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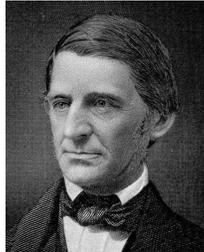
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Sydney Unitarian News

Editor: M.R. McPhee

June/July 2009



RALPH WALDO EMERSON, UNITARIAN PIONEER

Now that our readers have been made aware, perhaps for the first time, of this extraordinary man (see Max Lawson's article in the previous issue), we may as well tell you some more about him. It would certainly be fair to say that no-one in the history of Unitarianism, anywhere in the world, had such a brief period in the ministry but made such a profound impact on its future development – and not just in the US.

Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 25 May 1803, his given names being those of his mother's brother, Ralph Haskins, and his father's great-grandmother, Rebecca Waldo. (From about 1820, he would use Waldo as his first name.) His father, Rev. William Emerson, was descended from a well-known line of Congregationalist ministers and, as the distinguished leader of First Church, Boston, had led his congregation into the Unitarian fold when the denomination began to split.

His father died shortly before Emerson's eight birthday, leaving the family to live in considerable poverty. He was greatly influenced by his maiden aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, who was convinced that the Emerson line of ministers must continue. A self-educated and vibrant woman, she first introduced him to Hindu scriptures and Neoplatonism, which would shape his distinctive outlook on religion. The family's meagre resources did not prevent Emerson from having a proper education at the Boston Latin School over 1812–1817, after which he entered Harvard College at the age of fourteen and graduated in 1821.

Emerson and his brother, Charles, ran a school for young ladies in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, until the latter went to Germany to study divinity. Waldo took charge of the school for several years but then went to Harvard Divinity School. He became the junior pastor at Second Church, Boston, and was ordained in 1829. In that year, he married Ellen Louisa Tucker, who died from tuberculosis less than two years later. He succeeded the senior minister in 1830 and his unconventional sermons increased the church's membership. However, he resigned in 1832 because he disagreed with the Communion, even though his church had agreed that he could administer the service without taking it, himself.

Emerson then embarked on a tour of Europe, during which he met William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle. He returned in 1833 and made his living from 'supply preaching' and public lecturing until 1846. In 1835, he married Lydia Jackson, who took a keen interest in his ideas and his work. He published his first book, *Nature*, anonymously in 1836, the same year that he and some like-minded young ministers founded what became known as the Transcendentalist Club. That group

met on-and-off over four years to discuss radical theology, philosophy and related matters, then founded its own journal, *The Dial*, in 1840. Later to be edited by Emerson, the journal promoted the works of talented young writers, such as William Ellery Channing and Henry Thoreau

In 1837, Emerson delivered a lecture to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard that is now referred to as ‘The American Scholar’, in which he challenged US intellectuals to cease imitating Europe and to ground their ideas in American resources, sincerity and realism. That was followed in 1838 by his equally famous ‘Divinity School Address’, in which he shocked the Unitarian establishment by discounting Biblical miracles and denying the divinity of Jesus. Emerson published his second book, *Essays*, in 1842 (this time, under his own name), which contained the ‘Self-Reliance’ item that is still well-known today. Favourable reviews in London and Paris laid the groundwork of his later international reputation.

Emerson’s career as a popular lecturer continued to prosper, both in New England and the rest of the country. In 1847–48, he made a speaking tour of England, Scotland and Ireland, also visiting Paris. He spoke on a wide variety of subjects and many of his essays grew out of those lectures. He had also written some poetry over the years, the first volume of which was published in 1847, simply titled *Poems*. Six more books were printed over the next three decades, only one of which was more of his poetry.

Emerson had always opposed slavery but did not become active in the abolitionist campaign until the 1840s. He delivered his first public address on the subject in 1844, a commemoration of the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies. When the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, which required that escapees be returned to their owners, he publicly called for citizens to disobey it. In other areas, Emerson urged greater freedom of worship and championed women’s educational and economic rights. He held forth for more freedom and scope in university education and for purer methods in politics and trade.

From about 1872, Emerson began to lose his memory and his health, though he managed a trip to England, Europe and Egypt in that year with his daughter, Ellen. He rarely gave lectures after that time and only to familiar audiences. He died on 19 April 1882 and was buried in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts. While he preferred the term, ‘Idealism’, the Transcendental school of thought which he led swept American Unitarianism in a deistic direction for the rest of the 19th Century.

SERVICE DIARY

Meetings every Sunday from 10.30 –11.30am
(followed by coffee, tea and biscuits)

Date	Presenter	Topic
7 th June	Chad Vindin	Fiction in the Modern World
14 th June	Ian Ellis-Jones	The Importance of Being Humble
21 st June	Peter Crawford	Aristotle and his Influence
28 th June	Ian Ellis-Jones	The Early Church Fathers: How Greece Lost Out to Rome
5 th July*	Stephen Whale	Music Service
12 th July	Mike McPhee	The Evolution of Evolution
19 th July	Peter Crawford	The Courage of Socrates
26 th July	Stephen Whale	Music Service

* This will be Stephen’s last Music Service before he leaves us to study for a Master of Music Degree at the famous Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. There will be a special lunch on that day but he will also treat us to a concert after the service on 12 July. That presentation will consist of various classical pieces that Stephen has played in our services. Chad Vindin will succeed him as our church pianist and Music Director, as well as taking his place on the Committee.

[Please check the church website (www.sydneyunitarianchurch.org) for updates. The program for August will be available from the beginning of July.]



老子：「道德經」：第一章

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。

無名天地之始；有名萬物之母。
故常無，欲以觀其妙；常有，欲以觀其徼。
此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。
玄之又玄，眾妙之門。

From Chapter 1 of the *Tao Te Ching* (Book of the Way), traditionally attributed to the philosopher, Lao-tzu.

The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao;
The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.
The unnamable is the eternally real.
Naming is the origin of all particular things.
Free from desire, you realize the mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.
Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source.
This source is called Mystery.
Mystery within Mystery,
The gateway to all understanding.

Submitted by Unitarian Universalists Hong Kong – see next two pages for some further explanation. The English text is a modification of Stephen Mitchell's re-translation.

We light our chalice, recognizing that our bodies and our beings, our insights, actions, and hopes all come from the essential elements of existence. In our worship today, we honor the elements of earth, air, fire, and water.

Submitted by the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women. The English words were written by Carol Huston, but there are also versions in Hungarian, Japanese, Spanish, Swahili and Tagalog, which can be seen on the ICUU website: www.icuu.net.

[These are the Chalice Lightings from the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists for the months of May and June.]

Unitarian Universalists Hong Kong (known until recently as the Spiritual Seekers Society) was formed in 2004 by a group of young people who found each other via the Internet. Nine of their fourteen founding members are Chinese and the rest are of other nationalities. Their president is Alexander Szeto, who holds a BA in Religious Studies from the Hong Kong Baptist Society but moved on to a more liberal Christianity. Once they started holding regular meetings, their appreciation for Unitarian Universalism grew and they commenced to translate UU materials into Chinese for use in their services.

Over the last four years, the UUHK has held fortnightly meetings at various locations while gaining new members from both local and expatriate circles. They have established links with the Orthodox, Buddhist, Baha'i and Muslim communities in Hong Kong, as well as taking part in interfaith and other public activities. They were addressed by Rev John Clifford, Executive Secretary of ICUU, in November 2006 and co-hosted a talk by the controversial American Episcopalian Bishop, Rev. Gene Robinson, in October 2007. Their new website is: www.uuhk.org.

We wrote about the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women in the December/January issue and presume that the multi-lingual Chalice Lighting was produced at their conference in Houston, Texas, over 26 February – 01 March. Judging from its website: www.icuuw.org, the Convocation has become a permanent institution and more such conferences will be held in the future.

In other ICUU news, the Unitarian Christian Church in Chennai (Madras) has a new building, officially opened on 25 January, this year. The original church was constructed in 1813 and had understandably been deteriorating through age and weather. After some drastic monsoon rains in December 2005, the Indian Council of Unitarian Churches launched an appeal which received generous responses from Chennai's partner churches in Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as from other Unitarians in India, the UK, Australia, Canada, Europe and the US. A total of £27,100 was raised and the result was a beautiful modern church and first floor hall with many fine features. Planning is now being done for a smaller second floor to support the church's valuable outreach work.

TAOISM – RELIGION OR PHILOSOPHY?

By Dr Ian Ellis-Jones

When one starts to enquire into Taoism (also referred to as Daoism) one immediately runs into difficulties, as it is generally acknowledged that there is both ‘religious Taoism’ (*Tao-chiao (Daojiao)*) and ‘philosophical Taoism’ (*Tao-chia (Daojia)*). To further complicate matters, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism are very much intertwined, and Taoism itself has ‘borrowed’ from every religion it has come into contact with over the centuries. (It has been often said, “Taoism never met a religion it didn’t like.”) Nevertheless, let’s not pre-empt the final result.

Taoism, which is said to have been founded by the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu circa 580 BCE, is an amalgam of various ideas, beliefs, practices and activities centred around the themes and principles contained in the *Tao Tê Ching (Dao De Jing)* – the ‘Book of the Way’ – and the *Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu)*. The ideas, beliefs, practices and activities are quite divergent in nature, embracing such things as meditation, metaphysical speculation (in Taoism the emphasis is very much on ‘being’, not ‘doing’), yoga-like breathing exercises, martial arts, occultism in various eclectic forms (eg Chinese alchemy, magic, divination, astrology, talismanism, incantations and spiritism) and many other esoteric things as well. A belief in the supernatural is quite commonly found, there being considered many different types of “supernatural” entities (eg gods, ghosts, devils, ancestral spirits). However, there is a fairly ‘solid’ core of ideas and opinions that can fairly be said to have originated from the philosophizing of Lao-tzu (‘Wise Teacher’ or ‘Worshipful Master’), Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu.

One finds a ‘body of persons’ – in some places, quite organized (with Taoist monks, priests and sorcerers), in others hardly so at all – established to give practical expression to the various ideas, beliefs, practices and activities which are centrally and manifestly based upon faith in the following Principle: the need to align oneself spiritually with certain positive cosmic forces said to be inherent in the nature of things, and the efficacy in so doing. Taoists differ among themselves as to the nature of these cosmic forces but there would be little or no disagreement as to their existence and central importance. The faith in ‘the way of all life’ (*Tao (Dao)*) is a ‘living’ one, Taoism itself not being so much of a belief-centred religion as is the case with a religion such as Christianity. Some Taoists also believe in Powers or Beings of a theistic kind – there are even believers who worship God in the image of Lao-tzu – but that is not universal nor does the absence of such belief prove fatal insofar as the application of the definition is concerned, for what one does find in Taoism is “a cosmic faith, a sacred veneration for *Tao*, the primal source” (Maritain 1955:13). The Unitarian minister and Humanist, Charles F. Potter (1955:63) writes:

Now *Tao* is hard to translate into English and has been interpreted to mean Way, Word, Reason, Creative principle, and even God. Christian missionaries to China translated the first verse of St John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the *Tao*, and the *Tao* was with God, and the *Tao* was God.” But the *Tao* is not a personal God: it is rather the cosmic energy, the vital impulse, or the natural producing force in the universe.

Tao has also been translated as Enlightenment, the Absolute, God, Nature, Truth, Ultimate Reality, and the Way. The abovementioned Principle is considered by Taoists to be all-pervasive, if not also everlasting and self-existent. It is the ‘eternal Way’ and the ‘eternal Name’ to which all else – and there is plenty of that in the case of Taoism – is subordinate and upon which all else is ultimately dependent. All of the rituals, exercises and practices are designed and intended to assist the practitioner in aligning himself or herself with the positive cosmic forces said to be inherent in the nature of things and to celebrate the *Tao* in many varied ways, the ultimate goal being union with the *Tao*. (A Taoist priest is called a *tao shi* or ‘Way master’.) This cosmic harmony, and eternity of the *Tao*, is of sacred value, inspiring awe and reverence for life and, in some places, rituals of sacrifice and worship. Notions of immanence are widespread. Where there is polytheism, one also finds notions of transcendence. The *Tao*, itself, is a transcendent ‘entity’.

Although Taoism contains no doctrine or dogma as such, one can still find teachings and principles pertaining to the *Tao*, along with myth, fable, symbols and images of various kinds. The abovementioned writings, which are considered to be of considerable importance although they are not regarded as being infallible or inerrant, describe the spiritual journeying of the self (with the ‘goal’ of being set free from self) as well as many other perennial spiritual themes such as Being and Not-being, the One and the Many – the *Tao* sometimes being referred to as the principle underlying the One and the Many – and, in particular, the

“obtaining the One” (to use Lao-tzu’s expression). In Chapter 39 of the *Tao Tê Ching*, Lao-tzu (as cited in Chung-yuan 1977:99) says:

Attaining the One, heaven becomes pure.
Attaining the One, earth becomes peaceful.
Attaining the One, god becomes spiritual.
Attaining the One, the ocean becomes full.
Attaining the One, ten thousand things came into being.
Attaining the One, rulers became the models of the world.
All of them became so through the One.

In relation to what happens after death, the Taoist reverence for life extends to the state of death as well. Beaudreault (2001:Online) writes:

In respect to reverencing life as part of nature, so, too, we must, according to Taoist teachings, respect – not fear – our death. Our dying is but another symbol of the Tao, the way things are. Taoism is rather ambiguous concerning survival of the individual personality after death, but death is seen as our becoming one with the realm of the all-in-all, and in this sense it is a form of re-incarnation. Both life and death are perceived as a “transformation” – and we are but a part of all creation and its ever-changing nature.

Taoism has much to say about ‘the powers resident in the human soul, psyche or person’. The *Tao Tê Ching*, which, according to legend, was written by Lao-tzu, is in two parts, one about the *Tao*, the other about *Tê* [*Teh*]. *Tê* means Virtue, but “virtue in the sense of vitality, virility, or power” (Potter 1955:63). (*Tê* has also been translated as Best Conduct, Character, True Wisdom, Integrity, Reason and several other things.) We are talking here about creative, transformative power that a person can use to have mastery over problems and difficulties and to make “the best use of life by humanity” (Beaudreault 2001:Online). Potter (1955:63) writes:

And since the word King [Ching] means book, the *Tao-Teh King* is simply a book about the power you get by letting nature teach you how to live. Mr Ralph Waldo Trine’s book-title *In Tune with the Infinite* would be a good interpretation of the central theme of the *Tao-Teh King*.

Taoism also contains a set of ethical principles, another essential requirement of our definition. There are many texts in the Taoist canon that present the ethical principles of Taoism, with considerable emphasis being placed upon the commitment of the individual, and his or her accountability, to the community. As is the case with Buddhism, ethical principles are of paramount importance in the ethico-philosophical system of the *Tao*. Potter (1955:65) notes that Lao-tzu “spoke much as Jesus did”. There are symbols (such as the familiar *Yin Yang* symbol) as well as rituals and exercises of various kinds which are perceived to be efficacious in maintaining and restoring physical and spiritual health and wholeness and (in the belief of some) achieving immortality. In China there are Taoist temples and monasteries, many of which have reopened in more recent years. In the West one can find many Taoist groups and centres, although many of those would not claim to be concerned with Taoism. Indeed, some would even assert that Taoism is neither religion nor philosophy, but is simply a ‘way of life’ inspired by the rhythms of the universe and the cyclical occurrences of nature. Yes, it is that as well, very much so. Perhaps the most accurate description of Taoism is that it is a syncretic religion based on Taoist philosophy, Chinese folk religion and Buddhism that describes the way of union with the *Tao*. Potter (1955:69) writes:

A religion, or philosophy, call it what you will, which emphasizes naturalness and simplicity, which offers the consolations of mysticism to the unfortunate and bereaved, and which exalts the importance of physical and spiritual health and sanity, has much to teach the confused and distressed peoples of the earth today.

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Maritain, Jacques 1955. *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. New York: The World Publishing Company.
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[Please see last page for a final acknowledgement to our esteemed author, himself.]

YOU MAY BE A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IF...

- ... you think socks are too formal for a summer service.
- ... even your goldfish gets to vote on family TV viewing choices.
- ... you consider Charlie Brown and Dilbert to be spiritual leaders.
- ... you know at least five ways to say 'Happy Holidays!'
- ... you and your cat share the same therapist.
- ... your idea of a guy's night out is going to a N.O.W. [National Organization for Women] rally.
- ... your Christmas tree has seven symbols on its top.
- ... unleavened bread is part of your Easter Brunch.
- ... the letters PC mean 'personal computer' to you.
- ... Santa Claus was the last supernatural dude in which you believed.
- ... your idea of fish on Friday is dinner at a sushi bar.
- ... you find yourself lighting a chalice before brushing your teeth
- ... when you watch *Jaws*, you root for the shark. ("Hey, sharks have to eat too!")
- ... you've had an argument over whether breast milk is vegan.
- ... you've attended a tantric sex workshop during Sunday school.
- ... you refer to construction paper as 'paper of color'.
- ... you think belly dancing is a basic part of a Sunday service.
- ... on Hallowe'en, you explain to kids the Pagan significance of their costumes.
- ... you've never sung a singable hymn.
- ... e-mail fulfills a spiritual void in your life.
- ... you consider Larry, Moe and Curly to be the 'Holy Trinity'.
- ... the 'X-Files' is a regular source of your church's sermons.
- ... you wish that, when God 'visited' your church, He (or She) would bring something other than tuna casserole.
 - ... you take your day planner to church instead of a Bible.
- ... you consider Millard Fillmore one of the greatest U.S. presidents. (He was a Unitarian.)
- ... you think the statement "Whatever." is a valid theological point.
- ... your church has a garden merely to use all that darn compost your Green Sanctuary Team expects you to make.
- ... your basketball court is more often used as a platform for a sweat lodge.
- ... the only stained-glass windows you have were the result of a spray-painting project gone wrong.
- ... when someone mentions Transylvania, you don't immediately think of Dracula.
- ... your minister refers to the Ten Commandments as 'suggestions'.
- ... there's more discussion at your church about removing a tree than about removing a building.
- ... when you pray, you face Beacon Street in Boston [site of the UUA headquarters].
- ... your sanctuary has yoga mats and meditation pillows as well as pews.

These were created by Tom Cook of Orlando, Florida. Our excuse for the unavoidable American content will be that the Fourth of July is coming up. On the strength of that, here is the winning entry in *the Washington Post's* Style Invitation contest of 2003, wherein readers were asked to submit 'instructions' for something written in the style of a famous person. The writer was one Jeff Brechlin of Potomac Falls, Maryland.

THE HOKEY POKEY AS WRITTEN BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

O proud left foot, that ventures quick within
Then soon upon a backward journey lithe.
Anon, once more the gesture, then begin:
Command sinistral pedestal to writhe.
Commence thou then the fervid Hokey-Poke,
A mad gyration, hips in wanton swirl.
To spin! A wilde release from Heaven's yoke.
Blessed dervish! Surely canst go, girl.
The Hoke, the Poke – banish now thy doubt;
Verily, I say, 'tis what it's all about.

THE FOREST



When first I knew this forest
its flowers were strange.
Their different forms and faces
changed with the seasons' change –

white violets smudged with purple,
the wild-ginger spray,
ground-orchids small and single
haunted my day;

the thick-fleshed Murray-lily,
flame-tree's bright blood,
and where the creek runs shallow,
the cunjevoi's green hood.*

When first I knew this forest,
time was to spend,
and time's renewing harvest
could never reach an end.

Now that its vines and flowers
are named and known,
like long-fulfilled desires
those first strange joys are gone.

My search is further.
There's still to name and to know
beyond the flowers I gather
that one that does not wither –
the truth from which they grow.



Judith Wright (1915–2000)

* A rainforest plant also known as a spoon lily (see bottom right).

Judith Wright was a noted Australian poet, writer, environmentalist and advocate of indigenous land rights. Born on a property at Armidale, NSW, she grew up in Brisbane and Sydney before studying English, history, philosophy and psychology at the University of Sydney. She spent the years of World War II working on her father's station, where it is thought she developed the affinity for the land and its people and affected much of her later work.

Wright's first book of poetry, *The Moving Image*, was published in 1946, by which time she was a research assistant at the University of Queensland. Her other poetic works include *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *Birds* (1962), *The Other Half* (1966) and *The Flame Tree* (1993). The above poem is most likely from her 1963 collection, *Five Senses (The Forest)*.

In 1950, Wright moved to Mount Tamborine with the novelist and abstract philosopher, Jack McKinney, and married him in 1962. The forest in the poem is on that mountain, where she lived until 1974. (The name is of Aboriginal origin and has nothing to do with tambourines.) In addition to poetry, she also wrote works of literary criticism, family and pastoral history, short stories and children's books.

Our choice of this poem was prompted by World Environment Day (05 June), which was established by the United Nations in 1972 along with the UN Environment Program. Since 1991, WED has had a host city each year, where a week-long international exposition is held. The host city for 2009 is Mexico City and our region has had the honour twice: Adelaide in 2000 and Wellington, New Zealand, just last year.

JEREMY

By Patrick Bernard

Jeremy was screaming and thumping his desk hysterically. His office door was closed but everyone on the fifth floor could hear him abuse Indira, the marketing coordinator, who was stoically waiting for him to calm down. For Jeremy, who was Singaporean, it was normal, if not essential, to scream at employees, except of course when those employees happened to be Westerners, with whom he took a more diplomatic approach. There is even one of the Singaporean managers in my company who is infamous for slapping staff in the face occasionally, to emphasise a point or to express his discontent. Westerners, who are notoriously difficult employees, have a more limited respect for authority, particularly if it involves being subjected to any form of physical abuse and they would probably return any such brutality spontaneously in kind and with interest! Moreover, in Western countries, such incidents would invariably end up in court with the company having to pay a substantial compensation to the victim; the culprit facing the possibility of a jail sentence. With the spectre of brutality in mind, I sometimes fantasize that one day, in a moment of uncontrolled rage, Jeremy would indeed slap me in the face to give me the opportunity to collect a huge compensation and take an early retirement to enjoy the leisurely lifestyle I dream of, but so far I haven't had such luck!

Over the years, with this company, or 'The Corporation' as senior management likes to call it, I have been lavished with a variety of exotic and seemingly impressive titles. Presently, I am 'Academic Director' of the Mumbai Campus and 'Transnational Education Manager', whatever that means! Reading this you may imagine that I am strutting around the globe, flying business class, collecting at least a six-figure salary and that I am enjoying all sorts of other glamorous lurks and perks. In truth, I am still on a junior school teacher's wage, I only fly in 'cattle class' and stay in two-star hotels. Every time I ask my billionaire boss for a salary increase, I am awarded instead with a new, more bombastic and even more worthless title. The official letters of offer will invariably include the exquisite clause: "*Please note that this is a non-pecuniary promotion*", just in case I had the wrong idea!

Singaporeans have inherited their taste for vacuous titles from their former English colonial masters who have long displayed a penchant for risible euphemisms. In this 'Corporation', we all have phantasmagorical titles that have little to do with our incomes or our duties. The unwritten company policy being that: flattering employees' egos is always cheaper than giving them appropriate remunerations. Even our humblest office assistant who types the odd letter, collects the mail and brings us cups of tea has been anointed as the 'Logistics and Communication Manager'! Needless to say, this doesn't impress those cynical and greedy Westerners who are only in it for the money! The 'Corporation' can only hire our services, at best, but not our servile obedience yet, as we drag our feet to the nightmarish world of Fritz Lang's '*Metropolis*'.

In this environment, Jeremy is a model employee and as such, he is both cause and symptom of the decay of corporate ethics in contemporary society. Over the years I have encountered few people more devoid of any charm, grace and humanity than Jeremy. There is not the vaguest hint of passion, sensuality or endearing mischief about him, no evidence of red blood running in his invisible veins. Jeremy is a Kafkaesque functionary or, as Corné likes to call him: "A Creature from the Black Lagoon! A Thing"! He is the kind of person who carelessly brings our planet to its death, exhausting its resources and raping its environment, without a second thought, without a moment of self-doubt. If pressed on such issues, Jeremy would blandly answer like a well-programmed automaton that ethical and environmental considerations are not included in his job description. He would say: "Teachers should teach, managers manage and everyone should concentrate on doing exactly what they are paid to do and nothing else!"

In response, I once asked him over a couple of drinks: "But what about *thinking*?" He answered: "You can do that on your days off!", as if 'thinking' was merely some kind of eccentric hobby that you could only indulge in at your own expense. Using Jeremy's own description of the core contractual obligations of employees, I stubbornly pressed the point that, since 'thinking' is central to educating creative people such as visual artists, architects, filmmakers or designers, it does not make sense to deny the people who teach those subjects the opportunity, time and support to explore the world of ideas in great depth, themselves. Such prohibition can only prevent lecturers from fulfilling their duties, which does not make any academic or business sense! Jeremy was not happy with my line of reasoning and he has considered me a trouble-maker ever since. Unable to question himself, his beliefs or his values, Jeremy leads an 'unexamined life', and as we know, according to Socrates such a life is 'not worth living'.

Humanity at its best is riddled with doubts; at its worst, it is drenched in certainties. The great crimes of history have been committed by people without doubts. Referring to the Nazis, Hannah Arendt talked about 'the banality of evil', but in Jeremy's case it would be more appropriate to describe him as incarnating 'the evil of banality'! All those who work with Jeremy detest him intensely but I have a morbid fascination for such characters as I do with rare and venomous insects. It requires patience, curiosity and the spirit of adventure to explore the labyrinth of another person's mind but, in the end, appearances and perception are all that matter for most people who cannot be bothered to investigate any further.

Jeremy began his illustrious career in 'surveillance' – in other words, he was working in the secret police. Although I am no Biblical scholar, I am quite sure that the teachings of Jesus had little to do with the dark arts of the secret police operating in a police state like Singapore. I could not be bothered to ask Jeremy how he reconciled this sinister occupation with his 'born-again' Christianity. We all have our contradictions but this one goes beyond my grasp. To be a policeman is one thing, but to volunteer to be a secret policeman in a police state is quite another story. There are some sacred gates that one crosses at the expense of what we might as well call 'Karma'. It doesn't matter how much worshipping and happy handclapping one does afterwards in hysterical churches, it is too late! The damage done is irreversible. Intuitively, everyone sensed that Jeremy had crossed that sacred threshold and, in doing so, he had excluded himself from civilised society.

As if that was not enough, he had then followed these inglorious beginnings by making huge profits from the logging of vanishing rain forests in questionable places like Myanmar (ex-Burma), where he had entertained a cozy relationship with the appalling military dictators there. Although Corné is correct when he says that Jeremy is "A Creature from the Black Lagoon", a sobering question keeps nagging me: "Am I any better?" It is too easy to see the wickedness in others and ignore our own. We tend to paint in the darkest colours the individuals we like least. With a more restrained approach we often find that few people are viscerally wicked. I now realise, for example, that Jeremy is not a thoroughly 'wicked' person but an empty shell, a 'hollow man', which is of course, the most dangerous type of human being.

Anger and resentment are poor travelling companions in the journey of life, but it is all too often the ones we choose. Voyaging deeper into this journal, as into a thick jungle, I cannot find my way around the dark swamps of the human soul. So, I hope that my readers will forgive me once more for spending so much time in such slimy places. As I observe my fellow human beings and myself, without mercy, I struggle to avoid sliding further into bitter pessimism and I keep trying to catch a glimpse of light within myself and in others, the former being the hardest of all. The best way to do this is to engage with the world and to forget oneself.

With this in mind, I decided this afternoon after work to walk home by myself, so I gave my driver, Ramesh, the evening off and let him use my car to go and visit his family. As usual, he argued that I should not be going on my own but, in the end, he was only too happy to be able to spend some time with his loved ones. There are no footpaths in this part of Mumbai, so I had to fight my way through the swarming multitudes, enjoying the challenge, trying to survive the murderous drivers of cars, trucks, rickshaws and mopeds who knew no rules apart from blowing on their deafening and useless horns.

Amazingly, the civilisation which invented the first urban sanitation systems more than five thousand years ago still has open sewers today. I was surprised at how easily I had become used to the putrid vapors rising from the effluents. The sweet-and-sour odour of excrements is so much part of India that one has to learn to live with it or fly out of the country. A similar choice confronts the visitor with the beggars and hustlers of all sorts that flock around him as soon as he steps out in the street. Professional beggars, a myriad of amputees and children in standard-issue rags, follow the defenceless pedestrian like flies, refusing to disappear until a few coins have been thrown at them. The worst are eunuchs who throw blood-curdling curses at those who don't open their purses. There is no escape!

I nervously took a few photos of this sorrowful spectacle, wondering what motivates some of us to 'beautify' squalor and misery. I felt like one of those obscene fashion photographers who take gorgeous pictures of super-models posing in expensive clothes before exotic backgrounds of slums and poverty. On the other hand, those of us who question the moral value of any art-form inspired by repellent or tragic themes should then also dismiss, on similar ethical grounds, a long list of past masterpieces such as Goya's series of horrific etchings 'The Disasters of War', Géricault's 'Medusa's Raft', Picasso's 'Guernica' or the vast quantity of heart-wrenching war photographs which have brought the monstrosity of humanity safely to our coffee tables for over a hundred and fifty years.

While all these thoughts were swirling in my head, I did not notice a black Lexus cruising slowly next to me and I did not at first hear the passenger calling me from the comfort of his back seat. Unfortunately, it was Jeremy, whom I can never meet without some repugnance. By contrast, he seemed genuinely delighted to see me and he was oddly trying to shake hands with me, defying the great river of metal and rubber rushing by all sides of his car. I felt obliged to hold my hand out to him, although it was highly dangerous in this traffic. I was puzzled as to why he appeared so delighted to meet me – I had just seen him in the office less than ten minutes ago and yet he greeted me now like a long-lost friend. I felt sorry for him and particularly for his misplaced affection. His occasional attempts to be amiable were aggravating at best and most people welcomed his bouts of kindness with suspicion.

I was even more startled when he invited me to join him. “I am on my way to an excellent little bookshop. Would you like to come with me?” I had, so far, unfairly assumed that he never read a book but I was happy to be proven wrong on this occasion. However, the prospect of being introduced to an unknown bookshop was an offer I could not refuse, though I cringed at the thought of spending any time in his company. Besides all else, he had that creepy ‘eternal adolescent’ persona of Anthony Perkins playing Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Psycho’. His sudden and violent outbursts, his childlike giggling and his high-pitched voice gave the disturbing impression that he was saturated in infantilism.

Meanwhile, held hostage on the back seat, I endured the crushing boredom of Jeremy’s conversation and his intrusive questioning. He didn’t reveal much about himself directly but he wanted to know all about me and, since I had no desire to cater to his curiosity, our discussion went nowhere. My uncooperative attitude was hardened by his irritating habit of assuming that other people think like him and share his beliefs. We all have a tendency to believe that our worldview is in the natural order of things but, as we grow up, hopefully we accept that other people may think differently and, as a consequence, we try to avoid making statements which may offend our listeners on major issues such as politics, philosophy, religion or sex. Jeremy is completely devoid of such common courtesy. For example, being a ‘Born Again Christian’, he assumes that, for some unexplained reason, I was also a ‘Born Again Christian’. In any case, it is clear that in his mind that, if I am not yet a ‘Born Again Christian’, I will soon become one, as will everyone else!

Thankfully, after a brief car ride which felt like an eternity, we finally arrived at the bookshop, named ‘Granth’, and I had to refrain from breathing an offensive sigh of relief. Having only recently discovered the delights of Indian literature, I purchased a fair cross-section of local classics which would become my precious silent companions for weeks to come. As I was preparing to pay for these purchases, I noticed on the front counter a book hilariously titled: *How to Become an Interesting Person?* I burst out laughing and, sharing a complicit glance with the equally amused cashier, an intelligent-looking and charming young woman, I asked: “Who on Earth would buy such a ridiculous book?” With an embarrassed grin, she pointed her head discreetly towards Jeremy, who was walking in our direction. “I heard that!”, he said with false *bonhomie*. “What’s wrong with this book?”

I also pretended to be lighthearted about this and instead I dug myself into a deeper hole by answering, “You don’t need a book to tell you how to become an interesting person! That’s silly! Just have an interesting life!” Now mortally wounded, Jeremy retorted: “But that’s the question! How do you lead an interesting life? What is an interesting life, anyway?” At this stage I should have just ended with: “Every life is interesting in one way or another!”, but instead I rambled on incoherently: “It’s simple, just take chances! Take risks! Live dangerously! Live courageously! Don’t just do what you are told! Don’t worry about the opinion of others! When in doubt, always take the path you have never followed before, especially if it looks challenging! Don’t be afraid to get lost! Don’t be afraid of darkness, cold and loneliness! Don’t worry about illness, poverty and death! What else can I say? Throw caution to the winds! Be interested in things outside yourself and you will be interesting!”

I went on with this mad soliloquy for a few more minutes until I ran out of steam. Jeremy looked at me bewildered and then declared melodramatically: “I want to be your friend!” The cashier looked at me with eyebrows raised to the ceiling and teeth clenched in a nervous grin, wondering what I could possibly say next. At that point I became convinced that Jeremy was an incurable imbecile and I couldn’t wait to see the back of him. But he would not let me go so easily and, instead, he invited me for a drink at the Taj Hotel in the nearby suburb of Bandstand. My heart sank at this prospect but, unable to reject people who seek my company, I gave in to him once more, waiving an embarrassed good-bye to the girl at the till who looked at me with a compassionate grin as if I was on my way to a vasectomy.

The bar at the Taj Hotel is pretentious in that garish *nouveau riche* style that middle-class Indians seem to adore. Too much fake gold, real marble, kitsch water features and ubiquitous ferns are never enough! The waiters are obsequious and the cocktails in ridiculous *accoutrements* are outrageously expensive, costing as much as a week's wage of the person serving them. Worst of all, of course, was Jeremy's conversation. At times I just wanted to scream out of boredom and run out like a madman but, in the end, I behaved myself like a good little bourgeois should.

At one point, after a pregnant pause, looking me straight in the eyes as one does before making an earth-shattering statement, Jeremy asked me in all seriousness: "Do you think that I'll be rich one day?" All at sea and in despair, I uttered whatever came through my head: "Of course! Of course! I have no doubts that you will be rich one day! You have all the right ingredients and the drive!" I did not have a clue what those 'ingredients' were and I was hoping he wouldn't ask me to expand, which luckily he did not. "But, will I be a multimillionaire? That's what I really want to know!" At my wits' end, knowing full well how much Jeremy and Corn e loathed each other, I suggested: "You should talk to Corn e! He's the one who can read Tarot cards!" Jeremy looked disappointed with me and at last, we left.

We returned to his car and, from then on, I stopped listening to anything else he had to say. Instead, I contemplated the world outside, as if longing for a lost paradise. I silently lamented the artificiality of my life here, being constantly transported from my air-conditioned apartment in my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office and, in my spare time, I go to air-conditioned restaurants or air-conditioned shops. When my cocooned life becomes too oppressive, I vanish; I escape from this safe and sterile imprisonment; I disappear and abandon all cautions to be swept off my feet by the terrifying and irresistible charms of India.

Being stuck in a monstrous traffic jam was the perfect opportunity to flee from an unwanted travelling companion. Unable to stand Jeremy's company any longer, I said I just wanted to walk home. Jeremy laughed at this suggestion, as if I had taken leave of my senses, and insisted that I should be reasonable and continue with him: "You can't walk back to your place from here! It's too far, too hot and too risky! Westerners just don't walk in these parts! And besides, what's there to see?" "Everything!", I answered without bothering, once again, to explain what I meant and I stepped out, slamming the door behind me.

Having controlled my temper and tolerated Jeremy's platitudes for too long, I felt alive! At last I was free again in a world full of potentiality! Free to feel the heat, the flies and hustle-bustle of the streets. Free to smell the stench, the sweat and the unknown spices. Free to hear the street-hawkers cries, the blaring radios and chants drifting out of temples with the perfume of incense. Free to admire Indian women strolling like so many princesses in their magnificent saris. Free to be transported by the music of ancient languages brought by the winds from the steppes of Central Asia and rolling down the Himalayas like so many mighty rivers.

I dived into this sea of humanity with the enthusiasm of a reckless mariner. Before I came to India, I used to find the close physical proximity of crowds abhorrent but now I welcome it. Shoved and pushed in all directions by shimmering waves of every possible hue, I navigated joyfully, letting myself drift wherever the flow was taking me. Although I kept a firm hand on my wallet, I felt in my element. I did not sense any hostility, only curiosity or indifference, which is a form of acceptance. I was transported by this tide into a tumultuous street market, where it seemed that everything could be purchased after the ritual negotiations. Here, small mounds of fragrant spices were seducing the senses. There, rows of fake designer clothes and sunglasses were hurled into my hands. Steaming food stalls tempted passers-by with a multitude of delicious curries and irresistible delicacies from all corners of the subcontinent. Everywhere Indian music was bursting out of cheap loudspeakers. In this chaos, I was showered with a profusion of generous smiles and all those white teeth sparkled like ivory into the Oriental night.

Magnetic and repulsive, ascetic and exhibitionist, spiritual and obsessed with status, poisoned with prejudices, highly civilized and barbaric – India is all at the same time. As such, it is a universal portrait of humanity. In spite of the horror, the cruelty, the squalor and the vulgar materialism, it feels mysteriously familiar. If, as scientists claim, all non-Africans have direct Indian ancestry, then our distant Indian past must be somehow engraved deep into our genetic heritage, which may explain why, for so many visitors, arriving in India for the first time feels like a 'homecoming'.

[This constitutes the fifth chapter of Patrick's *Voyage* saga – new readers can see the previous instalments on the SUC website.]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones' article was adapted from material that first appeared in *Beyond the Scientology Case: Towards a Better Definition of What Constitutes a Religion for Legal Purposes in Australia Having Regard to Salient Judicial Authorities from the United States of America as well as Important Non-Judicial Authorities*. Turramurra, NSW: Ian Ellis-Jones, 2006. [Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the postgraduate degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Law (C02028), Faculty of Law, University of Technology, Sydney.] You can read the online version at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2100/404>.

COMMITTEE NEWS

As of the Annual General Meeting on 26 April, the Committee members are: Patrick Bernard (President), Peter Crawford (Vice-President), Michael Spicer (Secretary), Nadia Repin (Treasurer), Michael McPhee (Public Relations Officer), Curt Fraser, Ian Ellis-Jones, Yi Luo, Walter Mason, Jeff Sinclair, Olavan Souvalassy, Stephen Whale Chad Vindin (alternate member).

The next Committee meeting will be held on 05 July 2009. If members have any matters which they would like to be placed on the agenda for discussion, they should contact the Secretary on 0423 393 364 or email: michael_j_spicer@yahoo.com.au.

CONTACT US

The SUN welcomes any and all contributions our members may have. If you have any items you believe would be of interest, please submit them for publication. As you can see from the contents of this issue, such items can be serious articles, informative 'fillers', poems or even jokes.

Deadline for copy for the August/September issue of *The SUN* is Sunday, 12 July 2009. The preferred method for sending documents is as an attached WORD file to: info_syduni@yahoo.com.au – otherwise, simple email is suitable for short items or messages. Alternately, copy can be posted or brought to the church.

Some membership renewals for 2009 are now due – please see the form below for that purpose. Those wishing to join can use this form by way of application but should not send payment until their membership is accepted.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

I, (name) _____

of (address) _____

_____ Postcode _____

Phone(s): (home) _____ (other) _____

Email: _____

apply to join/renew membership in (delete one) the Sydney Unitarian Church and agree to abide by the rules as set down by the Constitution and management of the church.

Signature: _____ Fee enclosed: \$ _____*

Cheques should be made payable to: Treasurer, Sydney Unitarian Church. Membership is valid for the calendar year 2008 and should be renewed by 01 January 2009.

* Annual membership is \$20 and includes the SUN journal; subscription to the SUN only is \$15.

Sun definition: The sun is the ball of fire in the sky that the Earth goes round, and that gives us heat | Meaning, pronunciation, translations and examples. Word forms: plural, 3rd person singular present tense, plural suns , present participle sunning, past tense, past participle sunned. 1. singular noun. The sun is the ball of fire in the sky that the Earth goes round, and that gives us heat and light. The sun was now high in the southern sky. The sun came out, briefly. ...the sun's rays. The sun was shining.