

QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2020

Dear QUG supporter

London Quakers – Saturday February 8th 2020

Alan York, QUG committee member and author of QUG Pamphlet 39, will be speaking to London Quakers on the topic *Language, Truth and Religion*. Alan will talk about ordinary language, scientific language, religious language and the possibility/impossibility of a language of the spirit.

The meeting will be in Friends House, Euston Road, on the afternoon of Saturday February 8th 2020 from 2.00 to 4.30 p.m. It is open to all and there is no charge, though donations will be welcome. The meeting is jointly organised by London Quakers and QUG, and QUG literature will be on sale.

We look forward to seeing you there.

QUG 2020 Annual Conference

LIFE, TIME AND ETERNITY

Friday May 8th (6 p.m.) – Sunday May 10th (2 p.m.) 2020

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham, B29 6LJ

We are approaching the time when we have to return any unused rooms to Woodbrooke. This allows them to book in other people or groups if there are rooms available. So if you are thinking of coming and have not booked yet please send in your application form **in the next few weeks** to guarantee yourself a place.

In this conference we will consider questions like

- What do we mean by life?
- What is the nature of time?
- Can we get 'outside' time?
- How do different religions look at life and death?
- What comes after death, if anything?

We have invited a wide range of outside speakers, all approaching from a different religion or viewpoint. Here are our five speakers.

Philip Young – from a Christian perspective

Rev. Philip Young is a retired priest in the Church of England and helps out at his local church. He is a member of the Franciscan Third Order. He is also a Quaker and a pacifist. He has enjoyed living in East Anglia since 1980. He loves gardening, sailing and swimming in the North Sea, every day if he can. He writes poetry. He has run the London Marathon five times for

Water Aid and once to raise money for the rebuilding of St. Thomas' Church Hall in Norwich where he was Vicar from 2007 to 2012. Before moving to Felixstowe in Suffolk five years ago he was the Environmental Officer for the Diocese of Norwich. He is developing a website which can be found at www.revolutionoflovenow.com.

Philip believes that Love is God and God is Love and that Love transforms the individual and the world.

Sharada Sugirtharajah – from a Hindu perspective

Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham. Sharada's research focuses on representations of Hinduism in colonial and postcolonial writings. She also has research interests in Modern Hindu Thought, Religious Pluralism, Interreligious Relations, Hinduism in Diaspora, and Women's issues.

Sharada is engaged in freelance work and has led sessions for students, counsellors, social workers, nurses, clergy and multi-faith groups. She has acted as a consultant to various Religious Education projects and is on the International Editorial Board of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. Sharada edited and wrote two essays in the book *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick* (2012) and also wrote *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (2003). We are delighted to welcome back Sharada, who was a speaker at the QUG's 2012 and 2017 conferences.

Murray Corke – from a Zen Buddhist perspective

Dr. Murray Corke is a veterinary surgeon, conservationist and advocate for animal welfare. He is a clinical teacher at the Department of Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge. He is also a Zen Buddhist. He learned to meditate with the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in 1984, before encountering the teaching and practice of Thich Nhat Hanh on a retreat in south Devon in 1992. He then spent time on a number of retreats at Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh's monastery in south-west France. The Cambridge Sangha (Buddhist community), which started in 1993, has been his major support and source of learning over the years. He has been active in the Community of Interbeing since it was formed to promote the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh and the practice of mindfulness in Britain, leading courses and retreats throughout the country.

Arif Hussain – from a Muslim perspective

Shaykh Arif Hussain was born in Uganda, but moved to the UK at the age of 8. The Shaykh studied at Madrassah Syed Al-Khoei, London, and graduated with Honours in 1988. He then went to Iran for further Arabic and Islamic Studies. Later Shaykh Arif returned to the UK to establish the Al-Mahdi Institute in Birmingham, an important Shi'i Islamic Seminary. He is Co-director of CIMS (Centre for Intra Muslim Studies) and an active contributor to Interfaith dialogue. He has written many academic articles on various Islamic topics, and books including *289 Sayings of Imam Ali* (2017), *Islam and God-Centricity: A Theological Basis for Human Liberation* (2017) and *Islam and God-Centricity: Reassessing Fundamental Theological Assumptions* (2019).

Julian Barbour – from a scientific perspective

Dr. Julian Barbour is a British physicist with research interests in quantum gravity and the history of science. He has written several books and papers, most notably his 1999 book *The End of Time*, which puts forward the view that time, as we perceive it, does not exist as anything other than an illusion, and that a number of problems in physical theory arise from assuming that it does exist. He argues that we have no evidence of the past other than our memory of it, and no evidence of the future other than our belief in it.

The cost of the whole residential weekend at Woodbrooke will be £240 (with the offer to give a little more for speakers' expenses if you wish). We are still charging less than nearly all other equivalent courses at Woodbrooke.

The programme will include three breakout group sessions, a special Saturday evening event and opportunities to question the speakers. There will be the usual meetings for worship and epilogues; and plenty of time to socialise and enjoy the wonderful Woodbrooke buildings and garden.

Please note that the conference is open to all: you do not have to be a member of QUG or a Quaker.

An application form is near the end of this newsletter, and it also available on our website and (for QUG members) in *Universalist*.

Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering 2020

We are already gearing up for the BYM Gathering which is from 1st to 7th August 2020 at Bath University.

QUG will have a table at the Groups Fair on the evening of Sunday 2nd August and if anyone is intending to be at BYM and would like to help at the QUG table please email Tony Philpott at tonyp@qug.org.uk.

The speaker for our special interest meeting will be Peter Varney on the topic *Time, eternity and the planet*. We will be given the date of the special interest meeting later. See also the next item.

Unity with Creation – A talk at Beccles Meeting House, Suffolk, by Peter Varney – Friday March 20 at 12.30 p.m.

The pattern of the session will be meeting for worship at 12.30 p.m. for 30 minutes, followed by tea, coffee and biscuits and talk/discussion, finishing at 2.00 p.m.

As Quakers in Britain prepare for their summer gathering at Bath University, with 'Allyship in a climate emergency' as their focus, an anthropologist considers how indigenous people care for their communities and the environment.

Peter Varney first met the Iban of Sarawak in 1958; his research shows their holistic approach to the ecosystem and to all who live in their longhouses. The care and

respect for creation given by the Kogi of Colombia and Australian aborigines provide further examples.

We will reflect on this as we discuss our own commitment to others and all creation.

Peter Varney is a member of Norwich QM and of the Quaker Universalist Group.

Membership of QUG

Renewals for QUG membership were due on 1st January 2020, so to renew your subscription for this year (or to join QUG for the first time) please complete the membership form at the end of this newsletter.

As a member you receive two free issues of our journal *Universalist* each year plus a free copy of the QUG pamphlet which contains the written papers/articles from the conference. You will also be supporting the work of QUG.

Whilst most members choose to receive these publications as hard copies, the option is also available to receive them in e-form, at a reduced membership rate. Having the paper copies is £18 per year; having the e-copies is £12 per year.

New members will receive two free pamphlets of their choice.

We encourage members to take out a standing order because this is very helpful in reducing the work for your volunteer committee. You can also pay by cheque (made out to QUG) or by direct transfer.

Full details of membership (including our bank details and a standing order form) are at the end of this newsletter (or on our website at <http://qug.org.uk/membership/>)