



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 14th July 10.00am** meet at Dorset Humanists tent in lower gardens at for a prompt 10.15am departure to walk to the start point on Eastcliff.

Human Rights Champions at the Bourne Free Festival



Could you be one of our Human Rights Champions this year? You don't have to be LGB or T to walk in Bournemouth's LGBT rights parade. All you need is a DH or plain white T-shirt and the desire for a better world. A world, for

example, in which young people growing up gay do not suffer from unnecessary mental health problems and thoughts of suicide just for being who they are.

"I am a firm believer in equality for all. I look forward to this year's event with my Dorset Humanists friends whether gay or not." Carolyn Gardiner

Every year for the last few years a merry band of Dorset Humanists have walked in the parade to draw attention to the human rights struggle for LGBT rights around the world. But we would love to make a bigger

impact with more numbers. Could you be a human rights champion this year?

Bourne Free is a fantastic carnival of diversity supported by dozens of different groups and major employers in Bournemouth. Those who join us are often surprised about how much fun it is to take part. After the parade, we engage with hundreds of residents and visitors to Bournemouth at our brightly decorated tent in the Lower Gardens. It's our showcase event of the year when Dorset Humanists is open and visible to the world.

If you haven't pre-ordered a Dorset Humanists T-shirt you can turn up in a plain white one. Sign up now on [Meetup](#).

■ Dorset Humanists is a partner of the Dorset LGB&T Equality Network and of Humanists UK LGBT section.

Swami Manavatavadi



It is with great sadness that we report the death of Swami Manavatavadi. Known to us as 'Swamiji', he founded a humanist community in Kurukshetra, northern India, and with the help of his associates has helped to get hundreds of street children into education. Dorset Humanists has had a friendship link with him and the school since

2003. See inside for full obituary.



■ **Weds 25th July 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

How did Christianity become the religion of the Roman Empire?



A talk by journalist and prize-winning author Catherine Nixey

Christianity's conquest of the West entailed an orgy of destruction in which the followers of Jesus attacked and suppressed classical culture which helped to pitch Western civilization into a thousand-year-long decline. Just one percent of Latin literature survived the great purge; countless antiquities, artworks, and ancient traditions were lost forever. As Catherine Nixey will discuss, evidence of early Christians' campaign of terror has been hiding in plain sight: in the palimpsests and shattered statues proudly displayed in churches and museums the world over. Catherine Nixey taught classics before becoming a journalist at *The Times*. Her first book, *The Darkening Age*, won a Royal Society of Literature Jerwood Award.

■ **Thursday 2nd August 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



Sunday Walks

Sunday 15th July – Swanage, Durlleston and Dancing Ledge

Sunday 19th August – Puddletown Forest

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and

any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 17th July 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

LGBT Prejudice Past & Present

This month we showcase three short talks by our members about their personal experiences of discrimination and prejudices.

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See [Meetup](#) for further details.

Calling budding speakers! Do you have a short talk up your sleeve? Contact Phil Butcher if you would like to discuss your idea for a short talk.

✉ ph.butcher@gmail.com

Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 28th July 10.00-4.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre
Leadership Training day for the South Central England Humanists Network led by David Warden. 'How to run a successful humanist group'. If you are interested in becoming a humanist group leader and helping your local group to succeed then you will benefit from attending this course.

✉ chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

■ **Saturday 11th August 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre

The Big Change in Religion and Belief: How might a humanist respond?

Britain is currently going through what's been called the biggest change in religion and belief landscape since the Reformation, 500 years ago. But what's really going on? It's a lot more complex than simply a decline in organised religion and an



increase in those who have no religion. Some faith groups are themselves growing. And what do we mean by 'non-religious' anyway? Or 'religious' for that matter? What might humanists do to play a constructive role in making this great social change work for everyone? Jeremy Rodell is Humanists UK's volunteer Dialogue Officer and a former Trustee.

■ **Friday 17th August 7.00pm Middle Chine**

Dorset Humanists Summer Beach Barbecue

Join us for a fun evening on the beach. Bring your own food and bits to share.

■ **Wednesday 22nd August 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Death Café

At a Death Café people gather to eat cake, drink tea or coffee and discuss death. The objective of a Death Café is 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their finite lives'. It's a group-directed discussion of death with no set agenda. It's a discussion group not a grief support or counselling session. Death Café aims to be accessible, respectful and confidential with no intention of leading people to any particular conclusion or course of action.

Discussion facilitated by David Warden who is Chair of Dorset Humanists. David is currently studying for a diploma in humanistic counselling and psychotherapy.

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 8th August 7.30pm**
Skeptics in the Pub at Brunswick Pub, 199 Malmesbury Park Rd, BH8 8PX. £3

Stories from the Frontline of the Future

...with writer, entrepreneur, broadcaster, and futurologist Mark Stevenson.



Dorset Humanists *Life School* runs a variety of short courses focusing on how we can live good and fulfilling lives. Course attendees will be invited to study and critically reflect on the best scientific and philosophical resources available. A great way to meet people and develop friendships. 'Life School' continues this autumn with an exciting new series:

The Existentialism Course How to Love Your Life and Live Every Day as if it were your Last

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that if you do not wish to re-live every day of your life over and over again then you're not doing it right. This is perhaps the greatest challenge of existentialism: to live each day like that. But is this possible or even desirable? This course will draw on the writings of philosophers Julian Baggini and Gary Cox, both of whom have given talks to Dorset Humanists. It will also draw on the philosophical work of Don Cupitt and Terry Eagleton and a range of existential psychotherapies. Attendees are welcome to suggest additional resources.

This course runs for six consecutive Mondays from Monday 1st October to Monday 5th November 7.30-9.15pm. All at Moordown Community Centre.

A £15 non-refundable deposit secures your place on the course (£10 for members) and there's nothing more to pay, except for refreshments during the break.

The course facilitator is David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists. Contact details are below. *Book now - limited spaces.*

■ Feedback from our 'Happiness Course':

"I hope you will do the course again in some format as it was life-changing." Amy

"Very well run course, extensively prepared and researched, professionally presented." Paul

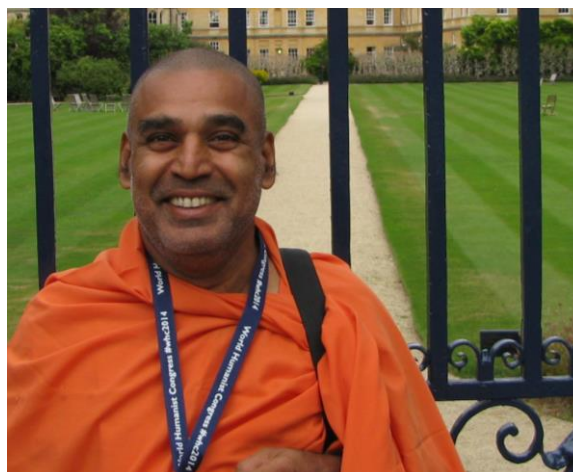


Swami Manavatavadi

David Warden

We are very sad to report that international humanist and humanitarian Swami Manavatavadi (Swamiji) has died, aged 58, owing to complications arising from diabetes and thrombocytopenia (low blood platelets).

Swamiji was born in Jagatsinghpur, eastern India in 1960, the eldest of his parents' six children. His original name was Satya Nandan. He later adopted the name 'Swami' meaning 'master over oneself' and 'Manavatavadi' meaning 'humanist' or 'humanitarian'. As the eldest son he felt unworthy of high family expectations. He was regularly beaten at school for not doing his homework but he was the only boy in class who knew about gravity - an indication of his scientific curiosity. All children in India are told stories about wandering sadhus (holy men and women) who detach themselves from society in order to achieve 'moksha' (spiritual liberation). Swamiji was drawn to this alternative way of life and he ran away from home at the age of 11. In search of a guru, he walked 2,000 miles from Cape Comorin (now called Kanyakumari) at the southernmost tip of India along the east coast via Calcutta to Badrinath in the Himalayas. He lived in the jungles and sustained himself on leaves, bark and berries. This walk took 10 months. He then walked the return journey to Cape Comorin through the central part of India. This journey took 6-7 months. His third epic journey of 1,000 miles took him to Vizianagaram where, at the age of 13, he was initiated by a wandering nagasanyassi (naked saint) into the Sankaracharya cult which dates from 8th century. The initiation process involved shaving his head, reciting some secret mantras, and being sprinkled with water. He then set out for the north again, living naked in the jungles in western India, eventually reaching the Himalayas where he lived for three months in icy conditions wearing only a loin cloth. It was on the Himalayas that he achieved clarity of beliefs about *ishwara* (the nature of reality), *atma* (the life-force), and moksha (*liberation*). It was here that he realised that



Swami Manavatavadi at the World Humanist Congress, Oxford 2014

supernatural beliefs are a human fantasy but he had no idea that there were any other naturalists, atheists, or humanists in the world.

During his time in the jungles Swamiji didn't speak to anyone and consequently he forgot his mother tongue (Odia). When he emerged from the jungles back into society he had to make a conscious effort to recall the English and Hindi he had learnt as a child. At the age of fifteen, he felt there was little point in continuing to live and he went to the Ganges to drown himself. He was followed by Swami Shantananda Rajhansa who persuaded him not to give up on life but to go and visit Dr Guljian Lal Kohli, an educational philosopher who had been a friend of Bertrand Russell. Swamiji had two letters in his possession written by Bertrand Russell to Dr Kohli.

Swamiji went to meet Dr Kohli in Ranchi in Eastern India and stayed with him as a student for 21 days. He then settled in the Hindu holy town of Kurukshetra, 100km north of New Delhi, because of its connection to the Bhagavad-Gita and at the age of sixteen he created a Humanitarian Foundation. He eventually acquired a plot of land and built a hut from mud and bricks. In 1986 the Humanitarian Foundation was renamed *The International School of Humanitarian Thoughts and Practice*.

In 1996 Swamiji first learned of the existence of the world atheist/humanist movement by attending the 4th World Atheist Congress at the Atheist Centre in



Vijayawada. In the same year he travelled to Mexico and spoke at the World Humanist Congress in Mexico City. In 1999 he spoke at the World Humanist Congress in Mumbai. In 2002 he attended the World Humanist Congress in Amsterdam (50th anniversary of the International Humanist and Ethical Union) and became an associate member of the IHEU.

I first made contact with Swamiji after I placed an advert in *International Humanist News* in 2002 asking for humanists in other parts of the world to get in touch with us at Dorset Humanists. Swamiji was one of the first to respond (Leo Igwe from Nigeria was another). Jane and Dennis Bannister and I met him in London in January 2004 and he came to Moordown Community Centre to tell us about his humanist school in India. John Hubbard and I visited the school later in 2004 and I made a return visit in 2006 when orphans from the Kashmir Earthquake had taken refuge there. Swamiji also spoke to us at the Green House Hotel in 2014 after the World Humanist Congress in Oxford.

Swamiji was a controversial figure in Indian humanism because of his name and style of dress but having become a sadhu which involves taking a vow to lead a selfless life, acquire wisdom and serve others, he saw no reason why this could not be combined with Humanism.

The *International School of International Thoughts and Humanitarian Practice* is perhaps best described as a humanist ashram or campus. It includes Kids' Kingdom which provides elementary after-school education in an informal atmosphere for primary-aged children including classes in English, maths, science and IT. For some children, this is their only education. For others, Kids' Kingdom is an enjoyable addition to the regular school day. Its motto is 'the rousing of reason and the increase of self-reliance'. The school attracts over 100 children and is funded entirely by donations. Kids' Kingdom was officially opened by His Excellency Dr A R Kidwai, Governor of Haryana State, in 2006. Since then, a programme of building works has been in progress.

Over the years, the generosity of Dorset Humanists has helped to fund the provision of school bags, stationery, clothing, laptops and desks for the children. Many of the children are from the lowest Dalit 'untouchable' caste and live in local slums. Kids' Kingdom gives them a chance to escape from street life and to develop their minds and skills for a better future. Sadhvi Asha Manav, known as Deviji, is the mainstay of the school.



The school has suffered years of harassment from a large Brahmin centre next door which would like to acquire the plot of land and in 2013, a student teacher, Mahadevi (left), was abducted by a Maoist gang.

Swamiji dedicated his life to the service of others. He lived a simple, ascetic life and his global travels, undertaken to gain support for his humanitarian activities, were funded by generous humanists in the US, Canada and Europe.

■ *If you would like to make a donation to our India Fund in memory of Swamiji please contact David Warden or our treasurer John Kingston. Cheques should be made payable to Dorset Humanists (India Fund).*

From Steve Laughton

I remember meeting Swamiji. I am glad I met him and pleased I gave him my computer. An excellent man and his philosophy is much needed in his home country where the influence of Zakir Naik with his so called peace foundation, funded and run from Saudi, is radicalising the former communist-voting Muslims in Kerala.

From Maggie Pepin

Swamiji was a brave and compassionate man and his death leaves a tremendous void, not least as far as the school is concerned.

Humanists UK services for non-religious people



Teddy Prout (left) gave us an inspiring talk at our Moordown meeting in June about the work of Humanists UK and pastoral care in particular. Formerly a music teacher he is now Director of Community Services for Humanists UK.

Teddy explained that Humanists UK is divided into two main areas of work: public-facing campaigns (such as non-discriminatory admissions to schools) and Community Services. Community Services includes trained speakers who go into schools to inform pupils about Humanism. Three-quarters of people under the age of twenty-four are non-religious and therefore they tend to be receptive to the humanist message. Teddy explained that “we want them to have a better vocabulary to express their views”. Most RE teachers are not trained in RE and those who are tend to be knowledgeable about the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and perhaps a smattering of Eastern religions but most do not understand the non-religious worldview. Last year 25,000 children were addressed by humanist speakers.

Only five per cent of the UK population understand what Humanism is even though, when it's explained to them, many people will identify as humanist. Humanists UK's online education resource *Understanding Humanism* has been highly commended internationally. Humanists UK has also launched its first massive open online course (a MOOC) – the first in the world. Broadcaster Sandy Toksvig introduces the course.

Community Services also includes ceremonies. Humanists UK has been lobbying the Humanist All Party Parliamentary Group to get humanist weddings legalised so that trained celebrants can legally marry people, as in



Scotland. Teddy said it's only a matter of time before this comes into force in the rest of the UK as the current situation is clearly discriminatory. A humanist wedding is one of the few times that people can stand up in public and declare their humanist beliefs.

Community Services has also organised a non-religious Remembrance Service in Fitzrovia Chapel, London, for the past two years. Other services include dialogue groups to promote better relations with religion, Young Humanists, supporting local groups such as Dorset Humanists, Faith to Faithless to support people leaving high control religions such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientology, and pastoral support.

Non-religious pastoral support consists of non-judgemental emotional support provided 'in the moment'. There is no follow-up obligation. It's not counselling but nor is it 'just a chat'. It draws on the skills of counselling.

Why does Humanists UK provide non-religious pastoral support? Teddy explained that for the past 500 years it's been Christian churches only which have provided this kind of support. Thirty years ago they were joined by Muslim and Jewish chaplains in the NHS and in prisons. Fifty percent of the population however is not religious. Religious chaplains claim that they can meet the pastoral needs of the non-religious as well as the religious, but how comfortable would non-religious people be discussing end of life issues with a religious chaplain who believes in heaven and hell? Or how comfortable would LGBT people feel discussing their pastoral needs with a religious chaplain who believes that being gay is sinful? Like-minded care is really important and not having this does a huge disservice to non-religious people



Non-religious pastoral support workers have to be endorsed by a body in good standing and with a clear worldview which it promotes and discusses in the public arena. Humanists UK clearly fits this category and can provide this critical component to help non-religious pastoral support workers get accepted in settings like hospices. At one stage the Chaplaincy organisation prevented Humanists UK from being members but there has been an exponential increase in openness and Simon O'Donohue from Humanists UK has now been elected chair of this forum!

Humanists UK is very clear that non-religious pastoral support workers should not proselytise people in hospital or in prison and so it provides a high quality training programme to ensure that workers have the right skills and attitudes.

In some settings, such as prisons, non-religious pastoral support workers have interacted with religious people who, for example, are gay and who find it difficult to speak with the religious chaplain about such an issue.

It's more difficult to get into the armed forces because how can you provide such support when abroad in a theatre of conflict? Religious chaplains are paid officers. The MOD is sympathetic but it will require time to work out the practicalities.

Residential homes are a challenge because homes are usually independent. Often the local vicar will visit but for most homes there is no pastoral support at all other than the essential care provided.

There is also a need for educational work to be done in prisons – ethical education in particular. The majority of people in prison have had a poor education and would benefit from knowledge about how to live well and meaningfully. 'Gatherings' in prison could also be organised – similar to a service. Prisoners crave human interaction.

Finally, Teddy said a bit more about *Faith to Faithless* which is an apostate support programme. Apostasy or leaving a religion can be considered to be a shaming of the family and honour-based abuse can include verbal, physical, and even life-threatening behaviour. 15,000 people in the UK are

affected each year. Frontline services such as police and social workers often let these people down simply because they don't understand the issue. *Faith to Faithless* aims to provide training and awareness events for these services.

The non-religious pastoral support network has 200 workers. This compares to 15,000 Church of England chaplains in the health service alone. We need more people! *Faith to Faithless* also needs more people, especially those who have experience of leaving high-control religions. We need better research and evidence but research is expensive. We need more online resources and funding.

Teddy ended his talk with an appeal: Will you help? One of the best things you can do is join Humanists UK in addition to Dorset Humanists. The two organisations are partners but separately funded and organised.

Humanists UK may be able to provide pastoral support training in the southern region subject to demand. Please let David Warden know if you are interested in non-religious pastoral work.

 chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

Join Humanists UK [here](#)

Could you be a schools volunteer?

Book now for a Humanists UK Training Event in Bournemouth

Dorset Humanists has a team of people who go into schools to speak to pupils and students about Humanism. Over the past few years we have spoken to over 4,000 children. But we could do so much more with your help.

Humanists UK are running an excellent training course for us in Bournemouth on Saturday 29th September. Please consider if you have the aptitude to be a schools visitor and, if so, why not book yourself on this course? Contact David Warden (email shown below or call 07910 886629).





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

July 2018

At our June 'Out of the Box' dialogue meeting with Christians, John Hubbard provided a thought-provoking introductory talk to our discussion on 'Education and Inequality'. When John taught at Bryanston School in Dorset thirty-odd years ago he recalls taking English lessons in a prefab. How times have changed. At the weekend, we attended his great-nephew's speech day at Bryanston School and the campus is now resplendent with multi-million pound facilities. The day started with a service in the school chapel and I confess I sang 'Jerusalem' and 'I Vow to Thee My Country' with gusto. I think you will agree they are irresistible tunes! The enthusiastic school chaplain entreated leavers to go into the world and 'feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick' and so on in time-honoured fashion. As the day progressed, however, I couldn't help thinking that a good number of these gilded youths would probably go into the City and other such careers in order to enrich themselves even further. And when the time comes for reproduction, they will send their own children to Bryanston School which no doubt will be even more splendidly endowed in another generation's time unless we do something about ever-widening inequality. John Kingston and I will be addressing the problem of inequality in two proposed short talks later this year. Since our talk from Positive Money in January, I have become convinced that the right place to start is reform of the monetary system. As former governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King said in a speech in New York in 2010: "Of all the many ways of organising banking, the worst is the one we have today." Money is nothing more than financial plumbing for the economy and it should be provided as a public utility without a corresponding mountain of debt. The current system is like one of those dystopian films where the air supply is controlled and restricted by a powerful group of men for their own enrichment. A democratic monetary system would direct investment into the real economy, end the housing crisis, fund the NHS adequately, provide well-paid jobs in green technology, increase tax revenues, and lead to an overall re-balancing of the economy and levels of income and wealth. We *can* design a better world.

The last time I saw Swami Manavatavadi was in Bournemouth in 2014. I promised I would visit the Atheist Centre in Vijayawada with him at some future date. Since then his health has deteriorated and he has been fighting a false allegation in the courts. I will miss him as a friend and secular 'soul-mate' who discovered atheism on the icy foothills of the Himalayas. He lit a small flame of rational enlightenment in northern India which will, I hope, continue to burn.

