



NEWSLETTER - 20

Registered Charity No. 1197043 February 2024

Incorporating Dr. Schweitzer's Hospital Fund

From the Chair

James Mark

Dear supporters,

Whilst contemplating how to form my 'view from the chair' for you, I've been looking at our logo and the strong image of our tree with people celebrating under it brought to mind a proverb of which I heard again recently: *"a society grows great when elders plant trees, the shade of which they know they'll never sit in"*. I think it's such a wonderful saying and aligns so perfectly with the principle of reverence for life. The concept of elders planting trees for future generations conveys a vital longevity and a deep respect and understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things. It signals the reliance of humans on nature (we are after all a part of nature) and reflects a mindset of valuing and sustaining life in all its forms.

This concept could not be more clearly demonstrated than through the incredible achievements of the VALITA team in Tanzania. They have truly embraced the philosophy of permaculture and are now implementing so many incredible initiatives for the benefit of the land and environment, for their local community and of course for each other. The team are also supporting many people through their outreach work, positively impacting so many lives. At the end of last year, three representatives from RfL UK made the journey to Dar es Salaam to see for themselves how the Bustani ya Binadamu (Garden of Humanity) project and the VALITA team are flourishing with the help of all the generous donations from you, our supporters. We are grateful to Emilie Murray for her inspiring write up of the trip.

In other news, Percy Mark participated in a seminar to celebrate the centenary of the publication of Volumes 1 & 2 of Schweitzer's Philosophy of Civilisation, organised by the Schweitzer Institute in Cambridge. Percy shares with us some of his thoughts and insights that arose during his preparation for the event. We are also treated to some of Vreni Mark's personal reflections from her time in Africa and specifically how they celebrated Schweitzer's 88th birthday on 14th January 1963!

Please join me in thanking and applauding Peter Cockhill and his son Roger, who last summer climbed Kilimanjaro to raise funds for RfL UK and VALITA, as referred to briefly on our back page. I urge you to read Peter's account of their adventure on our website (www.reverenceforlife.org.uk). It is a super story and articulates so well the challenges they endured and the emotion of reaching the summit.

On a more administrative note, I am happy to report that we did finally complete the transition to our new governance structure and are now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. From the outside, the only difference is a new charity number and new bank details, however, on the inside, we are now set up to operate more effectively, handle ever more complex challenges and ultimately create more positive impact towards our charity objects.

So, again I thank you for your loyal support and for the difference we are making together in the spirit of reverence for life. I wish you a healthy and happy 2024 and go find that opportunity to plant a tree or two ...

News from Tanzania

Emilie Murray

In September 2023, Paul Cockhill, Fran Murray and her daughter, Emilie Murray, visited the VALITA team in Tanzania. Emilie recounts their experience and highlights the inspiring projects that RfLUK will be fundraising for in 2024.

Unsurprisingly, Dar Es Salaam in September is blazing hot. The sun beats down on the dusty roads, baking the corrugated iron roofs on the ramshackle buildings that fringe every roadside. We were extremely grateful that Alex, one of the VALITA members, picked us up every day from the hotel. He could expertly weave his way through the chaotic traffic and navigate the dips and swells of the long track that stretches from the city all the way to Kaya.



The building, KAYA, meaning “home” in Swahili

Stepping out of the car on our first day at Kaya was an amazing moment. Here the sun filters down through lush cashew nut trees. We were surrounded by plants and chickens that roamed free, pecking around at our feet. The dusty beiges of the city had disappeared, replaced with dappled greens. We were immediately greeted by a group of children who led us to the terrace of Kaya.

All the residents were waiting for us on the red steps. It really was a joyous experience; they were so pleased to see Paul again and so very welcoming to Fran and I.



The view from the terrace of KAYA



A joyous welcome

A highlight of our trip was the guided tour of the land led by Frank Ngulwa and Paul Manyama. We walked every inch of Bustani ya Binadamu as they explained how they are implementing the philosophy of permaculture, that they have learnt from the permaculture course in Zanzibar.



From the left: Paul Manyama, Dominic Malesa and Frank Ngulwa

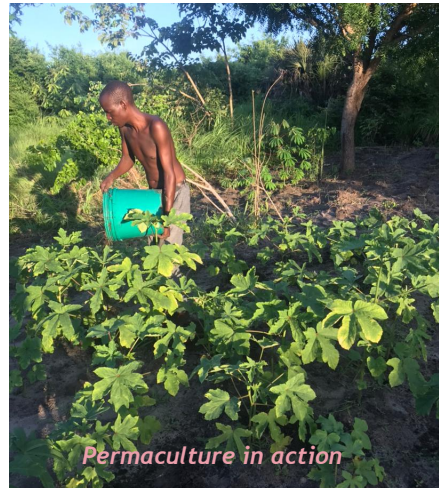


View over the 5 acres of land called Bustani ya Binadamu, meaning Garden of Humanity



One of the many interesting plants being grown

According to the principles of permaculture they have carefully divided the land into zones. The zone closest to Kaya is where they grow plants used in the kitchen every day, like the delicious lemon-flavoured grass that they brew with sugar to make sweet tea. Further from Kaya are zones for growing crops such as maize, okra and cassava. As it was the dry season these were not yet planted, but Frank showed us the layer of dry compost he had lain over the ground and how the ants were busy working to break this down and prepare the soil.



We saw the two fishponds full of baby catfish and the newly constructed pigpens and chicken coup. At the heart of the plot is a wild zone. Frank explained how they are going to leave this for native plants to continue to grow undisturbed, in harmony with the rest of the ecosystem.

The next step towards sustainability is to increase the amount of water they can store and improve their power generation.



After returning from our trip, RfLUK sent VALITA the money to purchase a new 10,000 litre water tank. Over the next year, we will be fundraising to install a new solar power system and batteries. This will mean that VALITA can pump all the water they need to irrigate the land and reduce their dependency on unreliable grid-power.

The more water they can store, the more crops they can grow and the closer they get to being able to produce enough food to feed all the residents and those they support in their outreach work.

A very moving part of our trip was the time we spent with a group of widows that VALITA help as part of their outreach. All these women have found themselves in the difficult situation of having to care for their children and grandchildren, as the sole provider for their families. With money donated from RfLUK, VALITA created a fund to provide these women with the seed money to set up their own businesses. We spoke with them about how they run their business and the difference it has made to their lives to now have a way to earn money. We heard many heart wrenching stories and were so touched by their resilience and bravery. RfLUK will continue fundraising to donate to this business fund so as to reach more widows who could benefit from this scheme.



Whilst meeting the women we saw their wealth of craft skills from, palm mat weaving, to batik dyeing and soap making. It is an exciting idea that these women could work with VALITA to set up a craft centre at Kaya. The products that they make have the potential to create a revenue stream which would support financial sustainability for VALITA.

This idea is something we are keen to research further over the coming year.

The VALITA team took us to the school in Mbopo where the children who live at Kaya attend. Since 2019, RfLUK have been involved with organising and fundraising for the installation of a water pump at this school. When this project first started, the school had over 1000 students. The school has grown considerably since then, with now over 3000 students. On arrival, we discovered that unfortunately the water pump has broken. We plan to fundraise to repair the pump as we are keen that the students and teachers can have clean drinking water once more.

To say that it was a privilege to spend a week with the VALITA team is an understatement. The deep kindness and generosity of the people that give their time to run the charity is so inspiring. It is clear that the good they do for their community is profound and the number of people who receive their help and encouragement is amazing.



A moment that will stay with me, is standing on the small hill at the back of Kaya with Dominic, the founder of VALITA. He wanted to show me the exact spot where he and Percy had sat together, in 2012, and envisioned what Bustani Ya Binadamu could become. So much has been done towards their vision since then and it is exciting to feel the momentum building towards the next stages.

There has been a lot of discussion between the RfLUK and VALITA members about how to create a training centre at Kaya that teaches the principles of permaculture and traditional craft skills, with the ethic of reverence for life at its heart. We are all looking forward to working towards this together.

Other News

Percy Mark

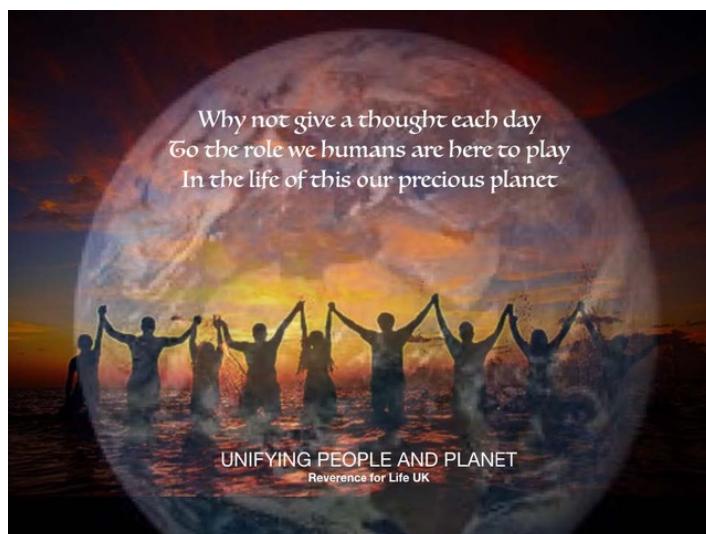
To celebrate the centenary of the publication of Volumes I & II of Schweitzer's Philosophy of Civilisation, the Schweitzer Institute, on the 10th November, held an online seminar in collaboration with Peter House College Cambridge. Speakers joined from Austria, Switzerland, USA and the UK. The proceedings were recorded and can be viewed at <<https://schweitzer.institute>> A slightly shortened version of my talk at this event is available on request by email and on our website.

As the last speaker of the day, I spoke about issues surrounding the non-completion of Volume III of Schweitzer's four-part project. Preparations for this talk yielded some valuable insights, some of which I would like to share here.

In the second of his four talks about Goethe, (1749 - 1832) Schweitzer, speaking in 1932, said this:

"Goethe was deeply convinced of the process of evolution in nature right up to and including humankind. Humans, for Goethe, are 'a piece of nature' ... And as soon as humans rise up to fully embrace true ethics, something new appears in nature, a higher dimension, a new possibility ... the spiritual journey of humankind is not something isolated and on its own but is a movement within the evolution of the whole of nature."

There are many milestones on this evolutionary path envisioned by Goethe, on which humankind is nature's instrument for bringing ethics into the process of life on Earth. One with which we are very familiar is the commandment Jesus gave to his disciples, *"Love thy neighbour as thyself"*; another was the abolition of slavery in the first half of the 17th C.; another, the creation by the UN of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. But a milestone set in 1915, which is not so widely recognised, is the broadening by Albert Schweitzer of the meaning of the word 'neighbour' in Jesus's commandment to include 'all Life', when he declared the essence of ethics to be captured by the phrase, *'to stand in awe of Life'*, (traditionally translated from the German as 'Reverence for Life').



During the first week in December 2023 a newly formed internet group calling itself "Lovers of Wisdom" (LoWG), of which I am a founding member, and which consists of both academic and amateur philosophers as well as psychiatrists and students from three continents, had its first inaugural online meeting. The topic for this first informal seminar was: 'What is the relationship between wisdom & ethics (if any)'. I was one of

three speakers to kick-start the discussion, and had the opportunity to present the essence of Schweitzer's ethical philosophy to this group. It was well received.

Towards the end of the wide-ranging discussion a student expressed the plea; “ ... *can we not have just a minimum viable philosophy? Something that gives us meaning and helps us navigate life as it is, without necessarily having all the big integrative metaphysics?*”

I was able to respond with: “That is exactly what Schweitzer’s ethics are: a ‘minimum viable philosophy’ to give meaning and purpose to all your daily actions!”

As Goethe and Schweitzer would have it - we, the human species, are nature’s way of introducing ethics into the fabric of life on earth. Accordingly, this task is our intended role - our contribution - giving meaning and purpose to our lives. We live in a time when it seems that our willingness and ability to fulfil this task is being severely tested.

Vreni Mark-Burkhalter Reflects

I am writing this on the day on which Albert Schweitzer would have been 149 years old and many memories are flooding in of the 14.1.1963, when he was 88 years old. I found a photo in my album taken on that morning with me standing in a group in front of the dining room door. Earlier, we had been singing in front of his bedroom door - as was the tradition for all members of staff on this special day - before they went to have breakfast. We had decorated the table with dried, colourful leaves sent from the vine which covered his house in his home village in the Alsace. I had baked a traditional Alsatian cake called a “Gugelhopf” and, as always, as the birthday child, he received 2 fried eggs, which he shared with the person of his choice at the table - a very lovely and special custom!



Later, after the evening meal, we gave him a little concert, usually for flute or recorder and piano to which Schweitzer listened with closed eyes and then gave us warm thanks. Expressing gratitude was very important to him and this made a big impression on me. His global correspondence was huge. Once a week potato sacks full of the mail arrived and it was a big task to deal with it. As I like to write I was often asked to answer letters sent with gifts of food coming from abroad and then, usually late at night, I would go to his room and he would always write a personal thank you note as well.

When I remember his birthday today, I think he would be so happy to know, that Reverence for Life UK has found its “Lambarene” in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He used to say that his hospital was his backyard where he practiced reverence for

life, but that everybody should find their own Lambarene. (The word Lambarene is a "Fang" word meaning "let us try a little").

Our last trustees meeting was very uplifting and I think Schweitzer would have been so happy to hear and see the enthusiasm of our group in the UK. Many friends have helped us with their donations and we are so grateful that Schweitzer's 'Reverence for Life' is still continuing to shine in this "not so easy world".

Kilimanjaro

During last summer, Paul Cockhill's brother, Peter, and his son, Roger, climbed all the way to the top of Africa's highest mountain - 5,895 m - and raised over £ 2000 in sponsorship for RfLUK and our Tanzanian projects.

Peter wrote afterwards:

"Five nights and six days on the mountain. Looking back, it seems such a short period, but it was not experienced as such. It was a wonderful experience of alignment with, and participation in, the magical, overwhelming beauty and complexity of life. I was amazed by the scale of the landscape and was reminded each night that we are living in but a tiny fragment of an unimaginably large universe."



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And finally...

Reverence for Life UK will hold your data for the purposes of updating you about our work and asking for your support from time to time. If you do not wish your details to be held for these purposes, please just send us an email on info@reverenceforlife.org.uk.

Thank you to everyone who has donated so generously over the last year and we hope this newsletter will help encourage further donations - we can only keep supporting our projects with your help.

The best way to donate is either via direct bank transfer or by sending us a cheque:

Bank transfer to: Lloyds Bank
Sort code: 30-98-97
Account number: 79291263
Account name: Reverence for Life UK

Send a cheque payable to Reverence for Life UK to:

Paul Neale at 10 Highfields, Saffron Waldon, Essex, CB10 2AD; or
Vreni Mark at Kenwood Cottage, High Str. Croydon, Royston, Herts. SG8 0DR