



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: May 2013

## What's On...

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 7.00-8.00pm  
**'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering**  
'Heart and Soul Words'  
– led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May, 11am-noon  
**'Comfort'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 11am-noon  
**'Letting Go, Moving On'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker and Sonya Leite

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30pm  
**Small-Group Communion**  
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2.00-3.00pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May, 7.00-9.00pm  
**'Rediscovering the Bible'**  
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 11am-noon  
**Membership Service:**  
**'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30-2.00pm  
**Essex Church AGM**

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 7.00-9.00pm  
**Worship Leaders' Practice Group**

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May, 11am-noon  
**'The Sea as Metaphor and Miracle'**  
Led by Caroline Blair

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May, 7.00-9.00pm  
**Reading Group: 'Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?'**

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 7.00-9.00pm  
**Cultural Outing: 'Sebastião Salgado: Genesis' Exhibition at the Natural History Museum**

## A Message from our Minister:

### Unitarian Values

In April some of us from Essex Church attended our General Assembly's Annual Meetings, held this year at Nottingham University. You can read some of our reports of the meetings on pages 6-7 of this newsletter. One of the key aspects of these meetings each year is the discussion of Motions, put forward by congregations and

groups of individuals who share a particular concern. This year was notable for me because of the quality of the debates. I'm not sure what made a difference. The Meetings are chaired by the President, this year a friend and lifelong Unitarian, Lis Dyson Jones. Early in the proceedings she jokingly reminded us of the need for the 'f' and the 'c' words to be in our minds at all times – referring to 'friendship' and 'courtesy', rather than to any terms of abuse. Maybe that helped us all to be careful in how we spoke.

Some Motions fall into the apple pie and motherhood category, where it would be strange for anyone to disagree. Yet even these are ways to highlight values that are dear to us as Unitarians. One such is the Resolution to '*cultivate an ethic of compassion and mercy to the billions of sentient beings who share this planet with us and to act in ways that promote our common welfare*'. More difficult issues discussed included a call for a Royal Commission on legislation of drugs. This was so carefully presented by members of our Penal Affairs Panel and showed a clear awareness of how complex such issues are in our society. Similar care was taken in the presentation of the motion about assisted dying. The complexity of this issue was reflected in a far longer than usual debate, which followed a year-long consideration by our congregations around the country. This motion was eventually passed, although far from unanimously. Many people expressed a concern that we should not speak out as a religious movement on such a difficult issue.

You can read the full wording of these Resolutions on our UK Unitarian website ([www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)). My hope is that all such matters reflect our values as Unitarians. We need to engage with the concerns of our day, just as those early Unitarians grappled with the challenges of their eras – ending slavery, votes for women, religious freedom, education for all - to mention but a few. In the last year we Unitarians have been at the forefront of the debates on equal marriage, because of various Resolutions on same sex relationships passed over many years at our Annual Meetings. Not all of us will agree on all of these issues and that is fine – it's another way to show Unitarian values in action. I look forward to hearing what you think!

Rev. Sarah Tinker



## In this month's newsletter...

- \* 'Keeping in Touch' – Please Opt-In to our Contacts List
- \* 'Dare to be Different!'
- \* Chairperson's Message from David Darling
- \* Reports from our GA Annual Meetings
- \* Reflections on 'The Spirituality of the Elements' from Sonya, Jo, Tristan and Heidi
- \* Report from the London District AGM
- \* Cultural Outing to Sebastião Salgado Exhibition
- \* 'Tie Up Your Camel... and Other Good Advice' - sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker
- \* and 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.



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## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting

### Stewarding:

**5<sup>th</sup> May:** Michaela von Britzke  
**12<sup>th</sup> May:** Natasha Drennan  
**19<sup>th</sup> May:** Gina Bayley  
**26<sup>th</sup> May:** Jim Blair

### Coffee:

**5<sup>th</sup> May:** Margaret Darling  
**12<sup>th</sup> May:** Caroline Blair  
**19<sup>th</sup> May:** Liz Tuckwell  
**26<sup>th</sup> May:** Juliet Edwards

### Greeting:

**5<sup>th</sup> May:** Jo Ridgers  
**12<sup>th</sup> May:** Gina Bayley  
**19<sup>th</sup> May:** Annie Fowler  
**26<sup>th</sup> May:** Carol Sheppard

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](mailto:rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)**

## Keeping in Touch

### Contact List for Members and Friends



At the latest meeting of the management committee it was decided that we would like to bring back the congregational contact list which, as longer-standing members may recall, was a very useful way of helping us to connect with each other.

I will be getting in touch with members and friends in the next few weeks to ask if you would like to have your details circulated in this list. This will be on an opt-in basis so we will not include your details unless you have given express permission.

We would encourage you to share your details on this list as it helps us strengthen relationships, and check in with each other, particularly when people are unwell. You might feel happy to have all your contact details shared with congregation members or you might just wish to share your email or telephone number.

**Jane Blackall**

'Blessed are those who yearn for deepening more than escape; who are not afraid to grow in spirit.



Blessed are those who take seriously the bonds of community; who regularly join in celebration and learning; who come as much to minister as to be ministered unto.

Blessed are those who bring their children; who invite their friends to come along, to join in fellowship, service, learning, and growth.

Blessed are those who support the church and its work by their regular, sustained, and generous giving; and who give of themselves no less than their money.

Blessed are those who know that the church is often imperfect, yet rather than harbour feelings of anger or disappointment, bring their concerns and needs to the attention of the church leaders.

Blessed are those who when asked to serve, do it gladly; who realize that change is brought about through human meeting, who do the work of committees, and stay till the end.

Blessed are those who speak their minds in meeting, who can take and give criticism; who keep alive their sense of humour.

Blessed are those who know that the work of the church is the transformation of society; who have a vision of Beloved Community transcending the present, and who do not shrink for controversy, sacrifice, or change.

Blessed are they indeed.'

**Rev. John Buehrens**

## Chairperson's Report

### Latest News from the Committee



We were very grateful to our warden, Jenny for hosting the last management committee meeting on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April in her flat as all the rooms in the church building had been rented out, a reminder of how well our building is used. Jenny also informed us in her report that we now have two new regular groups renting space.

In preparation for the AGM on the 19<sup>th</sup> May, Caroline Blair and Jenny had spent the day with the auditor preparing the annual accounts. The committee expressed its thanks to both for the hard work they do ensuring we stay both solvent and generous. We were reminded that as part of looking beyond our own needs the congregation had committed itself to supporting the educational needs of two young girls, through SOS villages. We pledged £1000 per year and encouraged members of the congregation to give even small contributions towards this fund. Look out for more information on this and consider what you could give.

Speaking of the AGM, can I ask you all to put the date of **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May** in your diary. It takes place after coffee after the morning service. We try to keep it as short as possible but it is an important opportunity for any member to have their say and to hear about our activities over the past year. One of the issues we will be looking at is how as a diverse group with different views we can commit ourselves to working together in harmony and with mutual respect.

Our latest membership renewal process shows that so far we have 38 members and 18 friends in 2013, with a number of other people for us still to approach about membership. We are grateful for the new people who join us week by week and who contribute to the life of our community. If you would like to know more about membership do talk to Sarah our minister or any committee member. We are looking at ways of helping people to integrate into the life of the congregation and plan to hold a couple of short sessions in the future looking not just at "Unitarian ways" but also at practical things like "how to switch the cooker on!" And "where we keep the rubbish bags!"

We also discussed bringing back the congregational contact list that some of you will remember. This is a way of members providing, if they wish, a way of being contacted whether by postal address, telephone or email. In the past many of us found this a useful way of showing our care for one another especially in times of sickness or infirmity.

As you can see the committee continues to work towards keeping our community of Kensington Unitarians as vibrant as possible so that we can continue to be a place of welcome for all those exploring their spiritual path. Do contact any of the committee if you have any suggestions, questions or concerns. With best wishes,

**David Francis Darling**  
Chairperson of the Congregation

## Dare To Be Different!



Sociologists tell us that in the western world these days fewer people choose to volunteer and fewer people join organisations like churches.

The reasons for this are both complex and debatable and it is interesting to consider why some organisations do continue to grow in membership and involvement, against the prevailing culture. Let's have a conversation about all this sometime soon as I would very much like to hear your views. But in the meantime let's dare to be different! Your membership of this congregation is important and valuable. The more of us there are, the more we can achieve. We live in a world where a liberal religious voice is much needed. We live in a society where freedom and justice are being eroded in subtle ways. Spiritual values can so easily be overwhelmed by the forces of materialism.

So if you are unsure about membership, do take that step and show your commitment for all that Kensington Unitarians stand for. We need you because together we can do so much more than we can achieve on our own.

Come and have a chat with me or any committee member if you want to know more and make a note in your diary now of our service and AGM on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May, when we will celebrate our members and our community.

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**

## The Inquirer and the Unitarian

### Please Take a FREE Copy!

As a congregation we have a subscription for the fortnightly Inquirer newspaper and the monthly Unitarian newsletter and are happy for members, friends and visitors to take a copy for free from the table in the foyer.

These publications are a good way to keep in touch with our national movement and to find out more about Unitarian activities and issues.

A Kensington Unitarians Cultural Outing:

## 'Sebastião Salgado: Genesis'



**Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 7.00-9.00pm**

**Exhibition at the Natural History Museum,  
Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD**

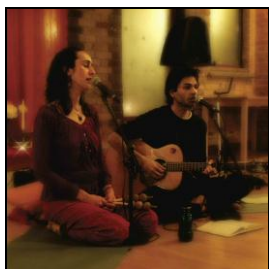
Our next cultural outing was suggested by Niall Doherty. We will be going to the 'Sebastião Salgado: Genesis' Exhibition at the Natural History Museum on 31<sup>st</sup> May to see extraordinary images of landscapes, wildlife and remote communities by this world-renowned photographer.

Please note that it is essential to book in advance as these museum 'lates' are very popular and tend to sell out. As well as the exhibition, several other galleries will be open, and there will also be live music and a pop-up restaurant. Tickets cost £10 (£5 concessions) from the NHM.

To find out more visit the Natural History Museum website:  
<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/index.html>

Natasha Drennan has been organising our programme of outings so do get in touch with her if you plan to come along or would like to know more: [tash\\_drennan@hotmail.com](mailto:tash_drennan@hotmail.com) / 07551 250 049. A small group of us had a good visit to the Hayward Gallery to see 'Light Show' in April and hope to continue with these outings approximately bi-monthly. We have tentatively pencilled in another outing on 26<sup>th</sup> July so you might like to save the date (details to be confirmed).

## Illumina Album Launch

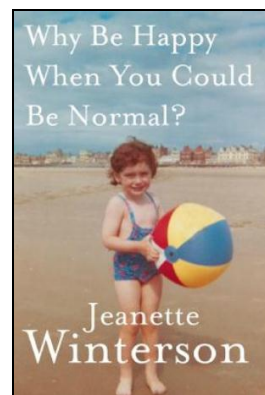


**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 5-7pm, here at Essex Church**  
**Entry by donation – pay what you feel**

Illumina have played and sung beautifully at the One Light Spiritual Gatherings on Friday evenings and at one of our Sunday services. This concert is to launch their new album 'Illuminate' which is out now: [illuminamusic.co.uk](http://illuminamusic.co.uk)

## Essex Church Reading Group 'Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?'

by Jeannette Winterson



**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013, 7.00-9.00pm**

The reading group's May session will be based on 'Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?' by Jeannette Winterson which was suggested by Gisela Boehnisch. This will be the 102<sup>nd</sup> title discussed by the reading group since it started up nearly ten years ago.

More information from the Guardian:

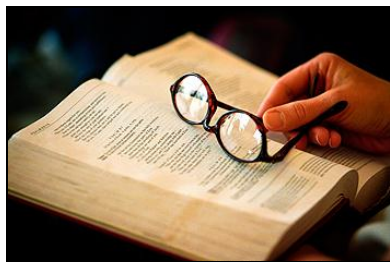
*"Jeanette Winterson's memoir is written sparsely and hurriedly; it is sometimes so terse it's almost in note form. The impression this gives is not of sloppiness, but a desperate urgency to make the reader understand. This is certainly the most moving book of Winterson's I have ever read, and it also feels like the most turbulent and the least controlled. In the end, the emotional force of the second half makes me suspect that the apparent artlessness of the first half is a ruse; that, in a Lilliputian fashion, what appears to be a straight narrative of her early life is actually tying the reader down with a thousand imperceptible guy ropes, so that when she unleashes a terrible sorrow, there is no escaping it and no looking away. "Why be happy when you could be normal?" is the real-life question of her adopted mother, as Winterson is evicted, at 16, for taking up with a second girlfriend (she attempts to exorcise her sexuality after the first having been unsuccessful). There are passages and phrases that will be recognisable to anyone who's read Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: this is not surprising, since that first, bold announcement of Winterson's talent was a roman à clef, and never claimed to be otherwise."*

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](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html)

## 'Rediscovering the Bible'

A monthly bible-reading group at Essex Church



Meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month at 7pm:  
13<sup>th</sup> May, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 8<sup>th</sup> July, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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](mailto: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**

## One Light Spiritual Gatherings

### 'Fr/Enemies'

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May 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.

### Forthcoming Gatherings:

14<sup>th</sup> June – Symbolism; 12<sup>th</sup> July – Mothering/Fathering;  
9<sup>th</sup> August – Health; 13<sup>th</sup> September - Accomplishment

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

## 'The Wisdom of Trees'

A retreat led by Rev. John Harley



Friday 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Hilfield Friary, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7BE

A weekend of creativity, reflection exploring the theme of trees through art-making, walking, meditation, poetry ritual and silence. This retreat invites participants to get in touch with their creative and spiritual selves, make connections with others and the world and gain insights into themselves – all in the healing presence of trees.

The weekend is open to all fellow travellers – those of faith and those of no faith or religion. The retreat will involve some walking around in the woods but no long walks. Every care will be taken to make activities safe and restorative – yet working creatively with others can have the potential to bring up powerful emotional material for people. John is a trained therapist though the retreat is not essentially offered as therapy – therefore participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own emotional processes.

John Harley is a dramatherapist, art teacher and Unitarian minister. He has been facilitating creative workshops for nearly twenty years and is the Chair of the Art and Spirituality Network, an organisation that offers opportunities for mindful creativity in safe, supportive group settings. He is fascinated by the interplay and dialogue between what some of us call spirituality – or exploration of the beyondness and mystery in this life – and our expressive, artistic, intuitive selves. He believes that when we give ourselves permission to play, take creative risks and get in touch with our bodies we can access a natural emotional intelligence and a sense of well-being and groundedness.

**Cost £155 – £170 - all meals and resources included.**

**For more information visit:** [www.beherecreate.co.uk](http://www.beherecreate.co.uk)



'Only now have I finally realized that my life has been an unending field trip. And I have tried hard not to be a tourist. But to be an adventurer, a traveller, an explorer, a learner, and a pilgrim.'

**Robert Fulghum**



*Our own Rev. Sarah Tinker leading the GA Anniversary Service 2013*

## Unitarian General Assembly (GA) Annual Meetings - Nottingham 2013

Our General Assembly Annual Meetings are always preceded by a pre-conference for ministers and this year we met for two nights so that we had more time together. Our main task was to discuss a document prepared by the Ministry Strategy Group, listing the competencies that we want ministry students to cover in their training. This document will next be sent out to congregations for consideration and if you would like to have a look at it you can access it online at <http://uministrystrategy.blogspot.co.uk> and do get back to me with any comments. Like all roles, ministry is changing rapidly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is a challenge to think how best to offer training that is both appropriate and affordable in changing times.

For such a small movement we do have a remarkable variety of congregations and I really enjoyed this year's Opening Ceremony, in which various congregations gave a presentation about themselves. Some highlights were hearing about a folk club in Billingshurst, a wedding fair in Norwich, an interfaith Carol Service in Bridport and small group conversations in Belper. As always, I am reminded how fortunate we are here at Essex Church, in so many ways. So few congregations can afford staff like us, or even a full time minister. Our building is modern and functional, whilst others have to cope with chilly winters, rattling windows and box pews. The age profile of our congregation is younger than most. And yet, we have the problems that beset many inner city churches, not just Unitarians: a transient population, problems in reaching out to families, transport issues, difficulties in getting our publicity to stand out when so much else is on offer. Another interesting presentation at the GA was on religious life today. Entitled 'Spiritual but Not Religious: Opportunity or Threat?', this talk was given by the Rev Dr Terasa Cooley, the Unitarian Universalist Association's Director of Congregational Life, and she raised many of the issues that we've talked about in recent growth gatherings. We hope to get hold of her slides and use them as a basis for discussion here before too long.

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**

The GA Youth Panel invited two community arts facilitators (who work under the name Stone Soup) to lead a workshop, 'Re-thinking the Chalice', in which we thought as freely as possible about what the Unitarian chalice could mean and be. About half the group were part of the young peoples' groups, and the other half were interested older people. Initially we were invited to draw a chalice, being as adventurous with our thinking as possible. The only common factor was the presence of a flame. Other than that, we had floating chalices, chalices balanced on someone's head, every possible shape of chalice, even a kind of ferris wheel with little chalices turning round and round.

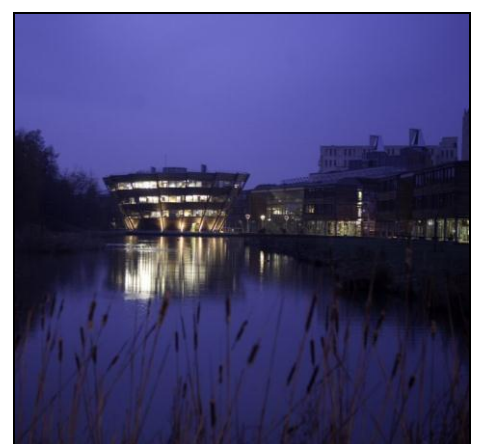
We were then invited to do five minutes of free writing individually, before being asked to form groups of five people, preferably not known to each other. The groups were then tasked with taking elements from their free writing and combining them into a poem. Some groups seemed to race through this; others found it difficult as the approach people had taken in their individual writing was so different. Two of us had independently moved from the idea of a floating chalice to the idea of dolphins playing in the water, and in the case of my own group of five I never really worked out how to combine that with the more solid concept of a chalice that means welcome and friendship. So when the whole thing was combined into one long poem it did not exactly feel like a unified work. But everyone really did seem to enjoy the process, and it was good to hear all the different associations that the chalice has for people. So here are some extracts from the meta-poem, showing a few of the different thoughts that people had on the subject:

Wherever there is a chalice, there is also love.  
 We pause and focus, in search of acceptance and connection  
 Our faith group, to cherish and love.  
 Reaching out, connecting, belonging,  
     nourished from one heart to one mind to one faith.  
 Fellowship, friendship, belief, hope, opportunity, love, yearning.  
 We have a home, a chalice light where everyone belongs.  
 Beacon dancing, hope uniting.  
 The flame spreads light and brings release, finding peace.

**Caroline Blair**



*New GA President, Rev. Bill Darlison (photograph by Rev. Nicky Jenkins)*



*The Nottingham Jubilee Campus by Night (photograph by John Hewardine)*



*Photographs from the Anniversary Service by John Hewerdine*



*Outgoing GA President Lis Dyson-Jones and all involved in the service*

For the first time in about eight years I was able to attend part of this year's GA meetings as an individual, rather than as a member of the staff team helping to look after the bookstall. I'll just mention three of the sessions I was able to attend. The new 2020 Congregational Development Programme was very ably presented by Ash James from Kidderminster. The aim is to both revitalise existing congregations and to promote new ones. It is estimated that £100,000 will be needed per project. At the moment it is not clear how such vast sums of money will be raised, though it is hoped that Districts will contribute where they are able. Many years ago I wrote an article for *The Inquirer*, suggesting that we should aim to have a Unitarian presence – either a chapel or a fellowship – in population centres of over one hundred thousand people (including Milton Keynes!). One thing I do agree with is that any developments have to be 'bottom up' rather than 'top-down'. Unless there is support and drive at the local level they won't work.

Although most of our Panels disappeared in the last GA re-organisation a couple of years ago, the Penal Affairs Panel survived and is very active in the denomination. Its meeting this year was entitled 'Illicit Drugs: Time to Rethink'. Whatever one thinks of illegal substances, it is clear that the present 'war on drugs' has not worked, and is unlikely to. In a fascinating talk David Barrie, himself a former civil servant introduced the subject and explained why most politicians won't even consider a rethink on drugs policy, for fear of being of seen as 'soft on drugs' by the tabloid press. Meanwhile we all have to live with the consequences of taking a purely criminal approach to the subject – it is estimated that 23% of burglars and 45% of shoplifters are addicts. Later in the meetings, the Assembly voted by a very large majority for the government to set up a Royal Commission or other public inquiry to look at drug-related issues and options for alternative approaches. One suspects it won't happen, or not for a very long time.

I had a vested interest in the meeting of the Unitarian Historical Society in that I have recently become its secretary and so was involved with the arrangements. After a brief AGM, our speaker this year, the Rev David Shaw, minister at Upper Chapel Sheffield, had the floor. His topic was 'William Bagshawe: Apostle of the Peak'. Anyone who has been to the Unitarian Centre in Great Hucklow, Derbyshire and in particular to our chapel there may have heard his name. William Bagshawe (1628-1702) was ejected from the living in Glossop in 1662 but then preached and worked extensively in the Peak District and the surrounding counties. He founded many congregations but only three remain, one of which became our Unitarian chapel in Great Hucklow. It is likely that David's talk will be printed in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* in due course.

Finally I must mention the Anniversary Service on the Friday evening. The preacher was the Rev Feargus O'Connor from Golders Green on 'Universal Kinship', but the service was led by our own Sarah, and what a good job she did. The only drawback to meeting on university premises is that a lecture theatre is not the most spiritual of places, though it is always inspiring to worship and sing with hundreds of other Unitarians. On a couple of occasions in the past the service has been held in a cathedral, but that's another story!

**Howard Hague**



*A view over the very modern dining room at the Jubilee campus*



*Rev. Danny Crosby, Jane Blackall and Jef Jones*

# Warden's Column

Although we generally don't take Sunday bookings, we do sometimes make exceptions to enable a weekend workshop – and I'm excited that this month, because of the bank holidays, there will be two. They're dance workshops, given by a friend of mine, Daniel Mang, on the dance form I've been studying for several years now and the descriptions give a good sense of how it combines physical precision and emotional awareness. I always love having the opportunity to dance in the church and people really appreciate that it's possible to have this kind of event here – thank you.

## Contact Improvisation and Communication 5/6<sup>th</sup> May

This workshop will combine material from co-counselling, radical therapy and non-violent communication, as well as ideas about consent and safer spaces that have been developing in "radical contact" spaces (see [www.radicalcontact.org](http://www.radicalcontact.org)), with contact improvisation and authentic movement.



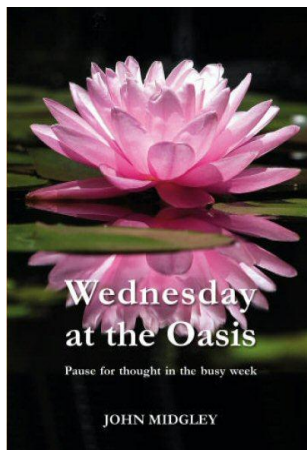
## Contact Improvisation through Experiential Anatomy 26/27<sup>th</sup> May

In this workshop we will combine and juxtapose the study of anatomy with imagery-based movement improvisation and contact improvisation. We will refine our awareness of inner spaces and body rhythms, of the space around us and of what we can hear, smell and see. We will use images, some more poetic, some more prosaic, of structures in our bodies, to help us change state and develop satisfying movement. We will then revisit some fundamental aspects of contact improvisation: how to share weight; follow a rolling point of contact; give all one's weight to someone else; make yourself light; modulate your weight; lift someone up; get used to being upside down; offer a plateau; connect to one's centre; use momentum; extend into falling; have your landing gear ready...

Jenny Moy

## 'Wednesday at the Oasis'

A New Book by Rev. John Midgley



A collection of fifty-two short sermons on topics that follow, approximately, the Christian calendar and the cycle of the seasons, plus reflections on contemporary event. They are intended to give something to think about from a broadly religious perspective; joys, concerns, things to celebrate or be grateful for, or comments on some of the troubling ways of the world, seasoned with a little humour. This collection represents a year's-worth of such reflections.

Available by post from Rev. John Midgley,  
2 Hirds Yard, Skipton, North Yorkshire, BD23 2AF  
Price £8.99 + £2.50 Post and Packing  
(Cheques payable to J. Midgley)

## 'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 16<sup>th</sup> June, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 18<sup>th</sup> August  
12.30 to 1.15pm, at Essex Church

(please note – no group in May due to AGM)



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. Along with Harold Lorenzelli 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 and 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.



A Short Course this Summer with Kensington Unitarians

## 'Art Meditations'

Thursdays 20<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> June and 18<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> July  
6.45pm for 7.00-9.00pm, here at Essex Church



Following the great success of our first 'Art Meditations' course this January we will be offering a further four sessions at the church (upstairs in the worship space itself) during June and July. Each of these sessions will be stand-alone but of course it would be lovely if you could make it to the whole series.

In each session we will reflect on spiritual themes using visual art, sometimes by responding to images, and sometimes by playing with various media (paint, collage, etc) ourselves. No particular artistic skills are required – the emphasis is on exploration and expression rather than technical merit!

A good portion of each evening will be spent working in meditative silence and we will come together in the second half of each session to share our responses and insights.

It would be helpful to know if you are coming so we know how many tables to set out. Please get in touch if you are planning to come along: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)



## Small Group Communion



**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 14<sup>th</sup> July  
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:

**12<sup>th</sup> May** – Led by David Francis Darling

**9<sup>th</sup> June** – Led by John Hands

**14<sup>th</sup> July** – 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.



### A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:  
12<sup>th</sup> May, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

**Also a weekly class each Tuesday  
lunchtime from 12.30-1.30pm**

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.**

## June Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for the June issue is **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May**. Please send your church newsletter contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, or any committee member by then. Thank you!!!

**Email your articles to:**  
[jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

# The Elements – ‘Heart and Soul’ Reflections

*Our ‘Heart and Soul’ gathering in April was on the theme ‘The Spirituality of the Elements’ – four members of the congregation offered their own reflections connected to the theme.*



I spoke about the Earth element as being alive to the Physical body. Being grounded, rooted. Like a mountain or a tree. The body is always present, are we always in our bodies? My experience of a Sweat Lodge was a way to access this element for me. A Sweat Lodge is a ceremonial sauna and purification ceremony, in a small adobe type of tent, with hot rocks in the centre. Water is poured on these rocks creating steam, you crawl into the tent on your knees into pitch darkness and warmth for several hours. This experience gave me access to being truly in my body. Connecting to the natural world by physically being on the ground out in nature and sharing the experience with others of the human world was a perfect joining of the two. Being in pitch darkness, sweating, praying, chanting, singing, laughing, crying as well as sharing our joys and concerns with others was a deep healing and renewing to the truth of oneness. I felt clean and purified on all levels. The Spirit in the Body, the Body in Spirit. Being in this sacred, warm, wet, nurturing safe space free of self-consciousness was a liberating and grounding experience. This was a profound connection with the Earth element. As a Caesarean baby, it's important to receive stimulation. Either from movement that is self-generated or any external experience such as the above that brings your awareness fully to your physical body. The Shaman is beating a drum, which resonates with your own beating heart, one is conscious of breath and the sweat pouring off the body. One is very much alive and present to the life force, grounded and present.

**Sonya Leite**

As a child I lived by a river in a small fishing town. My younger brother was a fisherman so our family life revolved around the tides. I sang in the Junior Methodist Choir. Every Wednesday early evening was choir practice and we sang our little hearts out on Sunday mornings. I was the only one in my family to go; it was a solitary and joyful thing to do.

I lived across the bridge on the other side of the town so I crossed the river very day of the 20+ years I lived there. The ever changing river. It wasn't ever the same. The tide was in or out; the water level high or low swirling and ominous glistening in the sunshine as the light caught the currents, peppered by the rain or battered by the storms, contained in its muddy, and latterly reinforced, banks.

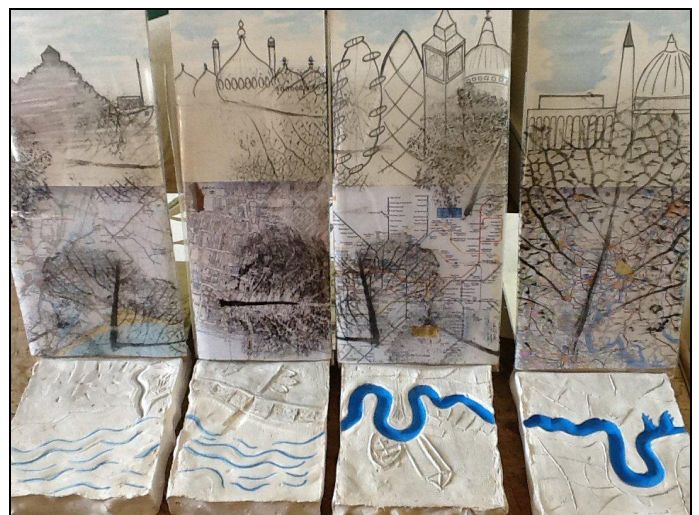
I crossed the river to go to school, to the shops, to meet my friends and go to church. Every Wednesday for choir practice and every Sunday on my way to church I'd walk parallel to the river smelling the smells of the fish market and hearing the fishermen shout to each other as they brought the buckets of fish ashore from those distinctive fishing boats with RX painted on the sides. It was a completely normal part of my life that I gave no thought to. I just 'was'. When I look back now I can see how unique that experience was.

As a small child, before I lost my nerve, when danger was a mystery to me, I used to balance along the huge bollards that bordered the river high above the mud, fascinated by it and unaware of the potential death trap that lay below me. Youth and blessed ignorance!!

I love to be by the water. I'm a Scorpio, one of the water signs along with Pisces and Cancer. I'm full of emotion and not afraid to express it. I 'go with the flow' until my passions are aroused then I'll swim against the tide, cause waves and generally whip up a storm until a solution has been found.

The water connects me with my family too. I made a piece of art last year from paper and plaster. Its title is Shoreline and it shows the connection through the seas and rivers that connect me with my children. We all live near to the water: the Potomac River near to Washington DC, the Thames and two shores of the English Channel.

Water is flow, passion, danger and connection for me... as in life.



**Jo Ridgers**

*'Shoreline' – artwork by Jo Ridgers*

Tristan wrote about 'air' spirituality – the spirituality of the intellect and words:

As a Unitarian, it's easy to get heady about religion. When I was younger, I was part of mainstream churches. When I was a child, I went to a local American Baptist church. There, it wasn't about theories or playing with philo-theological ideas. It was about the Bible and knowing your Scripture. But that did something to me: it made me think about the theory. And now, twenty-odd years later, you can't get to my heart without tickling my mind.

The theory got moved up a notch when my family moved to the Episcopal Church. I encountered creeds and catechisms and sacraments. 'Just how many sacraments are there?' the bishop asked my confirmation group. 'And how many were instituted by Jesus?' How many sacraments were instituted by Jesus? As any catechist will tell you: that's easy, there are two. Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That's the theory but as I look at it now, that's the wrong answer. The second question we were asked: 'What is Jesus?' We gave the response from the catechism. Jesus is fully human and fully God. The Greek word is *homousious*, of one substance, in this case, human and God. That's the accepted theory but that's the wrong answer.

These are the wrong answers because they ignore us, sitting here. How many sacraments were instituted by Jesus? Yes, Baptism and the Lord's Supper but what about loving God, however we might call her, with every shred of our being? What about seeing the Light of God in your neighbour? What about forgiving? What about being humble, that is to say, of the earth or human? Are not these also sacraments?

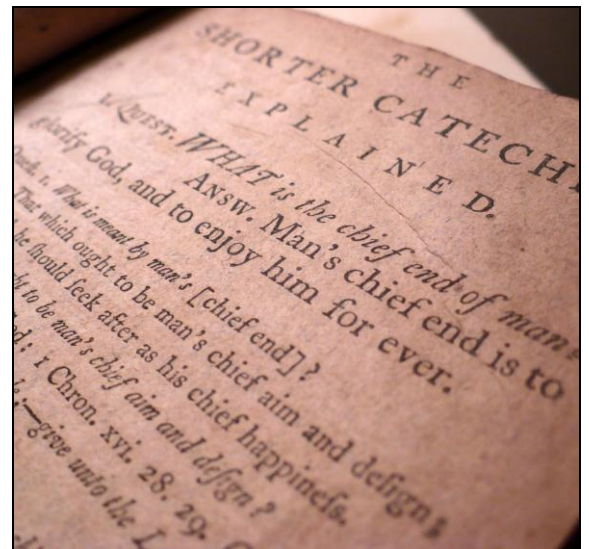
As for who is Jesus, my relationship with him was very different then. As a teenager, it was about worship and doing things right, as the priest said they should be done. Now, it's about friendship and understanding. And he has to share his place in my life with the Buddha, not that either complain. I now see the answer in the catechism to mean something entirely different. We are all fully human and fully God because we are all sons and daughters of the Divine. That divinity spilled out of Jesus in a very rare way. We still see it in a few special people but it's rare. *Homousious* is a description of us all.

So, does that mean that there's nothing to be had with playing with theological questions? Of course not! I love considering the nature of sin or the mechanics of Biblical scholarship. As much as I disagree with the creeds, and if you want an intellectual gymnastic loop, have a read of the Athanasian Creed--I still like to consider: What if Jesus really did resurrect bodily? What if Mary didn't die? What if there was a virgin birth?

There's no better place for theory to hide than in lists. Buddhists adore lists: The four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the ten Paramitas, the four Immeasurables. I could go on. The kind of Buddhism which speaks to me the most is Shin Buddhism. At its core is compassion and appreciation. Every breath is a chance to appreciate the beauty of the world which we see. Every step is a chance to reach out to Amida Buddha, to utter the six syllable Nembutsu (Namu Amida Buddha or Homage to the Infinite Light), to envision the Pure Land and the Light of the Buddha and the lotus blossoms on which we sit and the flower petals which flow in the winds in which we hear the faintest of music. We are all made of gold in the Pure Land because no matter how worthless we might feel here, we are of infinite value. We could say that that's just theory too. But I love it. It enlivens my mind and it opens my heart.



The element of fire is associated with the colour red and with the idea of transformation. In astrology it is associated with Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. In alchemy fire and the colour red is seen as the last stage of the transformation process. Jane and I wondered if we should start with the element of fire since Aries, a fire sign, is the first in the Zodiac. Aries is about new beginnings, leaving behind old energies and starting with the new, there is also a certain amount of aggression associated with Aries, ruled by Mars, god of war. The Alchemists view of fire is somewhat different; it is seen as the final stage necessary for finding gold the symbol of eternal bliss. Another interesting perspective can be found in the Prometheus Myth. Prometheus steals fire because he wants humans to be like Gods, he is punished for this, but at the same time gives mankind the starting point for civilisation. For me the element of fire is mostly about transformation, it can be hard to accept change, but in my view this is important for our emotional and spiritual growth. I have gone through many changes in my personal and professional life; my spiritual beliefs have also evolved over the years. Becoming a Unitarian has given me both a sense of freedom and a sense of belonging.



Tristan Jovanović

Heidi Ferid



## At Essex Church in April:

Thanks to Veronica Needa for inviting True Heart Theatre to bring us the magic of playback theatre one Sunday afternoon, where the joys and concerns of our everyday lives are given physical shape.

Another fascinating afternoon was provided by the Alister Hardy Society in April with an illustrated talk from Professor Eileen Barker, chair of INFORM, and an authority on new religious movements. There's always something interesting on offer here.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## Spirituality for a World in Crisis

Working Towards a Spiritual Alliance



### A Gathering to Seek a Co-Creative Approach to a New Era

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013, 10am-4.30pm**  
Here at Essex Church, London W8 4RT

*"The fundamental problem, I believe, is that at every level we are giving too much attention to the external, material aspects of life while neglecting moral ethics and inner values." HH Dalai Lama*

**What are the key issues at stake?**

**How might we co-operate?**

**Can we bring our various spiritual visions together to inspire a change in the way we live?**

Existing institutions are not rising to the challenges we face in today's world. So an emerging alliance of spiritual and religious groupings is coming together to explore what each might contribute to a coherent vision and set of actions for the future. The gathering will include opportunities for all to share their own perspectives on the theme and to contribute to future initiatives.

**Keynote talks during the day gathering:**

'Towards a Culture of Love and Wisdom' - David Lorimer  
'Spirituality for a World in Crisis' - Dr Greg Barker  
Opening/Closing Meditation - Sr Maureen, Brahma Kumaris

**Cost: £25 (concessions available)**

Register online via [www.wrekintrust.org](http://www.wrekintrust.org)  
Or email [book@wrekintrust.org](mailto:book@wrekintrust.org)

### Good Cause Collection of the Month:



## Arts Emergency Service

Collection on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May

For our next fourth-Sunday charity collection we will be supporting 'Arts Emergency', a relatively young charity, formed in response to the recent changes in Higher Education which have seen fees rise dramatically and which threaten to make arts and humanities subjects in particular inaccessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. From Arts Emergency's website:

*'The Arts Emergency Service is a distinct and dynamic organisation working to keep subjects in the Arts and Humanities accessible to everyone who wants to study them regardless of the barriers and perceived barriers. We believe an arts degree is NOT a luxury and the decision to study for any degree should be based on talent and passion rather than a financial trade-off between debt and future earnings.'*

The charity works to build national, online and local networks of support to help BA students and prospective Arts and Humanities students who are struggling emotionally, financially and practically to study those courses. Arts Emergency provide dedicated mentors who can support them in a variety of ways (including financial, emotional and practical), offer web-based information and support, and carry out fundraising for a national fund to enable talented, disadvantaged students continue studies despite real and perceived barriers such as lack of familial support, prohibitive debt and confusing repayment structures.

**For more information see:** [www.arts-emergency.org](http://www.arts-emergency.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:

**January 2013 – 'Trinity Hospice' – £117.14**  
**February – 'Azafady' (Madagascar Charity) – £157.36**  
**March – 'Send a Child to Hucklow' – £199.16**

# London District AGM 2013

The LDPA AGM finally took place at our Croydon church on Saturday 20 April 2013, having been postponed from 23 March because of bad weather. Of course any AGM is important formally in that annual reports and accounts need to be approved, but this meeting was additionally important in that the changes to the LDPA Objects required acceptance. The rest of the revised Constitution had been approved last year, but it was found that Charity Commission approval was needed for the Objects. This approval had been obtained, and the revised Objects were duly accepted by the meeting. They now read:



Beryl Payne and Rev. Jim McClelland  
(photograph courtesy of Rev. Daniel Costley)

*Inspired by the religious ideals and principles usually described as Unitarian or Free Christian, we establish the objects of the Assembly to be:*

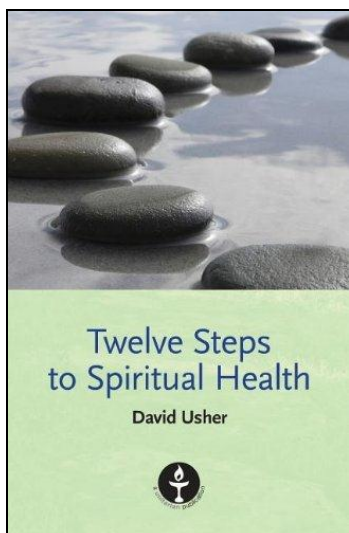
- a) *To promote the health and growth of the member congregations, and to facilitate the formation of new congregations*
- b) *To promote fellowship and co-operation among congregations*
- c) *To promote the spiritual life of Unitarians and Free Christians within the Province*
- d) *To promote social justice work within the Province*
- e) *To do all such other lawful things as are incidental to the above objects or any of them.*

Apart from some altered wording, the main change to the objects is clause d), which specifies social justice work for the first time. In a separate (and less formal) exercise, the LDPA Council has revised the 'Five Year Goals' that were approved in 2008. The goals have been reduced from six to four. These were also approved by the meeting and now read:

- 1): *All Unitarians and Free Christians within the District to have access to trained leadership*
- 2): *The District to be using all technologies for communication and outreach*
- 3): *Social action/justice to be integral to congregations' identity and programme*
- 4): *The District to have closer links with neighbouring Districts*

The following were elected to serve on LDPA Council: Karen Hanley (St Albans), Jo James (Brixton), Annabel Kramer (Lewisham), Francis Clark-Lowes (Brighton), Wade Miller-Knight (Golders Green), Peter Cheeseman (Tenterden) and Christine Martin (Godalming). Karen remains as chair for another year, with Peter as the (fairly) new treasurer. Beryl Payne, the Lay Leader at Chatham, was installed as the new LDPA President, taking over from the Rev Jim McClelland who has served for a number of years. Rev Rob Gregson gave a brief presentation on the recently launched 'Simple Gifts' Social Action project which is based at our Bethnal Green chapel in Mansford Street. This continues a tradition of Unitarian social service which has existed in this deprived part of East London for over 150 years. It is good to report that the varied programme is already proving a success with the local community. Before the AGM, the service was led by our District Minister, Rev David Usher. In a very moving address he referred to his current health problems and reflected on his Unitarian ministry over the years. We wish him the very best for the future as he undergoes treatment.

Howard Hague



## 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'

**A New Book by our District Minister, Rev. David Usher**

I am delighted to tell you that my book 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health' has now been published by Lindsey Press and is available through Unitarian Headquarters at Essex Hall, any good book shop, or online. As the title suggests, the book is a compilation of twelve things you can do to enhance your spiritual health, and is written in easily accessible non-theological language. It is designed for personal reading, but each step concludes with a set of questions so it is also a good resource for a study group.

The price is £8.00 + p&p via the General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians at Essex Hall (e-mail: [alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk), telephone 020 7240 2384).

Rev. David Usher

*We will hear more about this new title from Sarah in our service on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May.*

# 'Tie Up Your Camel... and Other Good Advice'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 17<sup>th</sup> March 2013

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

**Reading / Reflection:** In Charles Dickens' famous novel *David Copperfield* we meet Mr Micawber, a kindly, larger than life man who befriends the young Copperfield. Mr Micawber is thought to be based on Dickens' own father who had great trouble managing his family's money and spent time in a debtor's prison when Dickens was a child. Here is some sound financial advice from Mr Micawber, which might be of economic relevance to some within the banking profession in our society today.

*"My other piece of advice, Copperfield, said Mr. Micawber, you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen and six pence, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six pence, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and, and, in short, you are for ever flooded. As I am!"*

Mr Micawber's annual income and expenditure' was one of my mum's favourite sayings when we were growing up, along with assorted other bits of advice – financial and otherwise. 'Neither a borrower nor a lender' be was one that has stayed with me all these years – and when I challenged that as a teenager, wanting to lend my friends everything I possessed, she countered that by introducing a new maxim – 'only lend something if you are prepared not to get it back'. In last week's service I asked people to write down good advice that has stayed with them over the years and when I looked through the twenty or so pieces of advice that some of you kindly wrote down for me, it was perhaps not surprising that family members were the most frequently quoted source of good advice. Gina's son wisely reminds us all 'not to give advice unless we're asked for it' and Liz's dad told her that 'no experience is ever wasted if you learn something from it', which has helped her to think more positively over the years about life's more difficult experiences. Carolyn's father says 'always think before you act' and the classic encouragement of 'just do your best' echoed from various families. Thank you to everyone who contributed their pieces of good advice; we'll hear a few more later and some are written on the cards you were given today as you came in (available by email – just ask for your own complete set).

**Address:** OK, let's be honest. Do we really like receiving good advice? Well it depends a great deal, doesn't it, on the circumstances and who it is giving the advice. I don't know about you but there are people in my life, some dear friends, who I rarely tell my problems to because they have such an urge to put me right and give me their pearls of wisdom, when what I really want is just to air the problem and be heard. There are other people who I would always choose to share problems with, because they listen so well and seem to guide me towards my own solution rather than shoving their own views in my direction. I think when it comes to advice, timing is crucial – when someone gives us the right advice at the right time it can make such a difference; at other times that advice might just as well never have been uttered. Little wonder then that I'm amused by Oscar Wilde's delightful wisdom on the front of today's order of service, when he tells us "I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself."



Some good advice has been around for thousands of years. I've been reading sayings and proverbs from around the world this week – some of which, as you can imagine, are culturally specific, some now very outdated. There are a number of old English proverbs, full of advice about how women, children and dogs should be treated – with methods that we'd find abhorrent in this day and age. But some sayings are timeless and universal in their message to us. Last week several people mentioned traditional proverbs as being helpful to them – a stitch in time saves nine, don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, for example. You'll no doubt have your own favourite sayings, passed down through the generations in your family. Sayings such as these are a way of encapsulating and passing on cultural, societal wisdom. You perhaps know the saying that was the inspiration for today's service – from the deserts of Arabia, with its wry take on both faith and the nature of camels - 'Trust in Allah, but tie up your camel'. It's a perfect way to remind us that though religious faith may be valuable, it needs to be tempered with some basic common sense. This modern story from the Christian tradition gives a similar message:

*A religious man escapes to the top of a roof during a great flood. A rescue team comes by in a boat and they shout "get in, get in!" The religious man replies, "No I have faith in God, he will grant me a miracle."*

*Later the water is up to his waist and another boat comes by and the rescuer tells him to get in again. He responds that he has faith in God's saving grace. With the water at about chest high, another boat comes to rescue him, but he turns down the offer again because "God will grant him a miracle."*

*With the water at chin high, a helicopter throws down a ladder and they tell him to get in. Mumbling with the water now in his mouth, the man of faith again turns down the request for he has absolute certainty that God will save him. And so it is that he arrives minutes later at the gates of heaven having drowned in the flood. With broken faith he says to Saint Peter, "I thought God would grant me a miracle and I have been let down I want to complain to the management." St. Peter smiles and responds, "I don't know what you're complaining about, we sent you three boats and a helicopter."*

The message of stories and sayings such as these finds echoes in many of the self-help books that abound these days in book shops and perhaps on a number of our bookshelves. In days gone by, when changes in society and family structures came at a more gentle pace, much of our good advice would have come from our families, the elders of our communities and our religions. They would have helped people to establish their own moral compass. Nowadays we seek guidance from many varied sources, including books.

## 'Tie Up Your Camel...' (continued)

When we look at the growth of self-help publishing two names stand out from its early days – Samuel Smiles, a Scottish reformer, who published his first book called *Self Help* in the 1850s and did so much work with workers' education and mutual improvement societies to improve the lot of working people crammed into unhealthy Victorian cities. It's not an easy read now but it contains such a passion for making this world a better place. It reminded me of Gandhi's famous words – 'be the change you want to see in the world'. Another well-known name in the realm of self-improvement is Dale Carnegie, whose most famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, has never been out of print since first being published in the 1930s. Another of his works *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* is also hugely popular to this day. The title *How to Win Friends and Influence People* has been joked about over the years or dismissed as a guide for smarmy salespeople. Yet at its core is a simple and profound message – be interested in other people and be as kind to them as you can possibly be. Not a bad piece of advice.

Self-help books such as these often guide us to take responsibility in life – responsibility for external matters but responsibility for our internal world too. We can change our thoughts, they tell us. Neuro linguistic programming – a bit of a mouthful, NLP for short, uses the term *re-framing* – to encourage us to look at our thoughts and indeed our lives in a more helpful way. Glenn our new children's leader gives us a perfect example of this when he writes: "One of the most helpful things anyone's ever said to me was when I was an angst ridden teenager, full of woe for humanity and for our planet, whilst also feeling unhappy about being 'negative'. It was my oldest friend who said to me that my pain showed him I had a deep, deep love for life. Hey! What a change in perspective". Thank you for that Glenn. Our human ability to reflect on and, if needs be, change our thoughts is a remarkably useful skill to develop in life. We don't have to think in the same old ways; we are responsible for our thoughts as well as our actions and we can change both.

And as is sometimes the way with good advice, contradictory messages can be equally valuable. Yes it's important that we take responsibility in life, but there will also be times to let go, to step back. Someone wrote last week:

*'A Buddhist meditation teacher said that detachment was very important in their religion. This surprised me but I do find it useful to a degree – not getting overly involved in other people's problems or taking on responsibility for their lives is very important'.*

And so I wonder what your good advice to yourself and indeed to others might be? It's something to talk about over a cup of tea or coffee after today's service. As is probably right and proper for a Unitarian minister, after a whole week of study all I can come up with is a list of contradictions: do any of these three strike a chord with you?

My first would be – to be yourself – yet never forget your ability to make changes, to grow and develop through the course of your life.

My second would be – to be kind to others – yet always remember that there are times to be tough in speaking the truth in relationship with others.

My third would be – to be grateful for the gift of life itself – yet never forget just how very tough other people's lives can be – life is a gift that has been most unfairly distributed.

I look forward to hearing your good advice.

## Springtime Thoughts



Each year I am a little older and a lot more amazed at what seems like a miraculous event: Perennial plants returning in the spring. Sometimes I think this might involve a plant's version of courage.

Returning perennials are not new plants, tasting life for the first time—they've experienced life before. They've lived through torrential rains tearing their leaves, insects and animals chewing them, competition with their neighbours for food and water and light. They've struggled against weeds that invade like housing developers with their own aesthetic of greed, showing no regard for the character of the community they want to overtake. Summer brings fruition, then perennials must live through a slow autumn decay, when life seeps out of their leaves and stems, piece by piece, until nothing of them remains in the sun and starlit world. All they are is underground. Would we human beings want to come back again and again after all of that?

What do plants do when underground? Rest? Hibernate? Meditate? I missed out on botany courses, so I can't say with accuracy what goes on with plants during a Minnesota winter. But I can see that in spring an amazing thing happens: they're pulled toward the light, pushed by their own inner imperatives, much like human beings after transformative change. Even in the face of loss or deep alteration, it is the way of life to insist itself through all beings, making us dare to start, to grow, to hope anew. To rise from the cold dark damp earth toward the light, the same in essence but different from before.

Newly emergent plants are perfection itself, unmarred by anything, promising everything. Delicate as a just-dropped fawn, they're as yet untouched by insect mouth, hail, fungus or footfall. They grow so much each day in spring that we sometimes feel that if we sat still and long enough, we might see it happening.

In spring, plants and gardens are easy to love—largely, I think, because they allow us to hope. Anything can happen: life might go very well, be very beautiful. Full potential might be reached. We can taste the delicious possibility in our cells.

More likely, any number of pains and misfortunes will limit what actually happens. But in this moment, in the time of miraculous and courageous new life, it's possible to let promise and potential charm us, again. Amazing.

**Judy Remington**

*(read by Jeannene Powell in the service on 14<sup>th</sup> April)*

A New Venture Here at Essex Church for 2013...

## **'Heart and Soul'** Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013 from 7-8pm**  
Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library  
Followed by social time and refreshments

In January 2013 we held the first of our 'Heart and Soul' spiritual gatherings, which will take place on the first Thursday evening of each month, for new and alternative forms of Unitarian worship. They have been going well so far and we are looking forward to the next one!

The impetus to hold midweek worship came, in part, from a recent inquiry from someone who always works at the weekends and is therefore unable to attend Unitarian worship anywhere in London. This seemed a real shame so we decided to try and rectify the situation... and it all came together remarkably quickly!

These services will be led by members of the newly-formed 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. The gathering on 2<sup>nd</sup> May will be coordinated by Tristan Jovanović and has the theme 'Heart and Soul Words'. All are welcome!

### **'Heart and Soul Words'**

*Some words push our buttons. They lift us up and put us in touch with our deeper selves. Heart and Soul Words will be a sharing service where, if you wish, you can bring along a single word, a poem or a paragraph, of your own or someone else's making, to share. All it has to do is speak to your heart and soul. – Tristan Jovanović*



'Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence.  
Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance.  
Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence.  
Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance.'

**Yoko Ono**

## **Kensington Unitarians Film on YouTube**



James Barry of UK Unitarian TV came to Essex Church on 21<sup>st</sup> April to film the service and also filmed a few people talking about why they come along to our Sunday services. He has made a splendid five-minute video for us which is already up on YouTube – do go and have a look – **and share it with friends!**

You can find it here or via a link on the church website:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AISE-gWP1w>

## **Sunday Services in May**

**5<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – 'Comfort'**

**Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Come and enjoy listening to Handel's beautiful tenor aria 'Comfort ye, my people' from his 'Messiah' and explore some of the sources of comfort in life.

**12<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – 'Letting Go, Moving On'**

**Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Sonya Leite**

Spring cleaning can make a difference in our wardrobes and bookshelves. Today we'll consider how the clearing of 'stuff' might assist our spiritual lives too.

**19<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – '12 Steps to Spiritual Health'**

**Membership Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

A new book written by London's Unitarian District Minister gives useful advice on how to live a spiritually healthy life. This service will recognise the important work of 12 Step programmes and take a first look at David Usher's advice. During the service we will be welcoming new members to the congregation and inviting all members to re-affirm their commitment to the community in a simple ceremony. Our AGM will follow the service at 12.30pm.

**26<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – 'The Sea  
as Metaphor and Miracle'**

**Service led by Caroline Blair**

Throughout the almost unimaginably long period of human pre-history we were a coast-dwelling species. The sea provided food, safety, comfort, mythology and magic. No wonder we say that the sea is in our blood. This service will look beyond the sunbathing and beach volleyball to conjure up something of the deeper meanings of the sea.