



## **March 2010 Newsletter of the Keweenaw Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

*We support the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.*

### **Sunday Mornings at 10:30**

**March 7:** "Joy" Emily Dickinson says, "T'is so much joy! T'is so much joy!" while one character in Turkish author Orhan Pamuk's novel "Snow" says to another, "You got so drunk so you could resist the hidden happiness rising inside of you." Let's gather together and resist resisting. Come ready to share what brings you joy.

**March 14: Forum: topic to be announced.**

**March 21:** "Fear and Equanimity" Will Cantrell and Rev. Sydney will help celebrate the Equinox while whistling in the half-dark. **Potluck**

**March 28:** "War and Peace" Our superb pianist Neil Paynter will grace us with evocative pieces in this service of readings and music.

**Childcare is available every Sunday.**

**Our minister is The Reverend Sydney A. Morris**, ph. 370-3927, [samorris@uuma.org](mailto:samorris@uuma.org).

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**The Youth Group** will meet at 4PM March 7<sup>th</sup> at Dave Watkins' house (22229 Royalwood in Houghton 369-0734), to wander with KUUFers through the thorny thickets of ethics, money and internet explorations. Anyone with internet connections should bring along their device(s) -- laptop, phone, antenna ears, whatever.

**ADULT EDUCATION.** Value Based Financial Practices. The last class in ethical economics will be held at Dave Watkins' house at 4PM on March 7th. All are welcome -- but do let Rev. Sydney know you are coming. Bring your laptop and expect to enjoy the evening with teens, pizza and a large dog named Bear.

**Sacred Scripture.** Sunday mornings at 9AM, Rev. Sydney will lead her course in "Sacred Scripture" -- teachings which illuminate the religions of: Buddhism, Hinduism, the people of

the Book (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) and Sikhism. Every Sunday in March (except the Forum Sunday 14) and the first Sunday of April.

**KUUF members donated \$558** to the Guest at Your Table collection; \$200 to the KFRC Children's Indoor Playspace and \$1,050 to the UUSC Haitian Relief Fund. – Barry Fink

**March birthdays:** 3rd, Ken Kraft; 8th, Tracie Clanaugh, Emily Young; 9th, Tony Zoars; 11th, Arthur Mayer; 12th, Anna Shoos; 17th, Maureen Anderson, Jane Hiltunen; 19th, Jeni Jobst; 21st, Pete Ekstrom, Bill Fink, John Wheeler; 24th, Jeanine Sewell, Dave Watkins; 28th, Dan Wisti; 30th, Sharon Emley. If anyone is missing from this list (or any of the birthday lists), please let Dorothy Love know. #

**An Automated External Defibrillator (AED)** for use in case of a heart stopping attack, is available upstairs in the BHK building. It is on the wall inside the door of the adult gym at the top of the second floor staircase - the next floor above us - and the door is unlocked. It is recommended that one get Adult CPR with AED training. You can contact the American Red Cross and American Heart Association regarding lessons. Speak to Bill Fink if you would want to be part of a class for KUUF, if one were offered. There is a fee involved. There are very simple instructions for using the AED printed on the case, and a computer voice guides you through the set up and use, so you should not hesitate to grab it and use it if needed. – Bill Fink

**Our newest member, Christine Heppermann,** writes: "My family and I moved to the Keweenaw from Minneapolis last June, when my

husband Eric became the technology director for the library at Michigan Tech. We currently live in East Hancock with our girls, Claudia (age 11) and Audrey (age 6). I've been a children's book reviewer for over fifteen years, writing for a variety of publications including The Horn Book Magazine and the Minneapolis Startribune. This past January, I received my MFA in writing for children and young adults from Hamline University in St. Paul; so now, in addition to reviewing other authors' books, I'm working on books for others to review--preferably soon! I'm so happy to have found the welcoming, spiritually and intellectually stimulating community of KUUF."

**Bayside Unitarian Universalist Family Camp** happens only once a year. Imagine the joy of the fisher kids in the early mornings and the intergenerational fun each evening, the calm feeling knowing the kids are involved in great supervised activities while parents attend adult morning workshops, the excitement of seeing old friends from last year and meeting new friends this year, the beach, the campfire, the art projects, and all that family time. Bayside is a Unitarian village. A safe, warm, and nurturing place for "raising" the child in all of us. We wish it could happen all year long, but since it can't, we anticipate this one full week in July each year. We welcome families of all configurations to join us July 11th through July 17th, 2010. For information, please contact Stephanie Lent at 608-831-1784 or [sjlent@wisc.edu](mailto:sjlent@wisc.edu), or visit <http://www.yahoodrummers.com/bayside/>.

**From Merle Kindred.:** I'm sitting here with the palm trees waving and the crows caw-cawing, and having thoughts of you folks bundled up in the midst of March snows. My 2-1/2 months in British Columbia was good and I feel somewhat "repotted" in CDN soil. I departed for South India mid-December. My Malayali family and I are doing well at the house and we're busily figuring out what the priority finishing items are – e.g. proper outdoor concreted path from the kitchen back door down to the lower elevation, finishing the entry wall and gateposts, preparing

gardening plots, and adding more fruit, ornamental, and medicinal plants.

Orchids and anthuriums are more viable and affordable for us here at the house at the moment than cows and I have connections with people who've offered cuttings and tips, so the cowshed is going to be the plant nursery for now. If we shuffle some soil around on the plot, we can reposition our chicken coup and get some good birds – not the ones with the featherless necks (a feature of the breed) that look ravaged. Maybe some guinea hens with great eggs and a propensity for attacking snakes.

Again, I think fondly of all of you and so appreciate your support of my globe-trotting these past 4-5 years. Please convey my greetings to all at KUUF who remember me. – Merle.

**Backers of public financing** for congressional elections are making a new push, triggered by a Supreme Court decision that lets corporations spend unlimited money on politics. Two top Democrats in Congress back the idea. So why hasn't it gone anywhere? One big reason: Members of Congress prefer the current system because it favors incumbents.

Public-financing proposals have been kicking around Washington for years. Lawmakers and campaign finance watchdogs hyped the legislation's chances when President Barack Obama took office in 2009, giving Democrats control of the White House along with Congress. But a year later, it hasn't budged.

So when the Supreme Court ruled Jan. 21 that corporations and unions can spend unlimited amounts of their treasury money on election ads, public financing advocates saw an opportunity.

Without public financing, they say, members of Congress will look to lobbyists and special interests for money to counter corporate attack ads. They might also be inclined to cave in to corporations' legislative wishes rather than risk a barrage of negative election ads.

Sen. Dick Durbin, the party whip and the sponsor of Senate public financing legislation, said he hadn't thought his proposal would go anywhere without a major scandal, but he now thinks it has a chance.

**Susan Jocoby writes about Atheists** in the Washington Post's On Faith:

I was somewhat taken aback recently when I found myself on a list of "kinder, gentler atheists"--most of them women--compiled by a religious historian attempting to distinguish between socially acceptable atheism and the presumably mean, hard-line atheism expounded by such demonic figures as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett. This nasty versus nice dichotomy is wholly an invention of believers who are under the mistaken impression that atheism is a religion in need of a good schism.

The list of "kinder" atheists was compiled for USA Today by Stephen Prothero, an On Faith panelist and professor of religion at Boston University and author of "Religious Literacy" (2007), a lively and incisive account of Americans' ignorance about religion in general and their own religious history. Pleased as I was to find myself on a list in the company of such other spirited atheists as Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, author of the witty, recently published "36 Arguments for The Existence of God: A Work of Fiction," and Jennifer Michael Hecht, author of "Doubt: A History" (2003), it is nevertheless slightly insulting to find your name used not only to place female atheists in a special category but as a foil for a mythical enemy known as the New Atheists. The latter consist, in Prothero's view, mainly of Angry White Men who believe that all religious people are stupid and that "the only way forward is to educate the idiots and flush away the poison."

I don't mean to pick on Prothero, whom I greatly respect as a scholar of religion (this must be the sort of observation that he considers kinder and gentler), but his piece is a perfect example of all of the distortions of atheism cherished by anti-atheists.

Myth No. 1: The "new atheism" is a phenomenon that differs radically not only from atheism as it has existed since antiquity but from the views held by forerunners of modern atheism, including deists and Enlightenment rationalists, like Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, who played such a critical role in the founding of this nation. Try as I might, I find

little in the works of Dawkins, Harris et. al.-- apart from their knowledge of modern science-- that differs significantly from the views of secular thinkers of earlier eras. What is different is that today's atheists are not hiding behind other labels, such as agnosticism, in order to placate religious sensibilities. It is this lack of deference, more than anything else that has outraged religious believers--particularly those on the right--in America. Most have confused their constitutional right to believe whatever they want with the idea that the beliefs themselves must be inherently worthy of respect.

Myth No. 2: Atheists think all religious believers are stupid. It is true that Dennett coined the unfortunate term "Brights" to describe atheists-- which does imply that he considers believers dimwitted. But I disagree with Dennett on this point, and so do a good many atheists I know (some of whom didn't even make the "kinder, gentler" list). I am quite prepared to concede that there are a fair number of intellectually challenged atheists, and I have no interest in arguing about whether the proportion of dunces is higher among the religious. As for the intelligence of religious believers, I doubt that many educated atheists would consider Aquinas, Abelard, or, for that matter, Prothero stupid. What we do think is that their ideas are wrong and irreconcilable with the laws of nature.

One point, however, is indisputable: there is a strong correlation between simplistic fundamentalist beliefs, relying on a literal interpretation of sacred texts, and lack of education. As the level of education rises, the number of people who believe in materially impossible tales such as the creation of the universe in six days; the literal resurrection of the dead; and the Virgin Birth diminishes. That is why fundamentalists have been tireless in their efforts to inject religious teaching into public schools. So it is generally true (although there are of course many exceptions) that the less people have learned about science, history, and different belief systems, the more likely they are to cling to a rigid form of faith.

Nevertheless, education and intelligence are hardly identical. Holders of doctoral degrees, whether in philosophy or biology, are less likely

than high school dropouts to believe in the supernatural, but plenty of people with more than 16 years of formal education are quite susceptible to a wide variety of non-supernatural but equally muttonish notions dressed as lamb. One need only consider the number of grownup atheists who are still as entranced as 15-year-olds with the sophomoric Ayn Rand, whose basic philosophy, as expressed in her turgid novels, is that the only proper relation of one human being toward another is "hands off." History is filled with atheists who have embraced every crackpot notion from eugenics to the desirability of eternal life facilitated not by God but by science. Of course, there have also been a great many religious believers who find that their godly philosophy include racial superiority and the inferiority of the poor. (Let's not forget the most recent example of a stupid Christian politician, South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer, who thinks that free school lunches encourage the poor and stupid to reproduce.) What ultimately distinguishes atheists from religious believers, however, is that no intelligent atheist can ever claim that his or her ideas constitute absolute truth.

Myth No. 3: This brings us to the most common false stereotype about atheism--that it is a religion and, furthermore, that "atheist fundamentalism" is as intolerant as conventional religious fundamentalism. Prothero uses the revealing word "genuflection" to describe the supposed attitude of atheists toward the writings of Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens. Other critics of atheism have described these writings as "sacred texts" for atheists. I hate to break it to the anti-atheists, but another crucial distinction between us and them is that we have no sacred, authoritative texts.

As someone who, as far back as I can remember--certainly from around age 12--never accepted what I was taught in Catholic school and suffered no pangs of conscience when I realized that I did not believe in God or in any religion, I probably qualify as a "hard" rather than a "soft" atheist.

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