

QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2019

Dear QUG supporter

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

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. We have already booked four and are actively seeking one more. Already booked are:

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.

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.

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).

Our fifth outside speaker will approach the topic **from a Christian perspective**.

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. A draft programme is already on our website <https://qug.org.uk/>

As in recent years, we hope many of you will attend our conference. In fact, several people (members of QUG) have already applied using the forms in our journal *Universalist*, which came out a few weeks ago. Indications are that this conference will be very popular, so do apply early if you can. **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 at the end of this newsletter, and it also available on our website and (for QUG members) in *Universalist*.

London Younger Quaker Worship Group – Sunday December 1st 2019

Tony Philpott will be speaking at the Sunday evening meeting of the London Younger Quaker Worship Group on December 1st. The topic is *Unity in Pluralism*.

The meeting starts at 5.30 p.m. with a meeting for worship, followed by the talk and questions; it finishes with a shared meal. The meeting is for those aged between 18 and 35ish. They meet in Westminster Meeting House, 52 St Martin's Lane, WC2, on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays of each month.

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. Do book the date now if you are within reach of London.

Britain Yearly Meeting 2020

We are already gearing up for BYM which is from 1st to 7th August 2020 at Bath University. The speaker for our special interest meeting will be Peter Varney on the topic *Time, eternity and the planet*.

Our journal *Universalist*

We are looking for articles for the next edition of *Universalist*. This comes out in February 2020 and copy must be received by the editor, Hazel Nelson, by December 31st 2019. Please email to hazeln@qug.org.uk. Any articles of a universalist nature will be welcome, though the editor reserves the right to edit articles or decide that they are not suitable for the journal.

We also welcome reviews of books with a universalist theme, but these should be sent to our book reviews editor, Dorothy Buglass, at dorothyb@qug.org.uk.

Review of *Jesus today: a Quaker perspective*

Dorothy Buglass, our Reviews Editor, is looking for someone to review Michael Wright's recent book *Jesus Today: A Quaker Perspective* (Sixth Element Publishing, 2019, ISBN 978-1-912218-57-8). If you are interested please contact Dorothy directly at dorothyb@qug.org.uk. Dorothy would be able to send you a copy of the book and we would publish the review in *Universalist*

Muslim Women Seeking Power, Muslim Youth Seeking Justice

In 2015 our former QUG committee member, Christopher Bagley, wrote our popular pamphlet No. 34, *Islam Today: A Muslim Quaker's View* (which is available on the QUG website as a download and also as a hard copy).

Christopher has recently shared the writing of a book entitled *Muslim Women Seeking Power, Muslim Youth Seeking Justice*. In its final chapter he elaborates the pacifist themes of his QUG pamphlet and also seeks a rapprochement between Christianity, Islam and Judaism from a Muslim-Quaker perspective.

For further details please see <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1105634>. If you would like to contact Christopher about the book please do so through Tony Philpott (see end of newsletter). Christopher would be happy to share any of the chapters with interested readers.

David Brazier

I was delighted to hear recently from David Brazier. You may remember him as a speaker at our 2011 conference under the title *Love and its Disappointment - the experience of the spiritual path* (see *Universalist June 2011*). We have also published a book of his poems *Her Mother's Eyes* (to order visit <https://qug.org.uk/publications/books/her-mothers-eyes/>).

David lives now in France and is doing an increasing amount of teaching in the Netherlands. He had a book on Zen Master Dogen come out in the spring and this has connected him with a number of Zen groups in the Netherlands. See <http://eleusis.ning.com/video/david-brazier-about-dogen-s-genjo-koan>

Eleanor Nesbitt

Another speaker from the 2011 conference was Eleanor Nesbitt and curiously she has also contacted me in the last few weeks. She spoke under the title *Transformation Through Encounter?* and again the text is available in the June 2011 *Universalist*.

Eleanor reminds us that this November marks the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Twenty years ago, Gopinder Kaur and Eleanor published an award-winning book, with young people particularly in mind: but readers of all ages have reacted very positively. The book is entitled *Guru Nanak* and is Published by Bayeux Arts Incorporated, Calgary, Canada.

The book is beautifully illustrated and suggests the continuing relevance of Guru Nanak's insights. This year the e-book has been launched, and the original soft-cover edition is available too.

For more information please visit <https://bayeux.com/guru-nanak-3/>