

QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2021

Dear QUG supporter

QUG Annual Conference - LIFE, TIME AND ETERNITY **May 7th, 8th, 12th, 14th, 15th 2021**

After much deliberation we have now decided that our annual conference 'Life, Time and Eternity' will be online only. It is too risky to try to plan a blended conference this year.

Rather than cramming the conference into one weekend we are spreading it over two weekends and the Wednesday in between. We are avoiding Sundays so that people can attend their usual Sunday meetings if they wish to.

In this conference we hope to 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?

The dates and speakers are:

- Friday 7th May – 1900 – Session 1 – **Peter Varney** – from an anthropological perspective
- Saturday 8th May – 1030 – Session 2 – **Philip Young** – from a Christian perspective
- Saturday 8th May – 1430 – Session 3 – **Arif Hussain** – from a Muslim perspective
- Wednesday 12th May – 1900 – Session 4 – **Murray Corke** – from a Zen Buddhist perspective
- Friday 14th May – 1900 – Session 5 – **Julian Barbour** – from a scientific perspective
- Saturday 15th May – 1030 – Session 6 – **Sharada Sugirtharajah** – from a Hindu perspective
- Saturday 15th May – 1430 – Session 7 – Bringing it all together and looking forward

Full details of the speakers are at the end of this newsletter.

Each of Sessions 1-6 will be about 1¾ hours long and will involve a talk, small group discussion in breakout rooms, and a plenary. Participants of course can choose which sessions to attend.

Session 7 will not have a speaker but will try to summarise the whole conference and look forward to the future.

Each talk will be recorded and put on the website; also in June we hope to publish a pamphlet containing all the talks.

We will open registration for the conference on March 1st 2021. Please do not register before then. We will write to you again just before March 1st to inform you how to register and how you will receive joining instructions.

Because we are using Zoom we will not be charging participants. We have some technical expertise on our committee, and we have our own Zoom account, but we would welcome some more help over the seven sessions of the conference. **If you are interested in helping please let Tony Philpott know by responding to this email.**

We hope many of you will join us to discuss this challenging and exciting topic.

Your QUG Committee

The QUG Committee has now been meeting online over the past nine months to make sure that the message of QUG continues to be put forward in these strange and difficult times. We have produced newsletters and journals, updated our website and arranged a BYM fringe meeting. We have also now finalised this year's conference.

Two of our committee members, Phil and Fran Deegan, are resigning this year. They have done a great deal for us over the last 8 years and we are very grateful for all their hard work and enthusiasm.

Phil is currently the distributor of *Universalist* and we are looking for someone to carry out this job and join the committee. Phil will be able to give anyone taking on this role all the information needed to carry it out.

We are also looking for other committee members to take QUG forward into the future.

Like most organisations we are meeting online now and we envisage this continuing to happen a great deal, even when face-to-face meetings are possible again.

So if you think you could help us, please contact Tony Philpott, the clerk of QUG, by responding to this email.

QUG event at the BYM Fringe - 'Is the future of Quakerism universalist?'

In the past we have usually had a special interest meeting arranged during BYM, but this year there were no such official meetings. However, an unofficial 'Fringe' website was set up by a Quaker from Cambridge and we advertised a meeting on that and through this newsletter.

Over thirty people from all over the UK joined us on the evening of November 19th 2020 through Zoom to discuss the question 'Is the future of Quakerism universalist?'

There were three short talks by members of the QUG Committee, then we broke into four breakout rooms for about half an hour. After this there was a reporting back from each group, followed by a general discussion.

The evening started by describing the foundation of QUG by John Linton and other Friends in 1978. It ended up looking into the future: how 'universalist' will the Society of Friends be in, say, 2040?

It was argued that by abandoning creeds and the authority of priests in the 17th Century Quakerism has to some extent always been universalist: as individual Quakers develop their own spiritual awareness then all the views in the world are open to them. What has happened over the centuries has been a widening of experience, from the predominantly Christian culture of 17th Century Britain to the multifaith global culture of our life today. This widening of views will only grow over the coming years and Quakers will have to decide how to respond to this. This will not only be in beliefs, but also in practice. Who do we accept as members? What books will be available for reference in the meeting for worship? What religions or none will be reflected in the revised Quaker Faith and Practice?

Many of you will have views on these matters. Why not write an article or letter for the October edition of *Universalist* (see next item)?

The three introductory talks to the evening will be published in the next edition of *Universalist* (February 2021).

We hope to hold a similar special interest or fringe meeting some time during or near to July 31st to August 6th this year (the dates of BYM Gathering online).

Universalist

The October 2020 edition of *Universalist* was again well-received and it covered a wide range of topics. Here is a list of its contents:

- From the Editor - Shona Lowe
- Sourcing Hope in the Place Beyond Self-Concern - Justine Huxley
- A Poem about the Coronavirus - Br. Richard Hendrick
- Six Impossible Things - John Elford
- The Problem of Evil - Noël Staples

- When Doubts Ignored - Miriam Brown
- Finding Inner Stillness: Spirituality without Supernaturalism - John Senior
- Commonalities of Religious Experience - Peter Varney
- Language, Truth and Religion - Alan York

If you don't get *Universalist* on a regular basis then do join us as a member – see below.

Thank you so much for responding to our request for items for *Universalist*. Please keep writing: we welcome any articles related to universalism. Please send any articles to Tony Philpott (by replying to this email), or directly to the Editor of *Universalist*, Shona Lowe, at shonal@qug.org.uk. **The deadline for receiving articles for the October 2021 edition of *Universalist* is July 31st 2021.** (The June *Universalist* will be replaced by the pamphlet following our online conference on *Life, Time and Eternity*.)

Our website - <https://qug.org.uk/>

Our website is open for comments at any time, so please use it. For example, it would be good to have some QUG perspectives on how you are coping with Coronavirus and what the future might be post-COVID 19 (if that will ever be possible!). See <https://qug.org.uk/posts/>

Membership of QUG

Renewals for QUG membership were due on 1st January 2021, 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.

Our Conference in 2022

We are very hopeful of returning to Woodbrooke in 2022 and we have already booked April 1st – 3rd.

Further details of the speakers at our 2021 Conference

Peter Varney – from an anthropological perspective.

Peter Varney is a retired Anglican priest and a member of Norwich Local Quaker Meeting. He has Geography and Anthropology degrees from Durham University and studied Theology at Birmingham and Ibadan Universities. In Nigeria he encountered Yoruba traditions and indigenous Christianity. He first met the Iban of Borneo during RAF National Service and, after ordination to Anglican ministry, he began research focusing on the merging of Iban traditional beliefs and Christianity. His recent research has focused on Iban eschatological beliefs, which he will include in his conference talk. It can be downloaded from The Free Library: *The modernization of Iban eschatology: Iban burial ritual and afterlife beliefs in contemporary Kuching*, Borneo Research Bulletin. Vol 45.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

Contacting us, questions and unsubscribing

If you have any questions or wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter please send an email to Tony Philpott at tonyp@qug.org.uk.

Membership details follow below:

QUG MEMBERSHIP

APPLICATION / RENEWAL

Renewals for QUG membership were due on 1st January, so to renew your subscription for this year (or to join QUG for the first time) please complete the Membership Form on the next page.

As a member you usually 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.

While 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 (see below). Please note that if you are receiving

a paper copy of *Universalist* you may request to receive it in e-form as well, at no extra cost. Please contact our membership secretary (see inside front cover) for more details.

If you include an email address on the application/renewal form we will put you on our e-list to receive additional e-newsletters and information *unless* you request otherwise.

Annual Subscription rates for 2021

	with e-mail copy	with paper copy
UK member	£12	£18
Extra paper copy of publications	n/a	£12

If you live outside the UK please consult the membership secretary for rates.

New members will receive two free pamphlets of their choice.

We encourage members to take out a **Standing Order** because this is helpful in reducing the work for your volunteer committee. You can also pay directly into our bank account by Giro or electronic transfer. If you do this, please notify the Treasurer of the date and amount so that he can identify your payment. Thank you.

The Membership Form follows:

QUG Membership Form 2021

This is a: First application / Renewal (please circle)

There are three issues of the *Universalist* per year (though the June edition is usually replaced by the conference pamphlet).

I/We would like to receive the *Universalist* as follows:

Paper copies at £18 per year **or** E-mail copies at £12 per year
(*please delete as appropriate*)

I would like extra paper copies of the Universalist
at £12 each per year

I am adding a donation of

Total Annual Cost

I enclose a cheque payable to QUG/I am setting up an annual Standing Order/I have transferred the money to QUG bank account. (*please delete as appropriate*)

QUG bank details are: Lloyds TSB. The Quaker Universalist Group. Sort Code 30-97-35, Account No: 00016421.

Please print

Name(s)

Address:

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.....
.....
.....

Post Code:

Tel No:

.....

E-mail:

*Are you willing to allow your contact details to be made available to other QUG members? Please circle: **Yes** **No***

Please send your subscription to the treasurer:

Geoff Gates, 5, School Street, Church Lawford. Rugby. CV23 9EE. glengeoff@talktalk.net

The Bank Standing Order form follows:

Bank Standing Order Mandate

To: (your bank)-----
-

(Bank's address)-----

-----Post
Code-----

Bank sort code-----/-----/----- (as given in your cheque book)

Please pay TSB Bank plc,
St. Marychurch Branch, 221, St.Marychurch Road, Torquay, Devon. TQ1 4NB,
sort code 30-97-35, for the Quaker Universalist Group, A/C no 00016421, the sum
of:

(-----pounds -----pence).

*on the first day of each month(or)

*the ----- day of -----each year,

beginning-----until further notice.

*(delete as appropriate for monthly or yearly payments; for yearly payments give the day and month; and for either give a start date no sooner than one month from the date of your completing the Mandate).

And debit my/our Account No.-----

Donors name(s) and initials: _____

Address: _____

Post Code

E-mail

Signature

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Please send this completed form to:

Geoff Gates, 5, School Street, Church Lawford, Rugby. CV23 9EE