

**Transformation
and the
Unitarian
Movement**

by Peter Hawkins

THE 1998 ESSEX HALL LECTURE

This is the Essex Hall Lecture for 1998. It was delivered in Chester on Thursday 16 April 1998. Essex Hall is the London Headquarters of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and stands on the site of the building where the first avowedly Unitarian congregation in an English-speaking country met over two hundred years ago. The lecture was founded in 1892 and many distinguished persons in various fields have contributed to the series. The delivery of the lecture is one of the leading events during the General Assembly's Annual Meetings.

A list of previous lectures, many of which are still available for purchase, may be obtained by application to the Information Department of the General Assembly, at the address printed below.

Published by the Information Department of the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, LONDON, WC2R 3HY

Tel: (0171) 240 2384 Fax: (0171) 240 3089

E-mail: ga@unitarian.org.uk

ISBN 0 85319 060 7



www.unitarian.org.uk/docs

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this lecture to two very different men who were in their own ways committed to transformation and both of whom had a transformative influence on me. One is my father-in-law, the late Rev. Fred Ryde, who was a Unitarian minister in Blackfriars, Brighton and Ditchling, Bury and Hampstead, Editor of *The Inquirer*, Information Officer and Vice Principal of Manchester College Oxford. The other is the late Fazal Inayat Khan, who was my spiritual teacher and who, like his grandfather before him, worked to create a universal spirituality that spoke to our current world.

It is a great and daunting honour for me to be giving this annual Essex Hall Lecture. For many years I have studied, researched and practised in the fields of transformation at the individual, group, organisational, community and inter-organisational levels. I have worked as a psychotherapist, group-worker, leader of a therapeutic community and for the last 15 years as an organisational consultant, both in the UK as well as across Europe and South Africa. I have worked with large corporations, county councils, government agencies and voluntary organisations, but never before have I worked with the transformative process of a whole religious movement.

I believe I have been given this honour as a number of Unitarians have read my writings on the "Spiritual Dimension of the Learning Organisation" (Hawkins 1991), or know that I have studied why so many attempts to transform organisations, communities and movements fail. So in this lecture I will share my understanding of what is transformation, the reasons why transformation efforts so often fail and some ways that transformation can be best facilitated to avoid the traps and pitfalls. I will then engage with you, the representatives of this wide and diverse movement, to inquire into how we apply this learning to Unitarianism in the United Kingdom.

But let me begin with three short stories from the Mulla Nasrudin, the Sufi wise fool who lived in the Middle Ages, and whose tomb can be found in at least five places through the Middle East. His stories can be found from Turkey to India, and are perennially updated by succeeding generations. Several years ago it occurred to me that if a wise fool entered the late twentieth century in western Europe, he or she would probably become a psychotherapist, an organisational consultant, or perhaps a Unitarian minister! I have collected and recreated many of the Nasrudin stories and have set them in the context of organisational consultancy. These will be published later this year (Hawkins 1998).

1. The Keynote Speech

Nasrudin was an intriguing figure in the field of Management Consultancy and so the committee of the professional association decided to invite him to speak at the next conference.

He was introduced at length by the chairperson and then he rose to his feet.

"Who here knows what I am going to tell them?" he asked.

The audience, who were used to audience participation, all shouted "No!"

"Then you are not ready to hear it." he replied before sitting down.

The committee, who received many complaints from the audience, were outraged. The chairperson said: "We cannot let this scoundrel get the better of us. We must invite him back for the next conference." The committee all agreed with their prestigious chair.

On the day of the conference all the audience were ready, having heard about the events of the last conference. Nasrudin was introduced, got to his feet and said: "Who here knows what I am going to tell them?"

"Yes!" shouted out the primed audience.

"Then you do not need me to tell you." said Nasrudin and calmly sat down.

"This is too much. He should be expelled from the association." they were all saying in the coffee break. But the chairperson was stubborn. "No. We must invite this man back next year as the keynote speaker....we will sort him out."

The big day arrived and, as before, Nasrudin got up and asked:

"Who here knows what I am going to tell them?"

Half the audience cried out "Yes", the other half "No", as they had been briefed by the chair.

"Then let those who know tell those that do not." said Nasrudin and left the conference.

2. "Bon appetit"

Nasrudin soon became rich on his earnings as a renowned management consultant and, like many rich fools, decided to go on a cruise. The first night of the voyage he was given a table with a Frenchman. At the beginning of the meal the Frenchman greeted him with "Bon Appetit". Nasrudin thought that the Frenchman was politely introducing himself, so he responded by saying "Mulla Nasrudin". They had a pleasant meal.

However, the next morning breakfast started with the same ritual, the Frenchman saying "Bon Appetit", and so Nasrudin who now thought the Frenchman must be a little deaf said even more loudly, "MULLA NASRUDIN".

At lunch the same thing happened and by now Nasrudin was getting a little irritated with what he thought must be a very dim-witted Frenchman. Luckily that day he got talking to a fellow passenger who spoke French and was an inter-cultural consultant and coach. He was able to enlighten Nasrudin and tell him that "Bon Appetit" was a polite French greeting, that meant "have a nice meal".

"Ah! Thank you." said the enlightened and relieved Nasrudin. All afternoon he practised, walking up and down the deck of the boat. That evening he very proudly sat down at dinner, smiled and said to his new French friend, "Bon Appetit."

"Mulla Nasrudin." the Frenchman replied.

3. Finished learning

An excited father came running up to Nasrudin waving a letter. I have just heard from my son that he has past his M.B.A. and finally finished all his learning.

"Console yourself Sir," began Nasrudin, "I am sure that God in his infinite wisdom will send him some more."

Now I have brought the Mulla Nasrudin alongside me to warn you constantly of the dangers of listening to consultants who give advice. You cannot buy an answer on how to transform from somebody else; nobody else's solution will work. However, this statement is part of a paradox because at the same time I believe the old Chinese proverb that, when it comes to recognising organisational culture, the last one to know about the sea is a fish. It is very hard to recognise the sea that you are constantly swimming within. My current favourite definition of organisational culture is "that which you stop noticing once you have been part of an organisation (or movement) for three months", which is why we must never stop learning from newcomers. The Mulla, as the perennial newcomer, is also here as his stories work at three levels: as humour; as a way of helping us see the world differently; and by helping personal transformation.

But what is "transformation"? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines "transformation" as: "The action of changing in form, shape or appearance...a metamorphosis". It goes on to mention the late Victorian movement of Transformism: "The Doctrine of gradual evolution" which started in biology but was later applied to "moral and social relations". Although I am very critical of much of the application of Darwinian thinking to understanding social change, the concept of "evolution" is often a good place to start in considering social transformation. Professor Reg Revans who developed "Action Learning" used the formula:

$$L \geq EC$$

Learning must equal or be greater than environmental change

An organisation will only survive if its learning and development at least keeps pace with the changes in its external environment. There are two types of change that can be created though in response to an environmental challenge according to systems thinkers: first and second-order change. "Transformation" implies a quantum shift in form, a second-order response, and this is often contrasted to "development", which is more incremental, a first-order change. Water changing from 20 degrees centigrade to 40 degrees is development, more of the same; but water changing from -5 degrees to plus 5 degrees is transformation, a qualitative change. In organisational change, the difference between development and transformation can be seen in the nature of the questions that are being addressed. Organisations interested in development focus on increasing market share, improving efficiency, cutting costs. Likewise in a religious movement, those focusing on development ask: "How do we get more people into our congregations? How do we make our services more interesting? How do we improve our communication processes?"

Those focusing on transformation ask more fundamental questions: "What is it that we can uniquely offer that the world of tomorrow needs? What difference would it make to the world if we ceased to exist? What must we let go of and unpack from our camel train to enter through the eye of the needle into tomorrow's world?"

Development is focused on addressing today's problems; transformation focuses on tomorrow's challenges and how we must change ourselves in order to meet those challenges.

Many current leading writers are arguing that organisational development is inadequate to the demands of the time and we need to engage with transformative processes (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Wheatley, 1992; Nevis et al, 1996; Collins and Poras, 1994; Champy and Nahria, 1996; Ulrich 1996). Other writers have argued that transformation is an urgent agenda not only for organisations but for individuals and societies. (Harman, 1988, Berman, 1981, Capra, 1982 and others).

As preparation for this lecture I engaged a number of Unitarians from various parts of the movement in a collaborative inquiry into "Transformation and the Unitarian Movement". At the beginning of the workshop there was a good deal of debate concerning whether the Unitarian movement needed transformation, or whether gradual development was enough. I believe that we now live in a world where the pace of change is such that the choice is between radical transformation or withering away in small, ageing, fragmented communities.

This call for radical transformation within the movement is neither new nor original. One could argue that it lies at the very core of our community, tradition and beliefs. Calls for revisioning the nature of our movement can regularly be read in *The Inquirer*, and in Unitarian books and other publications.

The great Unitarian, J.E. Carpenter, argued in 1925 that one of the Unitarian core purposes was:

"The moral transformation of the world, by means of the transformation of individuals."

To this I would add that transformation begins at home — with our own social and political system!

H.L.Short wrote in 1962:

"A church must not only preach to its already converted members a doctrine which they consider true; it must have an effective place in the wider world. It must have some contemporary relevance, some function in the social order, some contribution to make to the intellectual life of the time."

John Hostler in 1981 wrote some very strong challenges to the movement as a whole:

"The fundamental tendency towards individualism...calls into question the function of the movement and the purpose of its corporate existence. For a life of practical virtue and charity is something which a man can attempt quite well by himself....so what benefit will he gain by belonging to a church?"

"The Unitarian movement is no longer so special or unique....the other denominations are gradually coming to a position in which for a long time it was a solitary pioneer. And this development threatens its continued existence. Only by maintaining a distinct identity can it have a role that will sustain it."

"Unitarianism must therefore create a new role for itself if it is to continue as a living and vital movement." (Hostler 1981)

The movement is not short of challenge from within its own ranks. What I believe it has most lacked is a coherent praxis or methodology for collective transformation of the wider system. It has well-developed practices and methods for individual transformation and renewal, and more recently has developed ways of facilitating congregational renewal. Transforming a movement of strong-minded individualists and fiercely independent congregations is a great challenge.

Before going on to talk about methodologies for large system transformation, let me first add my own perspective on one aspect of why transformation is necessary at this historical juncture.

While writing this lecture I have also been engaged in writing a chapter for George Chryssides' book on "Unitarian Perspectives on Contemporary Religious Thought". My chapter is on "Postmodernism and Religion". I would not describe myself as a postmodernist, but as somebody who believes that we live in a post-modern world and that the philosophies and epistemologies of the modern world and the Age of Enlightenment will not be sufficient to address the current challenges in personal, organisational and social change. While writing this chapter I had a very enjoyable time returning to my roots as a historian and reading a wide variety of Unitarian history, and what a rich history the Unitarian movement has. From the lives of its members, their writings and the social influence they had on their world, there can be no doubt that the Unitarians of the late 18th and 19th centuries were committed to transformation. However, their transformative struggle was to bring a radical, rational enlightenment approach to a world still dominated by pre-modern orthodoxy and individual oppression. Their faith was married to a modernist epistemology based on: **Rationalism, Individualism and Protest.**

Let me suggest that to move forward Unitarianism most needs to free itself from these cherished beliefs and this modernist trinity.

Rationalism
Individualism
Protest

Rationalism was central for the Unitarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to build a modern church, liberated from the dogmas of orthodoxy, and where individuals were encouraged to think for themselves. It also helped Unitarians to create a church where radical thinkers, poets and politicians, could find community support for their personal beliefs, and a spiritual basis for their work in the world. But if, in the post-modern age, we cling to rationalism we will become dusty, bookish, old-style intellectuals — locked in historical modernist libraries and imprisoned in dualism.

Individualism within Unitarianism is often caricatured by the phrase: "Wherever two or three Unitarians are gathered together, there are at least

three or four different opinions!" (Long 1997). Religious freedom and the rights of individuals have been important causes of the last 250 years, and in a number of parts of the world must still be struggled for. However, in the West, individualism has now manifested its shadow side — a world where a British Prime Minister can say "There is no such thing as society." and her Neo-Darwinian politics can produce a society of unfettered personal competition. In the Unitarian movement individualism can also manifest its shadow side, in which we can fail to be true communities or fellowships and become tolerant collections of opinionated odd-balls.

Protest is at the heart of Protestantism and, whereas other Protestant churches became incorporated into the establishment of their particular societies and countries, Unitarians have always looked for the next wave of dissent. Our Unitarian forebears and elders must be greatly praised for constantly moving forward the struggle for freedom. When freedom of worship was achieved they moved on to universal suffrage, and when that was won they moved on to universal religious tolerance, and then to oppose sexism, racism and other forms of prejudice. Unitarians have also led other denominations in pioneering female ministry, wedding ceremonies for couples of mixed faith and blessings of same-sex relationships.

Ultimately a protest movement is only as strong as the orthodoxy it opposes and dissents from. Of course there are still causes to fight for and freedoms to be won, but a protest movement needs a strong orthodoxy. As the orthodox religions of western countries decline so do their Protestant opposites. As the bonds between church and state grow ever weaker, and the Church of England becomes a strange mix of the pluralistically liberal and fundamentalist evangelical, the Unitarian church loses much of its identity and the opposition that held it together.

Two other pillars of Unitarianism, those of **Tolerance** and **Freedom**, I believe we must still raise our glasses to as we share food together. They are still much needed in our conflictual world, but they need to be expanded beyond the past anthropocentric context of the Enlightenment to embrace a deep ecological reverence for all of creation. For humans to be more tolerable on this planet, we must be less tolerant of abuse of the world and

its natural resources by us and our fellow humans (particularly First World westerners). Our freedoms must be circumscribed by the limits of sustainability and the principles of Nature, as articulated by Karl Henrik Robert in the "Natural Step" and Arnie Ness in "Deep Ecology". For those of us like myself, grown greedy on the fruits of exploitation of the world, we have much to give up. In the chapter on "Postmodernism and Religion" I offer a new trinity to replace Reason, Individualism and Protest.

Now in the world of organisational change there is much talk about transformation, and many books and articles being written about it, but not a lot of success in facilitating it happening. Here are some quotes about effecting change in large companies.

Figure 1.

Change programmes

-
- 70% of re-engineering efforts ultimately fail (Dr Michael Hammer)
 - 2/3 of companies that tried to implement total quality had not seen any significant change (Arthur D Little)
 - Many large scale change initiatives run into difficulty at implementation phase (KPMG Director of Change management)
 - Results from large scale change programmes is "seriously underwhelming" (Dr Richard Pascale)

© 2000 Bath Consultancy Group

Bath CONSULTANCY GROUP

Why is it so difficult? Well my colleagues and I have tried to research the answer to this very question. The first thing we discovered is that there was

a problem with the our basic understanding about change. Our way of thinking about change is rooted in our basic epistemology, the way we have been taught to learn and know about the world. Transformation must begin by transforming our epistemologies, our mind sets, changing the spectacles through which we view the world. Let me go through with you nine learning disabilities that most of us, who have been educated in post-Descartes and post-Newton western education, have acquired.

Figure 2.

Nine limiting mindsets about learning

1. Answer questions do not ask them
2. Answers are right or wrong
3. Don't cheat
4. Think 'either-or' for and against (Dualistically)
5. Think 'things' (Atomistically)
6. Cause → effect thinking (Linearly)
7. An effect has a single cause
8. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'
9. Learning is located within people



Now these learning disabilities, that we often learn in school (and Sunday school?), re-emerge when we are faced with the demands of complex change. There are a number of classic reactions that we fall into.

Change the leader. (The football club approach to change). If only we had a better President, General Secretary, better ministers etc.

Change the Structure. (the NHS approach to change). One County Council chief officer once told me that you had not won your spurs as a Chief Officer until you had completed your first two restructurings.

Rush to a task solution. A new publicity drive, a new mission statement, a new journal.

Go for growth. Without first asking growth for what purpose?

Invite in a Saviour. A consultant, a new leader or somebody to give the Essex Hall Lecture on "Transformation".

Believe that technology can solve the human problems. "If we were all on e-mail, and linked in an intranet, then we would not have any problems communicating."

A corporate senior management team asked Nasrudin whether or not he could prepare a communication policy for them, so that they could communicate better with all of their six thousand staff.

"Certainly." said Nasrudin. "Only first tell me, in communicating with your staff, what is it that you are not hearing?"

The Transformational Journey

Every transformational journey is unique, but there are some collective patterns that can be discerned from other organisations and movements that have successfully transformed themselves. From these patterns, I have drawn out some of the key steps or ingredients. This, however, is not the recipe — nor indeed the meal!

Step one: Ask what is it that the times are demanding from us?

Transformation begins not because you will it but because the time and tide demand it. Challenges emerge from the environment. Some of these we can respond to with our present way of being — we create first-order change; but other challenges defeat the best attempts at response from our current repertoire. These challenges demand a new way of being and responding from us, second-order change.

Step two: Ask what is it that we must let go of?

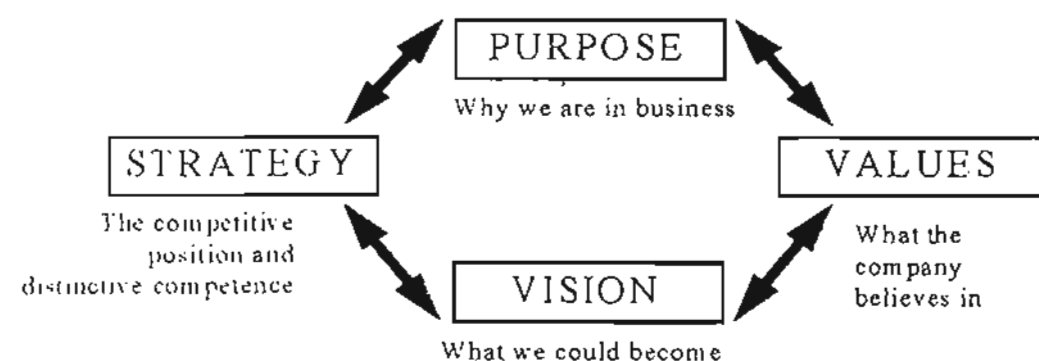
Transformation begins with death. Van Gennep in his now classic study of "Rites De Passage" showed how in many different tribes, transition rituals — be they puberty, marriage, birth or burial — began with death. There is no creation without destruction, no transformative new beginning without something dying. To transform Unitarianism, we must first ask: what is it that we must let go of? What is the excess baggage that must be discarded, before the camel can go through the eye of the needle? What must we each surrender in order to be truly open to the emergence of the new?

The Unitarian movement has to embrace its own descent. James Hillman, the ex-director of the Jung Institute and founder of archetypal psychology, pointed out that the problem with Christians is that they can only bear to have Good Friday if Easter Sunday is already guaranteed. The reality is that on Good Friday there is no guarantee of resurrection; there is only the surrender to, and the embracing of, descent.

Step three: Radically revisit the fundamental purpose

For transformation to happen we need to be clear about our core mission and vision.

Figure 3: Clarity of Mission



Purpose: Why do we exist? What is our fundamental purpose? What is it that we can uniquely do that tomorrow's world needs?

Vision: What would our movement look like, feel like, sound like and be doing differently if it fully lived its purpose?

Strategy: What differentiates us from others? What are our resources and competencies — not only material resources, but people resources, knowledge resources, process resources and spiritual resources? Where should we focus our efforts? What should our priorities be?

Core Values: How do we want to relate, both within the movement and to the world beyond? What core values should permeate all that we do — not just in worship but in business meetings, how we respond to enquiries and how we operate in the market place?

We must be very clear about the difference between a vision statement, a vision, and a visioning process. When I was working with the board of one organisation they spent a long time working on the statement of their core values by deeply reflecting on the values that first inspired them in their work, as well as what really mattered to them in their current work, and also what they would like to pass on to their successors and the following generations. They were pleased with what they had arrived at and somewhat surprised at how their personal core values had integrated so well with the other members of the team. They enthusiastically rushed into discussing how they could send this new value statement to all members of the organisation. Some wanted to put it in frames to go on office walls, others wanted it to be available to go in filo-faxes. I stopped this energetic debate, to point out that these were not organisational core values, they were not even their core values, merely their aspirations. After they survived the deflation, we explored how they might keep them in rough on the flip chart and take the list to each of their weekly meetings. At the end of each meeting they would spend ten minutes reviewing how both what they had decided, and how they had made decisions, matched with each of the core values. At the end of one month they changed their list in the light of what they now thought was feasible, and once again wanted to cascade the values to the rest of the organisation. I told them that I had stopped using the word "cascade" since one middle manager in another organisation said to me: "They at the top call it 'cascade change'. We call it being pissed on from on high!"

We eventually agreed that they would issue the core value statements to the next level of managers, asking them to give specific feedback on where they saw them living according to these values and where they experienced them acting in conflict with the values. Now we had moved from a "solution" and rhetoric to a learning and transformative process.

Step four: Design a collaborative, transformative inquiry process

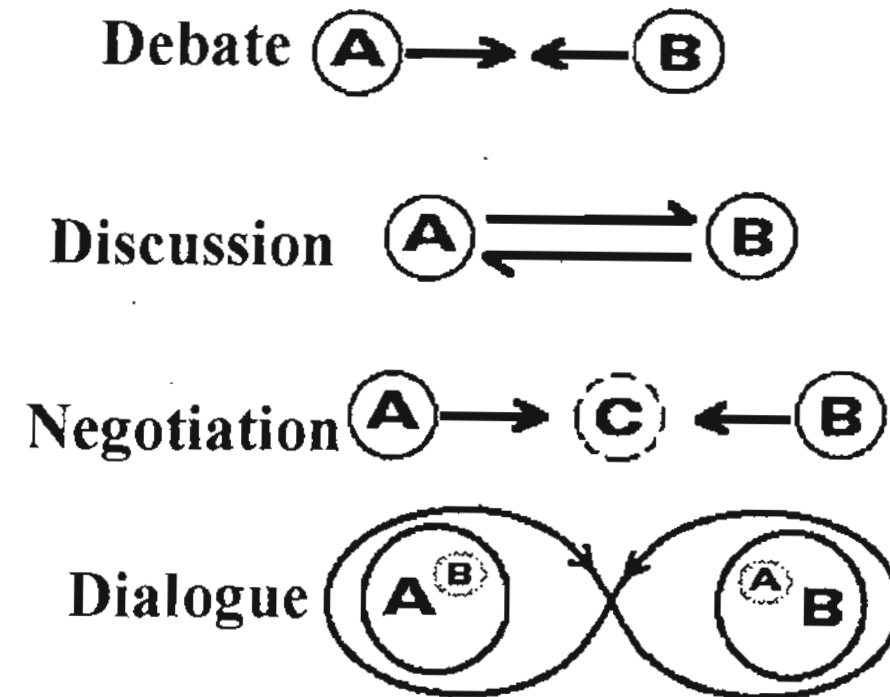
As indicated above, it is no good having a small central group come up with the solutions and then communicating them to all the others; for if people do not own the problems they are not going to own the solutions. Somehow the whole movement has to become involved in owning the challenges that currently only some people are aware of and even fewer own. Now this process cannot be done as part of the old structures and systems, because they might well be part of the problem. As Einstein once said, you cannot solve a problem from within the same level that created it.

This collective inquiry has to be designed in a way that recognises that "the medium is the message". It needs to be a process of exploration which in its very nature starts to organically rewire the organisation or movement. A process that creates new connections, relationships and neural pathways between one part of the organisation and another.

"Participative Inquiry" is a collaborative process of groups of people coming together to inquire collectively into an area of joint experience. It first requires a process of unlearning and for each of us to become aware of, and then to surrender, our fixed beliefs and assumptions. It is only when we have reached a state of unknowing that we can be receptive and open to the emergence of new meaning between us. To engage in this process we must not only learn the skills of self-awareness and careful listening, at a number of levels, but also the disciplines of dialogue.

So often Unitarian discourse can become serial monologues or debate. Now debate is similar to "discussion" — a word which comes from the same root as "percussion" or "concussion" and is about hitting the other person with your pre-formed ideas, while they hit you with theirs, as in figure 4.

Negotiation or mediation is often a modified version of this, which creates a compromise position C, between A and B. Transformational learning has still not happened.



In dialogue (knowing between) A endeavours, while holding their own experience, to be open and receptive enough to hold the reality of B within their own field of experience. B endeavours to do likewise. This creates a circuit or flow of knowing between the participants.

This can be developed into a form of **relational spiritual practice**, which can be termed "trialogue". Here the participants hold open the possibility of a third position. This third position, not occupied by any one individual, can be seen as the place of collective witness, or the opening for Grace to enter, or, if one is a Christian, the place where the Christ energy enters, ("Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I will be also." [Matt. 18.20]) In triologue we try not only to imagine creatively the reality of the other within us, but also to imagine the emergence of the new, from the third position. We attend to being open to learning and meaning that neither, or none of us, could possibly have known before we came into disciplined relationship, one with another.

Step five: The inquiry should start with identifying blockages not solutions?

Transformation is a natural process, not something that humans need to manufacture or engineer. We need to inquire collectively into how we might be blocking it from happening. Also, what are the blockages in the culture which we both inherited but also unconsciously sustain?

Now culture is a much used word and often poorly defined. Here are some of the definitions of organisational culture that are currently in use.

Ways to consider culture

Culture is ...

- the source of a family of concepts ... symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual and myth (Pettigrew, 1979)
- the ways of thinking speaking and (inter)acting that characterise a certain group (Braten, 1983)
- the taken-for-granted and shared meanings that people assign to their social surroundings (Wilkins, 1983)
- values and expectations which organisational members come to share (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979)
- the social glue that holds the organisation together (Baker, 1980)
- how things are done around here (Ouchi and Johnson, 1978)
- the collection of traditions, values policies, beliefs and attitudes that constitute a pervasive context for everything we think and do in an organisation (McLean and Marshall, 1983)

 Bath CONSULTANCY Group

Culture resides in the spaces but we tend to locate blockages in bodies — either the bodies of individuals whom we blame, or organisational bodies, such as Essex Hall, the Ministerial Fellowship, the Millennium Fund, or district x, or Unitarian faction y. This path is fraught with blame and defence. It creates a movement cluttered with petty politics, paranoia and protection of positions.

In preparation for this lecture I have read not only Unitarian history but a good deal of contemporary writing, and I have been most impressed with the quality of debate within the Unitarian community. Unitarianism continues to be a highly literate and keenly argued movement. Arthur Long has written a very good analysis of the denominations within this denomination. Andrew Hill, a moving personal view of the core beliefs and values of the "Unitarian Path". Matthew Smith has argued for clearer structure and form. The GA Council Working Party on *Vision 2001* convincingly argued for the importance of collective strategy and vision while others, such as Art Lester, have clearly articulated the need for a bottom-up community development process, and both are right. I would particularly like to pay tribute to the research and facilitation carried out by Dot Hewerdine, partly in connection with her Masters thesis, but partly for some of the development groups she has facilitated with Art Lester and others within the movement. In her thesis, she locates some of the cultural blockages to change and learning in the Unitarian movement in the relationship between the congregational communities, the districts and the central organisation. She discovers that many Unitarians experience spiritual energy in their local community, but the connection between their community and the wider movement is more problematic. As I read her thesis, I came to see how the movement is struggling with how to be a community of communities.

Now the Unitarian movement is not alone in trying to discover how to be a community of communities. The European community is currently engaged in just such a struggle on an international stage. I was for four years engaged with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, on how they could become a community of Psychotherapy communities and not just a bureaucratic, defensive and restrictive professional organisation — which is the way so many professional bodies degenerate. I was recently working with a consortium comprising a County Council, five District Councils, a Business Link, a Development Agency, a Training Enterprise Council, and several Colleges of Further Education on how they collaborate collectively to develop business in their wider area, and I became very aware that most social and political challenges flounder on the difficulty of partnership and collaboration.

In the Unitarian collaborative inquiry that I mentioned above, we collectively addressed the question: "What can I do as part of the Unitarian movement that I cannot do alone?" We worked in threes, one person asking the question five times, one answering and one writing down their responses. Because we had so many erudite writers and preachers, we introduced an additional challenge — that, after your first two answers, you had to come up with a response that you had not previously written, spoken or thought. The responses were varied and fascinating and, with help from some of those present, we clustered them in the following themes:

- Worship
- Community
- Challenge and support
- Spiritual development
- Literature and resources
- Joint inquiry
- Social action
- International affiliation

Here are some of the direct quotes under each heading.

Worship

- Worship with others — in quietness, song, listening, speaking, sharing what is deepest — a bonding spirit — that I can return to the world strengthened and uplifted;
- Take part in communal non-dogmatic worship;
- Communal feeling in worship — songs, stories, contributions on a theme, connected diversity and creativity — hearing the depth of sharing and the counterpoint.

Community

- Locally I can be part of a friendly, welcoming community — where I can belong;
- I can do the things that I want to do in a safe loving environment. Provides a context of safety and love. Acceptance of individuality — respect and honour for my opinions and beliefs;
- Opportunity to meet with diverse group of people in a congenial way you

would not otherwise meet without having to sign on the dotted line.

Challenge and support

- I can better deal with the difficult parts of my spiritual journey as part of the Unitarian movement;
- In personnel (or personal?) situations at work my Unitarian attitude helps me infinitely;
- Gained resilience in response to death and gives strength to face ideas;
- Challenged to have time and space to develop further;
- Keeps me inquiring — don't become self-satisfied with answers — support to go on.

Spiritual development

- A context where it is comfortable to be wrong or mistaken;
- Exposed to a whole wealth of ideas and spirituality that I couldn't find by myself;
- Have direct and useful open conversations about spirituality.

Literature/Resources

- Access ideas not available elsewhere — get stimuli that set me off in new directions — catalytic ideas — lead to fuller, deeper questioning.

Joint Inquiry

- Can speak openly about spiritual thoughts/beliefs — listened to in non-judgmental atmosphere. Assumptions not made about what is said and not said;
- Lead, run and develop religious education activities in an inquiring manner with respect and integrity;
- Have fun asking spiritual questions with other people;
- Have a religious education programme for my children that suits my conscience;
- Embrace paradox in community not just in head — engage with living paradox.

Social action

- Take action with others in accordance with Unitarian principles in practical way;
- Place to bring together the four facets of life: social action, inquiry, spiritual practice and worship — all interwoven.

International

- To be part of world-wide network of communities which share similar

values if not beliefs;

- Support liberal religious activities nationally and internationally in a significant way;
- Be part of an international movement outside the mainstream.

We also had some of the group working on the question: "What can my congregation do as part of the Unitarian movement that it cannot do alone?" Once again the responses were varied and intriguing and were similarly clustered.

Worship

- Quality of worship only through professional ministry which could not happen unless within the Unitarian movement;
- It can experience in its worship and spiritual practice etc. and make comparisons with elsewhere.

Community

- Can participate in national and district Unitarian activities;
- It could not model itself as an accepting religious community without knowing other examples exist;
- It is able to be a place that Unitarians from other parts can visit from time to time — the group welcomes that.

Challenge and support

- You can go to Hucklow as a resource for meeting people and restoring oneself;
- You can have a more effective, original voice;
- Have mutual support with other congregations, when it is needed — can give and receive support;
- We can hear wider and we can be heard wider.

Literature and Resources

- Greater access to quality resources from the centre e.g. human and material and counselling;
- On its own it would not have access to the stories of so many Unitarian communities that enriches its life at the moment;
- Availability of access to varied forms of literature e.g. hymn books.

Joint Inquiry

- Having contact with others enables us to look outwards and overcome fear;

- Shared past and present prevents us being trapped by myths of our own invention.

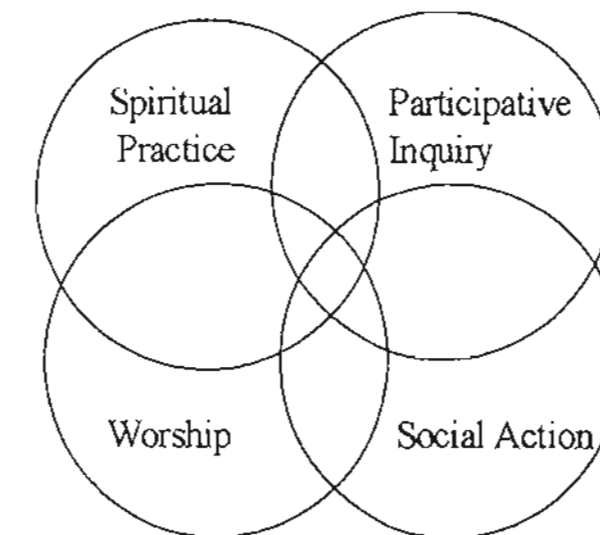
Social action

- Greater effect in social action.

International

- I can travel the world and find communities where I can be at home with like-minded people;
- The general public as part of the Unitarian movement can contribute to the lives the Unitarians in far off places e.g. Khasi Hills;
- Make meaningful contact with people world wide e.g. Hungary, USA — a "world wide web".

The next stage in a participative inquiry is to reflect on the emergent themes. What the inquiry process helped me to realise was the centrality to the Unitarian movement of four interconnected domains of practice. These I have put into a simple model.



When reflecting on this model, I was struck by how for me, the heart of Unitarianism is at the place all four circles overlap. This is the place where worship, spiritual practice, participative inquiry and social action are integrated and connected.

This model can also be linked back to the earlier challenge of how the Unitarian movement connects individual congregations to the wider

movement and creates a vibrant learning community of communities. The new challenge is to create a learning community of communities in each of the four domains. With the challenge comes new inquiry questions:

- How can the Unitarian movement be most effective at collective social action?
- How can we ensure both plurality of types of worship as well as a continuous deepening of our collective practice of worship?
- How can we best develop collective forms of spiritual practice that meet the needs of the time and the needs of the diverse membership?
- How can we use participative inquiry to ensure that Unitarian committee, business meetings and General Assemblies are an enriching form of spiritual practice?

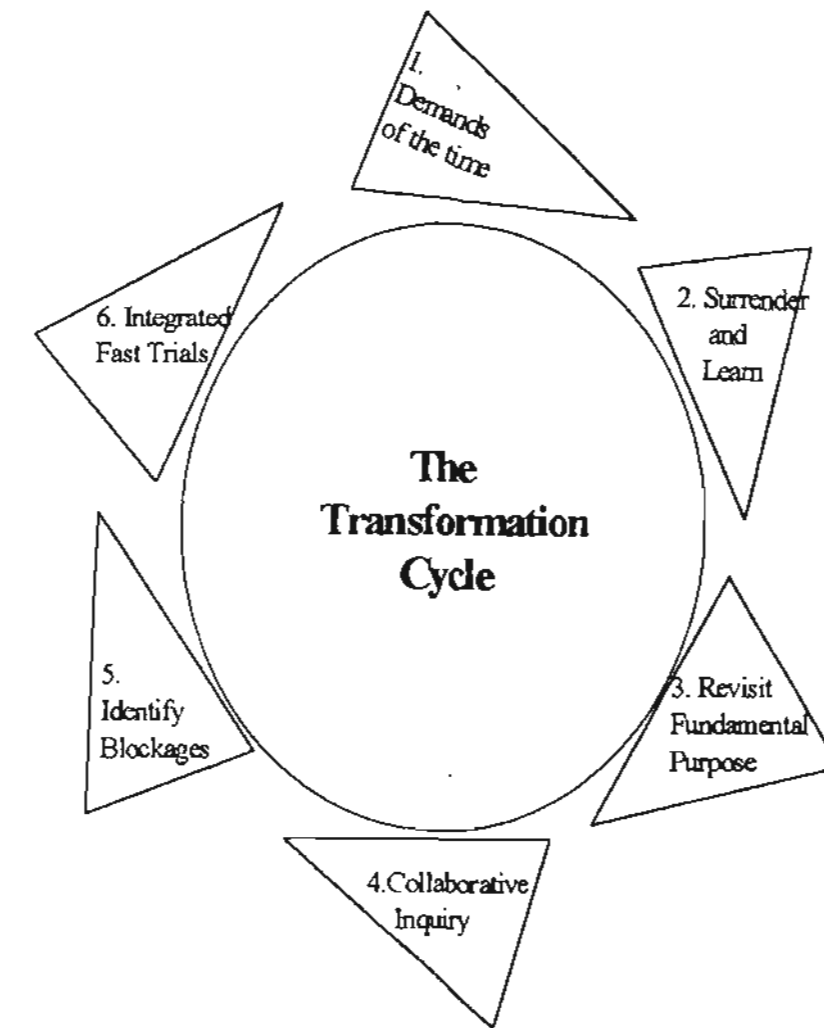
6. Step six: Integrated fast trials

As mentioned above there is a danger of going from diagnosing the problem to cascading the solution from a centralised position of authority. Analysis can never be completed before action, for it is often only when you try to change that you discover the deeper blockages that your diagnosis failed to see.

Also for transformation there will rarely, if ever, be one simple solution. Transformation comes from the dynamic combination of many change initiatives. However, there is another danger to be avoided, which we term "Death by a thousand initiatives", which leaves the movement confused, going in too many different directions and with initiative fatigue!

To avoid these two dangers, successful transformation efforts launch a number of parallel fast trial change processes, but ensure that they are well co-ordinated, learning in relation to each other and providing not only movement forward, but a deeper understanding of what needs to transform.

This provides us with the outlines of a transformational cycle:



At the centre of the wheel there needs to be a co-ordinating group that, like the hamster, keeps the wheel smoothly and energetically turning. I believe we need fast trials not only in the four domains and the connections between them, but also in how to unblock and revitalise the connections between individual congregations and the total Unitarian movement. In particular I would propose that parallel groups looked at the areas of:

- How districts function as a two-way channel between the centre and congregations;
- How ministers are provided with on-going training and development, support and shadow consultancy on how they can best act as a bridge between the individual, the congregation, the district and the

Unitarian movement;

That more is done to foster national interest groups that run across district and congregational boundaries and are perhaps linked to the four domains.

Conclusion

The moving words of one of our great Unitarian hymn writers, John Andrew Storey are:

" The church is me, the church is you
Not mortar, brick or stone;
It is with all who love the true,
And where true love is shown. "

The church is not only me, not only you, for then we are just a collection of individuals: it is also the myriad of connections on all levels between us that make up the distinctiveness of our movement; the Unitarian community of communities. At this particular time in human history, as the modern world — built on science, industrialisation and individualism — has reached its own nemesis and we are faced with an interconnected world teetering on ecological disaster, where certainties and orthodoxies have crumbled — causing some to retreat into dogmas and others into doubt — I believe the Unitarian movement is being called to fundamental transformation of its role in the world, its core beliefs and, most importantly, its systemic patterns of connectedness.

So to end as we started, a final Nasrudin story:

UNWANTED VISITORS

One day the head of Human Resources found Nasrudin walking all around the perimeter of the office block chanting and waving his hands.

"What are you doing?" inquired the bemused manager.

"Warding off unwanted visitors."

"But we have not had any visitors for over a month." said the manager.

"Ah good." said Nasrudin, "My intervention must be working."

Bibliography

- Berman, M. (1981) **The Reenchantment of the World**. Cornell University Press.
- Brooks, A. and others. (1993) **Unitarian Vision 2001: Caring enough to plan our Future**.
- Buehrens, J.A. & Forester Church, F. (1989) **Our Chosen Faith**. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Capra, F. (1982) **The Turning Point**. Bantam.
- Carpenter, J.E. (1925) **Freedom and Truth**. London.
- Champy, J. & Nohria, N. (1996) **Fast Forward: The Best Ideas of Managing Business Change**. Boston: Harvard Business Books.
- Collins, J.C. and Poras, J.I. (1994) **Built to last: Successful habits of visionary companies**. San Francisco: Century Business Books
- Hamel, G. and Prahalad, C.K. (1994) **Competing for the Future**. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Harman, W. (1988) **Global Mind Change**. Indianapolis: Knowledge Systems.
- Hewerdine, D. (1997) **Spiritual Energy in Organisations**. University of Surrey M.Sc. Dissertation.
- Hill, A.M. (1994) **The Unitarian Path**. London: The Lindsey Press.
- Hill, A.M. (1985) **A Liberal Religious Heritage**. London. Unitarian Information.
- Holt, R.V. (1938) **The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England**. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Hawkins, P. (1998a) **Consult the Wise Fool: Short Spiritual Stories for Organisational and Personal Transformation**. Hampshire: Crescent Books.
- Hawkins, P. (1998b) Postmodernism and Religion. in Chrysiddes, G. (ed): **Unitarian Perspectives on Contemporary Religious Thought**. London: Lindsey Press.
- Hawkins, P. (1997) - "Organisational Culture: Sailing between Evangelism and Complexity" in **Human Relations**, Vol 50, No. 4, 1997.
- Hawkins, P. (1994) - **Organisational Culture: Evolution and Revolution**. Bath Consultancy Workbook.

Hawkins, P. (1994b) - 'The Changing View of Learning', Bath Consultancy Group working paper, published in Burgoyne, J (ed.) **Towards the Learning Organisation**, McGraw-Hill.

Hawkins, P. (1991) - 'The Spiritual Dimension of the Learning Organisation' in **Management Education and Development**, Vol 22 Part 3.

Hostler, J. (1981) **Unitarianism**. London: Hibbert Trust.

Jones, T. (1996) **Unitarianism: Yesterday - Today & Tomorrow**.

Long, A. (1997) **Current Trends in Unitarianism**. Lecture sponsored by the Ulster Unitarian Christian Association, delivered at Holywood, County Down and Dublin.

Mackintosh, H.R. (1952) **Types of Modern Theology**. London.

Martineau, J. (1950) **Selections** compiled by Alfred Hall. London: The Lindsey Press.

Naess, A (1988) "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises" in **The Ecologist** vol.18. Nos.4/5.

Nevis, E., Lancourt, J. & Vassallo, H.G. (1996) **Intentional Revolutions: A Seven Point Strategy for Transforming Organisations**. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Robert, K-H. (1995) Cycle of Nature. In **Resurgence** no 178.

Short, H.L. (1962) **Dissent and Community**. London.

Smith, B. (ed) (1986) **Truth, Liberty and Religion**. Oxford: Manchester College.

Smith, M.F. (1997) The Essential Togetherness: Pointers To Structural and Interpersonal Change in the Unitarian Movement. **F.O.Y. News** July 1997.

Ulrich, D. (1997) **Human Resource Champions**. Harvard Business Books.

Wheatley, M. (1992) **Leadership and the New Science**. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Peter Hawkins PhD BA(Hons) MIMC (CMC) M Instd UKCP (Reg)

Dr Peter Hawkins, joint founder and managing partner of Bath Consultancy Group, is a leading consultant, writer and researcher in organisational learning, managing complex change, the development of organisational culture and collaborative inquiry processes. He has worked with many leading companies in Britain, Europe and South Africa, co-designing and facilitating major change and organisational transformation projects. He has been a keynote speaker at a number of international conferences on the learning organisation and teaches at a number of business schools.

He is author of "Consult the Wise Fool: Short Spiritual stories for Organisational and Personal Transformation" and co-author of the best-selling "Supervision in the Helping Professions" Open University Press. (Both are available from Bath Consultancy Group, 24 Gay Street, Bath, BA1 2PD.)

He has been involved with the Unitarian church since he married Judy Ryde, daughter of a Unitarian minister (the late Revd. Fred Ryde) twenty years ago and is currently an active member of the Bath Fellowship. He has written extensively about organisational learning and transformation and his paper "The spiritual dimensions of the learning organisation" has been used by a number of groups within the Unitarian movement.

