



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: August / September 2013

What's On...

Thursday 1st August, 7.00-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Midnight at the Oasis'
– coordinated by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 4th August, 11am-noon
'Bread of Life'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 4th August, 12.45-2.45pm
Lammas Gathering and Ritual:
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 5th August, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Sunday 11th August, 11am-noon
'Money Making the World Go Round'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 11th August, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Susan Smith

Sunday 11th August, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 12th August, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 12th August, 7.00-9.00pm
'Rediscovering the Bible'
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Sunday 18th August, 11am-noon
'Celebrating the Reformers'
Service led by Howard Hague

Sunday 18th August, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Monday 19th August, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Sunday 25th August, 11am-noon
'Summer in the City'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Tuesday 27th August, 6-8pm
'Propaganda, Power & Persuasion'
Cultural Outing to the British Library

Sunday 1st September, 11am-noon
'Saying Thank You
is Good for your Soul'
Service led by David Francis Darling

Listings continue on back cover...

A Message from our Minister:

Filling the Void



If your journey to Essex Church brings you along the main road of Notting Hill Gate, you've probably noticed that it has been closed for some time. In April, whilst investigating a water leak, Thames Water found something far more serious. A great big hole, with nothing in it. Empty space, with double decker buses trundling above, held aloft by a layer of tarmac and little else. The road has been closed ever since, with hopes that the work may be finished by the end of August. The road works have caused lots of problems. Far more traffic is coming past the church and that has increased noise levels and fumes. Vehicles are often stuck in queues and drivers beep their horns in frustration. Buses are having to take considerable diversions. But there are some benefits too. Some of the car free areas are more pleasurable to walk in and perhaps best of all are the 'customer information boards' provided to tell us all what's going on beneath the surface, complete with photos and lots of technical information. One early photo showed the 'great void' beneath Notting Hill – a gloomy murky shot of – well, a photo of not very much really. A hole, a void, a space with nothing in it, 3 metres deep in places and stretching beneath 50 metres of road.

Now it may be a genetic thing with us ministers (I don't remember it being taught at theology college) but it's such a temptation to launch into one of those 'it's a bit like life....' pieces of writing. Is it just me that resonates with this image – of life with empty spaces in it, of places within us that yearn to be filled, of gaps that we may suddenly stumble across within ourselves, not having realised that they've been there, hidden, perhaps for years? For a long while in young adult life I looked around for a group to belong to, an organisation which fitted my spiritual yearnings. I tried many different paths, some religious and some with a personal growth approach. Now you might expect me to say that once I'd found Unitarianism the void was filled and 'we all lived happily ever after'. But it wasn't really like that. In truth it took quite a while to decide to stay and put down roots in the congregation I happened to find. It took even longer to accept what I found, a group with faults and foibles just like any other. What made the difference and allowed me to settle was that I developed a sense of 'ownership' and started to care – and that helped me to belong.

I reckon that most of us experience a feeling of inner emptiness from time to time and we'll try all sorts of ways to fill the void. Tons of rock and concrete seem to be doing the trick in Notting Hill Gate but for human voids I'd recommend finding a community and taking the time to settle in and get to know people.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'What Do I Mean When I Say "God"?' – some reflections * 'Heart and Soul' Gatherings * '12 Steps to Spiritual Health' - course this autumn * 'Act(ions) of Equality' by Tristan Jovanović * Poems by John Hands * New Church Merchandise * Film Reviews by Liz Tuckwell * 'My Summer Ritual' by Veronica Needa * 'Why I Go To (whisper it) Church' by Helena Foss * Lammas Gathering * 'A Long Wait' – sermon by Rev Sarah Tinker * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.



Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church
112 Palace Gardens Terrace
Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT

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Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk
Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

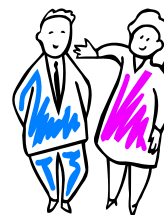
October Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for the next (October) issue of the newsletter is 15th September. Please send your newsletter contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, by then. Thank you!!!

Email your articles to:
jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

4 th August:	Sam Boyero
11 th August:	Gina Bayley
18 th August:	Veronica Needa
25 th August :	Niall Doherty
1 st September:	Natasha Drennan
8 th September:	Veronica Needa
15 th September:	Gina Bayley
22 nd September:	Natasha Drennan
29 th September:	Alice Lambert

Coffee:

4 th August:	Amanda Clark
11 th August:	David Darling
18 th August:	Gill Hague
25 th August :	Juliet Edwards
1 st September:	Jane Blackall
8 th September:	Caroline Blair
15 th September:	John Hands
22 nd September:	Margaret Darling
29 th September:	Juliet Edwards

Greeting:

4 th August:	Carol Sheppard
11 th August:	Sue Smith
18 th August:	Jo Ridgers
25 th August :	Jo Ridgers
1 st September:	Roy Clark
8 th September:	Tristan Jovanović
15 th September:	Heidi Ferid
22 nd September:	Jim Blair
29 th September:	Gina Bayley

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.
rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Gathering the Waters

Sunday 15th September 2013



We will be holding our annual 'Gathering of the Waters' ceremony in the service on Sunday 15th September.

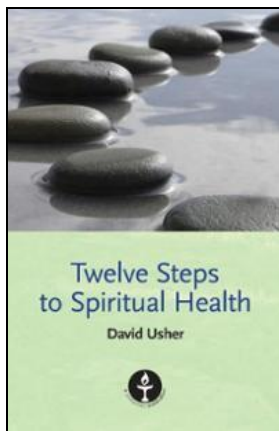
If you go away anywhere over the summer months then please do collect some water from the places you visit and save it to bring along to this service. Alternatively please do bring water from your kitchen, your local pond, water from the places of your lives, to join together in community.



A photo of our special 'Heart and Soul' spiritual gathering – on the theme of 'Openness' – in Kensington Gardens this July.

Book Now for this Autumn Course:

'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'



NEW evening group from 7.00pm to 8.45pm
Thursday evenings: 12th and 26th September,
17th and 31st October, 14th and 28th November

Based on a book written by our District Minister David Usher, this course explores what it means to us to feel spiritually healthy. Each evening will focus on certain areas of life – such as our bodies, our relationships with others and with money, our work, the natural world, mortality, community, celebrating – and we will encourage one another to take simple steps to increase our feelings of well-being, both in the world and within ourselves.

Registration costs £10 and includes a copy of the book. Have a look at your diaries and if this course appeals to you and you can commit to at least four of the six evenings, then contact Sarah to register for a place – by emailing sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phoning 020 7221 6514 and leaving a message with your contact details.

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



Thursdays 1st August and
5th September 2013 from 7-8pm
Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments

Since the start of this year, we have been holding regular 'Heart and Soul' spiritual gatherings on the first Thursday evening of each month, for new and alternative forms of Unitarian worship. These gatherings are led by members of the Worship Leaders' Practice Group. If you feel enthusiastic about the prospect of midweek services and experimenting with different forms of worship then please do come along and support us or get involved.

After the great success of last month's trip to the park, in August we will take advantage of having the whole church to ourselves and if the weather allows we will hold our alternative worship in the church garden. We'll be starting at 7pm but our theme will be 'Midnight at the Oasis' and we'll have time to appreciate our garden, described by some as a little oasis in the midst of our busy city. With some Middle Eastern snacks to enjoy together after the service this promises to be a delightful evening and all are welcome. You can even bring your camels.

August's gathering will be led by Sarah Tinker. Please contact Sarah (sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you have any questions or would like to know more. In September, the theme of the session will be 'balance', and this will be led by Jeannene Powell.

Lammas Gathering



Sunday 4th August, 12.45-2.45pm
After the service here at Essex Church

Lammas is a pagan festival of thanksgiving for early harvests and a time to take stock of what we have in store.

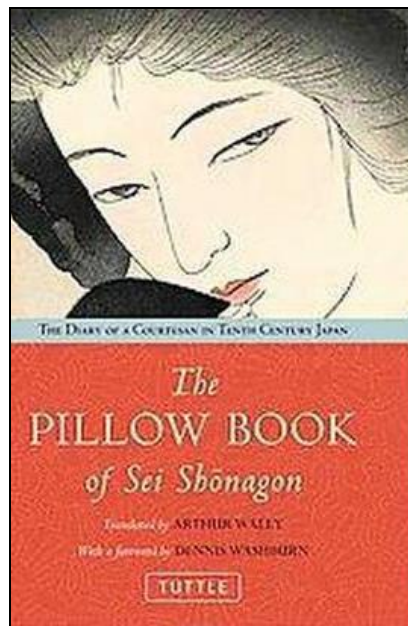
We will use this image to consider our own lives and create together a simple ritual of appreciation. Please bring lunch if you are staying for the gathering.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Essex Church Reading Group

'The Pillow Book'

by Sei Shonagon



Tuesday 24th September 2013, 7-9.00pm

The reading group's July session will be based on 'The Pillow Book' by Sei Shonagon. This was chosen by Caroline Blair and will be the 105th title discussed by the reading group since it started up ten years ago.

More information from Wikipedia:

"The Pillow Boo is a book of observations and musings recorded by Sei Shōnagon during her time as court lady to Empress Consort Teishi during the 990s and early 11th century in Heian Japan. The book was completed in the year 1002. In it she included lists of all kinds, personal thoughts, interesting events in court, poetry and some opinions on her contemporaries. While it is mostly a personal work, Shōnagon's writing and poetic skill makes it interesting as a work of literature, and it is valuable as a historical document. Part of it was revealed to the Court by accident during Shōnagon's life."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session. The group has been meeting monthly since 2003. We take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read so we tackle a wide variety of material. For more information see:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html

Language of Poetry...



Is closest to the human heart: all other sounds
Shapes or images are something abstract, almost
Set apart; but the quick release of sense and sound with which
We struggle to infuse heart and intellect are nearest to
The universal force which thrusts through dormant nature,
As Spring-time sap through trees and flowers.
The Highest Potency which some call "Source" and others "God"
Shows varied aspects of Herself in art and music, but
In poetry alone personifies. In poetry is felt and held
In other arts revealed then distanced. In no more delightful sheen
Is Source revealed than music's rapturous tones; but
Poetry plays her out: and as light replenishes each day
Enlightens and reveals our understanding.

John Hands

What Do I Mean When I Say 'God'?

After the service on Sunday 7th July we held a workshop entitled 'What is God?' We looked at the varied meanings we attribute to the word. Here are some of our responses to the question 'What do you mean when you say God?'



For me, God is the Being and the Power which lies behind all that is; behind Nature, Life, the Universe, and behind all our dreams, thoughts and desires. I think Life ultimately has its basis in God as Source and Creator, and God is what remains when all illusions have been stripped away. The God of the Philosophers resonates with me the most, and I conceive of God as the Absolute Mind and Spirit which lies behind the visible universe à la the Neoplatonists and German Idealists. At the same time I see God as the animating principle that inheres in Life, consciousness and the evolutionary process: the spark of Life and élan vital. Each of us is a unique manifestation of the divine and therefore valuable, and I wager that our ultimate goal is to realise our God-given nature and innate individuality; no mean feat in the face of the adversity surrounding us.

Niall Doherty

I lay on the floor of the church on a hot Sunday afternoon with a pencil and paper, wondering how to answer this question. It's a question I've been exploring for as long as I can remember, from those early childhood questions about the possibility of there being that lovely old man up in the sky looking down on us all and caring about how we behaved. Then through years of exploration and study to this day, when on my paper I drew a large question mark. The question mark reflects my sense of the divine as unknowable and inexpressible in language, that when we attempt to explain God in words we will always fall short. That for me doesn't mean we shouldn't try from time to time to tell one another of what God means for us, to express, in words or images or movement or sound, our yearning to comprehend. I so enjoyed hearing everyone's thoughts that afternoon. Alongside the question mark in answer to the question, I wrote:

- All that is, and more than that
- A great mystery
- The unknown within all that exists and beyond all
- The energetic spark of existence, the light within
- Beyond duality to oneness
- Light and also darkness
- ??????????????????????????????????

As a Unitarian minister I consider one of my tasks is to express a sense of this great mystery in a way that opens up possibilities for people rather than closing them down. In worship, in small groups and in private conversations I hope we can all feel encouraged to find imagery and descriptions that work for us and allow others the freedom to do the same. For most Unitarians revelation is not sealed, meaning that there will always be new possibilities, new truths for humanity to uncover – about science, about faith, about all areas of existence. Poet Mary Oliver writes:

“Let me keep my distance, always, from those who think they have the answers.
Let me keep company always with those who say ‘Look!’ and laugh in astonishment, and bow their heads.”

but I like to talk with people of strong faith and clear religious convictions, even though their path isn't mine – at least at the moment. In matters of faith, you never know!

Sarah Tinker

Seven or eight of us met after the service on Murray Sunday (when everybody else had gone home to watch the men's final at Wimbledon) to try to put into words what we thought we meant by the word 'God'. A constantly changing concept to me, and not just someone or something to make intercession – I have enough RESPECT for this entity to think it knows what is best in the scheme of things. I freely admit to lapsing into “Please God make the lights change” but then the God of my understanding has a sense of humour. It, or He (but not She) is a Benevolence, the author of Hope, a channel of love and inspiration, the Force for Good.

If God is Spirit, and we do not speak spirit language there has to be another method of communication. Communing is how I describe it – a bridge, a ladder of light. No doubt some find their pathway pursuing delights brought to them as they sit hunched over a laptop. I honour those who go Googling on my behalf as I create shape and colour and regeneration in the garden. To sit, to let go, to marvel, to jump to oblige the robin and the blackbird who, head on side, casts its spell.

Stephanie Saville

For me, there are a number of different clouds of association I have with the word 'God', and I find that different aspects of my understanding come to the fore in different settings and at different times of my life. I tend to describe my theology as being a kind of 'mystical panentheism' and this double-barrelled label brings together both my instinctive, felt sense of God, and my more intellectual, abstract ideas about God.

It is hard to put into words but the concept of God which comes most naturally to me is something like 'the integration of all-that-is' – God as the unfolding cosmos, discovering itself and finding its way as it goes along – and so we humans, all creatures, all things animate and inanimate are part of God. I sometimes think of us all as interconnected cells of God's body. Yet I feel that God is more than the sum of the parts of the cosmos and that God-consciousness might transcend God's body – the entire cosmos – in the same sort of way that human consciousness is said to arise from each human body.

Ultimately, however, my thoughts are still rather fuzzy, and on a day-to-day basis I don't think about God in this way much. Instead I find I often talk to God, and do my best to listen too, as I go about the business of getting on with my life. I might say 'HELP' or 'thank you', though more often the communication will be wordless, a sense of awareness, 'tuning in' or 'knowing'. In difficult times, I have felt a loving presence that supports me and gives me strength, like being held safe in comforting arms. Perhaps this is the most abiding sense of what I mean by 'God'.

Jane Blackall

Act(ions) of Equality

On 21 July 1813, the Unitarian Toleration Act was given Royal Assent in Parliament granting equality to non-Trinitarian Christians in England. On 17 July 2013, the Marriage (Same-sex Couples) Act, granting equality in marriage to same-sex couples was given Royal Assent, the near culmination of a very long battle for equality.

Often, sexuality and religion are not discussed together, unless it touches on a matter of scandal in the Vatican or drags the rather tired question of homosexuality and Christian morals over the coals once more. In England, both religion and sexuality are generally seen as private matters, with the freedom to choose one's faith and act on one's proclivities within reasonable limits. One is not, for example, permitted to marry multiple people or permit oneself to be seriously harmed for pleasure but we live, overall, in a very liberal society. But keeping one's religion or sexuality in the home is all very well and good until the time comes to make a change.



After all, to quote Carol Hanisch, the personal is political. The way I am allowed to conduct my marriage ceremony is personal but when the law prevents me from doing it in a church, that's no longer my choice. When the official word for my partnership is different to the heterosexual couple's next door, then that's political too. Similarly, when Unitarians were arrested, barred from public office, imprisoned and prevented from participating as full citizens in the life of the community, their beliefs were no longer personal.

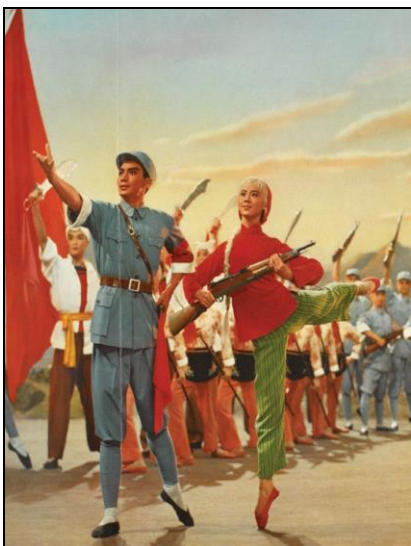
At the same time, we British are still touchy about these inequalities. We hold ourselves out as a beacon of freedom and democracy. Libertarian (i.e. the advocacy of free will in thought and action rather than the political philosophy) ideals run through the public conscience as truly British qualities. This seems to be a contradiction when the House of Lords granted Alan Turing, the code-cracking hero of World War II, a posthumous pardon for gross indecency just this month. Many other men who were jailed for homosexual acts have not been pardoned, including Oscar Wilde.

If the personal is political, then the House of Lords will be prepared to make such a pardon for all. It does not matter that many of these men have now passed away. The symbolism in this case is what makes the difference. It says that much as the Unitarian Toleration Act permitted dissenters to dissent without having to be dishonest about their beliefs and thus lose their integrity, we acknowledge the integrity of those men who lived their lives as they were created.

Unfortunately, inequalities still exist. It is still against canon law for a Unitarian to preach in an Anglican church. It will continue to be illegal for Anglican churches, even those parishes which want to, to celebrate marriages for everyone.

And so, what to do? I think we can do nothing but renew the call of the earliest Dissenters: to relieve the burden of the church from the state and thus fully remove the hitherto monopoly over marriage from the church. The personal is political thus the state should stay out of the bedroom, but even more than that, the church should stay out too. Only when we have removed the Church of England from its position of privilege can we see true equality in marriage and religion in Britain.

Tristan Jovanović



An Essex Church Cultural Outing:

Propaganda: Power and Persuasion

Tuesday 27th August 6pm-8pm, British Library

PLEASE NOTE - ADVANCE BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL

From the BL website: 'Propaganda is all around us. It is used to fight wars and fight disease, build unity and create division. Whether monumental or commonplace, sincere or insidious, propaganda is often surprising, sometimes horrific and occasionally humorous. While it's never neutral, it can be difficult to define and identify. This is the first exhibition to explore international state propaganda from the 20th and 21st centuries. From the eye-opening to the mind-boggling, from the beautiful to the surprising, posters, films, cartoons, sounds and texts reveal the myriad ways that states try to influence and persuade their citizens. Exploring a thought-provoking range of exhibits, you will find yourselves looking anew at the messages, methods, and media used by different states - discovering how they use propaganda through time and across cultures for both power and persuasion.'



Kensington Unitarians Art Exhibition This Autumn

Part of Open Studios, 11th-12th October 2013

Pocket Arts is organising a new artists open studios festival for the Kensington & Fulham area this autumn. We have signed up Essex Church to take part and plan to hold an 'open studio' for members and friends to exhibit their own art and craft works to the congregation and the local community on 11th-12th October.

Planning is at an early stage but we are thinking of inviting people to show up to three art or craft works in the exhibition. We would like to produce a booklet to accompany the event including statements from the artists and pictures of the works.

It would be helpful to hear from you in the near future if you are interested in taking part. Please email Jane if you would like to be involved. It would be handy to know what sort of works you are thinking of showing so that we can consider how best to put on the display. We will also need volunteers to help set up and steward the exhibition in October so please get in touch if you are willing to help out with the practicalities (especially if you have any experience in putting on exhibitions of this kind!). Email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk if you would like to be involved.

For more information about the event see: www.pocketarts.org



Our Local Foodbank



Do think about bringing some items to put in our Food Bank box, which will then be taken to the Trussell Trust Foodbank nearby. This organisation has stepped into the void created by increasingly harsh rules about welfare payments in this country. They generally give an individual or family just a few days' worth of food to tide them over until they sort out the immediate crisis, but will also help guide people to appropriate sources of advice. I am personally troubled that as a country we have slipped so quickly into needing such an organisation at all, but having spoken both to organisers and clients of the scheme I can see that it is well run and much appreciated.

If you would rather not travel through London clutching some tins then the Foodbank will happily receive cheques made payable to the Trussell Trust, as that enables them to buy staples like rice in bulk.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A reminder of the wish-list of items:

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- Sugar (500g)
- Fruit Juice (carton)
- Soup
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Tomatoes (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Tea Bags / Instant Coffee
- Instant Mash Potato
- Rice / Pasta
- Tinned Meat / Fish
- Tinned Fruit
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

If you would like to donate any of these items please bring them along to church next time you come. The church committee will need to arrange regular transport of the food we collect so if you might be able to help with this then let Sarah or a committee member know.



Warden's Column

Looking through the Church bookings diary for August and September, August is mostly remarkable for what isn't happening (it's our quietest month) and September for the festivals being celebrated here by our resident synagogue Beit Klal Yisrael. These are: Rosh Hashanah (Wednesday 4th/Thursday 5th); Kol Nidre/Yom Kippur (Friday 13th/Saturday 14th) and Simchat Torah (Thursday 26th).

Beit Klal was set up in 1990 to create a Jewish home for those who felt estranged from normative forms of Judaism and have made their home at Essex Church ever since. Here's some more information from their website:

Welcome to our politically, religiously and intellectually provocative community! We especially welcome:

- Women
- LGBTQ
- patrilineal
- non Jewish partners of members
- and secular Jews.

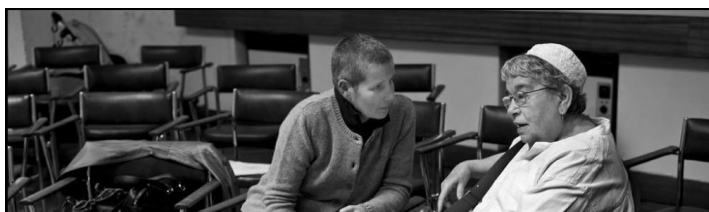
Today BKY is an evolving Jewish community. We are a community who cohere around a celebration of Jewish radicalism. We are a community whose ethos is to create a critical dialogue between Judaism's religious and secular intellectual heritage with a view to voicing new and distinctive forms of Jewish dissent. We take seriously Abraham Joshua Heschel's teaching that: "Prayer is nothing unless it is subversive".

Services: BKY holds an erev Shabbat service on the 1st and 3rd Friday of the month and a Shabbat morning Torah study service on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month.

Festivals: Beit Klal Yisrael celebrates all of the major festivals. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur involve the whole community coming together to pray and read the rich liturgy of the Yamim nora'im. On Rosh Hashanah we eat apples and honey, walk to Kensington gardens for tashlich and on Yom Kippur we spend the day in prayer, breaking fast together after the final shofar has been blown. Simchat Torah is a highlight of the year at BKY. The Klezmer Klub (klezmer musicians) accompany the community musically as we celebrate the reading of Torah.

As the dates of these festivals vary every year (according to the lunar calendar) it can sometimes be difficult for us to accommodate them – and on occasion they have had to take place elsewhere – but we do try and fit them in if we possibly can & our regular hirers are very generous about moving rooms, or even cancelling their own events to make that possible. Beit Klal are a religious organisation whose aims and energy really resonate with Unitarian values and we're proud and lucky to have them here.

Jenny Moy



Beit Klal's current Rabbi Judith Rosen Berry in conversation with the founding Rabbi Sheila Shulman



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
11th August, 8th September 2013**

**Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30
(PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF WEEKDAY)**

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

Cost £10 (£5 to members of church congregation).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Small Group Communion



**Sundays 11th August, 8th September
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

On the second Sunday of each month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. These services are led by different members of the congregation. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we can experience a variety of different approaches. The line-up for the next couple of months is as follows:

11th August – Led by Susan Smith

8th September – Led by Heidi Ferid & Sarah Tinker

13th October – Led by Jane Blackall

If you would like to find out more then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan. All are welcome.

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 18th August, 15th September
12.30 to 1.15pm, at Essex Church



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.



Spirituality and Mental Health Recovery:

Influencing the Bigger Picture

Thursday 12th September 2013, 2-4pm
Here at Essex Church, 112 Palace Gardens, W8 4RT

The main meeting runs from 2.00pm until 4.00pm. There will be a nominal charge of £5.00 (unwaged £1.00) for attending the events. Queries should be addressed to Georgina Long at gannlong@gmail.com or 0208 451 5319.

The purpose of the Forum is to act as a vehicle to bring together the main faith communities throughout the country, with the world of mental health. Spirituality is not only a vital element in a person's life experience and mental health but also a major factor in any holistic approach to supporting individuals in their environments.

For more information: www.mhspirituality.org.uk

'New-U' Afternoon



We're holding a 'New-U' event on Sunday 29th September to introduce new members to Unitarianism and the way Essex Church works as a congregation. We're making it an invitation only session so if you are new to the church and would like to know more about this session do get in touch with our minister Rev. Sarah Tinker for more information.

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Health and Healing'



Friday 9th August 2013
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Come and enjoy as we gather in healing and loving connection to Spirit. Come help us create a sacred space, bringing in the One Light, One Love for which we all long - with silence, music, spiritual transformation journey, and eternal inspiration from all faiths and none. Bring your beloved eternal self, family & friends.

Our guest in August is Interfaith Minister Anja Saunders. Holistic health has been her field of work for about 25 years. She is a spiritual healer, Shamanic practitioner and Alexander Technique teacher. After a short introduction she will lead us in meditation & distant as well as hands on healing. She will use toning - a way of bringing healing forces together through sound for group healing. In her experience with healing heart circles it brings everyone "in tune". With the right intent we focalise the breath which creates a sound bath. It is not necessary to be able to sing or hold a note or have a pleasing voice. It is a way of bringing healing energy through and focussing it for a specific purpose.

Forthcoming Gatherings:

13th September – Accomplishment; 11th October – Politics

*These events are free. Donations for expenses are welcome.
Any surplus will go to Essex Unitarian Church*

...some forthcoming workshops you may be interested in...

'Be Here Create'

Rev. John Harley is running the following 'Be Here Create' retreats this autumn. They are open to all and bring together a mixture creativity, fellowship, meditation and an exploration of spirituality and sense of self.

'Personal Transformations in the Wilderness'

13th – 15th September 2013

at Marsett Bothy, Wensleydale, North Yorkshire



An interactive, creative and playful weekend in the natural environment – time to ground and nourish the soul – inviting active participation and reflection with our lives and the elements. Grounded, revitalised and refreshed – this weekend aims to enable participants to feel re-connected with themselves with opportunities to incorporate their transformational experiences into their present lives – inviting peace and acceptance, energy and insight. Activities involved will comprise of walking, mindfulness, rituals, silence, cooking, music-making and story-telling. Cost – includes accommodation, food & resources – £150.

'The Soul and the Six Senses'

20th – 22nd September 2013

at The St Joseph's Centre in the New Forest

An exploration of our senses through movement, meditation, creativity and music and time to honour our intuitive, mystical selves. The soul is an ancient entity or phenomenon living deep in the human psyche and in our experience. It is explored in many of the world faiths and reclaimed and revisited in the worlds of music, art and even advertising. In this retreat we will be invited to participate in mindful and reflective activities that will help us get into contact with our senses and our understanding of the soul. There will be opportunities for gentle movement and creativity in a small supportive group (group size- no more than 12 people). Also there will be space for fellowship and free time. Cost of weekend – includes all vegetarian meals and accommodation – £160 (note: rooms are not en-suite).

For more information about how to book visit:

<http://beherecreate.co.uk/forthcoming-events/>
or contact jharley@beherecreate.co.uk / 07985 0900935

'Rediscovering the Bible'

A monthly bible-reading group at Essex Church

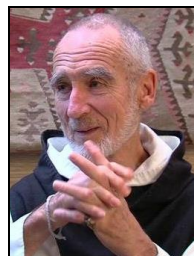


Meeting on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7pm:
12th August, 2nd September, 14th October 2013
(please note irregular date in September)

We started a monthly bible-reading group back in late 2012. In the sessions we simply read through the bible together, pausing to reflect, and share our own thoughts and feelings on what we read. We began with the Acts of the Apostles and we have now gone back to the beginning to tackle Genesis. We were very pleased to welcome eleven people to the first session and a core group have continued to gather each month since then. There has been a lot of laughter and fun in these sessions as well as exploration, discovery and learning.

Do contact us (email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you have any questions or just to let us know you're planning to come along. The bible-reading group is open to all who share a spirit of goodwill and curiosity about discovering the text anew – no particular theology will be presumed – please bring along a bible (any translation you like) if you have one. This group is offered in conjunction with the Liberal Christian affinity group of the district association (LDPA) and we hope to see friends from throughout the region at these meetings.

David Darling and Jane Blackall



'Day and night gifts keep pelting down on us. If we were aware of this, gratefulness would overwhelm us. But we go through life in a daze. A power failure makes us aware of what a gift electricity is; a sprained ankle lets us appreciate walking as a gift, a sleepless night, sleep. How much we are missing in life by noticing gifts only when we are suddenly deprived of them! But this can be changed. We need some methodical exercise in gratefulness. Years ago, I devised a method for myself which has proved quite helpful. Every night I note in a pocket calendar one thing for which I have never before been consciously thankful. Do you think it is difficult to find a new reason for gratitude each day? Not just one, but three and four and five pop into my mind, some evenings. It is hard to imagine how long I would have to live to exhaust the supply.'

Brother David Steindl-Rast

Church Merchandise



You might be interested to know about a project that I have been working on lately to develop some 'Church Merch' – everyday items printed with a chalice logo and a few words which hopefully indicate something of what Kensington Unitarians are all about. This is something we have been talking about for a long time. Lots of people have expressed their appreciation of the mugs bearing the chalice logo which were produced by the GA a few years back and we thought it would be nice to make some of our own. Following on from this idea was the thought that we might make other items, such as t-shirts and bags, with the same logo.

It seemed a fairly straightforward decision to use the same chalice design and colourway found on our website and orders of service but it has taken quite a bit of agonising to decide on the text. I have come up with the phrase 'community – spirituality – conscience' which I hope you will agree gives an accurate representation of the 3 main 'dimensions' of congregational life, stated in simple terms: a welcoming, supportive community; a connection to God or the spiritual aspects of life; and a concern for ethics and how we should live in this world. I have tried to use simple language which is inclusive of our theological diversity. It was inspired by the 'three jewels' of Buddhism. The design also includes our website address in the hope that people will be motivated to find out more about us!

So far I have ordered prototype oyster-card wallets and t-shirts, and hope to get some mugs in soon. Now that we have a design there are lots of possibilities for items we can personalise so let me know if you would like something in particular and I'll look into it. Some of the items (such as the t-shirts – as modelled by Annie!) can be printed-on-demand so we can order them one at a time but others (such as the mugs and oyster-card wallets) are going to be much cheaper if we buy in bulk so please do get in touch if you think you would like any of these items so that we can gauge demand before we place our orders.

Jane Blackall



A photo of the congregation gathered for the GA Sunday service and potluck lunch on Sunday 28th July. What a gorgeous bunch!

Film Reviews:

A round-up of some recent releases by Liz Tuckwell

‘Mud’



‘Mud’ stars Matthew McConaughey and Reese Witherspoon. Matthew McConaughey is the Mud of the title of the film, a convict on the run. It is set in the American Deep South on the Mississippi river although I wasn't quite sure what era it was meant to be. It is a coming of age story with Ellis (Tye Sheridan) a teenage boy as the hero of the film. He and his friend Neckbone, help Mud with his scheme to escape from the law and reunite with his girlfriend, which involves rescuing and repairing a boat stuck in a tree. Ellis thinks that Mud's obsessional love for Juniper, his rather flighty on/off girlfriend is romantic and wants to help for that reason although Mud's love for Juniper has led him into actions, which resulted in his imprisonment. This hero worship leads him into non-ethical behaviour, stealing parts for Mud' boat from his neighbours and convincing himself that the parts are not really wanted. He is shown the errors of his ways by his parents who when they find out, insist that he apologise and return or pay for the parts he stole. Mud for most of the film, seems to be a less than reputable character, shows himself capable of selfless action such as when he saves Ellis from dying by taking him to hospital when he knows that he risks capture by doing so.

All the performances were good but I particularly enjoyed Reese Witherspoon as the flighty Juniper and Jacob Lofland as Neckbone, Ellis's pragmatic teenage friend. I could easily imagine him playing the part of Huckleberry Finn. I did have a couple of questions about the film. How does Mud manage to keep his lucky white shirt so spotlessly clean when he is living rough? And, more seriously, why is the state allowed to demolish houses built on the river when people move out? (As Ellis and his family do eventually). This seems to be rather draconian and the reasons for this are not explained in the film.

‘The Great Gatsby’

This is a fresh version of the story, directed by Baz Luhrmann who also directed Moulin Rouge. It shares some similar production values as Moulin Rouge, with spectacular scenery and costumes. The lavish parties that Gatsby throws really are something to be seen. Like Mud, it is the story of obsessive love; Gatsby's for Daisy Buchanan. I thought that Leonardo DiCaprio as Gatsby and Tobey Maguire as the narrator, Nick Carraway were both very well cast. However, I did think that some of the scenes seemed rather stagy. Daisy and Tom Buchanan, Nick and the others in their social circle are well educated and from a social elite and Tom despises Gatsby. The film shows that being wealthy does not make someone a good person. Although Gatsby is shown to be involved in some murky dealings and dubious people, he is also portrayed as the noblest character in the film. He is capable of hard work, commitment and selfless love unlike the others. Right at the end of the film, Nick says to him, '...they're a rotten crowd. You 're worth the whole damn bunch put together.'

‘Behind the Candelabra’



This is an autobiographical film about a love affair that Liberace had with a young man. It stars Michael Douglas as Liberace and Matt Damon as his young lover, Scott Thorson; it is very funny but also very sad. It shows that Liberace despite his talent, popularity and wealth could never be happy for two reasons. One is because of his insecurity about people loving him for himself. He could not have an honest relationship with any lover. Two because he was constantly living a lie, pretending to be heterosexual. One of my favourite moments in the film is when Scott, having split up with Liberace, goes into a bookshop, and picks up Liberace's autobiography, which has been completely falsified. The hostility and intolerance shown when Liberace is revealed to have been gay after his death is shocking and explains why he never 'came out'.

The film presents Scott Thorson as a very honest man who does not want to exploit his relationship with Liberace and became a drug user because of the pressures of the relationship but you do wonder about that. Sadly, Thorson's life did not go well after leaving Liberace. He continued to be a drug user and ended up in prison on several occasions. He is now dying from cancer.

Liz Tuckwell

'Congregations are gatherings of people. People are imperfect. Therefore, rest assured that we will always have something about which to be dissatisfied. No worries there. But there's another reason that we become so easily dissatisfied. In the industrialized world, we live immersed in consumer cultures. We are indoctrinated almost every minute of every waking hour to consume, purchase, prefer, sample, like, follow, watch, and so on. Look around you right now. Somewhere within your line of sight is product branding, which has one ultimate purpose, which is for you to spend money.

In this way, we are like fish, who don't know anything except water until we jump out of it. Few of us have lived in anything but a market-oriented, consumer culture. However, congregations are not McDonald's. We don't have customer service departments where you can complain that the coffee was cold or the sermon was sour or the songs were too hard.

What we do have is a gathering of imperfect people, all trying their best to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our G-d; to love ourselves, our neighbours, and even our enemies; to love our G-d with all of our hearts, and all of our minds, and all of our souls; to raise up the least among us, the merciful, the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry, the peacemakers, and so on.

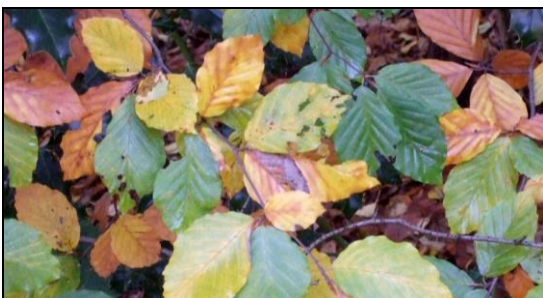
And so, the next time you find yourself "unsatisfied" in your congregation, realize that you are imperfect, as is the congregation. Pull yourself out of the consumer mentality. Keep your marbles in the ring, and ask what you can do to help the congregation achieve its expressed mission. Every congregation's mission, however expressed, boils down to this: Nurturing spirits and healing the world. Inreach and outreach. Being cared for and caring for others. What can you do to nurture spirits and heal the world? Congregations don't exist for their own sake. People don't gather to stare at each other and be unsatisfied. We come together to make a difference in our own lives and in the lives of others.'

UU Minister Rev. Matt Tittle

Autumn Colour Walk

A Date for your Diary:

Wednesday 6th November, Epping Forest



Come and join us for a walk in Epping Forest. We will be leaving the church at 10am or meeting at Loughton station (on the central line) at 11am. Put the date in your diary.

Why I go to *(whisper it)* Church



Since the autumn of 2012, I have found myself drawn back to Kensington Unitarian Church Sunday service again and again. I say I go to 'the service', but I have trouble bringing myself to say that

I go to church. Because I rejected organised religion back in my disillusioned early teens. Shell-shocked at discovering what, exactly, the Holocaust was, and what, exactly, nuclear weapons were capable of, I decided to look for some answers as to why the world appeared to be such an unholy mess of war and atrocity - something which hasn't seemed to have abated to this day. The only spirituality I knew of - and had access to - at the time, was Christianity. I wasn't sure why I was born into 'original sin' in the first place but I got down on my knees and prayed to Jesus for salvation anyway, just as I was told to. I gave it my best shot. Honestly, I did. And absolutely nothing happened.

So that was the end of that.

In my early twenties, I found a particular form of cathartic meditation practice, devised by the late maverick Indian mystic Osho, that quite literally saved my sanity during a very painful time in my life. By opening up and actually feeling the pain of several abusive episodes in my childhood, my heart opened up to what I can only call 'divine love' too. Being brought to my knees and to tears with the sheer overwhelm of this awesome, unnameable loving presence was the balm that started healing my fractured soul. Yet it had absolutely nothing to do with going to a church or subscribing to an ideology. So I find it annoying to say the least when intellectual, dogmatic atheists brand 'spiritual but not religious' people like me, as flaky 'enemies of reason'.

I can't even say I am a Unitarian. But I can say that if I believe in anything, I believe in love. And I love how each Sunday, Sarah (or whoever else is leading the service) manages to inspire and move me by drawing on the wisdom of so many spiritual traditions, from Buddhism to Zen. For the past nine months or so, the service has been a haven for me during the tumultuous time of leaving an unhappy relationship. A rock to steady me in the swirling, choppy waters of life-change.

How anyone can ever presume to have a monopoly on the truth, whether religious or scientific, astonishes me. As mere specks of dust in this inconceivably vast cosmos of over a hundred billion galaxies, how can we possibly know anything for sure? 'Life,' Osho once said, 'is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived.'

The service somehow captures the essence of universal love that has always sustained me. Quite simply, I'm hooked! So that is why I go to, *ahem*, church.

Amen. (Did I just say that?!)

Helena Foss

Helena Foss is a freelance writer and sporadic blogger. See: www.helenafoss.co.uk

Multifaith Calendar (August)



1st August – Lammas/ Lughnasadh – Wiccan/Pagan

Lughnasadh, otherwise called Lammas, is the time of the corn harvest, when Pagans reap those things they have sown and when they celebrate the fruits of the mystery of Nature. At Lughnasadh, Pagans give thanks for the bounty of the Goddess as Queen of the Land.

4th August – Lailat-ul-Qadr / The Night of Power – Muslim

This commemorates the night in 610 CE when the prophet Muhammad received his first visit from the angel Jibril (Gabriel) and his revelation of the Qur'an. Muslims believe that the date of this night is kept secret by God, but that they 'May seek the Night of Dignity in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan' (Bukhaari, quoting Aisha, who heard it from the Prophet). Many Muslims spend the last ten days and nights of Ramadan secluded in the mosque, praying and studying the Qur'an, to ensure they receive the special benefits promised for their prayers and devotions on Lailat-ul-Qadr.

6th August – The Transfiguration – Christian

This festival commemorates the occasion when Jesus went up a mountain with three of his disciples, Peter, James and John; here, as his death approached, they saw his face change and his clothes become dazzling white. They witnessed him in conversation with Moses and Elijah, and heard a voice saying, 'This is my own dear Son with whom I am pleased – listen to him'. For many Christians this confirms the divine nature of Jesus. For Orthodox Christians this is an especially important festival, pointing to Christ as both human and divine. Although Moses and Elijah had died centuries before, they could live again in the presence of the Son of God, implying that a similar return to life can apply to all who face death.

8th August – Eid-ul-Fitr / Feast of Fast-Breaking - Muslim

Celebrations of this festival may extend over the first three days of the month of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan, although only the first day's celebration is religiously sanctioned. It is a time for making gifts to the poor (Zakat-ul-Fitr, the charity of the fast, must be paid before the Eid prayer). Here is a time for new clothes, good food, and presents for children. Families get together and contact friends, especially those who live far away. The community will assemble for Eid prayer and a sermon at the mosque or at a large place which will accommodate the whole community of the town or village. The traditional greeting is 'Eid Mubarak' – 'a happy and blessed Eid'. (There is no reference in the Qur'an but there is in the Hadith, the traditions of the Prophet).

8th August – Fravardigan / Muktdad – Zoroastrian

The Fravardigan festival (the festival of the fravashis), popularly known as Muktdad (All Souls), commences ten days before NoRuz and is the last festival of the old year. The Zoroastrian day commences at sunrise and not midnight, and so during sunrise on the first day of the festival the immortal souls, together with their fravashis (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors, artistically depicted as half man/half bird),

are welcomed by name by the Zoroastrian Mobeds or Magi (priests). For ten days they reside in the place of worship, hovering around a table full of metal vases, each specifically earmarked for an individual family and containing white flowers. They leave the physical world after the last ceremony, held on the tenth evening, but before the dawn of NoRuz. The designated priest – as a farewell gesture – will then empty the water from one of the metal vases, which he will turn upside down, signifying that it is time for the immortal souls and the fravashis to return to the spiritual world.

15th August – Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Christian (Catholic)

On this day Catholic Christians celebrate the 'taking up' of Mary, body and soul, to heaven. Many Catholic communities mark the festival of the Assumption with processions and fêtes.

18th August – Navroze / No Ruz – Zoroastrian (Shenshai)

New Year's Day on the Shenshai Calendar. In the tenth century a group of Zoroastrians fled from Iran and were given religious sanctuary by the Hindus of Western India, where they became known as Parsis (or Persians). During the twentieth century the Zoroastrians of Iran have revised their calendar to take account of the leap year, while the Parsis of India have continued following the traditional imperial or Shenshai calendar.

21st August – Raksha Bandhan – Hindu

This festival takes place on the full moon of Shravana. Raksha means 'protection' and bandhan means 'to tie'. Girls and married women in families of a north Indian background tie a rakhi (amulet) on the right wrists of their brothers, wishing them protection from evil influences of various kinds.

23rd August – Khordad Sal - Zoroastrian (Shenshai)

The Birthday of Zarathushtra, one of the most important Zoroastrian festivals. Khordad means perfection and although the actual date of his birth cannot be accurately identified, the festival of Khordad Sal symbolically celebrates the birthday of Prophet Zarathushtra and falls on the sixth day following NoRuz.

28th August – Dormition of the Mother of God – Christian (Eastern Orthodox. Julian Calendar)

On this day, Eastern Orthodox Christians commemorate the passing of Mary, Mother of Christ, in the presence of the Apostles. Miraculously brought together at her house, Mary told the Apostles of the reason for their gathering, and comforted them. She raised her hands to pray for peace for the world, and blessed each apostle before giving up her spirit. The apostles buried Mary at Gethsemane, where Jesus had also been buried; but on the third day after the burial, when they were eating together, Mary appeared to them, saying "Rejoice". In this way, the apostles first learned that Mary's body had been taken up into Heaven, where Christ had already taken her spirit. When the apostles went to the grave, her body was gone, leaving a sweet fragrance. The symbolism of this event encompasses the idea of death as 'falling asleep' (this is what 'dormition' means), to be followed by eventual resurrection.

28th August – Janmashtami / Krishna Jayanti – Hindu

The birthday of Krishna is widely celebrated throughout the Hindu world. He is a very popular avatar or incarnation of Lord Vishnu and many Hindus fast in his honour until midnight, the time of Krishna's birth. Those unable to fast will take some fruit and milk. In the temples Krishna is welcomed with singing, dancing and sweets. In some homes and temples an image of the new-born Krishna is put in a cradle and special sweets (e.g. the powder, panjiri, given traditionally to women after childbirth) are offered and distributed.

Multifaith Calendar (September)

1st September – Harvest Festival – Christian (dates vary)

Special services are held around this time of year to give thanks for the goodness of God's gifts in providing a harvest of crops along with all the other fruits of society. Displays of produce are often made, usually distributed afterwards to those in need. Increasingly the emphasis is on a wider interpretation than just the harvests of the fields and seas.

1st September – Installation of the Sikh Scripture in the Harmandir Sahib – Sikh

In 1604, in the Harmandir Sahib, a complex structure on the site of the present-day Golden Temple, the Sikhs' fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, installed for the first time the the Adi Granth, a volume of scripture for the Sikh community. It consisted of the hymns of the first five Gurus plus those of other 'saint-poets'. Hymns by the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, were later incorporated in the scripture, so forming the present Guru Granth Sahib.

5th September – Rosh Hashanah – Jewish

New Year's Day, 5774 years from the creation of the world. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of ten days of repentance and self-examination, during which G-d sits in personal judgment on every individual. The blowing of the ram's horn (shofar) in the synagogue is a reminder of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram instead of his son, Isaac. Apples dipped in honey are eaten in the hope of a 'sweet' new year. The greeting is 'Leshanah Tovah Tikatev' (may you be inscribed for a good year).

9th September – Ganesh Chaturthi – Hindu

Ganesh Chaturthi is a Hindu festival in honour of Ganesha, the god of good fortune and new beginnings. He was the elephant headed son of Lord Shiva and Parvati, and is often referred to as Ganupati. This festival is particularly significant for Hindus from Maharashtra and is celebrated in a major way in Mumbai. Celebrations can last one, five or ten days, and will conclude with the immersion in water of the image of Ganesh.

10th – 17th September – Paryushan – Jain

These are eight days of purification, devoted to study, prayer, meditation and fasting, and ending with a period of confession and forgiveness. Often monks will be invited to give teachings from the Jain scriptures. Paryushana means 'to stay in one place', which signifies a time of reflection and repentance. Originally the practice was monastic for the most part.

11th September – Ethiopian New Year's Day – Rastafarian

Rastafarians have a four year cycle, each year named after an evangelist. This is the beginning of the year of John.



14th September – Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) – Jewish

This is the final day of the ten days of repentance, and is the holiest day of the year in the Jewish calendar. The Bible calls it the 'Sabbath of Sabbaths', and it is marked by 'afflicting the soul' – expressed through a total fast lasting 25 hours. Jews spend the eve and most of the day in prayer, asking for forgiveness for past wrongs and resolving to improve in the future. The Book of Jonah is read. A common greeting is 'G'mar Chatimah Tovah' ('May you finally be sealed for good').

19th - 26th September – Sukkot – Jewish

A harvest festival commemorating the 40 years that the Jews spent in the wilderness on the way from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. A temporary hut or booth – called a sukkah – is used during this time for eating meals and for visits and socialising. In hot countries families may live in their sukkah during the festival. The roof, which has to be open in part to the elements, is covered with branches and decorated with fruit. Four species of plant, the lulav (palm branch), the etrog (a yellow citrus fruit), the hadas (myrtle) and the aravah (willow) are used at the festival.

22nd September – Autumn Equinox (Mabon) – Wiccan/Pagan

Day and night stand hand in hand as equals. As the shadows lengthen, Pagans see the darker faces of the God and Goddess. For many, this rite honours old age and the approach of Winter.

27th September – Simchat Torah – Jewish

This festival marks the completion of the annual cycle of reading from the Torah. As the reading should be continuous, a second scroll is begun again as soon as the final portion of the Torah has been read from the first scroll; so, as the reading from Deuteronomy ends, with the next breath, Genesis begins without a break – the Torah is a circle that never ends. All the Torah scrolls are paraded around the synagogue, with children dancing and singing, as do many of the adults, giving as many people as possible the honour of carrying a Torah scroll. Most progressive Jews celebrate this one day earlier, combining it with the eighth day of Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret.

Responding to Sunday Sermons: 'All Will Be Well'?

Stephanie sent the following comment in response to the 'All Will Be Well' sermon in last month's newsletter. We'd be interested to hear your response to this or any of our other sermons so please do write in if you've got something you want to share with us.

I had a card today from a friend who had no sooner retired than he needed surgery to his heart, and now he has had treatment (cardioversion) to make his heart toe the line and beat in regular rhythm. One kind friend will respond immediately saying "well that's all right then". But it is not all right and his heart may beat regularly for a little while and then go into irregular mode. There could, COULD be complications. I know that (as might be expected), and I know that he will have been told. Pollyanna's 'all shall be well' is born of ignorance in this instance. So anyone wanting to show sympathy has to put him or herself in the position of someone who has just received this information. Obviously I have chosen as an example to illustrate the point a subject I can be expected to know about. And I will tell my friend that yes, it is desirable that his heart rhythm be regular, but it can be treated in another way and that anyway, there are lots of people walking round to an irregular tune. What I call EMPATHY.

Stephanie Saville

Good Cause Collection of the Month:



FoodBank Foundation

Collection on Sunday 25th August

As we start collecting for our local food bank here in London Carol Sheppard has chosen our charity collection for September. It's the FoodBank Foundation, which works to alleviate food poverty in South Africa. For £75 they can feed one person for a year and through their programmes many desperate people have managed to get their lives back on track. The charity currently feeds 35,000 people a day, half of them children. The charity specialises in rescuing food from suppliers that would otherwise end up in landfill and then supplementing it with other staple foods to ensure nutritional balance.

For more information see: www.foodbank.org.za/uk



Trussell Trust Foodbank

Collection on Sunday 22nd September

We will follow this up in September with a collection for our local Trussell Trust food bank to supplement the items that we have been collecting for direct donation to this project. See page seven for more about this vital work on our doorstep.

For more information see: www.trusselltrust.org

Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

May – Arts Emergency Service - £63.29

June – Arundel Castle Cricket Foundation - £116.83

July – Unitarian General Assembly - £238.88 + Gift Aid

Forgiveness Project Annual Lecture 2013

Tuesday 17th September 2013,
6.45pm – 8.30 pm (Doors open at 6.15pm)

Ondaatje Theatre, Royal Geographical Society,
1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR

The keynote speech at the 2013 Annual Lecture will be delivered by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen. Professor Baron-Cohen will be speaking on Zero Degrees of Empathy: Exploring explanations of human cruelty and kindness. The lecture will be followed by a panel discussion with Mary Foley, Peter Woolf and Marina Cantacuzino, chaired by Gerald Keane.

Tickets are £10 each and will be on sale
from www.theforgivenessproject.com.
Tickets sold out last year so do book early!

An Essex Church Cultural Outing:

Big Bat Walk



Thursday 19th September, 6.40-9.10pm
London Wetland Centre, Barnes

WWT London Wetland Centre is one of the best places to watch bats in London as about seven species hunt on site. This bat walk will give you the chance not only to see these amazing flying mammals and their astonishing aerial acrobatics, but also learn more about them with a talk by a bat expert before heading out to the reserve. Bat detectors are supplied to help you identify the species that are swooping around and to listen to them 'chattering' as they hunt for food.

The walk is for adults and children over 8 years. The cost is £10 and this price includes admission into the centre for the bat walk only. To book your place, call the Wetland Centre on 020 8409 4400.

PLEASE BOOK ASAP IF YOU PLAN TO COME as numbers are limited and if you leave it too late you may find you are disappointed. Let Jane or Niall know if you have booked a ticket so we can all meet up.

My Summer Ritual

I visit Nadia every year in the mountains of Northern Italy. I know her through Playback Theatre, since the mid-1980s, when her kids were little. Now she has a grandson Giorgio, from her daughter Erica. She has been the primary teacher of Playback Theatre in Italy over the years, and now she is leaving most of that work to her students, who are now excellent practitioners in their own right. And I come every year as their international advisor. This year their summer programme took place near Lecco close to Lake Como – and after a wonderful experience with them I go further north to the mountains to see what Nadia is up to.

From a busy life as a social worker and psychotherapist in the middle of the city, Nadia has now chosen to live very close to the land. Lunalpina is about 6 years old. She farms the permaculture way. This year she taught me to harvest Amarantha plants, and then make a delicious soup from it within hours.

Last year I was helping her make mosaics for tabletops from beautiful tiles which were abandoned or donated samples, from businesses in the region. Volunteers of all ages have come to help. She runs creative arts workshops as well as teach people how to work with the land.

All the tableware, pots and pans have been donated by the residents of the neighbouring villages. Her two sets of solar panels now give her more hot water than she needs, and supplies all her electricity. Within ten years they will have paid for themselves. This time as well as harvesting green plants which I would have overlooked as weeds, I prepared 108 napkins for her from a roll of lovely purple fabric which she got for a few Euros. Nothing is wasted. Nor my time – I was only there for 36 hours!

She took over the local abandoned primary school, converted it into an Eco-School which she calls OIKOS now, and has permission from the local council to do this on a 10 year free lease. Her son Julio is now working the land with her, and while I was there, harvested grains, and then ground them into flour and made the most delicious bread, which we had with our supper.

He is inventing all sorts of interesting recipes for vegan food. And their latest initiative is to run evening 'Dinners' for people who would like to come and experience this kind of food – fresh from the land. The fee is very low, just enough to cover costs, and the guests receive a most wonderful – even magical – exposure to an experience of what's truly possible, DELICIOUS, natural and now almost completely lost in our relationship to food and the land.

And every year I have my own therapeutic encounter with her horses. Foulou last year gave birth to Stella, who is now almost as big as her mother. And my bliss is to give them a thorough brushing.

My father was a very well-known jockey in the 1930s of Shanghai. He was in his 50s when I was born so I never grew up with horses. And I go to Lunalpina to wake up my father's genes in me. I feel very close to him as I give Stella and Foulou a good rub-a-dub and I imagine his relationship to the horses he rode and loved.

Veronica Needa



'A Long Wait'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 7th July 2013

An audio podcast of this sermon is available on our website.

"I see in the rising crescendo of ethnic tensions, civilization clashes and the use of religious justification for acts of terror, a clear and present danger to humanity. For too long the pages of history have been stained by blood shed in the name of God...In our interconnected world, we must learn to feel enlarged, not threatened, by difference." Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I suspect that not many people know this: that up until 1813 it was illegal in Britain to deny the Trinity or to assert that there are more Gods than one, to deny that the Christian religion is true or that the Christian scriptures are not of divine authority.

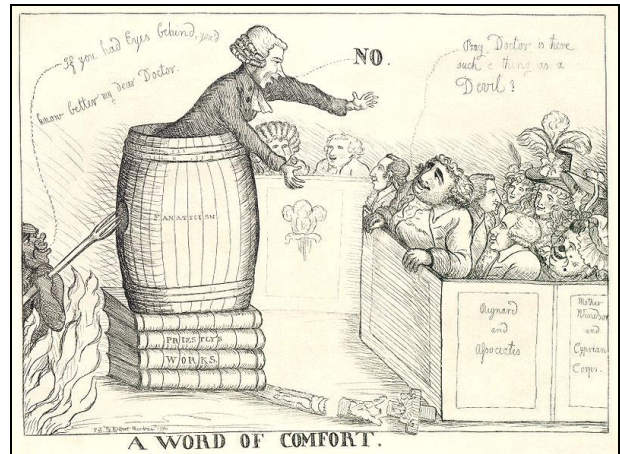
If you did assert any of those matters in writing, printing, teaching or speaking – then you were barred from holding any public office – in the church, in local or national government or in the military. And if you were convicted a second time of such a crime you could be imprisoned for up to 3 years and be barred from many legal rights including the guardianship of children, bringing a case to court, or being an executor of someone's estate.

In July 1813 an Act was passed with this title - "an Act to relieve persons who impugn the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity from certain Penalties". This wordy title has been simplified over the years to the Trinity Act or the Unitarian Relief or Toleration Act. And at last, to have Unitarian views and to express them publically was legally acceptable. 1813 – it's not all that long ago is it – just 200 years ago. Interesting to note that the Roman Catholics had to wait until 1829 for their religious beliefs to be accepted in the Roman Catholic Relief Act.

But for us Unitarians, legal acceptance arrived in 1813 and it's this 200th anniversary that Unitarian congregations around the country are celebrating this summer. And thanks for our freedom can be given to one William Smith MP, the leading dissenting Member of Parliament of his day, who worked tirelessly to achieve this and so many other social improvements, including the abolition of slavery. William Smith is better known now as Florence Nightingale's grandfather but in his time he was highly regarded as a skilled and determined campaigner.

It is not easy I think for us to imagine life in the late 18th century or to understand the pressures and concerns of their day. We know that dissent from the fixed creeds and beliefs of the Church of England had been legal since Charles 2nd's reign – passed by the Act of Toleration in 1689. So there were lots of Dissenting congregations and ministers – and quietly some of those held Unitarian views. Much was discussed in private. One of my favourite examples is from Evesham where a group of dissenting ministers held regular meetings and disguised one of their meetings as an asparagus lunch – held in May of each year, from 1782 to the present day.

Here at Essex Church we are proud to remind people that ours was the very first openly Unitarian congregation – founded in 1774 by one Theophilus Lindsey, who had left ministry within the Church of England because he could no longer support Anglican



theology with integrity. Two hundred people attended that first service – and in the congregation there were apparently both government spies and assorted future prime ministers of our country. So although it was illegal to express Unitarian views the powers that be generally chose not to seek prosecutions and Dissenters were often to be found at the forefront of social change.

But these were tumultuous times - religion and politics were closely inter-twined, both here in Britain and abroad. Joseph Priestley for example, best known now as a scientist, was also a Unitarian minister, and he was enthusiastic in his support for revolutionary causes abroad, especially in America and France. In 1791 a patriotic mob in Birmingham burnt down Priestley's New Meeting House and his home and the homes of other prominent Unitarians. Priestley and his family eventually emigrated to America.

Back here in England once the Trinity Act was passed in 1813 there was a rapid growth of congregations identifying themselves as Unitarians – from some 20 congregations in 1810 to over 200 in England alone by 1825. And the rest as they say is history. Except of course history does have that tendency to repeat itself. In truth there is still discrimination against Unitarianism to this day here in Britain. In 1933 the Dean of Liverpool Cathedral invited a well-known local Unitarian minister to preach there. On hearing of this, some Anglicans complained and at a Convocation in York it was decreed that no Unitarian could ever again be allowed to preach in an Anglican church. Unitarians are also not accepted as members of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Tiny slights, annoying, or indeed upsetting, to some. But perhaps such on-going discrimination might help us to relate with people all around our world who are facing discrimination each and every day because of their chosen faith. The State Department of the United States issues an annual review of religious freedom around the world, a report which you can access online. As you might imagine, it paints quite a grim picture of a world filled with intolerance in one form or another. In various countries it is illegal to hold religious beliefs contrary to the state supported religion. In many more countries discrimination is fuelled by views expressed by government leaders. Last year's report noted an increase in anti-Semitism in countries such as Hungary, Greece, Argentina and France, as well as the more obvious Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Egypt. The following countries were cited for particularly harsh treatment of people for their religious beliefs: China, Eritrea, Iran, Burma, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

'A Long Wait'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker *(continued)*

What can we do about all this? Not a lot in truth. We might sign online petitions or join Amnesty International campaigns – for such actions can make a difference in how individuals are treated by repressive regimes. To know that people of the world are informed and concerned about ill treatment may sometimes help. We might campaign for a truly universal acceptance of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights throughout countries of the world. It declares that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance".

But perhaps the key tasks for us are to ensure that our own house is in good order - to examine our own prejudices and attempt to re-balance the prejudices of our own society. We can perhaps feel pride in our pluralist society where all people are free to express their own religious beliefs. Or we might despair that, for example, Channel 4's recent decision to broadcast the early morning call to prayer during the Islamic festival of Ramadan has caused such a furore, at least in the media. And let's remember the much less publicised, though far more painful, truth that most Muslim and Jewish places of worship here in the United Kingdom now feel a need to have guards on their doors in case of attack. Imagine if that was us, if we Unitarians had people on guard to protect us from attack because of our faith. That of course is what the Dissenters of hundreds of years ago had to do.

Now we can perhaps offer a useful voice in the debate on how to live in a diverse community; on how we can encourage ourselves and others to be curious about those who are different from us rather than afraid; on how we can assert common human bonds across the divides, forged from good will. I think that would be a worthy legacy of our forebears' struggles to win our own religious freedom - a sign of our gratitude and indeed, our respect. Amen.

'There are people whose presence is encouraging. One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own.'

John O'Donohue

Violin

How easy to be sentimental about you – especially when
Your slender body is clasped by a slim, earnest girl
Swaying in the breeze of your near-perfect melody.
But there is more to you than mere holding – more even than music;
You manifest what we here can never fully embrace
The bow of beauty, the belly of desire, the tune of possibilities
Reaching out.

John Hands

Worship Studies Course



The second session of the Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step) took place at Essex Church in July. Sarah and Jane are co-leading the course and on this occasion they were joined by Rev. Danny Crosby, of the Altrincham and Urmston congregations, who led a session on prayer in worship. Participants, including several members of the Kensington congregation, are attending four day-long workshops across the course of 2013 to attain this GA-accredited certificate.

What's on in September...

Monday 2nd September, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 2nd September, 7.00-9.00pm
'Rediscovering the Bible'
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Thursday 5th September, 7-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
On the theme of 'Balance'
– coordinated by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 8th September, 11am-noon
'Fresh Starts'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8th September, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Heidi Ferid and Sarah Tinker

Monday 9th September, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 12th September, 7-9.00pm
Course: '12 Steps to Spiritual Health' (1/6)
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th September, 11am-noon
**'Tweet Tweet: In Praise of
our Feathered Friends'**
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker,
Michaela von Britzke and Jane Blackall

Sunday 15th September, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Monday 16th September, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 16th September, 7.00-9.00pm
Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 19th September, 6.40-9.10pm
Cultural Outing: Bat Walk – BOOK NOW!

Saturday 21st September, 10.00-4.30pm
Worship Studies Course (3/4)
For continuing students only

Sunday 22nd September, 11am-noon
'Harvest Festival'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 23rd September, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 24th September, 7.00-9.00pm
**Reading Group:
'The Pillow Book' by Sei Shonagon**

Thursday 26th September, 7-9.00pm
Course: '12 Steps to Spiritual Health' (2/6)
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 29th September, 11am-noon
'Little Boxes'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 30th September, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Sunday Services this Summer

4th August, 11am – 'Bread of Life'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Bread is one of humanity's staple foods and it is often used as a symbol of spiritual nourishment. Join us for an exploration of bread as a symbol within Christianity and in pagan traditions. Followed by a Lammas ritual.

11th Aug, 11am – 'Money Making the World Go Round'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A service to link in with a British Museum exhibition on coins from Biblical times. How best might we develop a spiritual approach to our finances, both as individuals and as a society?

18th August, 11am – 'Celebrating the Reformers'

Service led by Howard Hague

In today's service we will be looking at some of the remarkable men and women whose names appear on the Reformers' Memorial in London's Kensal Green Cemetery. These include Mary Carpenter, Major John Cartwright, Harriet Martineau, W.J. Fox, Frances Power Cobbe and Robert Owen. A number have Unitarian connections.

25th August, 11am – 'Summer in the City'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As our neighbourhood gets dressed in its finery for Notting Hill Carnival, we will be having our own, probably quieter, celebration of summertime and all things sultry.

**1st September, 11am – 'Saying
Thank You is Good for the Soul'**

Service led by David Francis Darling

In this service David will explore why saying thank you is not only good manners but might also be good for our own spiritual growth.

8th September, 11am – 'Fresh Starts'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

With children and students starting their new academic year, this service will consider the many ways in which we can all create fresh starts throughout our lives.

**15th September, 11am – 'Tweet Tweet:
In Praise of our Feathered Friends'**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker, Michaela and Jane

This service will feature our annual 'gathering of the waters' ceremony. Bring water from your travels, your kitchen, your local pond, water from the places of your lives, to join together in community.

22nd September, 11am – 'Harvest Festival'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

We will meet to celebrate the harvest time as people have done throughout the ages. As the autumn equinox marks the time of balance between day and night we will consider the balance of giving and receiving in our lives.

29th September, 11am – 'Little Boxes'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Linking with the Tate exhibition of L.S. Lowry's paintings of northern industrial towns, this service will focus on humanity's remarkable ability to flourish whatever the circumstances.