracle happens but I am either asleep or too preoccupied to even notice except in the summer. The trees and hedges were silhouetted and black against the bare sky, I sensed in them in anticipation like an indrawn breath.



I attempted to pick up some significant pebbles on the way but these were all frozen to the ground so I gave up after a while and instead focused my attention on my intention. Now my eyes were seeing colour and very soon I could see the edge of the wood and the grassy track all

covered in frost. I knew this was where I would find the perfect place to welcome the elementals, angels, ancestors and guides. I called the dogs to me and we walked slowly along the woodland edge heading east sensing the best places. At the first oak tree I paused and said 'good morning' but after a polite conversation I realised that this was not the spot. At a walnut tree I paused and repeated my greeting but once again after a polite conversation I realised that I should move further on. At the second oak tree I knew I had found the exact spot. This tree was ready and waiting for me!



I looked at the ground and saw that this tree was planted over a badger sett. The characteristic shaped holes were between the roots of the tree and in the spoil were several excellent pebbles that were not frozen to the earth. I picked them up and arranged them whilst greeting and welcoming each of the elemental directions. I sat with my back to the tree facing south and a beautiful view of Bredon Hill, a Neolithic site, a few miles away that was covered in snow. With one dog on my right side and the other on my left I sat and waited.

The sun was coming up and I could see the sky lightening by the second. I watched the horizon to the south for a few minutes and saw a number of crows head for some trees. Very soon I felt drawn to look towards the east and within a few seconds at that exact spot two red deer appeared. They paused sensing me and the dogs before running southward. I kept looking and a minute later a third red deer followed them. We sat comfortably smelling the earth and the cold, watching the light and the birds overhead. Then I

was drawn to look west, and from a bramble thicket not more than 6 feet away a muntjac deer appeared, hardly larger than my dogs, and headed off north very quickly. This was too much temptation for my dogs, that chased after it but with no chance of catching it.



The dogs returned and we sat some more and I was aware of a huge sense of peace like a balm over me. All was still and I felt fully grounded as if actually part of the tree, the earth and my dogs whilst the cold air came and went in my lungs. Time stood still. I had become absorbed into the earth. I knew my ancestors were close, I sense the tree extend its energy around me like a blanket. The trunk felt alive and responsive to me at my back. It drew me closer to the trunk and I could sense the pulse of life within it. Suddenly I knew I was much loved and that this tree, hugging me close, would always be at my back supporting me. I felt tears trickle down my face and in the extreme cold they stung my cheeks. The tree said to me, don't be drawn into illusion, you always have a choice. You can react to things in your life with love and you will receive love. You can react to others with fear and that's what you will perceive. Feel your reaction, identify it and know that you made it, not something outside yourself. The universe around you is for you. You have my love all your earthly life, no matter what you do. I will never stop supporting you whatever wrong turn you think you take or however life unfolds.

Tears ran down my face and I could no longer wipe them away. After about 20 minutes we were all cold sitting on the ground but I had received a message, I felt calm and supported and so we headed back for breakfast. On the way we glimpsed again the red deer in a clearing,

watched geese overhead in a wonderful pointed arrow shape and passed by a venerable oak of about 350 years of age. Having sat against the younger oak minutes before, I felt drawn to address this lovely old tree. I rested my back against it briefly and felt the surge of energy from the roots heading towards the sky; an echo of my message reassuring me.

Soon we were back home in our centrally heated house having breakfast. Within half an hour my sister rang to say that my 90-year-old mum was very poorly. So I quickly got ready and went to her house about an hour and a half away, after ringing the surgery and arranging for a paramedic to visit. I didn't feel concerned or panicked by this although I have never done this before. It was as if my oak balm was calming me and making everything smooth. There were no hold-ups on the way and I didn't even feel tempted to break the speed limit! When I arrived the paramedic had been there about 10 minutes and was giving mum a thorough check up. I didn't feel worried, all felt in place. He took some blood and arranged a hospital appointment for suspected inflammation of the gall bladder. He was also calm and efficient and had gone within an hour leaving me with instructions.



I stayed with mum feeling this wonderful ease that all would be well, whilst looking after her and making her as comfortable as possible. She slept for a while when I sat with her and then I collected a prescription for her before satisfying myself that she was well enough for me to return home. On the way about 10 miles from home my car broke down. All the electrics failed. I coasted to a halt in a gateway and as the gloom descended I realised that even this didn't bother me. I felt able to ring the garage, insurer and arrange the tow truck as if I was ordering a meal

from a menu. The oak was right; I had a choice in life about how I responded to difficulties no matter how big or small.

When I arrived home my dogs were happy to see me and I went outside to look at the stars with them. I felt some thanks were in order and whispered to each direction, my ancestors and elementals, but most of all to the 30-year-old oak living in my garden. I touched its bark with my fingers, felt the mosses and lichens and saw the bare branches above me. I returned to the warmth of the house. All was well despite the minor traumas of the day. The oak had given me the gift of insight before the day began and the wisdom to cope with everything that happened.

Kate Smart

Images by Kate Smart

Notes and glossary

**Telluric grids:** another term for terrestrial energy that arises from the Earth and forms into grids or matrices.

These are thought to be the foundational energies that criss-cross our planet and have a positive / negative flow. The lines forming the grids are parallel and spaced at equal distances apart creating a three dimensional cube or diamond shape. There are a number of grids with unique spacing, characteristics and alignments.

**Hartman grid:** one of the telluric grids that was first observed by Dr Ernst Hartman (1915 - 1952) who believed that this type of grid is aligned to the Earth's magnetic field. Dr Hartman was a German medical doctor who thought that the grid had both a beneficial and detrimental impact on health from his studies.

**Cardinal points:** or main compass points, north, south, east and west. These directional markers are arranged from a central 'rose' primarily aligned to magnetic north derived from British maritime and cartographic heritage although other cultures mark directional points from the prevailing winds, passage of the sun, astrology, sacred landscape features etc. Native cultures often have five points rather than four and assign a colour to the direction known as 'directional synesthesia' that is remarkably similar across cultures that are geographically distant.

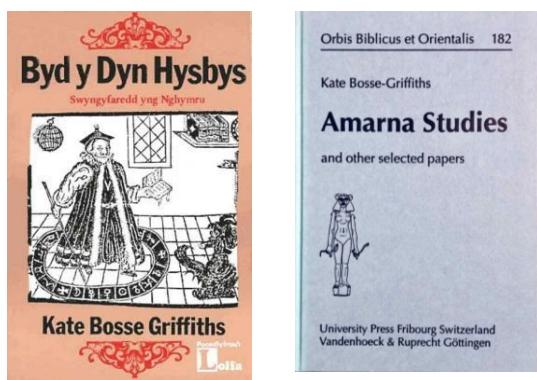


Helm Crag panorama, Grasmere. R Riachi

## Dynes Hysbys (a wise woman): Dr Kate Bosse Griffiths

This is a short postscript to my article on Dynion Hysbys – Welsh Wizards, Cunning Folk and Wise Men (De Numine 71). It's always welcome if an article has an interesting afterlife! This one partly arises from an oversight in my earlier selection of sources.

A book which I had intended to consult – Kate Bosse Griffith's 1977 *Byd Y Dyn Hysbys* (World of the Dyn Hysbys) – was out of print and apparently unavailable online (although I've since found a pdf version).(1/2) However, I subsequently located a copy in my local library in Newtown. It later struck me that Bosse Griffiths herself rightfully has a posthumous claim to the title of "Dynes\* Hysbys" (or Wise Woman).(3) Her entry on the Chwarae Teg website, describes the author as an eminent Egyptologist who made a unique contribution to twentieth century Welsh literature.(4) The life story of Kate (or Käthe) Bosse Griffiths is also in itself fascinating, as described in a new Aberystwyth University research project on Refugees from National Socialism in Wales.(5)



Käthe Bosse was forced to leave Germany in 1936 because of Jewish ancestry, although she was brought up as a Lutheran. According to fellow Wales-based German academic Dr Marion Löffler, as a classicist with a PhD in Egyptian sculpture the young Dr Bosse had been "poised for a career curating the world-renowned collections" of Berlin's museums.(6) Instead, via jobs at the Universities of St Andrews, London and Oxford (where she met her Welsh husband), she settled in Wales and, eventually, became curator of the Egypt Museum at University College Wales, Swansea.

Bosse Griffiths' academic papers on Egyptian sculpture were published after her death in a collection entitled "Amarna Studies."(8) In addition, she wrote extensively in the Welsh language, having mastered this in a very short time. The 1977 *Byd Y Dyn Hysbys* brings together Bosse Griffith's interests in both the history and culture of Wales as well as her extensive knowledge of European and African cultural heritage, in which she locates the phenomenon of Dynion Hysbys.

As someone with a strong locus in "ancient religion and the supernatural," Kate Bosse Griffiths seems to me to belong within the tradition of German scholarship in Wales found at UWTS Lampeter and, indeed, the Religious Experience Research Centre's director, Professor Bettina Schmidt.(8)

\* After consulting Welsh language expert Delma Thomas, I've decided to use the more usual term for woman (dynes) rather than word "menyw" that appears in my previous article.

**Janet Mackinnon**

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## Communicating with animal spirits

**Humanity is facing a defining choice – to walk the same path as generations before us or embark on a visionary journey and consciously create the world we want to see. I've been in direct communication with animals, on a conscious level, for the past 15 years. I am a firm believer that I am not the only one accessing the subtle communication of our kindred spirits. The truth is we are all animal communicators, we are all interspecies communicators.**

Why stop at dolphins, whales, dogs, and cats? The plants and trees, rivers and mountains have consciousness. All of life is awake and interconnected. The only problem we're experiencing in this Anthropocene era, is the Great Forgetting. We have forgotten our interconnectedness. We have forgotten we are a part of nature. We have forgotten we are nature.

It's vital we reconnect with the truth of who we are and move into a consciousness where we commune and communicate with nature as naturally as breathing. I wish for a world of direct communication where we seek the viewpoints and wisdom of other beings who inhabit this great planet. Mother Earth is asking one thing of us and it's simple. Mother Earth is asking us to change.

Interspecies communication is the most powerful tool we possess that can change the world; it changes who we are on a profound level because once it's acknowledged on a deep-felt level that all of life is interconnected and sacred, change is the only decision we can make.

I began 2022 taking part in the 7 Days of Rest and Renewal event with my colleague, South African animal communicator Wynter Worsthorne. We communicated live, in front of the audience, as the bridge for different species to come forward to be heard.

It may surprise you that a non-human animal can express themselves in this way, that a human can receive this communication, perhaps both, maybe neither. Animal communication is so natural, so real, so exquisite a connection, it is true communion with another sentient being.

Of course, the communication can be received by alternative methods: emotions, images, and sensations. Before I made the move into animal communication, I was a theatre stage manager and I spent 15 years practising the art of listening. Listening to the play so I knew when to cue an actor on stage, listening to the next instruction from the director, basically being in the present moment, listening. It was a perfect training ground for my work now – listening to animals.

I've had the honour of communicating with several snakes. It began with a Royal Python who called herself Ruby. She was the first snake I'd ever held, and my body was rippling with fear, which I was trying desperately to hide from my students sat in a semi-circle in front of us. Ruby communicated, "Let. Go," as she travelled down my right arm. "Let. Go," as she crossed my lap and travelled up my left arm. "I'm trying," I said to her, silently in my mind. "Let. Go," as she moved her strong muscular body up the centre of my chest and then arched her head out a little to bring her face directly level with my eyes, "LET. GO!" Then a miracle occurred. The rippling fear running through my body ceased and I felt her. I felt the truth of who she was as a sentient being. Ruby taught me, and my students, that the fear we feel of snakes is our own fear mirrored back to us. I wasn't the only one to experience this instant healing, at this workshop and others, students who identified as having a snake phobia were in love with Ruby and wished to hold her by the end of the communication.

I communicate with companion animals too. I've found missing animals, including a dog called Marmite based over 100 miles away from me, who showed me with images I saw with my mind's eye that he was stuck 15ft underground in a disused canal shaft a mile away from his home, where the top entrance was covered with weeds. He'd been missing a week but through communication with him and then sharing the details with his guardian, she was able to find him within an hour. I've helped locate dogs as far as Australia, so distance is not a barrier. My dog, Morgan, explained, "We are all connected, all of the time, across any distance."

Despite being an atheist before animal communication entered my life in a conscious way, I now love communicating with animals who have transitioned. It's an honour for me and very comforting for those left behind. Texas, who inhabited a ginger cat body, communicates with me now and has been a great support in helping me create our Conversations with Nature World Summit. In 2020, when I asked the Animal Kingdom, "How can I best be of service to you?" The animals replied they wanted to connect with huge numbers of people and to 'help people sleep-walking through their lives' to understand the interconnectedness of life.

One of my roles is to connect people with wild animals in their natural habitats. I facilitate ethical Whale and Dolphin Communication Retreats. The dolphins are wild and have the whole ocean to inhabit, and by their freewill they choose to come close to us humans, to swim beside us and maintain eye contact. Sometimes a smaller pod will invite us into their pod and surround a person at the front, sides and behind – this is a heavenly experience of pure bliss. I've been back a few years now and dolphins recognise my energy frequency and seek me out. On one visit three dolphins by-passed snorkelers and swam within a few centimetres of my mask, first one, then another from the other direction, then the third from the opposite direction, and repeating this for ages. I heard the dolphins say, "welcome back! Welcome back!" but more than

that I felt them, I felt their joy, their excitement, it was so strong and effervescent.

One year I attended one of Joan Ocean's conferences and there was a day when we hadn't seen any dolphins. I communicated with a passing humpback whale and asked, 'Where are the dolphins?' The humpback showed me they were far north in the opposite direction. We turned the boat around and after travelling halfway there, just when the 34 passengers began to doubt, a humpback whale breached right next to our boat three times. We felt the whale was encouraging us to continue. When we reached the spot, we stopped the engine. No dolphins. One of the leaders and I stood at the back of the boat and reached out with our hearts and telepathically scanned the ocean. We saw them deep down, we felt them. A few minutes later a huge number of dolphins rose and invited us to join them. Everyone said it was the most moving and joyous communion they'd experienced. The next morning as we left the harbour there were two humpback whales waiting for our boat. They stopped right in front of us and breached and breached. First everyone broke out into cheers and excitement, but then fell into the most reverent silence and wept. The whales were acknowledging we had listened to them and trusted. The feeling was now you understand, we are all connected.

**Pea Horsley, Animal Communicator**  
[www.animalthoughts.com](http://www.animalthoughts.com)

Awakening Hedgehog

J. Greenwood 2021



## A crafty unlocking: Covid-19 and other shapeshifters

*Hermes, son of Zeus, who brings luck, slid in sideways through the keyhole and passed into the hall like a breeze...like a mist...*

Homeric Hymn to Hermes 146 ff

### Locks and dreams

On the eve of the first lockdown I was locking the front door when the key jammed. Try as I might, I couldn't get it out. The locksmith was duly called and fitted a replacement lock, which failed almost immediately. This meant, rather ironically, that during the first few days of lockdown I couldn't lock the door. Was I the target of some sort of cosmic jester with a penchant for irony? It certainly seemed that way.

These were odd times indeed: not just for me, but for millions and millions of others. Safely locked down once more, I began to wonder about apparent 'synchronicities' such as the door event. Was a bigger picture being disclosed by such things? If so, what was it? The key thing, in particular, nagged. Later I learned that in ancient Greece the image of Hermes was stamped onto housekeys. Why Hermes? In essence, because this slippery, deceiving trickster god was the 'master' of the border; never more at home than in the betwixt and between state of a boundary or a doorway. As shapeshifter, thief and liar, it was Hermes who, as the Homeric *Hymn To Hermes* attests, stole Apollon's cattle, transformed himself into mist, and slipped back home through the keyhole so he could claim in deceitful self-defence that he'd never so much as stepped over the threshold. I began to wonder: is there anything to be gained by seeking to view the Covid-19 pandemic through such a keyhole? To peek in and to see it, in essence, as some sort of 'trickster phenomenon'?

### In search of the Trickster

An internet search revealed that I wasn't the first person to push open this particular door: although I might have been the second. In an entertaining blog post written on April 7th 2020, Nancy Charley pondered over the question of where the Trickster might be found within the unfolding pandemic. '[W]here would I find him?'

she pondered. Urging people to panic buy? Twisting the story in the media until the question of what to believe about Covid-19 was one that received only murky and confusing answers? Or leading the clapping on doorsteps throughout the land? Remember, she cautioned: tricksters are amoral. They don't look to take sides, but when they do they might take both - or neither.

Attempting any kind of list or overview of trickster characteristics is fraught with dangers and difficulties. After all, a large part of his slipperiness - and the trickster is almost invariably a 'he' - consists of his ability to change his form at will, the better to pull his pranks. Nonetheless, in a seminal essay in which he seeks to produce a 'heuristic guide' to such ostensibly mythological pranksters, William J. Hynes considers several features, starting with an anomalousness which includes the ability to shapeshift.

For Hynes, shapeshifting allows the trickster to do many things. For example: it can be used as a trap, as when the Navajo Coyote trickster becomes a tree in order to capture birds. It also enables the trickster to pass across thresholds and borders, as in Hermes' transformation into mist in order to slip through the keyhole. Hilariously, it also enables the Tibetan trickster Agu Tompa to invade a cloister in order to make love to the nuns (a trick only discovered when they all fall pregnant). Agu Tompa's shapeshifting involves nothing more than the putting on of nuns' robes, but the pattern is already clear: shapeshifting confers upon the trickster a distinct advantage when it comes to crossing otherwise impermeable boundaries in order to cause havoc.

### Crafty unlocking

This is, of course, exactly what Covid-19 does, for this virus appears adept at adopting all manner of guises in order to slip between the boundaries of individual cells and bodies. Borders mean nothing to it: whether they separate individuals, countries or whole continents. Mutation and variance seem key to its success, calling forth the need for ever-varying vaccines in a bid to stem its spread. Indeed, on 17th June 2021, in calling for

the urgent need for polyvalent vaccines - 'multifaceted' inoculations based on multiple variants of the virus instead of just one - Chris Whitty unwittingly echoed William Hynes' definition of the trickster when he described the virus as 'fundamentally ambiguous, anomalous and polyvalent' (emphasis mine). It seems that in the case of this particular virus, fighting fire with fire equates to producing a vaccine that can shapeshift in time with the disease itself, for Covid-19 thrives in a situation of mutation and transit. Even the symptoms of Covid seem to shift shape – sometimes markedly.

Crafty unlocking, then, seems to be the order of the day. But we're not done yet. At the start of the pandemic I found myself pondering about the difference between the earlier SARS epidemic from 2002-4 (SARS-Cov) and the current Covid-19 pandemic (SARS-Cov-2). The earlier outbreak accounted for, in total, 8,098 infections and 774 deaths worldwide. At the beginning of 2022, just over two years from the beginning of the current pandemic, there had been approximately 300 million Covid-19 infections and getting on for 5.5 million deaths. Put bluntly: what is Covid-19 getting 'right' that SARS got 'wrong'? What is the overall key to its dreadful success?

We've all seen many - perhaps too many - pictures of a Covid-19 coronavirus. Massively magnified, it's ball-shaped with spikes on it. At the end of each spike is a little crown shape (which is why it's called a coronavirus). The spikes are partly key to Covid-19's success, because they allow it to latch on to a protein on the surface of our cells called ACE2: very much like putting a key in a lock. Back in 2002-4, the SARS coronavirus could do it too, but the crown on the end of the spikes on the current Covid-19 coronavirus is a better fit for the ACE2 protein than SARS was. How this happened is massively complex and yet to be understood, currently spawning all manner of theories involving a range of 'conspiracies' and none at all. The upshot, however, is clear: the key is now a better fit, so it unlocks us more easily.

But there's more. When a coronavirus 'opens the lock', it has to split into two halves in order for the infection to continue. Back in 2002-4, with SARS, that didn't happen very easily. Hence only

a few thousand cases and a few hundred deaths world-wide. But with the current coronavirus, it happens very easily indeed, because Covid-19 uses an enzyme to enable it to split called Furin which it gets from the human body: the 'something more' that contributes to its massive and deadly ability to spread, relative to the 2002-4 outbreak.

### Bricoleur and situation-inversion

In his heuristic guide to tricksters, William J. Hynes sets out several defining features of such figures both historically and cross-culturally, drawing liberally from a rich range of comparable mythologies. Of particular interest at this point is the feature of bricoleur. Of this, Hynes says, 'The bricoleur is a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution.' Within the specific context of tricksters, he notes that there are many such examples of novel, whatever-is-at-hand adaptation, utilised by such characters in pursuit of their aims. Thus, the Chippewa trickster and demigod Wenebojo is said to have transformed his intestines into sweet food for his aunts and bloody scabs from his rectum into sweet tobacco for his uncles. Covid-19's use of Furin in order to more readily split - and thus infect - invites reflection within this context, suggesting, as it does, the same creative ingenuity: pressed, once more, into the service of boundary-crossing. Using what is to hand, Covid-19 is enabled to go beyond SARS: essentially by tricking its host into actually contributing to its own violation. Crafty unlocking, indeed.

### New ways of being

Having said all of this, shapeshifting, boundary crossing and disruption are never the final words in trickster tales. There is method in the apparent madness. Trickster's antics frequently disclose new possibilities and fundamentally re-visioned ways of being, and these often start with the subversion and consequent deflation of human pomposity, self-deception, and pretension. In this way, tricksters frequently 'cut us down to size' only to build us up again in different, re-fashioned, ways. As June Singer remarks, the trickster is always 'ready to bring us down when we get inflated, or to humanize us when we

become pompous. He is the satirist par excellence, whose trenchant wit points out the flaws in our haughty ambitions, and makes us laugh though we feel like crying...' In essence, she avers, 'The major psychological function of the trickster figure is to make it possible for us to gain a sense of proportion about ourselves.' Thus, there are positives as well as negatives to be had from the trickster's antics, and 'cutting down' or deflation are never merely ends but, rather, frequently-necessary means. That this insight might be applied to the recent pandemic - that it might, in one sense, be viewed as a 'trickster event' at once positive and negative - needs no additional comment, although as we emerge from it we may hope that, collectively, we will carry the lessons learned from that event with us.

And lessons there have been. It has been a humbling experience, but one that has taught us much. The beneficial impact of lockdowns on the well-being of the climate was a lesson learned early on, but we have also been reminded of the fragility of all our plans and proposed endeavours, together with the contingency of so much we once took for granted. We have learned much about the nature of viruses, too: including how much we actually don't know.

### Hermeneutics and conclusions

In seeking to view Covid-19 through the 'lens' of trickster studies, I have in no way sought to belittle - far less to downplay - the tragedy and significance of each individual loss to this cruel and terrible disease. It has been more a heuristic strategy; a shift in the focus of enquiry in search of new ways to discern meaning within - including the meaning of - shared events which remain with us still. Interpretation can be, and often is, a slippery business, one that can be fraught with controversy and the source of sometimes bitter division. 'Reading' situations

often requires the breaking-down of boundaries in search of fresh ways of discerning meaning. Indeed, there is something almost tricksterish in the endeavour, reminding us, as it does, that 'hermeneutics' takes its very name from the fellow whose activities and relevance I have been exploring. That the Greeks offered Hermes the last libation before sleep in his role as bringer of dreams might also give us pause for thought: but that is, perhaps, for others to explore, particularly given that strange dreams – dubbed 'Covid dreams' by some – have been marked features of the pandemic virtually throughout.

At the very least, it might be argued that Covid-19 has given trickster myths a new resonance and potency. More than this, though, is the sneaking suspicion that something has been at play in the events of recent months that tells us much about what reality really is.

**Mark Fox**

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Mark Fox is an independent researcher, speaker and writer. His books explore various fortean topics and his latest, *Cold Inn*, explores many specifically 'trickster' themes within a fictional context. For more, go to [www.markfox.co.uk](http://www.markfox.co.uk)

## Heavenly experience

**It is easy to conceive of a plausible cause of the concept of Heaven (or Paradise) in the first place; especially if the background culture includes a negative stance towards the world experienced by humans, such as it being a “Vale of Tears” or the like.**

It is not surprising that, under the conditions of slavery, Heaven often figures prominently in the background culture:

*“Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.”*

If we envisage a wholly positive place or state of mind, then there is something to aim for, a purpose, a meaning, a hope, which we sorely need. It can thus have a pragmatic effect upon behaviour, values and individual stability, and even happiness.

However, there remains a problem with how the Vale of Tears got here in the first place. So it is easy to see how a culture could also envisage a heavenly beginning as well as a possible end, plus an event which somehow spoilt the whole business, then there is a more fulsome and satisfying explanation of the entire system.

There was Heaven, we messed up, but there could be again. It makes a psychological sense, though sadly, truth is a tougher hurdle.

In addition to all that, I want to suggest here that there is a further dimension which is not just explanatory, but a direct experience which is ‘heavenly’ and can contribute to the topic. It is the Home which the Spiritual song refers to.

There is a core of mystical experience which includes a component of ecstasy, bliss, rapture and similar vocabulary. Those who have experienced such things repeatedly say that these words are inadequate to characterise the sense of liberating euphoria. Some psychologists speak of a loss of ego-boundaries. St. Teresa writes of the self becoming a “glass castle.”

In this state of Opening or Awakening, which can last a fraction of a second or (it is said) become permanent, the barrier, the boundaries of the

self falters and there is a vast inflow of pure and benevolent energy.

If we take the various attempts to describe this experience, and extract the features supplied by the local culture as, for example, references to Mary or Krishna & various doctrinal components, the result is a remarkable similarity across the world, across time, across faiths. It would appear that this experience can occur to anyone with any background. It is more likely to happen to someone seeking it through the varied techniques used to encourage it, but it can appear suddenly to someone of no particular faith just going about their business. It can be, to use the title of a recommended book by Marghanita Laski, dealing with some of these issues, an ‘Everyday Ecstasy’.

To give a very inadequate idea of this core experience which is commonly regarded as indescribable, as it goes beyond words; it involves a radical change in the apprehension of time, which slows almost to a standstill; there is a reduction or even loss of what some psychologists call ego-boundaries so that the distinction between the self inside and the world outside fades or disappears; there is a consequential expansion of the sense of self into this Opened world; with that expansion comes a feeling of liberation from personal concerns; as the self expands into the previously external world, so the world rushes into the self in the form of a personalised energy. All this is accompanied by the rapturous feelings mentioned earlier.

It is this ecstatic euphoria which I wish to concentrate on here and suggest that it may have got into part of the meaning of our concept of Heaven, or, as I would prefer to call it, Home. By means of this experience the term acquires a personal quality beyond the merely conceptual.

Sometimes a mystical Opening can be not instant and overwhelming, but slower and more moderate. When it happens in this softer form it is easier to see the components of the experience. The subjective impact is as if a warm, gentle and personalised Presence seeps into the

psyche and keeps going, so that eventually the sense of self is left completely immersed and totally penetrated by the caring substance. It is like a memory of being in the womb, except, unlike then, this time there is a formed individuality. In this possible rebirth the self is radically changed; the distinction between the inside (where we are) and the outside (where the world is) is removed. It is all One.

Unfortunately, we are not fully integrated beings. Our self is not a single, coherent thing. That part of our self which fits this field of Pure Goodness is totally at Home. It instantly harmonises and is overjoyed. Thus the sense of ecstasy. Home at last.

However, the Goodness (I prefer not to use the L-word, it carries too much baggage) spreads throughout the psyche, there is no clear separation. The loss of the distinction between the inner & outer world means that it isn't that the self resides in but does not partake of the Goodness, no, the Goodness floods & joins with the self. The two are One. Those parts of ourself which are not so selfless are also engulfed by the glorious purity. Such parts don't fit. They don't harmonise. This need not be a deep evil, but where we have become habitually not as virtuous as we might be. All those little failings where we were not so compassionate, as kind, as generous, as understanding, as we might have been. The conflict is felt as disgusting. These are actual parts of who and what we are and they are felt during the experience as foul, revolting nodes of filth, like pockets of rotting moral tumours. It is instantly obvious that, for our own benefit, we must work to dissolve, remove, negate them.

In my own case, I encountered the manifestly distressing fact that my skills of forgiveness were

poor, especially with respect to my father and how he behaved when I was a child. The lack of forgiveness was simply shown to be a living lump of putrefaction by its incompatibility with the pervading Goodness. I desperately wanted rid of it, who wouldn't. So I began at once on that task when the experience faded. It took twenty years to fix.

This isn't the worst. It seems we all have our dark side. We try very hard not to acknowledge its presence and usually succeed pretty well. But there is no hiding in this open place. We have parts of our self which become exposed as even more averse to the spirit of selfless being. Some parts of our self assert that individuality against all else. Our egoistic self is our protection against the world, the bolt-hole where we are safe. This ultimate safety is experienced as threatened by the Presence of Goodness. It cannot harmonise & relax into unity. There is a fear of annihilation. Yet these are components of our self and the experience of their existence is intolerable. They burn. This part of our own being, which is destroying itself in the face of its opposite, is sensed as a fiery horror. When this occurs, and it doesn't always, it is usually enough to jerk the consciousness back into normality.

I would make two observations about this feature of the experience and its possible contribution to the concept of Heaven. Firstly, there is a judgment, but it is not made by some sort of external being from on high. We judge ourselves. We judge ourselves having been given the undeniable means to do so. Secondly, at least in this experience, Heaven and Hell are the same place.

**Michael Shearer**

## **Are we something more?**

### **Making sense of spiritual experience...**

**The Alister Hardy question has been the 'bedrock' of spiritual experience research for many years, and I am sure will continue to be so. Here is a 'new look' suggestion for widening the scope of the question with a form of questionnaire which selects different types of religious or spiritual experience, and encourages reflection and discussion. If anyone is interested in taking part, do please contact me.**

Are we anything more than what our senses tell us? Does life have some particular purpose for each of us amongst the variety of experiences we all have? There are so many questions we could ask as we try to make sense of our lives. Are there indicators of something more, beyond the limitations of the senses and the nature of the physical body? Is there a spiritual dimension to our lives that better indicates our true nature? If so, how can we become more aware of this? Or do we feel that we are no more than the result of a complexity of physical and chemical processes that begins at birth and ends at death? Is this reductionist view adequate?

The world is changing fast. There are so many possibilities for us today, but so often something seems to be lacking in our search for happiness, fulfilment and well-being. Life doesn't come without its problems. There can be few, if any, people who have not had to face some pain or trauma in their lives, often exacerbated by the more global problems of conflict, climate change, pollution, inequality and much else.

Hence the question 'Are we something more?' - beyond what the world has to offer, something which is true for all of us, whatever our situation in the world. Is this 'something more' available even when the material box of goodies is exhausted and the endless list of solutions runs dry? What is it that can bring peace, joy and meaning to our lives? This is what spirituality claims to be about. The Church and religious institutions have traditionally been the place where people looked for answers and a guide through the harsh realities of our frailty and

mortality. But today life is different, and it is probably fair to say that most of us are not finding answers through religious institutions.

This suggested questionnaire (below) lists some types of experience which people claim to have had. These may help indicate if we really are 'something more', whether there is a spiritual component to our lives and, if so, the significance of this. The questions here are not exclusive to each other; they often overlap and may be different ways of describing the same thing. Some people claim to have had very significant experiences which have been hugely positive and life-changing for them. Probably however, for most of us, experiences of 'something more', something of a spiritual nature, will be less spectacular, but not without significance.

Participants could be asked to complete the questionnaire by putting a tick if they feel they have had an experience of the type indicated, a cross if they feel they have not, or leave the question if undecided. Words in the questionnaire which are particularly meaningful to participants could be underlined. This could help uncover the prevalence of different types of experience which people have had and the significance for them. It may also lead to some interesting and creative discussion and maybe reflection, exploration and further questions will result. Besides using this with groups who have an interest in spirituality, this proposed questionnaire could be used with groups likely to represent a variety of different experiences and opinions, and see what happens.

Hopefully, this will in due course give us a better idea about whether and to what extent spiritual experience is part of people's lives today. I am not looking for accounts of particular experiences, although this would be welcomed for sharing if people wish.

This is a piece of private research. Personal data are not requested, although an indication of age, any religious belonging or spiritual practice followed may be helpful.

**Jon Robinson**

## **Are we something more? Suggested Questionnaire**

**Have you had any of these experiences? Please put a tick for 'Yes', a cross for 'No' or no mark if undecided.**

**Please also underline any words which are particularly meaningful for you.**

1. A sense of uplift / joy through connecting with nature / beauty / music / the arts or similar?
2. A bad experience, such as suffering, pain or loss, which has led to a spiritual awakening / sense of spiritual presence / significant new faith or insight?
3. Feelings of being part of, or one with, what is greater than or more than your sense of yourself as a normal, separate and individual self?
4. A feeling that kindness / compassion / forgiveness / empathy / love which you have given to others, or you have received from others, has enriched your life / given you a sense of wholeness and well-being?
5. A feeling that some apparent coincidences in your life have a deeper meaning or purpose, and are more than simply chance?
6. A positive experience of a widening of consciousness, a sense of wholeness / healing, which has resulted from some spiritual practice?
7. A sense of answers to prayer / of being guided / influenced / helped from 'beyond', from God / the Divine / some spiritual presence?
8. An experience that has indicated for you that there is something of us, or of which we are part, that survives death?
9. Have you had moments of new insights / understanding of the purpose or meaning of life / visions for a better world, perhaps triggered by a particular incident?
10. Awareness of an overwhelming sense of presence / power / hope / love, coming through a living person or from somewhere 'beyond'?
11. An experience that cannot be rationally explained, for example, a psychic experience, whether of a positive or negative nature?
12. Have you ever been moved by a sense of mystery / of the numinous / of a sense of wonder / of deep peace, perhaps triggered by a particular situation, which is somehow 'more than' our normal awareness?
13. A feeling that all our experiences, whether of a spiritual nature or otherwise, can be reduced to a rational and scientific explanation without reference to a spiritual dimension?
14. A feeling that you have no time / opportunity / desire / need to reflect on deeper meanings of life?
15. A feeling that many of our problems today (e.g. mental health) are a result of spiritual crisis / emptiness?

Hopefully this should give us a better idea of the types of spiritual experiences which people are having, or not having, today, and the importance for them and maybe all of us.

An indication of age and any religious or spiritual belonging or practice would be helpful.

**Please send replies to: Jonathan Robinson 3, The Beeches, Beaminster DT8 3SL  
Email: murrell.robinson@protonmail.com**

## EXPERIENCES

### Communing with nature

All sorts of memories come to mind when reflecting on my experiences of communion with nature: from naturist holidays on Greek islands to the wonder of having our very own flowering banana plant with miniature bananas... Sadly the latter was blown down in the storms in November 2021.

But the experience that first had me use the term 'communing' happened on many occasions when I flew; if you can remember those days when we could just hop on a plane and go anywhere at any time.

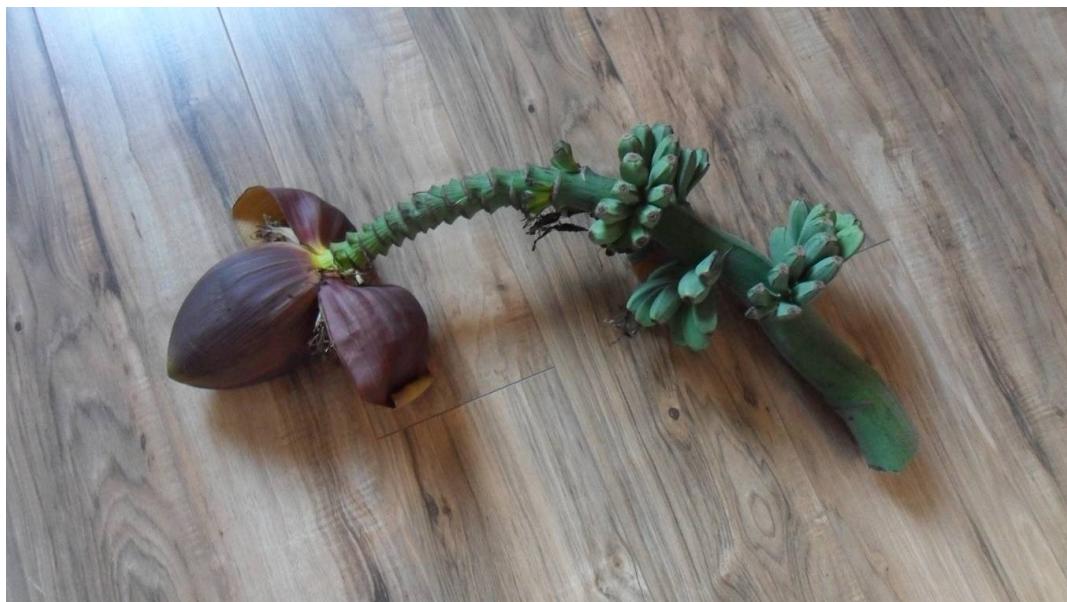
Once the plane had reached cruising height and cabin assistants and passengers had all settled into whatever they were intent on, I would go into a general reflective, meditative state, with a focus on the clouds through which we were passing. I would tune into the surrounding sky and open myself to whatever exists at that altitude. On many occasions over the years I had the distinct impression of some sort of sentient presence.

I would introduce myself to it and welcome it into my consciousness. It seemed surprised that I was able to and wanted to ... and pleased to be able to, well, commune. To feel so connected to the life that surrounds the Earth inevitably raised my spirits during those flights.

P.S. As a safety officer in the School of Geographical Sciences and the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Bristol, I run the Health & Safety induction for students, preparing them for their lab work and, in particular, field trips. Our bottom line in helping them to identify and minimise risks whilst researching the Natural World, is to urge them to "Be aware". In other words, to be present ... to commune with the nature they are researching. Not only will they be safer that way, but they will also have a much deeper appreciation of it.

**Dr Keith Beasley**

[keith.beasley@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:keith.beasley@bristol.ac.uk)



## Clyde Puss at rest

My friend Linda had her two all-black cats, Bonnie and Clyde, as kittens 18 years ago. They had different personalities - Bonnie was sociable and friendly but a bully to her brother, while Clyde was and had to be stand-offish with his powerful sister. He lived outdoors a lot therefore. Bonnie died suddenly in the summertime four years ago. Linda, who always buried her pet cats in her garden, laid Bonnie to rest in the chosen patch of the garden and Clyde continued his life gradually becoming less energetic, slower and spending more time at home than previously.

About 3 ½ years ago Linda acquired two young Siamese kittens, Mojo and Cocoa, and they seemed to perk old Clyde up with their liveliness and play. Clyde took a new interest in life as a result. Clyde lived on until he was 18 and then

one day last November he became poorly. He managed to get himself out through the cat flap and sat in the garden under the lilac tree there. Later that evening Linda found him dead and sitting directly above his sister's burial plot. He'd never been seen sitting there or nearby before. Linda was amazed. Could he have smelt Bonny's body in the ground after her burial and for a while afterwards? Why did he want to be so close to his dead sibling when he was so ill? Did he know he was going to be no more?

His final manoeuvre has stunned not only Linda but all her many friends who are animal lovers. None of us have ever heard of such an action by a feline before. A true and wonderful mystery.

**Valerie Evans**



## Fruits of a childhood mystical experience

**Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934)** was an American author who wrote about the plight of American Indians, Mexican-Americans, and women in the American Southwest during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Author of 32 books and 250 publications, her book *Land of Little Rain* is required reading for many US school children. Mary Austin was also an early feminist who advocated for women's suffrage and birth control.



In a book written toward the end of her life, *Experiences Facing Death*, she describes her childhood mystical experience and how it was, "the one abiding reality of my life." Mary Austin sees this as a "God experience," but hastens to add that God to her is not a person but "Universal Consciousness."

This is her description of her childhood mystical experience:

*I must have been between 5 and 6 when this experience happened to me. It was a summer morning, and the child I was had walked down through the orchard alone and come out on the brow of a sloping hill where there were grass, and a wind blowing, and one tall tree reaching into the infinite immensities of blueness. Quite suddenly, after a moment of quietness there, earth and sky and tree and wind-blown grass and the child in the midst of them came alive together with a pulsing light of consciousness. There was a wild foxglove at the child's feet and a bee dozing about it, and to this day I recall the swift inclusive awareness of each for the whole --- I in them*

*and they in me, and all of us enclosed in a warm lucent bubble of livingness. I remember the child looking everywhere for the source of this happy wonder, and at last she questioned --- "God?" --- because it was the only awesome word she knew. Deep inside, like the murmurous swinging of a bell, she heard the answer, "God, God ..."*

*How long this ineffable moment lasted I never knew. It broke like a bubble at the sudden singing of a bird, and the wind blew and the world was the same as ever --- only never quite the same.*

She states that even as a child she would leave her companions to re-visit her mystical experience. This is similar to the experience of one of my friends, Dr Pam Kircher, a hospice physician who had a childhood near-death experience and shared with me that one of her favourite things to do as a child was to depart her playmates to be alone with God.

Mystical experiences can range from mild to overwhelming. The experience of Mary Austin influenced her as a guiding principle throughout her life. She goes on to state that this sense of presence was something always within reach and that, on occasion, she was enclosed with, "warmth as light." Mary Austin was not a conventional Christian but looked forward to an afterlife in which we will be able to experience God more fully.

Mary Austin was one of my Aunt Ene's favourite authors. When she read this account to me when I was a child, it didn't mean much to me at the time. But now it is something I treasure, much as I regard memories of my Aunt Ene.

**Ken R Vincent**

### References

- Austin, Mary (1931) *Experiences Facing Death*. Indianapolis, USA: Bobbs-Merrill Co.  
Vincent, Ken R. (2019) *God is with Us: What Near-Death and Other Spiritually Transformative Experiences Teach Us About God and Afterlife*. Guildford, UK: White Crow Books

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Hunter\\_Austin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Hunter_Austin)

## LETTERS

### Re THOMAS PITCHFORD

Dear Editor,

I learnt of the death of Thomas Pitchford in the Autumn issue of De Numine. I am still coming to terms with this news.

I worked with Thomas while editor of De Numine since his arrival as AHT Librarian.

He offered help and advice with unfailing courtesy, a Southern Gentleman with Antebellum manners, always a pleasure to encounter. But also, intriguingly, one day I noticed he wore as a belt buckle a large metal arachnid, which looked remarkably like a tarantula. This was an unexpected accessory for a Southern gentleman - the larger arachnids were his hobby, he said, but did not elaborate further...

Thomas was a great help when it came to the twice yearly mail out of De Numine. While Jonathan Andrews was still in post, working on the Archive, they both provided the muscle for collecting De Numine from the printers and getting it up to the main desk for posting. When Jonathan left we relied on Thomas for this, as well as for the printing of up to date address labels which required detailed liaison with the Membership secretary. This may all seem

mundane but in later years, after Jean left and other volunteer help dwindled, my husband and I found Thomas' help invaluable.

He also helped keep the books for review under control: We received a wide variety of unsolicited copies, and, ever the optimist, I kept everything in the hope that someone would one day offer a review. Some of the books got so familiar I became quite fond of them, and the review shelf became rather like the literary equivalent of an orphanage - Thomas gently pointed out that reviews should really be of recent publications, and we devised a plan for re-routing the 'stayers' into the library. So no book was abandoned, just sent to a better life (i.e. more likely to be read!) elsewhere.

I continued to be intrigued by Thomas and the Tarantulas - I could not help but speculate on this seemingly anomalous aspect of his personality. It remained a mystery however; being mildly arachnophobic myself, I was not really tempted to enquire further.

So glad to have known you Thomas, even though I will never know now how these creatures fitted into your life.

Patricia Murphy

Dear Editor,

I was so sad to read in the last issue that Tom Pitchford had died in March. I found the news difficult to take in.

I worked with Tom for several years in the RERC office. I asked him if he preferred to be called Thomas or Tom, and he said he really didn't mind. He was one of the nicest, kindest, and most charming people I have ever met, and he brought a quiet, calm presence to the office. His beautiful Texas accent was part of his charm of course, but there was so much more.

The spider buckle on his belt was renowned among the library staff – he kept (real) tarantulas as pets at home.





Tom had among his screensavers a couple of photographs taken when he worked at the zoo in London. They were so delightful that I asked him to send me copies.

I treasure these photos.

Jean Matthews

Dear Rhonda,

Thank you for the interesting sharing of articles in both the Summer and Autumn issues of *De Numine* and the new approach used to create them. The way you presented my article on experiences in the Summer issue was pleasing and encouraging.

Sadly I felt disappointed with Mary Cook's experience 'A very special dog,' mainly because of the photo which was nothing at all like Cleo, whom Mary had described. Cleo was a Lurcher [see picture below – Ed].

Kind regards,

Trudy Porter



*Now Cleo can have the last word – Ed:*

**Cleo's Greyhound-Collective Prayer**

Our Master in Heaven, how/éd be your name.  
Your kennels are home;  
You, we will obey  
In this life and the one to come.  
Give us today our daily gallop  
And forgive us our rabbits, squirrels, cats (and the pigeon in Newport town centre!)  
As we forgive those who punish us for doing what we were bred to do.

*Lead us not into temptation – especially chasing sheep!*

*But guard us from evil men, who strike us and abandon us.*

*For yours are the kennels,  
our power and our glory  
Win or lose  
Now and always.*

*AMEN!*

Mary Cook



## POETRY

### All in the same canoe

Crafted  
From living trees  
In ancient forests  
Tended  
By countless generations  
Rooted  
In earth,  
Connecting,  
Caring,  
Communing  
Together.

Offering  
To share  
With open hearts,  
Paddling  
In the same canoe  
Together.

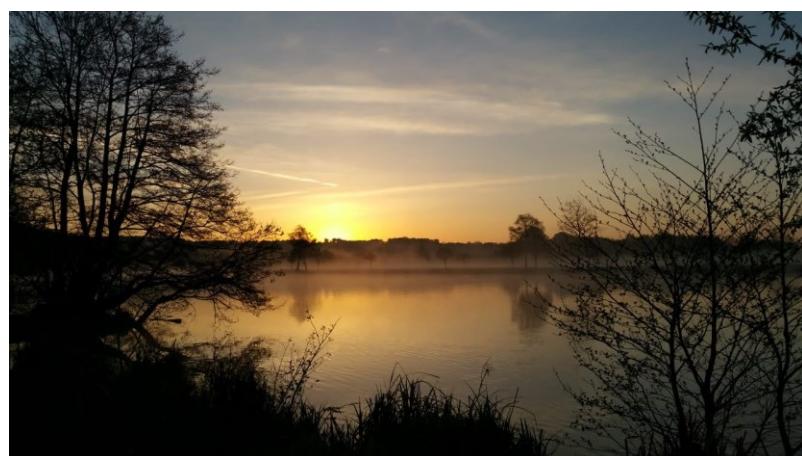
Then -  
Abruptly  
Felled,  
Cleared,  
Extracted,  
Rooted out  
By grabbers  
Converting  
Verbs to nouns,  
Trees to lumber,  
Minds to closed beliefs.

So certain in intent  
The rugged man  
Paddles  
His own canoe  
Alone.  
Striving so hard  
To win the race,  
Tenacious to the last  
He finally falters,  
Nature exhausted.

A daunting insight  
Slowly dawns –  
We're all In the same  
Canoe  
Together.

**David Lorimer,**  
Victoria,  
British Columbia  
October 2019

First published in Paradigm Explorer 2021



I rewrote the following after reading *Awakening to a New Reality*, reviewed in the last edition of *De Numine*.

Blessed be the universe  
in it we are free  
Free to choose a way to live  
Live sustainably  
Learning from all that has passed  
Traumas centuries had cast  
Gone from us at last

We are people who prepare  
Highways for the Heart  
Robust hope replace despair  
And our world repair  
People paying pure respect  
Breadth beyond the final breath  
Pacing paths of peace.

I use this in my daily office in place of the official version which has become too narrow.

Blessed be.

**Philip Tyers**



## REPORTS

### Report from the Hon Treasurer

#### Accounts for the Alister Hardy Trust for the year ended 31st July 2021

As is usual for the Spring edition of De Numine, I write a brief summary of the financial situation of the Trust for the financial year which ended last July – this is particularly for those who were unable to attend our Zoom AGM. This has been another active year, largely owing to the generous bequests received over the past few years. We are, naturally, very grateful for legacies as they do, in fact, provide our main source of income: it is of course sad that we were unable to thank these generous donors when they were alive. Whilst we are showing a small deficit, this is in line with my 5-year forecast, a forecast which is kept under review and revised in time for the May Trustees' meeting. Our investments, under the guidance of our stockbroker, have provided us with our main income, together with the income from our members. In addition, this year we received the final payment from a legacy of long ago of £10,000 and the capital appreciation of our portfolio has, exceptionally this year, risen just over £46,000, but as the investment advertisements always make clear the value of investments can always go down. In order to preserve our capital as far as possible we are not making any significant new commitments. It should be noted that our deficit is well below that of the previous year.

I would draw your attention the recently published latest edition of Exploration into Spirit. This book has been written by John

Franklin who has been involved in many ways with the Society and Trust over a period of some 35 years. Even if you have an earlier edition, this much enlarged book which includes the author's concluding reflection is well worth purchasing at just £13 including postage. If you would like a copy please send your cheque for £13.00 to me at Field Cottage, Eardisley, Herefordshire HR3 6NB.

I set out below a short summary of the accounts – a full set of accounts is available on request for those who wish to receive them. Just let me have your name and address and I'll send you a copy. I would particularly highlight the most significant payment of £11,400 in respect of supporting the RERC, Lampeter, which of course funds the member of staff who looks after the archive and the AHT books.

You will have read in the Autumn 2021 edition of De Numine of the sad death of Tom Pitchford in February 2021. This accounts for this figure being lower than the previous year

The accounts were unanimously approved by the Trustees at the Virtual AGM (Zoom) held on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2021.

**Dr David Greenwood, Honorary Treasurer,  
January 2022**

d.greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk

## Accounts Summary:

<u>Income</u> (including investment income £8,969 and subscriptions £4,023)	£25,272
<u>Expenditure</u> (including donation to UWTSD of £11,400, various honoraria, and additional expenses associated with activity on the part of volunteers and trustees)	£27,297
<u>Net deficit</u>	£2,025
<u>Fixed Assets</u> - Tangible assets (mainly books and works of art)	£50,526
<u>Current Assets</u> - Bank accounts and invested funds	£368,793
<u>Total Assets less Current Liabilities</u>	£418,599

## Report from the Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust

Presented to the AGM by The Revd Canon Professor Leslie J Francis

### Setting the context

A year of twelve calendar months is a very short period of time within the life of an established institution like ours. Sometimes it is salutary and illuminating to stand back in order to identify the patterning of occurrences over a longer period. I am suggesting a three-year period for my assessment – the three calendar years of 2019, 2020, and 2021.

2019 makes a good starting place because that year we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Alister's founding of the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU) in Manchester College, Oxford. Central to that celebration in 2019 were three core events:

- The conference in Lampeter
- The Members' Day in Oxford
- The completion of John Franklin's history covering the whole fifty years

In the three-year period 2019 to 2021 the Alister Hardy enterprise has flourished in a variety of ways and its visibility has grown on the international stage.

Under Professor Bettina Schmidt's leadership, in addition to the ongoing online journal, the Centre in Lampeter has produced an excellent online conference, with Professor Jane Shaw as keynote speaker and showcasing other work from the Centre. Bettina has also launched the

following book: Bettina E Schmidt and Jeff Leonardi (2020) *Spirituality and wellbeing: Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religious experience and health* (Sheffield, Equinox).

Working from Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, Professor Jeff Astley drew to a successful conclusion the scoping study collaborating with Professor Wesley Wildman from Boston University, responding to the question: If Sir Alister were beginning his venture now... how would he have designed his archive? (It is unfortunate that the pandemic has disrupted the intended progression of this project.) Jeff has also produced a very useful overview of the field in his book: Jeff Astley (2020) *SCM study guide to religious and spiritual experience* (London, SCM).

Under the leadership of Marianne Rankin and Andy Burns, and with the technical expertise of Mike Rush, the membership has been introduced to high quality and well-attended online events. For example, the most recent Members' Day benefited from presentations by Steve Taylor, Geoffrey Ahern, Mara Steenhuisen, Mike Rush and Marianne Rankin.

Building on the secure foundations put in place by Patricia Murphy and Jean Matthews, under the leadership of Rhonda Riachi now supported by Billie Krstovic, De Numine has thrived and attracted fascinating material, including in the

most recent issue a piece on ‘Dynion Hysbys: Welsh wizards, cunning folk and wise men past and present’.

2019 marks an important starting point for two other reasons. First, on the completion of his book, John Franklin invited the Trustees to revisit the intention of our founder, Sir Alister. John’s invitation resulted in two high quality studies produced by Jeff Astley under the title of Shaping our vision of the future, that have been considered by the Trustees: ‘Alister Hardy’s vision’ and ‘Research on the Alister Hardy Archive’.

Second, the meeting of the Trustees in June 2018 had established the Working Group for a Strategy and Business Plan. The initial groundwork of the Strategy Group was reported to the Trustees in November 2019 with plans to move forward in 2020. Three major events impacted the work of the Strategy Group during 2020. The first major event was totally unexpected and of global significance. The impact of the pandemic cannot be ignored. The second major event was also totally

unexpected and had significant impact on the Centre in Lampeter. We continue to mourn the sad loss of Thomas Pitchford (1969-2021) as so well commemorated in the latest issue of De Numine.

The third major event was the response of the Trustees at the meeting in May 2021 to the warning from our Treasurer, Dr David Greenwood, that we needed to reflect seriously on the longer-term financial sustainability of our activities.

### **Looking to the future**

As chair of the Trust, I am most grateful to Prof John Harper for the way in which he has resourced the Strategy Group and invested considerable energy and time both in visiting Lampeter and in collaborating with the Director of the Centre there and the senior library staff of the University of Wales Trinity St David to assess the current needs and to shape a strategy to address those needs.

**The Revd Canon Prof Leslie J Francis**

## **Report from Director of Communications and Membership**

### **Membership**

AHT membership stands at about 240 and I continue to monitor subscriptions and enquiries for joining. Bank standing orders remain the simplest way to maintain membership payments please. In addition, I am able to arrange for mailing of our publications.

### **Communication**

As DoC I am often asked about details of our events and I send out email notices of activities arranged by the AHT, AHRERC and by linked organisations, as well as events held by those in a similar field of interest to our own. Almost all are still held online at present.

### **Members’ Day**

In 2021 this was a Zoom event. The annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on *Extraordinary Awakenings - Spiritual*

*Transformation in the Midst of Suffering* was given by AHT member Dr Steve Taylor. He is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University and a prolific author on psychology and spirituality.

Steve shared some examples from his new book *Extraordinary Awakenings: When Trauma leads to Transformation*, explaining how suffering can bring about spiritual awakening. This book had already been featured on *Thought for the Day* on Radio 4, and in a half hour documentary on the BBC World Service. After delivering his lecture, Steve read a few of his poems and led us in a short meditation, giving us a richly enjoyable morning.

The afternoon featured reports of ongoing research projects linked to the AHT. Speakers were Geoffrey Ahern on completing work begun in the late 1980s *A Structural Analysis of Transcendent Awareness: UK- & India- Based Accounts*; Mara Steenhuizen on *What About the*

*Light Beings? RERC, Orbs and Spiritual Unfoldment*; Mike Rush on *A Service Evaluation of the UK Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN)*; and I spoke on *Researching the Fruits of Religious and Spiritual Experience in the RERC Archive*. All presentations were recorded and are available on the AHT website. Professor Bettina Schmidt is to publish the papers in the online *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*.

In other events last year, I gave an online talk to the VI Form at Wellington College and led a face to face Quiet Day at Holland House, where we shared, reflected on and learned together from Covid and the lockdowns.

## Events

We will host an online meeting on April 30<sup>th</sup> with guest speaker David Lorimer, familiar to many of you from previous talks and as

## Oxford & Cotswold Group Report

### An introduction to Dowsing, November 2021

It was a pleasure to be back at Frank Cook Court in Kidlington on Saturday 6th November 2021 for a meeting of the Oxford & Cotswold branch of the AHS and see real people, rather than images! Eilish completed the event by giving us a fascinating talk on dowsing.

She distinguished between the use of a pointed Y shaped wooden stick (usually hazel I believe) or loosely held L- shaped metal rods (bent metal coat hangers will do) used to detect water and buried pipes – this is called divining – and the use of a pendulum, which is called dowsing.

The first mention of divining is by Herodotus in the 4th century BCE. Much later in the 16th century CE divining was used in Germany to locate metal ores. Queen Elizabeth 1st was impressed and arranged for German diviners to work in England.

In the 20th century three French priests used dowsing methods, in one case to detect unexploded shells and tell whether they were

Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network and Editor of their journal *Paradigm Explorer*. His latest book, *A Quest for Love and Wisdom*, from which his talk on Dr Albert Schweitzer is taken, was reviewed in *De Numine* No. 70, Spring 2021.

As always, please RSVP to Andy Burns or me and – most importantly – copy in Mike Rush, who will send the zoom link.

Every good wish to all members for a good year in 2022.

**Marianne Rankin**

German or Allied. One of the priests wrote a standard work on dowsing called ‘Radiesthesia.’

Some time ago Eilish went to a dowsing course run by John Temple and was most impressed when he immediately diagnosed her with a medical condition of which she was unaware. The pendulum can also be used to locate lost objects, in conjunction with a map of the relevant area if necessary.

Eilish showed us two of her pendulums. One was a glass bead, ~1cm in diameter suspended on a fine metal chain 20-30cm in length. The other one was a conical piece of metal, several centimetres long, similarly suspended. In both cases the end of the chain, held between finger and thumb, terminated with a small bead, which helped to reduce the effects of involuntary movements of the fingers. Any material can be used for the pendulum though it should be circular in shape (i.e., not a rectangle). The suspension can be cotton, wool, twine or a metal chain.

The pendulum ‘answers’ questions with a yes or no. To calibrate your pendulum, you ask it a question, to which the answer is yes (in my case, is my name Neil?). The resulting motion, say clockwise, indicates yes. Conversely anti-clockwise indicates no. (This order may be reversed.)

It is important when using the pendulum to

## **South-east Wales Group Report**

### **Meeting 9th December 2021**

Three of us were present to discuss “Books we have read during this time of lockdown.” Members were understandably undecided whether to attend due to Covid restrictions. Two others participated by lending or borrowing books at different times. We appreciated the books we shared, including James Rebanks’ “The Shepherd’s Life”, and his following, “English Pastoral”, which shows a deep concern for the future of farming; and Edmund de Waal’s “The White Road – a pilgrimage of sorts” which was his search for the origin and history of porcelain, which always felt to be akin to his essence.

Also shared was Stephen R Bown’s “White Eskimo, Knud Rasmussen’s Fearless Journey

### **Meeting 16th March 2022**

Our group now meets on Wednesdays, and today six of us attended. My daughter, now a group member, had composed a slick, musical, entertaining and inspiring video for us, and quite independently of my titling our year’s programmes, had called it “Rationalising the ‘Irrational?’” And so we began our session with a viewing.

Today’s subject was specifically: “How has your experience of the Religious or Spiritual affected your life?” The immediate reaction to our title was that we felt that we were talking about the ‘spiritual’ not the ‘religious’. Nevertheless, we shared our associations with the church.

I was just nine when I deeply felt the need to know if God really existed. I had a Bible in pictures, and looked to Jesus’ words on the gifts

quieten your ego – perhaps you should meditate first – and ask specific questions. You will find that there are some questions that you cannot answer with a pendulum. Accept this.

Thank you, Eilish, for sharing your ideas and experience with us.

**Neil Hancox**

into the Heart of the Arctic.” Rasmussen’s exploring was less that of discovering new places, but rather meeting new and unusual people, and sharing in their mythologies. Though not strictly of a spiritual nature, there was deep thought and philosophy in the books.

Sadly, Ken Davies (see De Numine 66 & 69) lost his Norwegian wife, Signe, following a long illness. Her name was alien to me till Ken joined our group. Around the time of her death I was reading “White Eskimo”. Then on its penultimate page appeared the name ‘Signe’. I was stunned. The nurse who tended to Rasmussen during his last days – the only nurse on the east coast of Greenland - was also a Signe. The name occurred just that once.

of the Spirit. “Ask and ye shall receive”, so I did. At ten years old I resolved to read the real Bible because I needed to know more about what I had subsequently seen. I also began to attend church – neither of my parents did. And so began my searching. It affected the whole of my life. Another member said his experience too was in his early childhood, and felt it had always been a major part of his life. Another’s experience had come too late to be able to say it affected much of his life, but quite evidently it had been transformative. Another felt she had always had a sensitivity to others’ health problems, which she is able to act upon.

We had had one of our best meetings, after which we felt much livelier and happier, a true “Meeting for Healing.” I look forward to our June meeting.

**Mary Cook**

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Do not tread upon my dreams; poems of reflection* by Jonathan Robinson. 2021, Great Britain: Libertas Publishing.**

The title of this collection comes from his poem ‘Lament for failing churches’, that invites them to ‘sit beside us, not above us... encourage us to seek with zeal a better world...’

In his introduction Robinson cites William Wordsworth, who described poetry as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’. Robinson’s poetry uses words to describe what is beyond them, both outside and within us. He hopes that in poetry we can find the deeper thoughts and feelings which today’s religion often evades. As he explores in his poem ‘words’, they sometimes build bridges, sometimes attack, and sometimes point towards the space where all things connect and become one. Indeed, the whole point of this collection is to express this place.

Some are about seasons; summer, or New Year; some about things: apples, doorways, clouds; some about events; birth, death. While the fact that there are fifty-two might lead one to expect a year’s supply of a poem a week, they do not march in any sequence, but dance into unexpected yards. Each is accompanied by a picture; ‘inner darkness’ is illustrated by the angel of Gethsemane in the chapel of Coventry Cathedral where one is invited to drink the cup Christ drank.

‘As a glass is drained of the good wine it once held,  
All that gave life is turned into a grey dust.’

He challenges the official religious leaders by asking

‘Where is the living silence...  
The still small voice of calm that moves the world  
To place its arms around us?’

Here is a book of words. Words that draw us beyond themselves into an encounter with Reality; to ponder the world we live in both seen and unseen, words to read and reread, to ponder, to flick past and to return to again and again.

Robinson picks up Alister Hardy’s image of the living stream of life in all lives, interconnected and moving onwards ‘whilst time on earth allows it’.

In ‘A different perspective’ he asks ‘Is it really true that we are separate creatures...?’ and by further questions discovers ‘there are no earthly boundaries... We each are players interlinked...’ ‘Looking out to sea’ discovers that God is not beyond, but ‘within ourselves; That single sacred power that intersects our time, and drives the Universe.’

I found in this selection no platitudes, but a deep and satisfying vision of life as an embracing unity.

**Philip Tyers**

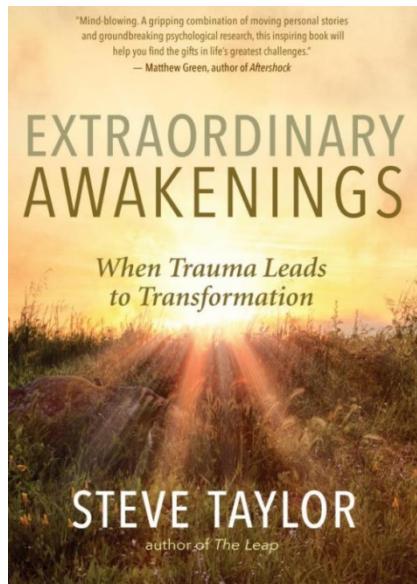
**Steve Taylor, *Extraordinary Awakenings: From Trauma to Transformation*. Novato, New World Library, 2021. 254pp. ISBN 978-1-60868-767-1 (paperback).**

Dr Steve Taylor is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Leeds Beckett University, and former Chair of the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Society. He has written a number of books on his ideas and research including: Waking from Sleep, Out of the Darkness, The Leap, and Spiritual Science. He is also a

published poet and has the accolade of appearing in the Watkins Review of the 100 Most Spiritually Influential Living People.

Taylor’s latest book, Extraordinary Awakenings: From Trauma to Transformation, focuses on experiences of what he calls Transformation Through Turmoil (TTT). These are intense and

permanent experiences of spiritual awakening triggered by trauma or distress. The types of turmoil covered include: war and cases of resulting Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), imprisonment, bereavement, facing death through both Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) and “Intense Mortality Encounters” (IMEs), depression and suicide, and addiction. Taylor refers to the people who go through these transformations as “shifters”, as one of their main defining characteristics is a shift in their sense of personal identity and values, “...a shift into a more intense and expansive state of awareness.” Not everyone who experiences trauma will become a shifter, but for some, psychological or emotional turmoil can result in profound personal transformation.



In using the terminology of “spiritual awakening”, Taylor draws attention to the idea that such transformations, can be understood as part of a process of individual and cultural psycho-spiritual evolution. Unfortunately, sometimes the disruptive effects of this process can be mistaken for psychosis. However, Taylor explains that not all examples of spiritual awakening are brought about through turmoil. Many people experience a more gradual awakening process by following a spiritual path over many years. Occasionally people can also experience transient awakening experiences that do not result in permanent transformation. Trauma or turmoil can result in either permanent or temporary awakened states, which Taylor describes as, “...a higher

functioning psychological state – a state of enhanced well-being and freedom from psychological discord, in which people live more authentically and creatively.” Taylor summarises the characteristics of spiritual awakening as expansions of: perceptual awareness, insight into one’s own being, connections with others and the natural world, and of our concepts of ourselves and society in a global sense. In this respect, although Taylor only briefly mentions the similarity, the concepts and individual cases he describes overlap to a large degree with Stanislav and Christina Groff’s concept of “spiritual emergency.”

Although Taylor’s aim is not to provide advice on how to navigate one’s way through experiences of TTT, he does suggest various factors that seem to make the journey easier. If one can accept the experience with an attitude of surrender to it, remaining open to what is happening, and find a framework of understanding that makes sense to each individual experiencer, then the path may be easier to tread. Whilst obviously not advocating that people seek out traumatic experiences as part of their spiritual practice, Taylor suggests that those of us who have not experienced TTT can nevertheless learn from those who have by embracing challenges when they arise in our lives, consciously detaching from our attachments, and by contemplating our own mortality.

Taylor draws on various religious and spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Christianity, and Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way, to offer a model of TTT whereby our old self or identity is dissolved, either by a sudden shock or by a breakdown of attachments, that results in the revelation of a new or Higher Self. This new identity, suggests Taylor, is latent within the individual, “When intense deprivation and suffering... strip us of our desires, our attachments, and our identity, an extraordinary awakening can occur.” Such shocks or breakdowns can occur when we are reminded about our own mortality, by our helpless inability to free ourselves from patterns of habitual behaviour, or when we experience social isolation. Perhaps, the latter is

particularly relevant considering the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. We may wonder what the final psycho-spiritual impact of lockdown will prove to be when Taylor states, “To be cut off from ordinary society and all its distractions, and to be obliged to turn our attention to our own being, can therefore prove to be a powerful experience.”

In summary, Taylor’s book contributes to the ongoing study of religious and spiritual experiences in the tradition of William James and Sir Alister Hardy, as well as to the philosophical and theological debates about the meaning of suffering, and the literature on

spiritual emergency begun by Stanislav and Christina Groff. However, perhaps the most important contribution that Taylor’s book makes is to offer a sense of hope and optimism to all of those who are currently isolated and alone, facing the fact of their own or a loved one’s mortality, or who feel out-of-control and at the mercy of their own inner processes or the apparent chaos of the world around them. For in the dark night of our souls we may find the opportunity to see a guiding light; an opportunity not to break down but to “shift” up.

**Mike Rush**

**Raymond Moody, *God is Bigger than the Bible*. Life After Life Institute, Coppell, TX, USA, 2021**

Dr Moody is the author who coined the term “near-death experience.” His subsequent research includes shared death experiences (when a person dies, and a loved one who is at the bedside briefly accompanies the dying person into the afterlife).

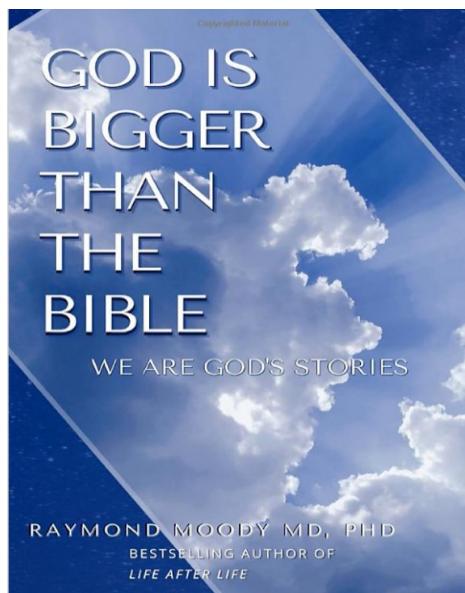
Raymond Moody is a God-loving man but has problems with religious fundamentalists and Bible literalists who drive people away from God. According to Moody, God doesn’t care which religion we choose. God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. God cares about what is in our heart.

Moody goes on to say that God is not interested in punishing us for our sins; instead, “God loves and educates us rather than dispensing justice.” Hell has to do with the vagaries of human personality; in other words, people make their own hell.

For me, one of the highlights of the book is Moody’s sharing of his mystical experience that occurred during a deep depression. He also shares delightful conversations with his young daughter. Once she told him of a pre-birth memory in which she recalled that she didn’t want to come to earth --- she wanted to stay in heaven with God --- but God told her that she needed to come to earth to be his daughter. On another occasion when she was 9 years old,

while walking with her father, she told him that she wanted to “go to hell.” Why? Because there were a lot of self-righteous kids at her school preaching to the other kids about hell. She told him that she would rather be in hell with her friends than in heaven with the scary fundamentalists.

Moody’s chapter on God and Dr Seuss was a bit hard for me to get my mind around. He has made a study of nonsense in speech like 1950’s Doo-Wop songs or the magic chant of Cinderella’s fairy godmother, “Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo!” Nonsense words are used by jazz singers



when they “scat,” by country-western singers when they yodel, by charismatics when they speak in tongues (glossolalia), and by shamans to enter a trance.

Some years ago a proper Presbyterian friend of mine (who happened to be a psychologist) told me that he had joined a group in his congregation that was “speaking in tongues.” I told him, “You know that it is not a real language?” He looked at me and said, “Of course, but the point is to enter a trance state.”

Moody feels that because near-death experiences and mystical experiences are ineffable, people usually present them as “travel narratives,” and by being aware of

nonsense speech, they can more directly relate their experience as a direct conversation with God.

The remainder of the book is a much easier and a delightful read. At the end of the book, Moody presents his 13 Thoughts About God: God loves us, God wants to be in relationship with us, God is greater than existence itself, God transcends the afterlife. He states that he believes the afterlife is a state in which we will be much closer to God.

**Dr Ken R Vincent**



## NOTICES

### ***Exploration into Spirit... The History of the first 50 years of the Religious Experience Research Unit***

**by John Franklin**

The Alister Hardy Trust would like to draw your attention to John Franklin's new edition of the History of the RERC and AHT. This is the 3rd edition of the history, bringing the story up to the end of 2019 and concluding with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the RERU in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy.

John, an AHT Trustee, served as Secretary of the former Alister Hardy Society and also led the AHS London Group for over 30 years. His history is an invaluable account, recording the key moments and people involved in the

evolution of the RERC in the fifty years since the earliest days.

The book can be ordered at £12 (including P&P) from:

Dr David Greenwood  
Field Cottage  
Lower Welson  
Eardisley  
Herefordshire  
HR3 6NB

D.Greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk

## EVENTS

### **9 July 2022**

10am to 4.30pm

### **The 2022 Conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre**

Keynote - Prof Rowan Williams, Cambridge on "The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich"

Cliff Tucker Theatre, Lampeter, also streamed online.

See programme below

#### **Book online at Eventbrite:**

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mystical-experiences-past-and-present-tickets-294615782737>

### **23 – 25 September 2022**

#### **Sacred Earth, Sacred Mind**

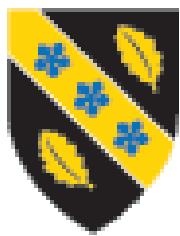
#### **A joint conference of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies and the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network**

The Nightingale Centre, Buxton, Derbyshire

Keynote speaker: Dr Serena Roney-Dougal

**Contact Vivien Elliott for bookings**

**Email:** vh.elliott1@gmail.com



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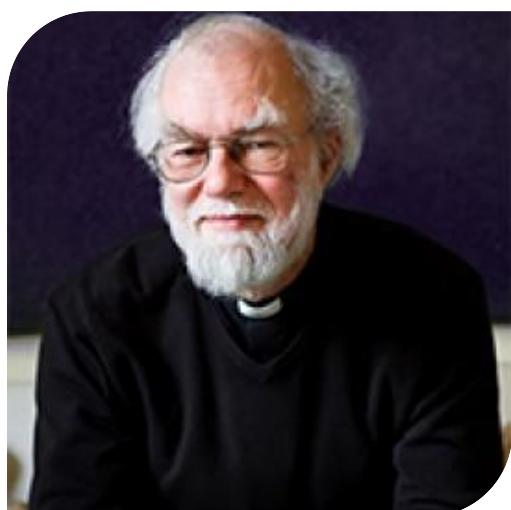
# Mystical Experiences: Past and Present

**The 2022 Conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre**  
Supported by the Alister Hardy Trust and The Learned Society of Wales

**9 July 2022, in the Cliff Tucker Theatre, Lampeter**  
**(also streamed online)**

**Keynote: Prof Rowan Williams, Cambridge**

*The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich*



# **Mystical Experiences: Past and Present**

## **9 July 2022**

### **Programme**

10 a.m.

#### **Welcome**

Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre

Prof Medwin Hughes, Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Prof John Harper, Vice Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust

10.20 a.m.

#### **The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture**

Prof Rowan Williams, University of Cambridge

*The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich*

11.40 a.m.

Prof Lisa Isherwood, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

*Margery Kempe: God's wild housewife!*

#### **12.30 – 2.00 p.m. LUNCH BREAK**

2.00 – 4.30 p.m.

Prof Ron Geaves, Cardiff University

*The “Inmost Heart” of Islam*

Prof Marta Helena de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia - UCB

*Brazilian psychotherapists' narratives about mystical experiences in clinical contexts*

Prof Bettina Schmidt, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

*Rudolf Otto and a reflection of mystical experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic*

#### **Book now at Eventbrite:**

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mystical-experiences-past-and-present-tickets-294615782737>