



# The Communicator

of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Lake County

---

## March 2008 Programs

**2 - "The Strange But Ultimately Sensible Religious Beliefs of the Maya"** by Steve Glassman, Humanities Professor at Emory Riddle University, Daytona Beach and author of "On the Trail of the Maya Explorer". He also is the author of many historical and mystery books.

**9 - Rev. John M. Higgins** of Rockledge, FL visits us again. He always gives us an interesting message. Topic to be announced.

**16 - "Hands Up, Palms Down"**. Rev. Dr. Randolph Becker, minister of the UU Fellowship of Key West, will be our speaker. He writes: "Nearly 2 millennia ago, something happened at one of the gates to Jerusalem. The events of that day have long been historically trivialized in the service of a particular Christian theology, even though it was one of the greatest humanistic moments of recorded history. If you strip away centuries of scriptures and dogma, what is left should stir the heart of every religious liberal."

(Randy is the son of Bill & Gladys Becker and a friend of our congregation.)

**23 - Easter Sunday** with Rev. Roger Seidner -- "Resurrection in the 21st Century". A word about Easter from your Consulting Minister. We follow the Western Calendar with Easter being observed March 23, possibly the earliest date to be recognized. The Eastern Calendar is closer to the Jewish calendar with Passover April 20 and Orthodox Easter on April 27. Next month we will take a look at Passover in the 21st century.

This is the eighth year I have been privileged to lead in your worship during the spring season. I try to initiate a message that will provide thought without repetition. A review of the past 7 Easter messages moves me to examine the concept of resurrection from the perspective of the 21st century and I look forward to your response on March 23.

**30 - Chasing Melville's Whale-Part 2: "Ishmael in the Mast Head."** Ronald Vierling returns to complete this two part message. We enjoyed Part 1

and are looking forward to this conclusion. Ron Vierling, an Orlando UJer, teaches English at Full Sail University, Orlando.

Our monthly Pot-Luck Lunch follows this service. All are welcome.

A note of interest--I have asked Ronald Vierling to bring some copies of his romance novel, "Clementine Camille" which you might like to own.

...Gladys Becker

Roger and Clarice are available to respond to calls for pastoral care in crisis situations. If you or someone you know has a need, feel free to call them at 407-905-5767. Reverend Seidner is consulting minister to our church.

## President's Column...

My how time flies when you're having fun! Already the second president's message is due and it seems like only yesterday it was the first.

I do again extend my appreciation to Kit Tatum for her speed and diligence in getting our new beautiful blue with white letters t-shirts printed in good time for the Georgefest Parade and to sell to any member who would like one to wear. Our cost for each shirt came to \$7.56 and we are charging \$9.00 in order to partially defray the cost of a new banner to carry at the General Assembly in Ft. Lauderdale in late June. Our current banner may be retired, with a proper ceremony, upon receiving the new one if the members desire. Or we may have use for all banners.

One other money matter, the Board agreed the congregation will donate \$100 to Colgate Rochester (NY) Crozier Divinity School in honor of Rev. Roger Seidner.

In addition to the GA there is an important meeting in Gainesville on April 18-19, the Florida District

(Continued on next page)

**Next issue deadline: Wednesday, March 26.**

**Send material to [canopus1@comcast.net](mailto:canopus1@comcast.net)**

## UUCLC Information & Contacts

Mail address: PO Box 1761, Eustis, FL 32727

Phone: 352-383-2263

Email contact: [canopus1@comcast.net](mailto:canopus1@comcast.net)

Website: [lakecountyuu.org](http://lakecountyuu.org)

### Officers

Bill Hermann, President  
Barbara Coats, Vice Pres.  
Patti Stiner, Treasurer  
Joyce Littlefield, Secretary

### Trustees

Ruth Gray  
Henry Gray  
Carol Ann Patton

Roger Benton Seidner, Consulting minister.  
Phone: 407-905-5767

The *Communicator* is published monthly, from September through June.

Editor, Ted Fessler Phone: 352 483-7405

## Frequently Asked Questions on Buddhism

Steve Collins, who leads the Meditation Group Sunday mornings from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., offers some answers to FAQs about Buddhism that he has found on the internet.

**Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy?** For centuries people have tried to categorize the Buddha's teachings in various ways, trying to fit them into the prevailing molds of cultural, philosophical, and religious thought. Buddhism is an ethical system -- a way of life -- that leads to a very specific goal and that possesses some aspects of both religion and philosophy.

It is a philosophy. Like most philosophies, Buddhism attempts to frame the complexities of human existence in a way that reassures us that there is, in fact, some underlying order to the Universe. In the Four Noble Truths the Buddha crisply summarizes our predicament: there is suffering, it has a cause, it has an end, and there is a way to reach the end. The teachings on karma provide a thorough and logically self-consistent description of the nature of cause-and-effect. And, according to the Dharma, a deep and unshakable logic pervades the world.

It is not a philosophy. Unlike most philosophical systems, which rely on speculation and the power of reason to arrive at certain kinds of logical truths, Buddhism relies on the direct observation of one's personal experience and on honing certain skills in order to gain true understanding and wisdom. Idle speculation has no place in Buddhist practice. Although studying in the classroom, reading books, and engaging in spirited debate can play a vital part in developing a cognitive understanding of basic Buddhist concepts, the heart of Buddhism can never be realized this way. The Dharma is not an abstract system of thought designed to delight the intellect; it is a roadmap to be used, to lead the practitioner to the ultimate goal, nirvana.

It is a religion. At the heart of each of the world's great religions lies a transcendent ideal around which its doctrinal principles orbit. In Buddhism this truth is nirvana, the hallmark of the cessation of suffering and stress, a truth of utter transcendence that stands in singular distinction from anything we might encounter in our ordinary sensory experience. Nibbana is the sine qua non of Buddhism, the guiding star and ultimate goal towards which all the Buddha's teachings point. Because it aims at such

## President's Message, continued...

Annual Assembly. This year's meeting focuses on an on-going ambition to "bend toward justice" in creating a multicultural ministry according to the District press release. Paula Cole Jones, lead consultant of the UU JUUST Change Consultancy will be the featured presenter. I will have handouts and application blanks this Sunday.

On the local level Ruth Gray reports she and Pat Linfield along with Patty Nemeth and her daughter Michelle are pursuing the possibility of forming a youth chapter at Lake-Sumter Community College where Miss Nemeth and her sister Danielle are students. Anyone with suggestions or insights in this field or to LSCC is asked to contact Ruth or Pat.

Our circle dinners are just around the corner and near as I can tell the first one is March 01. I am unabashedly inviting myself to as many as I can make to meet and greet and if I haven't touched base with a hostess/host yet please contact me. My old family recipe is dessert from Publix.

Thanks, Bill Hermann

### March Birthdays:

Eleanor Fessler, Mar. 12  
Ted Fessler, Mar. 22  
Patti Stiner, Mar. 27  
Joyce Gray, Mar. 30

a lofty transcendent ideal, we might fairly call Buddhism a religion.

It is not a religion. -- In stark contrast to the world's other major religions, however, Buddhism invokes no divinity, no supreme Creator or supreme Self, no Holy Spirit or omniscient loving God to whom we might appeal for salvation. Instead, Buddhism calls for us to hoist ourselves up by our own bootstraps: to develop the discernment we need to distinguish between those qualities within us that are unwholesome and those that are truly noble and good, and to learn how to nourish the good ones and expunge the bad. This is the path to Buddhism's highest perfection, nirvana. Not even the Buddha can take you to that goal; you alone must do the work necessary to complete the journey.

**What is Dharma?** We hear and read this word everywhere. Dharma is a Sanskrit word. It means teaching, truth, doctrine, spirituality, or reality. It means the truth of things as they are. Its literal meaning is that which supports or upholds. Dharma is thus likened to the ground we stand upon. Another, lesser known meaning of dharma is "that which remedies, alleviates, heals and restores". The truth embodied in Dharma teachings heals what ails us, on the very deepest level.

Buddha Dharma refers to the teachings of the compassionate, enlightened Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, who lived in the 5th century BCE in northern India.

#### **How should I teach Buddhism to my children?**

The Buddha's advice to parents is straightforward: help your children become generous, virtuous, responsible, skilled, and self-sufficient adults. Teaching Buddhism to one's children does not mean giving them long lectures about bardos and prostrations, or forcing them to memorize the Buddha's lists of the eightfold this, the ten such-and-suches, the seventeen so-and-sos. It simply means giving them the basic skills they'll need in order to find true happiness. The rest will take care of itself.

The single most important lesson parents can convey to their children is that every action has consequences. Each moment presents us with an opportunity, and it is up to us to choose how we want to think, speak, or act. It is these choices that eventually determine our happiness. This is the essence of karma, the basic law of cause and effect that underlies the Dharma.

**Are Buddhists vegetarian?** Some are, some aren't. There is no evidence to suggest that the Buddha discouraged his lay followers from eating meat. Although some people may point to the first of the five precepts as evidence that the Buddha asked his followers to be vegetarian, this precept only concerns the intentional act of depriving a living being of life, and says nothing about consuming the flesh of an animal that is already dead.

Many Buddhists (and, of course, non-Buddhists) do eventually lose their appetite for meat out of compassion for other living creatures, but from the strict Buddhist perspective, the choice of whether or not to eat meat is purely a matter of personal preference. Earlier this year HH Dalai Lama spoke out in favor of a vegetarian diet, and not eating meat (or using furs or skins). Since then, many Tibetan Buddhists have been integrating vegetarianism into their lives.

**What is the Buddhist stance on environmental issues?** One of the central tenets of Buddhism is the inter-dependence of all things (the doctrine of interdependent origination). Therefore, Buddhism is at heart an ecological religion. Our very lives, the air we breathe, the water we drink the food we eat are all dependent on the environment and to harm the environment is to harm ourselves.

One of the principle Buddhist precepts is the reverence for life and the intent to prevent all suffering. This precept entails a regard for our environment: plants, animals and minerals. If we destroy the environment, we destroy ourselves. If we take care of the environment, we take care of ourselves.

**Do Buddhists pray?** Buddhists don't pray to a Creator God, but they do have devotional meditation practices which could be compared to praying. Radiating loving-kindness to all living beings is a practice which is believed to benefit those beings. The sharing of merit is a practice where one dedicates the goodness of one's life to the benefit of all living beings as well as praying for a particular person.

In Tibet prayer is going on most of the time. Tibetans pray in a special way. They believe that when certain sounds and words, called mantras, are said many times, they arouse good vibrations within the person. If a mantra is repeated often enough it can open up the mind to a consciousness which is beyond words and thoughts.

**What is enlightenment? Where is Nirvana? Can anyone be a Buddha?** Nirvana, the so-called "Other Shore" (i.e., the goal of the Buddhist path) is everywhere and nowhere. It is not a place but a state of mind: one of total awareness; deathless peace; joy, ease and fulfillment; and perfect freedom. Nirvana is by definition the highest form of everlasting happiness, desirelessness, fulfillment and peace. It is experienced by the heart-mind liberated from the fetters of ignorance, dualism and delusion, and freed from conflicting emotions including attachment and desire.

Anyone can realize such an innate reality, which is your own true nature. This is technically known as "Buddha Nature". To awaken fully and irrevocably to that is awakened enlightenment, or Buddhahood.

That is why Buddha said: "I only point out the Way; it is up to you to walk it."

Meditation, the conscious or intentional cultivation of attention and awareness, is a skillful means or effective method leading directly to awakened enlightenment.

**What is meditation? Is it good for everyone?**

Meditation is the intentional, conscious cultivation of attention and awareness, often called mindfulness. Developing mindful awareness purifies, illumines and frees the mind. It liberates awareness from habitual conditioning, compulsion and attachment; clarifies, resolves and eases inner conflicts; and expands and raises consciousness.