

'LIVING ENERGY' Service at GUC on 9th Jan 2011  
Lyanne Mitchell

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Glasgow Unitarians have been on a journey - we embarked on an ambitious refurbishment programme, to move our worship room from the top floor of our building, down to street level - where we hope we shall be more visible from the outside as a church fellowship. The basement will become our new coffee and social hall. The other two floors will be rented out as commercial offices and we are actively searching and advertising for suitable tenants.

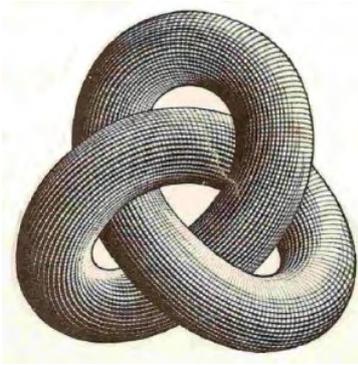
This is no mean feat for a small group like ours. I think we can feel very proud of this achievement. As a congregation, we had to make sacrifices and difficult decisions along the way. We had to choose between refurbishing our building and employing a minister - even a half-time minister - as we could not afford to do both. We chose to refurbish. That took courage and faith in ourselves.

It takes a great deal of **energy** to refurbish a church building and to maintain a rolling programme of Sunday services without the support of a minister. How we use our energy, has long been a subject of great interest to me. Last year, I embarked on a philosophy course. It is a course in *practical* philosophy.....the practical approach very much appealed to me. Each week, we explored the BIG questions... like - What is wisdom? Knowing oneself ; Levels of awareness ; Living in the present ; Living justly, and How we use our energy. Our tutor reads quotations from the classical philosophers then throws the theme of the evening out for discussion, by the group.

Philosophy means - philo = love of.....and Sophia = wisdom  
The love of wisdom. A running question through each of our sessions is - 'What would a wise man or woman do in any given situation?' We are encouraged to continually ask this question. Through reflecting on our behaviour and our experience of practices and exercises given throughout the course, it is hoped that we may develop our own perceptions...and in that process, each discover more of wisdom for ourselves.

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A recent session was all about the Three Fold Energy. Many of you may know all about this - but it was new to me. We were introduced to the model from the Indian Vedic tradition, found in the renowned philosophical text, the Bagavad Gita. A model is something we can work with which will give us a better understanding of the subject under consideration. It is not intended to be the *only* way of looking at something. The Sanskrit word for force or energy is 'guna'. According to this model, the environment in which we find ourselves is governed by 3 fundamental energies .



The Gunas - Threefold Energy

Satva / Rajas / Tamas.

**SATVA qualities** - HARMONY / BALANCE / LIGHT / ILLUMINATION / INTELLIGENCE / INSPIRATION / CLARITY / PEACE / STILLNESS / HIGHER SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

**RAJAS Qualities** - POWER OF ENERGY / ACTION / CHANGE / MOVEMENT / DRIVE / GROWTH / CREATIVITY / LIFE POTENTIAL.

**TAMAS qualities** - DARKNESS / SLEEP / REST / DISSOLUTION / INERTIA / REGULATION / CONTROL / DISCIPLINE / MATERIAL POTENTIAL.

In every situation, all are present, but one predominates. What makes the difference is the *balance* of these energies. Usually, we spend our time oscillating between Rajas and Tamas - but we also need to develop Satva energy, through various spiritual practices such as meditation, stillness or prayer.

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My class group spent some time discussing these energies and how they influence us. Someone who spends too long in Satva, could become lost in dreams, un-grounded - the 'absent minded professor' syndrome. Someone, dominated by Rajas could be running around like a headless chicken, stressed and obsessive. Someone trapped in Tamas, is in danger of becoming a bossy, disciplinarian, lacking spontaneity and flexibility. It is important to understand that no one of these energies is superior - we need them all. But we need to be able to choose the right one for any situation. This choice can be exercised within a matter of seconds, or throughout a whole lifetime.

This Three Fold Energy model can be applied to the individual and also to an organisation like a church fellowship or even a nation. We might ask ourselves which energy is dominating the Coalition Government at the moment? But let's not go there right now!

As a member of the Trustees, I look at Glasgow Unitarian Church, as we struggle through long committee meetings, full of property and financial reports, following a hectic period of preparation for celebrating our Bi Centenary..... and wonder if we are dominated by Tamas and Rajas, and badly needing a good big dollop of Satva!

Some of us may be worrying that our decision to do without a minister has left us without the personal and pastoral 'glue' that a good leader / facilitator can provide. As individuals and Unitarians, we all have our own ways of developing Satva when we need it. I practise Reiki - which is a form of energy healing and for me, it is a wonderful way of re-energising and calming my life. Meditation and prayer are key practices for developing Satva. Music, nature, stillness, there are so many ways.

During the summer, I stupidly filled my diesel car with unleaded petrol. The trip I was planning to take had to be abandoned. The AA man who rescued me, turned out to be a bit of a philosopher

and we got talking. He was sympathising about my abandoned journey as I had to wait to have my tank drained. My throw-away comment - 'Ah well, perhaps it was not meant to be' - led to quite a

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deep discussion, there on the pavement in the rain. He told me that he keeps a 'spirit journal' every day. He is an ex Catholic. He addresses his journal to 'Fred' - his chosen name for higher energy.(!) He begins every page by saying 'thank you' for everything in his life... and then asks for what he feels he needs for that day. It reminded me of the saying - 'If you only say one prayer, make it 'thank you'.

But it struck me that this practice of his is a way for him to live in the present and the writing of his journal is a powerful tool for him to balance his energies.

You may or may not remember some words I quoted at my last service. They came from Rev Michael Dadson at Unitarian Experience Week, last Summer at great Hucklow. He said :-

*Unlike devotees of most, if not all, spiritual and religious systems, the modern universalist / unitarian is not a passive receiver of that which will do you good – which might save you; but is someone who is active – indeed pro-active – in **exploring, evolving and operating his or her own spiritual way of life.***

***We need an open space for the sharing of possibilities, between balanced, open-minded, humble individuals who each have a sense of how they are travelling and are secure enough to take an interest in how others are travelling – a community of independent travellers.'***

I believe that GUC badly needs that 'open space for sharing possibilities' to help us not only to develop our own spiritual path but also to reach out in practical ways to the wider community of Glasgow.

So how do we achieve this 'open space for the sharing of possibilities'? As you know, plans are afoot for a 'shared ministry project' in Scotland which I think is very exciting. Another way to share may be to form Engagement Groups within our fellowships. You may remember Jane

Dwinell, the American speaker, who introduced this idea at GA a couple of years ago. She wrote the book 'Big Ideas for Small Congregations'.

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I was most impressed to see on the St Marks website that they have a 'Poetry for Pleasure' group, and 'Mindfulness@ lunchtime' and an 'Interbeing Group'. They are to be congratulated! These appear to be some form of 'open spaces' for developing Satva energy! I am sure some of us in Glasgow, would be most interested to hear more about these groups and may be inspired to follow their example.

I was a teacher within Further Education for the second part of my professional career as a graphic designer, and we were regularly encouraged to engage in a process called '**Sharing Best Practice**'. Why re-invent the wheel, when you can benefit from successful habits and initiatives developed by colleagues? Surely this is a sensible 'fast-track' to improving one's teaching methods for the benefit of students. And I think the same applies to Unitarian fellowships.

Iain Brown has written an article in Glasgow Unitarians' current News & Views, entitled 'A Way-Side Tryst?'. ( It can be found on the GUC website - click 'newsletter'.) This is just one member's view of how we could move forward. You may not agree with it - and have your own ideas? I have suggested that Iain's article could open a dialogue among us within News&Views. Please consider writing down your own ideas - about how we can best move forward - ways in which we can re-energise our spiritual journey together. Send your ideas to Janet and myself.....let's use our newsletter more actively as a *collaborative voice*, which can help and inspire us all.

The Worship Leaders group is currently meeting to discuss its role / remit within GUC. Also the Trustees are looking at all the Sub Committees of the church to encourage action and development. I believe that GUC has 3 main areas of essential activity - worship, pastoral care, and outreach. They all need energy - appropriate energy.

Satva reflective energy might be in other circumstances, the special remit of a minister - but we can all be 'ministers' to one another on this journey! Ideally, Satva energy should *flow* into Rajas activity and then be blended with Tamas regulation, as in the yoga model of the Gunas. No

amount of dreaming without action and regulation, will benefit either the individual or the group. There is a time to be still - to meditate - to reflect - but life requires us to act and to work.

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Unitarians have chosen a rather abstract path to follow - preferring to work out our journey by ourselves rather than following a ready-made map, printed by any mainstream religion. We have chosen to be *independent travellers*....and that can be scary as well as exhilarating. To be inspired is wonderful - to be flooded with Satva energy....but then it is essential to come down to earth and translate it into action, permeated with Rajas and Tamas. This is the challenge. Good works, social advance, justice, great works of art and scientific discovery - were never achieved by Satva energy alone - but without it, there would be no original conception of what needs to be done.

My hope that we shall not be too independent in our travelling - but will find quiet time along the way to **share our best practices** and to bring them to fruit in the wider world.

As I was developing this service, it suddenly struck me that as a Unitarian address, it contains quite a few 'trinities'.  
ie - to re-cap

The Threefold Energy - Satva -----> Rajas -----> Tamas.

GUC's responsibility for  
WORSHIP ---- PASTORAL CARE----- and OUTREACH.

And it even occurred to me that the ancient Vedic Threefold Energy could even be reflected within the Christian Trinity model - FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. Holy Spirit equates with SATVA - Higher spiritual light..... SON could equate with RAJAS - action in the physical world.....and FATHER could equate with TAMAS, the regulator.

Food for thought? 3 is a powerful and some might say, 'magic' number.

Finally, let's not forget the 'Broken Buddha' - who reminded us earlier in the service that life is not neat and tidy. None of us is perfect - we are all cracked a chipped in one way or another! *'The broken Buddha says he*

*knows how we feel. Our hearts beat together for a time, and we are strengthened.'*

**May our hearts beat together in this fellowship - and may we be strengthened.**

Thank you for listening.