



Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

3 June, Martin Horlacher,

"Identities: The Other and Us"

We all want and need to be part of a "group" - it's one of the most fundamental aspects of human nature, our need to have an identity. And yet, all too often, it's so incredibly easy to go along with pack mentality - "groupthink" - instead of using critical thought and our own individual reasoning. What is needed, arguably, is more of a balance of both, particularly in today's volatile world.

10 June,

No meeting.

17 June, Rev. Geoff Usher,

"Keeping Our Chalice Alight"

The Flaming chalice—or the chalice and Flame—has become the internationally recognised and adopted symbol of our Unitarian—or Unitarian Universalist—faith. The lighting of our chalice normally constitutes an important part of the opening minutes of our worship services, although it remains free of any single, set ritual or formula.

24 June, Helen Whatmough,

"Trust in Our Everyday Life"

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### Greens Call for a Universal Basic Income

Di Natale called for the introduction of a universal basic income scheme, which he labelled a "bold move towards equality".

"We need a universal basic income. We need a UBI that ensures everyone has access to an adequate level of income, as well as access to universal social services, health, education and housing," he said.

"A UBI is a bold move towards equality. It epitomises a government which looks after its citizens, in contrast to the old parties, who say 'look out for yourselves'. It's about an increased role for government in our rapidly changing world.

**By Luke Michael Probono, 5 April 2018**

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Finland trialled a limited form of UBI whereby 2,000 unemployed people aged 25-58 (so not "universal") were being paid a tax-free €560 monthly income, no work required **JT**

Finland and Universal Basic Income

A response to “Finland has Second Thoughts About Giving Free Money to Jobless People” by Peter Goodman, New York Times.

Goodman says this:

“But the Finnish government’s decision to halt the experiment at the end of 2018 highlights a challenge to basic income’s very conception. Many people in Finland — and in other lands — chafe at the idea of handing out cash without requiring that people work.”

But then ends the column like this:

“This may be the main reason that basic income has lost momentum in Finland: It is effectively redundant.

Health care is furnished by the state. University education is free. Jobless people draw generous unemployment benefits and have access to some of the most effective training programs on earth.

‘In a sense,’ said Mr. Hiilamo, the social policy professor, ‘Finland already has basic income.’ “

So do the Finnish people have second thoughts about giving money to jobless people or not? Has the Finnish public soured on basic incomes or does Finland’s basic unemployment allowance alongside the rest of its welfare state (housing allowance, basic social assistance, health care), all of which have widespread support, already provide such an income?

Goodman’s article also discusses the decision by the current right-wing government of Finland to apply activation requirements to the country’s basic unemployment allowance. Under the activation scheme, those that do not do specifically established activation tasks see their benefit levels cut. (Finland’s new basic unemployment allowance with activation requirements is similar in nature to the job guarantee proposal now floating around in the US.)

But Goodman makes no mention of how the Finnish public actually responded to this right-

wing unemployment benefit reform. He doesn’t mention public opinion polling showing that Finns oppose the idea 56 percent to 36 percent. He doesn’t mention that a citizens’ initiative received the 50,000 signatures required to force legislators to reconsider the plan in eight days and eventually gathered 140,000 signatures (in a country of 5.5 million people). And he makes no mention of the massive strike of 200,000 union members (in a country with around 2 million employees) over the proposed changes. Simply speaking, every possible indicator says these reforms have been quite unpopular.

As for the basic income experiment itself, it is worth emphasizing again that it is ending exactly when the government said it was going to end when they launched it. The government is not going to do more experiments, but they never said they were going to do more experiments. As Antti Jauhiainen, Joonas-Hermann Mäkinen, and I wrote when the proposal was launched, Finland’s UBI experiment was never set up to be much more than a publicly stunt (Jauhiainen and Mäkinen specifically said as much in a later piece in the New York Times). The sample size was too small, it was only targeted at the unemployed, and the goal was explicitly to see if the unemployed would take up work if a “welfare trap” (in this case basic unemployment allowance) was removed.

The latter point is perhaps the crucial one for understanding just how far Goodman’s piece has gone off the rails. The way the UBI experiment in Finland worked was they took people who were already on basic unemployment allowance (or labor market subsidy) and then gave them a UBI amount that was identical to what they were already receiving from those programs. The difference was not really an infusion of money. It was a promise that for the next two years, they could take up work without losing their unemployment benefits. So the plan did not give any new free money to jobless people as those jobless people were already getting that “free money.” And the reason the rules surrounding the free money changed for the experiment was to see if it would make them stop being jobless.

What this all means is that both the UBI “experiment” and the very unpopular activation requirements were implemented by Finland’s right-wing government for the exact same reason, which was to try to nudge jobless people into work. There was never any change on this front: the right-wing government has been trying to promote employment the whole time as part of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä’s goal of bringing the Finnish employment rate up to 72 percent by next year.

From “The Gray Lady and the UBI” by Matt Bruenig, Jacobin.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/04/finland-universal-basic-income-new-york-times>

(A true universal basic income gets paid to everyone in a society and they can work for more money or not as they see fit. It is intended to be “a living wage” ie one could actually live upon it without being in poverty. The motivation for it is to prepare for the coming of the age when robots have taken not only almost all “blue collar” jobs but most “white collar” jobs too. JT)

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## Religions of the Indian subcontinent

*Morandir Armson*

### Reading.

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmo-gonal philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come

to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

**Henry David Thoreau.**

Good morning everyone.

The reason I was asked to give this talk, is that I mentioned one of the religions of India in an earlier presentation, and was asked to explain these religions of the Indian subcontinent. I say `Indian subcontinent' rather than just `India' because these religions geographical territory extend from Sri Lanka in the South, to Bhutan and Nepal in the North-East, and to Jammu and Kashmir in the far North.

Alright. Before I tell you about these religions, I have to fill you in on Religious Studies 101. You see, religions, like most other human creations don't just pop into existence from the Void. And like animals, they evolve from existing forms.

Comparative religionists tend to divide the great world religions into three groups. These are;

- **the Abrahamic religions**; these are religions whose adherents believe in the prime importance of the prophet Abraham or derive their spiritual tradition from him. The usual examples of this group are Bábism, Baná'i, Christianity, Druze, Islam, Judaism, Mandaeism, Rastafari, and Samaritanism.

- **the Taoic religions**, often called simply the East Asian religions or Far Eastern religions; these are religions whose adherents believe in the prime importance of the tao, the mysterious, cyclic life-force. This group includes Chen Tao, Chondogyo, Confucianism, Đao Cao Dài, Lao Hoa Hao, I-Kuan-Tao, Jeung San Do, Mahayana Buddhism (which, despite its name is more Taoist than Buddhist), Shinto (which as I mentioned last time is a weird synthesis between Taoism and shamanism), Taoism, and Zen (which is a form of Mahayana Buddhism, that is even further from traditional Buddhism). And lastly;

- **the Dharmic religions**, often called simply the Indian religions or Eastern religions;

these are religions whose adherents believe in the prime importance of dharma, which essentially means 'correct conduct', but carries slightly different nuances to different groups. All of these faiths originated in the Indian sub-continent and include Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and (to a lesser extent) Sikhism. (Sikhism is a syncretic faith, which combines aspects taken from both Hinduism and Islam).

But two things which complicate everything! First off, as I mentioned before, the concept of dharma differs significantly between these groups. For a Hindu, dharma is duty. For a Jain, dharma is righteousness, or conduct. While for a Buddhist, dharma is usually taken to mean only the Buddha's teachings. Secondly, studying Hinduism is slightly complicated by another fact. You see, Hinduism doesn't really exist.

- OK, before people start looking at me as if I'm insane, let me explain - I'm afraid we are up against our old enemy reification again. As I've mentioned earlier, we humans have a minor problem with the Universe. Namely, it's quite big.

- And humans have come up with great way of dealing with quite big things – we cut the big thing up into smaller things and give those things names. Then, we cut the smaller thing up into even smaller things and give those things names. And we repeat the process, until we have pieces small enough to study.

Perfect, right?

But alas! After we've done all of this shuffling, and cutting, and naming and labelling, we tend to forget that we've done it. And we start acting as if these completely artificial, imaginary groups are things that have an independent existence.

- It's like fish. People are looking at me again! According to the Oxford Dictionary of Underwater Life, the biologist Stephen Jay Gould has concluded that there is no such thing as 'a fish'. His reasoning goes as follows. While there are many free-swimming, gill-bearing, aquatic, craniate animals that lack limbs with digits, most of them are not closely related to each other. For example, a salmon is more closely related to a camel than it is to a hagfish.

And so, in like manner, although there is a collection of related Indian religious traditions, which has been called Hinduism which exists, this is really a colonial British name for a diverse group of religions, most of which are more or less closely related, but aren't really a discrete religious entity.

You see, **Hinduism** has gone through a series of evolutionary changes:

**Vedic** – based on the sacrifice of sacred bulls, and epic poetry. Named Vedic after the Rig Veda, a collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns counted among the four Hindu religious texts known as the Vedas. The Rig Veda was likely composed between roughly 1700–1100 BCE, making it one of the oldest texts of any Indo-Iranian language, as well as one of the world's oldest religious texts.

**Upanishadic** - based on complex philosophical concepts. Named for the Upanishads - a series of Hindu sacred treatises written in Sanskrit around 800–200 BC, expounding the Vedas in predominantly mystical and monistic terms.

**Bhakti** - Theistic devotional movement, that emerged in mediaeval Hinduism, that originated in the seventh-century Tamil region of south India, The Bhakti movement regionally developed around sects of different gods and goddesses, such as Vaishnavism, (which focuses on the worship of Vishnu, the Renewer) Shaivism (which focuses on the worship of Shiva the Destroyer), Shaktism (which is devoted to a group of goddesses, called the Shakti) and Smartism (liberal or inclusive sects, who focus on five major gods). The movement was inspired by a large number of poet-saints, who championed a wide range of philosophical positions, Bhakti is what people mean when they say Hinduism today. So....

Hinduism, as I've said, is really a collection of different religious traditions, all of which originate in India. Indeed Hindu is merely the Persian name for an Indian person. It contains a great many different philosophies, but it's united by a number of shared concepts, some textual resources, a collection of common ritual techniques, and an over-arching shared cosmology, which leads to a number

of different practices, as widely separated as shared methods of astrology, and pilgrimages to a number of sacred sites.

Hinduism has been called the 'oldest religion in the world'; some practitioners refer to it as **Sanatana Dharma**, the 'eternal law', beyond human origins.

Hinduism prescribes the eternal duties, which include honesty, ahimsa, (which is refraining from injuring living beings), patience, forbearance, self-restraint, and compassion.

- Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs which are well known in Western thought include;

**Ahimsa**, (Refraining from injuring living beings, which is the basis for Indian ritual vegetarianism).

**Karma**. Literally action, work or deed. Often it refers to the spiritual principle of cause and effect where intent and actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of that individual (effect).

**Moksha**. Release from the cycle of rebirth impelled by the law of karma or the transcendent state attained as a result of being released from the cycle of rebirth.

**Yoga** (Literally any path or practice, which can be used to attain moksha. But don't confuse this with the nonsensical, pseudo-Hindu gymnastics, sold by clever Indians to stupid Westerners).

So. I turn now to **Jainism**, one of the more interesting minor faiths of India.

(I should add that, although Buddhism was founded in India, it is no longer an Indian religion. This is because Buddhism (which has always had a difficult relationship with Hinduism) was driven out of India and into Tibet – where it flourished. So, any Buddhism which exists in India now is Tibetan-style Buddhism, which was re-introduced into India.)

Jainism is an ancient religion from India that teaches that the way to liberation and bliss is to live a life of harmlessness and renunciation. The aim of Jain life is to achieve liberation of the soul. The word "Jain" derives from the Sanskrit word jina, literally "one who has conquered". In some ways, Jainism is very similar to Hinduism, but it also contains elements

which are reminiscent of Buddhism – probably because it is the ancestor of Buddhism.

But it is a tough religion.

For example - **Jain monasticism**:

Everybody is expected to adhere to vows – social pressure to become a monk or a nun. - Tearing out hair – they don't shave their heads!

- Breathing through cloth - for fear of hurting invisible organisms.

-Whisk broom – to sweep away insects.

Starvation – you are expected to starve yourself to death.

**Sikhism**.

Sikhism is a revealed religion, founded during the 15th Century CE in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, by Gura Nanak.

Sikhism holds that God is formless, shapeless and cannot be understood by the Human mind. Sikhism is also panentheistic, in that it posits that the Divine and the Universe are essentially one and the same. It has been said that the Guru Nanak originally taught that Sikhism was a deliberate synthesis of Hindu and Muslim beliefs, but that, over time, his teachings were re-formed and presented as a Divine revelation.

So. An understanding of the religions of India requires time and absorption. It's not a minor study. Indeed, just studying one section of Hinduism requires a massive investment. I know – I've seen it. Learning Sanskrit alone takes a ridiculous amount of time. I have nothing but respect for these scholars. I have a friend from Uni who decided in Third Year that she wanted to study the Bhakti tradition in the Twentieth Century. So she vanished into India for five years

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(As everyone who attends a talk by Morandir Armson knows, he packs an awful lot of extra information into his "asides" and answers to questions.

Remembering how much extra he told us about the Jain religion than is indicated in his notes above, I thought I would see what I could find out about modern Jainism, especially as the religion is practised

in Australia. Is every believer still expected to live almost the life of a monk or nun? Is the monastic path still as austere as it used to be? So far I have not found an answer to all my queries.

The Britannica is nevertheless an excellent place to start if you are motivated to learn more:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jainism>

Wikipedia tells me that the layperson's vows are not as austere as the monastic vows eg Abstinence from sex and sensual pleasures is prescribed for Jain monks and nuns; for laypersons, the vow means chastity, faithfulness to one's partner.

But the whole question is complicated by there being not one but two traditions of Jainism. Clearly we are going to have to invite a member of the Australian Jain community to give us a talk at our Fellowship and clear up additional questions—but thanks to Morandir for whetting our appetites. JT)

(P. S. And of course there is Sikhism which also sounds fascinating too....)

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### **A Brave and Startling Truth**

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet  
Traveling through casual space  
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent  
suns

To a destination where all signs tell us  
It is possible and imperative that we learn  
A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it  
To the day of peacemaking  
When we release our fingers  
From fists of hostility  
And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it  
When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of  
hate  
And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed  
clean

When battlefields and coliseum  
No longer rake our unique and particular  
sons and daughters  
Up with the bruised and bloody grass  
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches  
The screaming racket in the temples have  
ceased

When the pennants are waving gaily  
When the banners of the world tremble  
Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it  
When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders  
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce  
When land mines of death have been  
removed

And the aged can walk into evenings of  
peace

When religious ritual is not perfumed  
By the incense of burning flesh  
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake  
By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it  
Then we will confess that not the Pyramids  
With their stones set in mysterious perfection  
Nor the Gardens of Babylon  
Hanging as eternal beauty  
In our collective memory  
Not the Grand Canyon  
Kindled into delicious color  
By Western sunsets

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into  
Europe  
Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji  
Stretching to the Rising Sun  
Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Missis-  
sippi who, without favor,  
Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the  
shores  
These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it  
We, this people, on this minuscule and kith-  
less globe  
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and  
the dagger  
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of  
peace  
We, this people on this mote of matter  
In whose mouths abide cankerous words

Which challenge our very existence  
 Yet out of those same mouths  
 Come songs of such exquisite sweetness  
 That the heart falters in its labor  
 And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting  
 planet  
 Whose hands can strike with such abandon  
 That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the  
 living  
 Yet those same hands can touch with such  
 healing, irresistible tenderness  
 That the haughty neck is happy to bow  
 And the proud back is glad to bend  
 Out of such chaos, of such contradiction  
 We learn that we are neither devils nor  
 divines

When we come to it  
 We, this people, on this wayward, floating  
 body  
 Created on this earth, of this earth  
 Have the power to fashion for this earth  
 A climate where every man and every  
 woman  
 Can live freely without sanctimonious piety  
 Without crippling fear

When we come to it  
 We must confess that we are the possible  
 We are the miraculous, the true wonder of  
 this world  
 That is when, and only when  
 We come to it.

~ Maya Angelou ~



**Hope is the Thing with Feathers**

“Hope” is the thing with feathers—  
 That perches in the soul—  
 And sings the tune without the words—  
 And never stops—at all—

And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—  
 And sore must be the storm—  
 That could abash the little Bird  
 That kept so many warm—

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land—  
 And on the strangest Sea—  
 Yet—never—in Extremity,  
 It asked a crumb—of me.

~ Emily Dickinson ~



**Autumn Chant**

Now the autumn shudders  
 In the rose’s root,  
 Far and wide the ladders  
 Lean among the fruit.

Now the autumn clammers  
 Up the trellised frame  
 And the rose remembers  
 The dust from which it came.

Brighter than the blossom  
 On the rose’s bough  
 Sits the wizened orange,  
 Bitter berry now;

Beauty never slumbers;  
 All is in her name;  
 But the rose remembers  
 The dust from which it came.

~ Edna St. Vincent Millay ~



**Communion Circle**

The earth.  
 One planet.  
 Round, global,  
 so that when you trace its shape  
 with your finger,  
 you end up where you started. It’s one. It’s  
 whole.  
 All the dotted lines we draw on our maps  
 of this globe are just that, dotted lines.  
 They smear easily.

Oceans can be crossed.  
Even the desert can be crossed.  
The grain that grows on one side of the border  
tastes just as good as the grain on the other side.  
Moreover, bread made from rice is just as nourishing  
to body and spirit as bread made from corn,  
or spelt or teff or wheat or barley.  
There is no superior land, no chosen site,  
no divine destiny falling on any one nation  
who draws those dotted lines just so.  
There is only one earth we all share,  
we, the living, with all else that lives  
and does not live.  
Everything,  
everything, for good or ill,  
is part of the shared whole:  
sky, earth, song, words and now, this silence.

~ Mark L. Belletini ~

Source: Sonata for Voice and Silence



"Bounty" Wikipedia

### **Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?**

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** *Full membership \$50 concession \$20* . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher for an application form at the Sunday service.

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.***

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: jantendys@yahoo.com.au or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical nature that you would like to share with the congregation?*** As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*