



# GLASGOW UNITARIANS

## APRIL 2021

# NEWS & VIEWS

*Open to the world*

*Open to spirit*

*Open to the changing wind*

*Open to touch*

*Open to nature*

*Open to the world within*

*Open to change*

*Open to adventure*

*Open to the new*

*Open to love*

*Open to miracles*

*Open Beloved to You*

*Open to learn*

*Open to laughter*

*Open to being blessed*

*Open to joy*

*Open to service*

*Open to saying "Yes!"*

*Open to risk*

*Open to passion*

*To peace and silence too*

*Open to love*

*Open to beauty*

*Open Beloved to You*



**Open** *The Waterboys*

**GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH (SCIO)**

**72 Berkeley Street, Glasgow G3 7DS Scottish Charity Number SC016472**

*Cover - Lyanne Mitchell*

# Programme and notices

## Business Meetings in April

6th Ministry sub-committee at 7.30 pm

8th Management Committee pre-AGM at 7.30 pm

11th Glasgow Unitarians' AGM at 2.00 pm

24th General Assembly AGM

## Sunday Services in April

4th Neil Spurway "When in Rome..."

18th Jim Millar "Physics and Genesis – unlikely bedfellows"

## Wednesday Discussion Meetings at 7.0 pm

7th Further discussion prompted by Isaiah

14th Death Cafe

21st Places I have loved ... and would love to revisit

28th Quiz night

## Requests for our readers from the editors:

- **Contact us** if you have any issues reading *News & Views*, in print or online, because of font size, or any other reason, and we will try to find a solution
- Please **send us your Spring pictures** and/or observations and reflections on the season
- If you have friends—Unitarians or otherwise—near or far—who may enjoy *News & Views*, feel free to **invite them to join our mailing list** by sending us their email address
- The GA has received 6 motions for discussion at the AGM. However, time constraints mean that only 4 can be fitted in, and delegates will vote for the four at the start of the meeting. A brief description of the content of the motions follows. The full account of each motion can be found on the GA website:

<https://www.unitarian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Motions-2021.pdf>

All motions urge action by the General Assembly regarding specifically:

Motion 1: The misuse of alcohol

Motion 2: Disinvestment of our funds from fossil fuel

Motion 3: Support for the Unitarian Youth Programme and development of same

Motion 4: Gender Identity Rights

Motion 5: Production and Adoption of a Code of Ethics in Unitarian matters

Motion 6: Support Interfaith Red Cross Memorial Peace Appeal re Covid19/emergencies.

**Contact** Iain Brown ([secretary@glasgowunitarians-scio.org.uk](mailto:secretary@glasgowunitarians-scio.org.uk)) or Donald Jacobs

([donrayjay@aol.com](mailto:donrayjay@aol.com)) who are the GUC representatives at the AGM this year, or **contact**

Ruth Gregory ([rlgregory1765@gmail.com](mailto:rlgregory1765@gmail.com)) who will be representing the SUA

**Please send submissions for May *News & Views* to Janet, Lyanne or Donald by the middle of April**

**NEWS & VIEWS - Janet Briggs, Lyanne Mitchell and Donald Jacobs**

[j.briggs159@virginmedia.com](mailto:j.briggs159@virginmedia.com), [lyanne.mitchell@mac.com](mailto:lyanne.mitchell@mac.com) and [donrayjay@aol.com](mailto:donrayjay@aol.com)

**WEBSITE Lyanne Mitchell and John Wilkinson**

## Talking About Death

Death is a topic that's fundamental to us all.

At the Remembrance Service of 2020 in November, we heard some of the reminiscences and memories of some of our friends in GUC. These resonated and have stayed with me. Airing memories, feelings and wishes, even long past, gives an insight into the person you are. Not the mother, father, sister brother, wife, husband or friend but 'you', an individual with your own experiences, and thoughts.

But, we still need to talk about death. On a practical level, there's planning considerations. Awareness of what you want at the end of life enables others to respect your wishes. If such a conversation never takes place, someone else will make the decisions for you. Probably with the best of intentions, but possibly not the choices you would make.

The pandemic has been a time of uncertainty for many, a new awareness of our own mortality. GUC holds the occasional death café on a Wednesday evening, we have an occasional Service discussing end of life and death. We can offer a choice of Worship Leaders for a funeral, but we don't offer much in the way of practical matters.

We are considering running a programme of events related to ill health and death during 2021. Another Death Café, a Service, further discussion. We are redesigning our Next of Kin form to better suit the needs of a remote Congregation.

None of this is intended to be intrusive. We aren't offering to hold Power of Attorney for you or pry into your personal business. However, as your Church, we do have some obligations. We want you to feel able to discuss your personal affairs. We can provide a listening ear and support. We can offer a safe place to hold specific requests you may have for your funeral or other arrangements. A sealed envelope would remain secure and unopened for delivery to the addressee at the appropriate time.

Talking about end-of-life issues is an opportunity for closeness. By talking about death we can come to appreciate the extraordinary everyday moments of our lives. We are forced to look inward and contemplate who we truly are as human beings. This can bring perspective and help us to set our priorities and make choices wisely. It sheds light on the meaning of our relationships and strengthens the bonds we share with those with whom we're holding these conversations.



*Alison Briggs, Church Officer*

## The Nurture Society

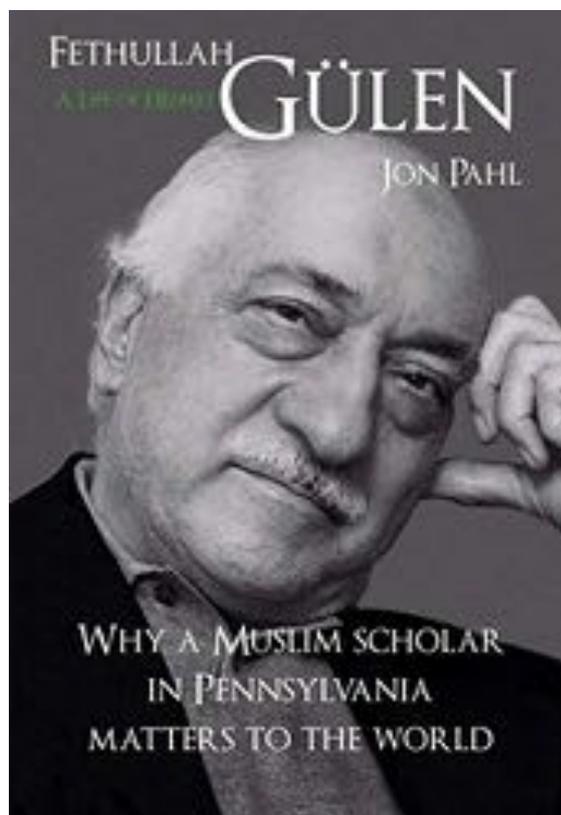
Our Glasgow Unitarian church has long had a connection with members of the Nurture Society, a supportive group of political refugees from present-day Turkey. Former Lay Leader Alistair Bate met them in Edinburgh, where he was living. They introduced themselves as members of [Dialog4Scotland](#), and he invited them to tell us about themselves at a meeting in our Centre. Language difficulties ensured that we came away with only a hazy notion of their story. Nevertheless, Alistair and I carried on the friendship, and before long he was a speaker at a lecture which they arranged at Edinburgh University in honour of Mohammed's birthday. I went along to support him. One of our friends spoke there in halting English, and Alistair spoke mystically of 'The Rose of Medina'. For me, it was a pleasant and friendly but ultimately mystifying experience.

Later that year, they asked him to speak again, this time about Christmas. Sadly, by that time, Glasgow had decided to part company with Alistair, so they asked me, and I did my best. The talk was to be held again in Edinburgh, and at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. Their representative had prepared a Power Point exposition of extracts about Jesus from the Koran. I had only my version of the usual nine-lessons commonly presented in Protestant churches at Christmas-time, augmented with the sceptical Unitarian treatment of these references – truly a comical experience, though no other Unitarians saw it. I did warn them here, and in Aberdeen. The Aberdonians must have been surprised when two Turkish ladies joined their Women's League meetings. Nevertheless, I was treated kindly and seriously throughout, and driven home to Glasgow.

Since then, some members of [Dialog4Scotland](#) were settled in and around Glasgow. We have been able to have many more Inter-Faith events, mostly over food, in our Centre and in their splendid new premises in Cambuslang. Our Wednesday group met there a little over a year ago, and participated in Inter-Faith discussion before being entertained to a glorious meal.

More recently, we were invited to take part in a Zoom prayer meeting, where an Imam spoke about the breadth and inclusiveness of Islam, with quotations from the Koran, a Christian spoke about the Lord's Prayer, along with Biblical quotations, and I chose as my theme, 'God in All Things', with quotations from Unitarian writers, chief of them being Edinburgh Unitarian Dr June Bell, as representing my understanding of Unitarianism.

Through all these years, our connection has been blighted by the poor linguistic skills common to most Britons. Happily, as time passes, we are meeting people who can speak English fluently, which greatly facilitates meaningful dialogue, and it bodes well for future contact and friendships, as well as Inter-Faith understanding. This month they invited us to watch, with them, a YouTube video "Broken Lives" with the author, Jon Pahl, introducing his book, about Islamic scholar Fethula Gulen, who founded the group Hizmet, to encourage Turkish graduates and young professionals to help make the world a better place by spreading education and opening schools, first of all, in rural Turkey and in neighbouring countries like Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, where Turkic languages are spoken. More recently, as they have come increasingly under threat from the current regime in Turkey, they have travelled further afield, more or less all over the world, under the names of [Dialog4Australia](#), for example. I hope that we can continue our friendship with these people in years to come. Gulen has found acceptance and friendship with the Unitarian Universalists of America as our friends seek to do with Unitarians here.



*Janet Briggs*

## Inter-Faith in Iraq

Not for the first time, we should be inspired at news of an initiative by Pope Francis. As I write, he is on a four-night visit to Iraq, in support of the diminished Christian population there, and in an attempt to bring healing Peace by promoting Inter-Faith respect and co-operation. His entry into Bagdad was flanked by dancing representatives of the many Faiths that used to flourish in Iraq. He has already made a speech before the Prime Minister, and had made a formal visit to the reclusive Shia Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani. Today he is visiting Ur, the ruins of the five-thousand-year-old city, reputedly the birthplace of Abraham who is revered as a prophet in the scriptures of Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. There he has made a speech in the open air, again emphasizing that we are all one people under God.



For centuries, Iraq was home to Muslims, both Shia and Sunni, Yazidis, Kurds and Christians. Iraqis were proud of their diversity, but it made them a target for the blasphemy of single-minded 'religious' terrorists, unknown numbers of who still roam the deserts of the Middle East. This visit is a brave move by the eighty-four-year-old Pope, and Security has been stepped-up accordingly.

On his final day in Iraq, he will conduct prayers for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation at two of the sites in the Kurdish sector, in the oil-rich North, where ISIS's worst acts of terrorism and destruction took place, and in the afternoon. he will conduct a solemn Mass in Mosul. After a night's rest, he will fly home to Rome.

## Summary of Outcomes of Business of the Management Committee

The revived membership of our long departed musician, Kerr Jamieson to the Highlands was approved with delight.

The deficit so far into 2021 was commented on as surprisingly small.

It was reiterated that GUC will only accept written requests for printed copies of News and Views. Subscriptions to the Inquirer are still due to Wilma Patterson who acts as the church's agent.

In these difficult times it was confirmed that a full report on pastoral care will be presented to the AGM.

A programme of desired improvements, many of which can most conveniently be carried out while the church is closed, will also be presented at the AGM.

The constitution will be amended slightly to legitimise online attendance at meetings.

The AGM and General Assembly will be held on line once again and the delegates to it will be Donald Jacobs and Iain Brown, either of whom can be contacted about any matters anyone wishes to raise.

*Iain Brown*

## Your Body and Consciousness (Adapted from GUC service on 7th March)

You are what you eat. So the saying goes. And it must be more or less right. As lumps of matter we start with a contribution from our father (very tiny) and our mother (lots, then more and more through pregnancy). After that, we are composed of what we eat, what we drink and what we breathe. What else?

Well glad we sorted that out.

But hold on a moment.

For quite some time, people have often thought that, if you take a scientific view of the world, you must be a bit soft in the head to think that we are something beyond our physical bodies. Surely that's romantic wishful thinking at best.

That is how things have seemed to be.

But our understanding is changing. Now, there is a good scientific case to be made that we are more than our bodies. Radically more. And always will be.

The world is full of information systems. And we are some of them. In fact, all living things are some of them.

Reflecting on this, we may similarly allow the possibility of the opposite process: living information systems being transposed on to new platforms.

An amoeba is a lump of matter, but as a living organism it is a system built on information which happens to use the constituents of a particular complex acid as its platform. And so are we. Our physical base, like that of the amoeba is not sufficient, and not necessary for us as systems based on information. We rest on a particular physical base.

But, as the song says, "It ain't necessarily so."

In a world where software can sit in many kinds of platform, this is perhaps easier to get our heads around than in earlier times.

I am not thinking of transhumanism here. That is the idea that we could upload our minds into cyberspace. It is something much more profound.

So...

On one level we are what we eat.

On another we are what we compute.

We are systems built on information. Information which uses living cells and their contents as a platform.

And most of those cells are replaced, with varying frequencies, in the course of our lifetime: Our continuing identity is as a system not as continuing bits of matter. One exception is the group of cells making up our cerebral cortex. Most of these stay with us through our life.

So let us turn to what goes on in our brains and those of many other animals.

We are what we eat - our physical constituents

We are what we compute – think of ourselves as information systems.

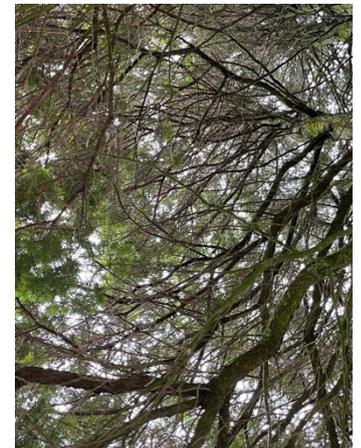
But we are much more than this:

We are what we feel: we have subjective experience. We have consciousness.

Philosophers, cognitive scientists, poets and prophets have all wrestled with the character and nature of consciousness.

Ways have been found to show how consciousness may have evolved. The benefits and superior fitness to environments it may bestow. But nothing in the world known to physics, in its standard form, and nothing in the world of information begins to account for our **capacity** for consciousness.

Yes, we can develop our knowledge of the neural correlates of consciousness. Yes, we can trace evolutionary paths based on selective advantages conferred by consciousness. But none of this accounts for our capacity to exhibit consciousness. Time travel would have been a handy tool for dinosaurs as they faced extinction some 66 million years ago. But a trait only has selective



advantage if that trait is within nature's toolkit. (Perhaps some dinosaurs did have a capacity for time travel and leapt into a sort of Jurassic Park of the far future, but I doubt it!)

It is worth repeating: nothing in the world known to physics, in its standard form, and nothing in the world of information begins to account for our capacity for consciousness.

Physicalism is a philosophical view of the world that holds that everything that is real and which can cause change to happen must be physical in nature. Consciousness is an awkward phenomenon if you hold that position. It has led many who are wedded to a physicalist stance to some odd positions. Eliminativists give conscious experiences a technical name ("qualia") to make it easier to maintain that they don't exist at all. Some others who follow a branch of panpsychism claim that every bit of matter is conscious. If every atom and quark is conscious, perhaps this provides the base for the leap to the consciousness we experience.

One of the most prominent and rigorous of physicalist philosophers of mind, Jaegwon Kim, can only conclude his book "Physicalism or something near enough" with "the 'hard problem' of how any system can be a conscious system remains".

For the world around us to be capable of conjuring up consciousness - something so radically different from matter and information, strongly suggests that consciousness in some form is in one way or another at the core of reality. As Albert Einstein is said to have said: "Everything should be made as simple as possible. But not more simple." Simply physicalist accounts of reality are perhaps just too simple to match the evidence.

One might object that we only witness consciousness in association with complex neural systems.

But we should perhaps reflect on our knowledge of matter. The subatomic world is very very different to the bricks and mortar of our everyday experience.

And it may be that our everyday experience of consciousness no more exhausts the nature of consciousness than our everyday experience of matter exhausts the nature of matter.

We are what we eat.

We are what we compute.

And we are what we feel.

And it may be so—I believe it is so—that our bodies are not sufficient and not ultimately necessary to the reality already pregnant with consciousness from which we come and of which we are part.

We are much more than our bodies. And what that "much more" is, is only contingently dependent on our bodies.

A love letter is contingently dependent on the paper/email/facebook wall it is written on. Paper makes a difference. But not all the difference. It is the feeling that counts.

Information systems can be supported by many platforms. The platform makes a difference. But not all the difference. And the same goes for consciousness.

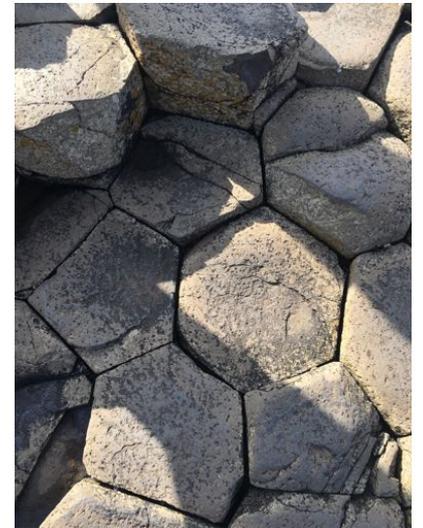
For many of us, we have been brought up in intellectual terms with the mindset that, from a scientific perspective, it is daft not to believe that our reality rests solely on a physical reality.

But, just as Darwin made it intellectually respectable to believe in something other than traditional creation stories, so our growing understanding of information and consciousness makes it intellectually respectable to see the physical as a part and not the whole base of reality.

We come from a core reality which is pregnant with consciousness as well as matter/energy and as well as information and the mathematics on which it is built.

My own belief is that, in some fashion, we will ultimately return to that base.

In the traditional Zulu phrase, we are going home.



*Jon Cape*

*Vincent tries -  
It's hard to teach yourself to paint.  
At last he finds the Southern sun  
His yellow sunflowers welcome Paul.  
How they talk!  
but ideas clash.  
His dreams dissolve and drown in blood.*



*Vincent sighs -  
He needs a sanctuary to heal.  
The drive to paint cannot be tamed  
by solitude or doctor's care.  
Every day  
it grows and grows  
until his brush strokes glow again.*



*Vincent dies -  
two small, bare rooms (six francs per week)  
This final frenzied phase of life.  
Then tragic death in Theo's arms.  
Side by side,  
two modest graves  
now whisper of a brother's love.*



**Vincent**  
by Lyanne Mitchell

It is our custom at GUC, to offer all new members the 'Hand of Fellowship'.

It gives us great pleasure to offer our *returning member*, and distinguished organist, Kerr Jamieson the

**'WELCOME BACK' HAND of FELLOWSHIP.**

This was offered to him during Lyanne's service on Sunday 21st March.

We are all delighted to have Kerr back within our membership.



As we prepare to sit, each in the comfort of our own homes, for the **Annual General Meeting on 11th April**, let me urge you to consider standing - for election as a trustee. One of the very positive developments from the period of pandemic is the discovery that gathering virtually on Zoom for our monthly meetings of trustees has, in many ways, improved them. We get better attendances, and good discussions each time. If you are a member, living far from Glasgow, for whom the commitment to travel to



meetings made committee work for GUC impossible, this is my message for you: everything has changed! We really want to be welcoming new members - and old too, particularly if you have not been on the management committee for some time - to participate in the work of running GUC. If you might like to have a chat first, before deciding whether to stand for election, please feel very free to call me - [07802349898](tel:07802349898). I should be delighted to hear from you.

*Roddy Macpherson, Convener*

## Balloons over Bagdad



Apparently, in an effort to cheer people up, the Iraqi Government announced a Festival. I say ‘apparently’ because we won’t have heard about it here. A group of Dutch engineers engaged in some rebuilding project over there had the bright idea of clubbing together and organising a flight of hot-air balloons over the city just before dusk on that day. They also filmed themselves preparing to do it—all speaking in English for maximum exposure, and because they all can.

They ordered three or four hot-air balloons from Europe, and they came in plenty of time, but not to Bagdad Airport, and the Security team at the airport, who did not know that such things existed, refused to release them.

With only a day or two to go before the Festival, they telephoned to Holland for a magnificent mixed bouquet to be put on the next flight to Bagdad. They invited the Mayor of Bagdad to a morning reception, and duly presented him with ‘a gift from our country’, and told him their plight, asking him to see if he could get the balloons released. He was able to make it happen, and they duly arrived on the morning of the festival.

Even then, it was a comedy of errors. Petrol for the burners was easy to obtain. Compressed air to inflate the balloons had been forgotten, and when hastily ordered, the nozzles on the cylinders were not compatible with the nozzles on the balloons, so a tradesman had to be found, with the ability to fashion a high-pressure connection, promising him a balloon-ride if he could. He did, and in the last half-hour of daylight, three balloons were filmed sailing into the sunset. The engineers were happy. Everyone they saw in the streets was smiling.

They hope to be able to make hot-air balloons a feature of a national Bagdad Festival, which may perhaps restore some pride in the demoralised people of Bagdad.

*Janet Briggs*

# Don't forget to write!

A service on zoom by Lyanne Mitchell  
GUC - 21st March 2021 (Extract)

**Chalice Lighting** - *Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to encourage, and to express our love.*

## A letter is a kind of historical artifact.

There are so many examples of letters written by famous people which inform us and give us huge insight into their lives - artists, musicians, political leaders, writers. My daughter Claire gave me a fascinating book 'Letters of Note'. I have chosen 4 of them to be read out by obliging friends.

*In 1936 a young girl wrote to Albert Einstein on behalf of her Sunday School class, asking the question "Do Scientists pray?"*

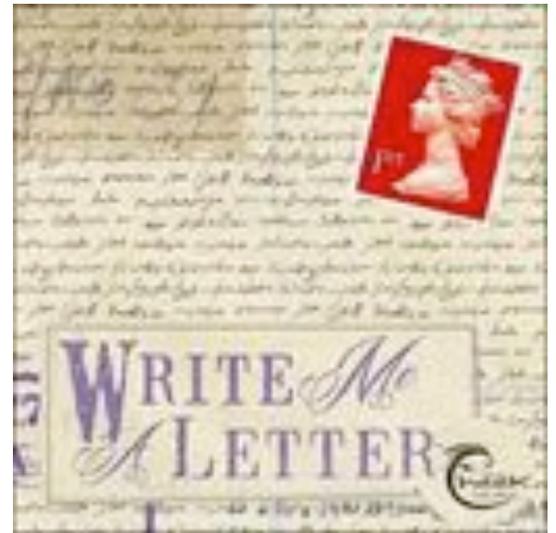
*January 19, 1936  
My dear Dr. Einstein,*

*We have brought up the question: Do scientists pray? in our Sunday school class. It began by asking whether we could believe in both science and religion. We are writing to scientists and other important men, to try and have our own question answered.*

*We will feel greatly honored if you will answer our question: Do scientists pray, and what do they pray for?*

*We are in the sixth grade, Miss Ellis's class.*

*Respectfully yours,  
Phyllis*



*January 24, 1936*

*Dear Phyllis,  
I will attempt to reply to your question as simply as I can. Here is my answer:*

*Scientists believe that every occurrence, including the affairs of human beings, is due to the laws of nature. Therefore a scientist cannot be inclined to believe that the course of events can be influenced by prayer, that is, by a supernaturally manifested wish.*

*However, we must concede that our actual knowledge of these forces is imperfect, so that in the end the belief in the existence of a final, ultimate spirit rests on a kind of faith. Such belief remains widespread even with the current achievements in science.*

*But also, everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that some spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe, one that is vastly superior to that of man. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is surely quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive.*

*With cordial greetings,  
yours, A. Einstein*

During the events leading up to the start of World War II, Gandhi wrote a letter to Adolf Hitler, 'for the sake of humanity' asking him to listen, as the "one person in the world who can prevent a war". It never reached Hitler due to an intervention by the British Government.

*Dear friend,*

*Friends have been urging me to write to you for the sake of humanity. But I have resisted their request, because of the feeling that any letter from me would be an impertinence. Something tells me that I must not calculate and that I must make my appeal for whatever it may be worth.*

*It is quite clear that you are today the one person in the world who can prevent a war which may reduce humanity to a savage state. Must you pay that price for an object however worthy it may appear to you to be? Will you listen to the appeal of one who has deliberately shunned the method of war not without considerable success? Any way I anticipate your forgiveness, if I have erred in writing to you.*

*I remain, Your sincere friend  
M. K. Gandhi*

On a lighter note - here is The Best Cover Letter Ever. After working in advertising as a copywriter in New York City, [Robert Pirosh](#) moved to Hollywood in 1934 with dreams of becoming a screenwriter. Here is the cover letter he sent to all of the directors, producers and studio executives he could think of.

*Dear Sir:*

*I like words. I like fat buttery words, such as ooze, turpitude, glutinous, toady. I like solemn, angular, creaky words, such as straitlaced, cantankerous, pecunious, valedictory. I like spurious, black-is-white words, such as mortician, liquidate, tonsorial, demi-monde. I like suave "V" words, such as Svengali, svelte, bravura, verve. I like crunchy, brittle, crackly words, such a splinter, grapple, jostle, crusty. I like sullen, crabbed, scowling words, such as skulk, glower, scabby, churl. I like Oh-Heavens, my-gracious, land's-sake words, such as tricksy, tucker, genteel, horrid. I like elegant, flowery words, such as estivate, peregrinate, elysium, halcyon. I like wormy, squirmy, mealy words, such as crawl, blubber, squeal, drip. I like sniggly, chuckling words, such as cowlick, gurgle, bubble and burp.*

*I like the word screenwriter better than copywriter, so I decided to quit my job in a New York advertising agency and try my luck in Hollywood,  
May I have a few with you?*

*Robert Pirosh*

He got the job by the way!

Now....I'm going to sit right down and write myself a letter.....  
and make believe it came from YOU!