



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: November 2019

What's On...

Sunday 3rd November, 11am-noon
'All Souls'

Led by Jeannene Powell

Wednesday 6th November, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 7th October, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Time & Transience' led by Brian Ellis

Sunday 10th November, 11am-noon
'Remembrance Sunday'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 10th November, 1-5pm
'Our Stories of Migration'
with Michaela von Briztke & Sarah T

Wednesday 13th November, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Friday 15th November, 7.30-9.30pm
Playback Theatre: 'Transitions'

Sunday 17th November, 11am-noon
'Tick Tock'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 17th November, 12.30-1.15pm
'Find Your Voice'
Singing Class with Margaret

Sunday 17th November, 2.00-3.00pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 17th November, 3.00-6.00pm
Happy Café @ Essex Church

Wednesday 20th November, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 24th November, 11am-noon
'How We Spend Our Days'
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Sunday 24th November, 12.45-2pm
Sunday Conversation:
'Time and Transience'

Sunday 24th November, 2.30pm
Piano Recital by John Newton

Tuesday 26th November, 6.45 for 7-9pm
Poems for a Winter's Night

Wednesday 27th November, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 28th November, 7.00pm
Management Committee Meeting

Time & Transience

A Message from our Minister

It's 'that time of the year' again. Clocks are turned back an hour. Evenings draw in. Leaves fall from trees. Autumn may not be everybody's favourite season but it's an ideal time to consider this month's ministry theme of 'time and transience'. Though I highly recommend ignoring any shop windows that are displaying a countdown of 'only ** shopping days to ****'.

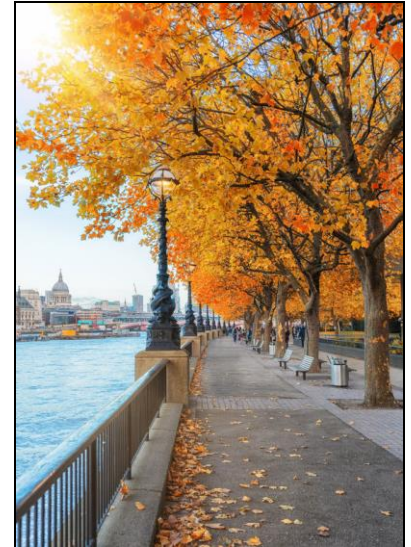
In a book of world prayers recently I found this line attributed to the Aztecs: *'Only for so short a while are we loaned to each other'*. How would our view of life change if we viewed everything as 'on loan'? It's a message in accord with our increasing awareness of humanity's effects on our planet earth home. We're waking up to the need to protect this planet rather than exploit its ever-depleting resources. If we borrow a planet rather than own it, we are held responsible for its care. Our duty is to use, not misuse, and to pass it on to the next generation in a reasonable condition.

How might we treat the people we live alongside, if the temporary nature of our togetherness stayed more consciously in our minds? Would we show our love and care more openly? Could we express our feelings more fully and seek to understand those we love in more depth? Or would it be easier to accept someone just as they are, with all their human flaws and frailties, if we held to the fore of our minds that they are simply on loan to us, for so short a while?

And what of our own lives? Many of us are at an age where our own mortality is very much in our minds. Can we utilise that awareness to heighten our sense of being alive? Are we noticing the miraculous each day? Are we appreciating small pleasures and seeking out rewarding activities to lift us beyond the mundane and familiar?

There are lots of ways to join us Kensington Unitarians in the month ahead as we meet together to explore meaning and purpose in life. As well as our weekly services and the many activities run by other groups that we host, you could be part of a Sunday conversation on this topic of time and transience, bring a favourite poem to our 'poetry for a winter's evening' group and come along to our monthly free singing workshop. I look forward to hearing what being 'on loan' means for you.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

* 'Our Stories of Migration' workshop with Michaela and Sarah * 'Poems for a Winter's Night' * Christmas Events at Essex Church * 'A Voyage Through Romantic Music' with John Newton * 'Q&A' by Brian Ellis * 'Lotus Life Skills Workshop' by Julia Alden * Poem by Marianne Harvey * Unitarian Women's Group * FUSE Announcement * West London GreenSpirit Group Update * Happy Café * 'Seasons of Change' reflection by Rev. Sarah Tinker * and much 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.

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church
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Notting Hill Gate
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Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Sunday Conversation on 'Time and Transience'

Sunday 24th November, 12.45-2pm



Bring your sandwiches and thoughts about this month's ministry theme of 'Time and Transience' – and why not plan to stay on afterwards for the concert that starts at 2.30pm.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



We need lots of lovely people to muck in to make the church a hospitable place so if you haven't taken on one of these volunteering tasks before please consider giving it a go (you might consider 'shadowing' a regular to get trained up). We realise that it can be hard to commit in advance but you could always ask someone else to stand in if it turns out you can't come.

Stewarding:

3rd November: Juliet Edwards
10th November: Brian Ellis
17th November: Julia Alden
24th November: Michaela von Britzke

Coffee:

3rd November: Allison Smith
10th November: ?????? (*can you help?*)
17th November: John Humphreys & Pat Gregory
24th November: Maureen Cummings

Greeting:

3rd November: David Carter
10th November: Charlotte Chanteloup
17th November: Roy Clark
24th November: Juliet Edwards

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you want to sign up for one of the forthcoming slots.

jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Christmas Events at Essex Church



Sunday 15th December, 11am onwards Carol Service & Congregational Lunch

Save the date and join us for a hearty sing of familiar carols. It's a great occasion so why not invite your friends and stay behind for a bring-and-share congregational Christmas lunch after (please bring simple dishes which can be served from the container you bring them in and don't need heating up).

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm-6pm Candlelit Christmas Eve Service

We will be holding our traditional contemplative evening service on Christmas Eve, with well-known carols, and a time of candlelit silence. This will be followed by time for refreshments. Jane is also organising a Christmas meal in a nearby pub after the service, as she has done in previous years, so please get in touch with her ASAP if you'd like to join as places are limited (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

‘Our Stories of Migration and Shakespeare’s Plea for Hospitality to Strangers’



Sunday 10th November, from 1.00-5.00pm
Co-facilitated by Michaela von Britzke and Sarah Tinker – Here at Essex Church

Please book your place for this free, exploratory workshop and help us trial these new workshop materials. We are seeking 8 to 12 people, both with family roots in this country and migration backgrounds, to join us in a conversation, aiming to enhance our understanding of one another’s experiences.

Migration, the movement of human beings around the world, affects each and every one of us, as it did people in Shakespeare’s time. In much of our world today, migration has become a focus for concern and discontent, providing fuel for the growth of nationalist politics. By exploring our separate and intertwined experiences of ‘immigration’ as people with indigenous and immigrant backgrounds, we hope to create new kinds of welcome, with empathy as a vital tool. By the end of this conversation, we may want to choose small next steps towards strengthening a sense of cohesion in our multi-cultural society.

Have a chat with Michaela or Sarah and book your place for this workshop. Or email info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk. We’ll provide a sandwich lunch and drinks and invite you to bring some snacks to share.

Concert Invitation:

‘A Voyage through Romantic Music’

Sunday 24th November, 2.30pm at Essex Church



A concert including compositions by our very own John Newton, and arrangements of works by Chopin, Liszt, Wagner and others. All are welcome to join us for this free afternoon concert starting at 2.30pm here at Essex Church. With Mark Verter and John Newton on piano and Robin Smith, baritone.

‘Finding Our Voice’ Monthly Singing Workshops



**Sunday 17th November from
12.30pm to 1.15pm at Essex Church**

Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. 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 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 sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.

Poems for a Winter’s Night

Tuesday 26th November at Essex Church
6.45 for a 7pm start, ending by 9.00pm
Led by Brian Ellis and Sarah Tinker



Choose a favourite poem, let us have a copy in advance and let’s join together in a companionable circle and read to one another. Famous poems, new poems, poems you’ve written yourself – all are welcome. With seasonal treats and refreshments.

Q&A with Brian Ellis

#3 in a new series where congregation members answer a range of questions so we can get to know each other better.

Who are you?

Hello, I'm Brian Ellis, a seventy four year old retired civil engineer, spending my working life in teams of engineers designing road and railway bridges. I come from East Midlands artisan stock, although I was born in Luton, moving to London for my first job, and where I've lived, in Ealing, for the past fifty years.

When did you first come to Essex Church?

On the first Sunday of 2015; a new year, the start of a different life.

What brought you to this congregation?

Chance. I was idly looking through a magazine that my wife read, but I never looked at, while I was dealing with her affairs. A short entry stated the basic Unitarian beliefs and I was interested enough to look up the Unitarian Church website. Living midway between the Richmond and Kensington congregations I chose Kensington for my first experience of the Unitarians.

What roles or tasks have you taken on at Essex Church so far (or which are calling to you)?

I first became involved helping in the church garden; I had just moved from a house (with garden) to a flat (without) and the church garden provided solace for my loss. Moving from an old house to a new flat also meant that I was deprived of basic DIY projects, but I have found a substitute for the house in becoming an unofficial odd job man at the church. I began to feel very much part of the congregation when I was invited to join the committee and to occasionally lead Heart and Soul. Serving coffee and tea after the service is the next thing calling to me.

What other religious communities have you been connected to (if any)?

None. I do not count having to go to Sunday School at the local C of E as a connection. This seemed an imposition in my free time of a few more hours of schooling, and none of the adults I knew were associated with religious institutions or ever expressed any interest in anything outside their material lives. I couldn't understand why all the different gods couldn't sort out who was actually the creator, and even if they did I was still puzzled by who/what created the creator. End of interest in established religion and start of a journey of general free thinking. Without realizing I was a fellow traveller of the Unitarians for sixty years.

What difference has belonging to this congregation made to your life?

Becoming part of our congregation has shown me that it is possible with the help, encouragement and friendship of others to change and grow in ways that I felt were impossible to effect on my own. I have always been low in self-confidence and esteem, and while I coped with this within a loving and sustaining relationship for most of my adult life it became more intense after my wife died. The gift of self-discovery that has been given to me as a member of the congregation will be difficult to repay.

What do you tell friends and acquaintances who ask you 'What's Unitarianism'?

This is a question which generally occurs in an informal or passing conversation so I try to be brief and concise with the hope that this might encourage further interest. 'We are congregations of individuals, each welcomed and supported as



themselves with their own beliefs, but together seeking truth and meaning for life here on earth. We work towards the unity, and respect for, all life'. Most people I have spoken with have not heard of the Unitarians and are interested that a truly liberal church exists but do not want to enquire further. I can only hope that by flagging up our presence it may encourage someone to find their spiritual home.

What is your favourite hymn (and why)?

'The Spirit Lives to Set Us Free'. I enjoy music, any music, and I've begun to realise a little late in life, by joining a choir, how beneficial it is to join in making music. I'm sure this is why making music is such an established part of religious practice, there is something unifying and satisfying in creating together with nothing more than our voices. In order to join in this act of creation however I need a hymn that doesn't pitch about all over the stave or have tricky word and rhythm matches, nor can I deal with complicated ideas in the words while I'm trying to sing. And I like a chorus, something to let go in after the seriousness of each verse. Hence this hymn. I find it quite poetic that the lines, although straightforward statements, give much to be thought about in a spiritual journey.

Would you like to tell us about a social justice issue / good cause which is close to your heart?

I'm an armchair supporter of several charities active in a number of areas, but the one I've supported for the longest is WaterAid. Working in engineering I could see no technical or economic reason why, given a co-operative political approach, all the world could not have access to clean water and sanitation as the result of the initiative of the first World Water Decade 81/90, but we're not there yet. More personally, I am a supporter of charities working for the introduction of assisted dying to this country.

What makes you laugh?

Gentle satire, self-deprecating humour. The Goon Show, Monty Python, Blackadder, Spike Milligan, Tommy Cooper, Victoria Wood; much of life itself can produce a wry smile.

What one piece of advice for life or pearl of wisdom would you like to offer to newsletter readers?

Failure is the way to find how not to do things.

What can you see from where you are sitting now?

A wall.

Festive Tea Dance in aid of Stonewall Housing

Sunday 22nd December, 2-5pm at Essex Church
Starting with a dance lesson for beginners!



We invite you to our next Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance in aid of Stonewall Housing! We had a great time in September (as you can see from the photos!) and we'll be back in December for a Festive Special (please note the change of date to the 22nd). There will be tea, cake, partner dancing and line dances from 2-5pm. All are welcome - complete beginners to life-long dancers alike - and even if you think you have two left feet this will be a relaxed and welcoming space for all to enjoy. The afternoon will begin with a dance lesson led by Rachel Sparks.

Save the date now to come to this fun event in aid of a good cause (£5 of the door price goes to Stonewall Housing, a charity providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people fleeing violence, harassment and abuse). There's no need to bring a partner so just come as you are - do tell your friends though - the more the merrier! We encourage gender neutral partnering which means anyone can lead/follow. We are family-friendly so children come for free with any paying adult. Tickets are limited and cost £12 in advance (£15 on the door). Pay it forward tickets are priced at £10 and all proceeds of this ticket will go to Stonewall Housing. Book online: www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk/book-online. Members of the congregation get free admission. You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes to help raise money for our nominated charity and of course donations are very welcome. If you have any questions do email Rachel on hello@rachelsparksdance.co.uk

For more information contact:

rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk or visit
www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

Volunteers will be needed to help with the reception desk / tea stall – please email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk if you can help!



'In order to overcome the pain of transience we must learn the difference between loneliness and being alone. Unless we can be alone with ourselves, unless we can recognize and accompany ourselves, be at one with the changes life entails, no matter how many are with us, we will always remain lonely. This is not to suggest we become a recluse or a hermit, or someone who has rejected companionship. Just the opposite. We must simply learn to become whole and complete within ourselves, free to be with or without a companion, free to depend upon ourselves, know who we are, not be led around by others, but walk freely on our own two feet on this precious earth.'

Brenda Shoshanna

Good Cause Collection of the Month:

'Rewilding Britain'



Collection on Sunday 24th November

Rewilding is the large-scale restoration of ecosystems where nature can take care of itself. It seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing them to shape the landscape and the habitats within. Rewilding encourages a balance between people and the rest of nature where each can thrive. It provides opportunities for communities to diversify and create nature-based economies; for living systems to provide the ecological functions on which we all depend; and for people to re-connect with wild nature.

The charity's stated aspirations are to: Reverse the loss of biodiversity in large core areas of land and sea / Restore ecosystems to a functional and resilient state / Reignite people's passion for the natural world / Revitalise local economies in ways that work ecologically / Reintegrate nature and society for the benefit of both / Reintroduce key missing species where it makes sense.

Website: www.rewildingbritain.org.uk

Recent Charity Collections:

July 28th – H&F Foodbank – over £300

September 1st – Kew: Feed the Future – £158.36

September 22nd – Simple Gifts – over £150



'Transitions'

Friday 15th November, 7.30-9.30pm

London Playback Theatre is a team of internationally experienced professional theatre practitioners, consultants, educators, and therapists. We create spontaneous, improvised theatre through a unique collaboration between performers and audience. We encourage people to share their real life stories – through the magic of theatre – we bring those stories to life. Our work offers opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of each other and to develop authentic ways of communicating. As an audience member you are not in the spotlight unless you choose to put up your hand to share something – you will be engaged in the whole experience as friendly witness – and you can stay for conversation afterwards. Playback returns on 15th November to explore the theme of 'Transitions'. They offer performances free of charge (donations welcome).

For information see: www.londonplayback.com

Warden's Column: What's On in our Busy Building



This November we have two bookings in the 'Alternatives' Programme organised by St James Piccadilly, both on the theme of improving physical health through mind/body interaction. 'Alternatives' is a not-for-profit events company with a mission to inspire heart, mind and soul for a better world. Their core values are wisdom, service, community, integrity and alchemy. They've been holding events at Essex Church several times a year since 2015.

Saturday 2nd November – 'How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body'
by Dr David Hamilton, 10-4.30pm, cost £85 (£70 concessions).

In this empowering workshop, you will learn some practical strategies for harnessing your mind and emotions to help your body. David will teach visualisation strategies that have been shown to enhance the immune system and benefit some patients.

Saturday 30th November – 'Health Mastery'
by Clive de Carle, 10-5pm, cost £85 (£70 concessions).

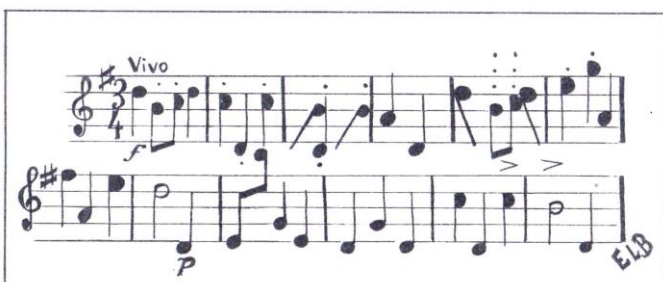
The Power of nutritional alchemy and advanced technology to heighten psychic awareness, create emotional harmony and illuminate spiritual purpose.

A full brochure of all of their events this autumn, with timings and charges, is available in the lobby or you can read it online at www.alternatives.org.uk.

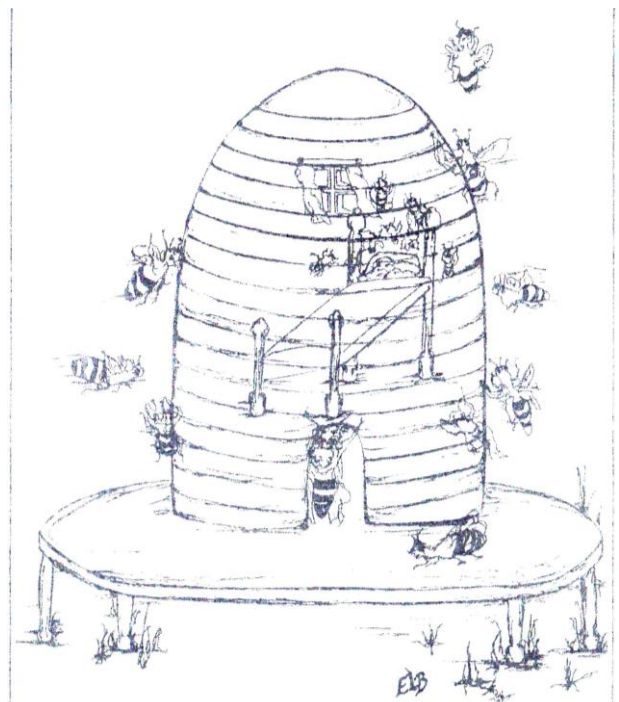
Jenny Moy

More Images of Tinnitus

This illustration of the experience of tinnitus comes from Eliz Beel's contribution to 'The Dividing Line' exhibition held last year in the Central Space Gallery. If you experience problems with hearing, sight or any other issues that may affect your ability to access activities here at Essex Church, please let us know what might assist you.



Above: 'The Sounds of Tinnitus: A Crazy Tune'
Right: 'The Sounds of Tinnitus: The Buzzing of Bees'



Thematic Ministry



Theme-based ministry is shaping activities in many Unitarian communities, both here in the UK and over in the States. It's designed to strengthen the life of a congregation through monthly themes - used in worship, small groups and other activities. It gives everyone an opportunity to get more involved so do have a look at the themes planned for the months ahead and let us know if you'd like to suggest a reading or a piece of music, bring your own thoughts to one of our Sunday morning gatherings, lead an activity or an outing, or write something for the newsletter. We recently met and planned themes for 2020. Have a look through and see what this list sparks off for you: 'Lost & Found', 'Rebellion, Defiance & Dissent', 'Self & Other', 'God & the Divine',

'Desire & Wanting', 'Bodies & The Material World', 'Seeking Paradise', 'Conflict & Harmony', 'Change & Continuity', 'Limits & Boundaries', 'Legacy, Inheritance & Looking Back', 'Nurturing & Nourishing'. This month we're exploring Time and Transience, with Scarcity and Abundance as our December theme. Here are some ways you might like to explore November's intriguing theme of 'Time & Transience':

- Consider how your time is spent and what that tells you about your life choices and priorities. What changes might you want to introduce?
- For a week observe your relationship with time. If you are someone who is often late, aim to be on time or early for a change. Or if you are usually on time, experiment with turning up late and seeing how that feels. (Best not done with trains!)
- 'The soul's answer to the problem of time is the experience of timeless being' writes Jacob Needleman. When have you experienced timelessness and what have you learnt through such experiences?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

A Pocketful of Autumn Haikus



Shining in its shell
Whether it is seen or not
A perfect chestnut

*

A very good year
Just a suspicion of mist
Nineteen eighty three

*

Daylight has broken
All feathers fluffed up
An owl hums himself to sleep

*

Gold and silver day
Sheep's legs cast long thin shadows
Rosebay willow herb

*

Dishevelled and loose
The honeysuckle
Has a last swing before fall

Marianne Harvey

'Reality Behind Creation'

Jay Lakhani, Mehrdad Noorani & the Soveida Ensemble
Sunday 24th November, 7-8.30pm - Here at Essex Church

Join us for an enlightening discussion exploring the mystery behind creation, and how each individual can connect to it in our everyday lives. This event will feature Jay Lakhani, a theoretical physicist, author, and popular TED talk speaker, who studied Quantum Mechanics under Sir Roger Penrose. He will speak on Spiritual Humanism. It will also feature Mehrdad Noorani, a Gnostic practitioner who has studied multiple spiritual and esoteric paths, and is a teacher of Heart Meditation and the 'Alchemy of Inner Silence'. The Soveida Ensemble will also be present, playing a long-forgotten form of ancient music, on some of the oldest instruments known to humankind, and helping to bring listeners into contact with their own heartbeat. Tickets for this event are £5. Book via: www.realitybehindcreation.eventbrite.co.uk

'The soul must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God. . . . It must learn not to be continually yearning to do something, to attack something, to accomplish something useful, but to play the divinely ordained game of the liturgy in liberty and beauty and holy joy before God.'

Romano Guardini

'Seasons of Change'

Reflection by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on Sunday 22nd September

They do say that no-one likes change except for a wet baby in need of a nappy change. I don't know about you but for me it's a bit more complicated than that. Change is fine with me, so long as I have chosen it. It is the changes that I haven't chosen and that life seemingly thrusts upon me, - those are the changes that I sometimes dislike and which, given half a chance, I shall resist. And as I look around our congregation here today at Essex Church I know how many people have had changes thrust upon them recently; in fact I would be surprised if there was a single person here with us today who has not faced some changes in the last twelve months – some of them joyous, some of them scary, some of them seemingly now completed, many still very much in transition, in progress, unfinished, incomplete.

And of course incompleteness is the stuff of life – the moment we are born we are on a journey through life, a journey that rolls and unfolds before us, a journey with unexpected twists and turns. A journey in which we get to make many choices, where we exercise our free will, a journey in which we are, for some of the time at least, conscious and aware. We humans have the ability to reflect on our existences and it is that I think that gives our lives both richness and poignancy. We are aware of time passing, we watch ourselves change and grow both physically and emotionally. We're born, we die, - and we know it.

The changes in our own lives are mirrored by the universe itself, with its myriad processes, all working to their own timescale – the spinning planets, the burning sun, mysterious black holes, weather changing, leaves on trees, fruits falling to the ground, roses fading, - each with its own path to follow, its own sequence of changes. Nothing stays the same be it at the planetary level or at the microscopic. G. K. Chesterton put it well I think when he wrote: "All conservatism (*meaning conservatism as a concept rather than referencing any particular UK political party*) is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change."

And a torrent of change is what we exist within. Alvin & Heidi Toffler wrote a book about this where they defined the term 'future shock' as "... *the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.*" and "*the dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future.*" The Tofflers are credited with first using the term 'information overload' – which is my permanent state now – I cannot possibly process and deal with all the information that comes my way.

I wonder if any of you have tried to buy a piece of electrical equipment recently – a television perhaps or something to play music on? Buying a TV used to involve a decision about how big a screen you wanted to buy and you had perhaps half a dozen choices. Standing in the midst of an electrical department recently it dawned on me that we are indeed in the midst of a new age – this is the era of 'home entertainment' in which every aspect has been made as varied as possible. And TVs and sound systems are just one tiny example of the complexity of our lives today. As the Tofflers predicted when they wrote their book *Future Shock* nearly 50 years ago now – the effect on human beings facing too much change too quickly is shock and that shock has to be worked through, processed if you like, be it a change of TV or a far more profound change in our personal lives.



The need to work through change has always been known to the wise. I remember many years ago studying the work of an anthropologist called Van Gennep. He coined the term 'rites of passage' to describe the ceremonies that tribal people used to mark a person's transitions through life – birth, coming of age, marriage and death. Van Gennep studied many pre-industrial societies and identified three key elements in any rite of passage. Firstly there is an acknowledgement of an ending. This must be properly marked in some ritualistic way – perhaps through grieving or through some symbolic letting go. The person under-going the rite of passage is then considered to be in a second phase, a time of transition, they are about to cross over a threshold – to leave the past behind and to step out into the unknown. This is sometimes described as a liminal state, a threshold, that border between the conscious and unconscious, like the shoreline of the sea, a moving, shimmering borderland; this is a place of uncertainty, it is dis-orientating by its very nature because the psyche is in the process of re-orientating itself, a bit like finding its way through a fog or mist.

When we are in the middle phase of a rite of passage, or indeed most changes in life, it may feel as if we are lost as we are letting go of our old sense of self. It can be exciting and exhilarating but also scary. It's a time when we cannot know anything for sure, everything is there to be re-examined, re-considered. Old routines fall by the wayside, uncertainty rules. And that liminal phase eventually leads on to the stage of transition itself in which the change is made and the new situation is recognised and marked. In an ancient initiation ceremony for example, held to mark a young person's acceptance into the adult group – the middle phase might well involve a period of isolation and hardship, a time when the young person is tested in some way. Only when the tests have been undergone can the transition to adult status be properly marked by the group. As I thought about changes and transitions this week, one realisation stood out for me. As a society we generally lack clear ways to mark our transitions. And the transitions that are noted the least are the private ones, the quite profound inner developments that we go through at various stages of life, the quiet letting go, the coming to terms with, the finding of necessary resolve to accept, to step into, a new phase of life that we wanted to resist, these inner changes need marking and honouring I believe.

There are some key spiritual teachings that are designed to help us through life's changes and transitions - we've heard them a hundred times before and I for one will need to hear them a hundred times more. I wonder if any of these three key teachings speak particularly to you today?

The first message is that struggle may contain something of value. Tough times are.... tough..... But they may bring blessings, new possibilities perhaps, fresh insights, valuable opportunities

(continues overleaf)

'Seasons of Change'

reflection by Sarah Tinker (*continued*)

for growth – what do they abbreviate them as? AFGOs – another flippin' growth opportunity. This is the hidden jewel of fairy tales – rewards may arrive after difficulties.

The second useful message in times of change is to savour the moment – when everything is in a state of flux, our senses are heightened and if we stay as much as we can in the present moment, it can be a very rich and creative time indeed.

The third spiritual teaching for times of challenge and change is my favourite – 'this too shall pass'. It's a helpful reminder that nothing stays the same – not us, not those around us, not our society, nor any situation in which we find ourselves. It's become a bit of a mantra for a few of my friends – and our stock response to the helpful reminder 'this too shall pass' is 'yes, it may get worse'. Yes it may get worse, and what we have to remind ourselves and our companions on life's journey is that we do generally have the resources to manage ourselves and our circumstances as life's changes come our way. If we pack up our rucksack for life's journey with these three teachings,

- Look for the blessing in every situation
- Savour the moment, stay as much as possible in the here and now
- And remember that this too shall pass.

then we are as well-equipped as we can be for the ever-spinning seasons of change that are our lives.

Unitarian Women's Group



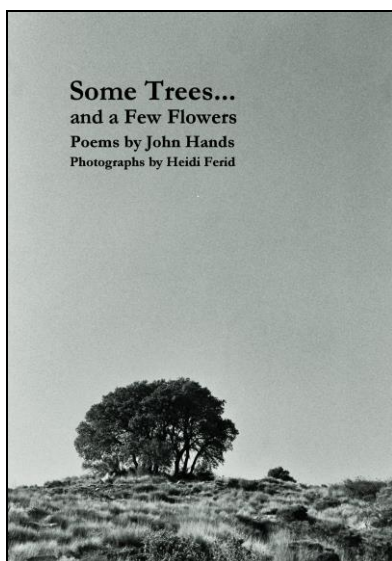
I've just returned from the Unitarian Women's Group (UWG) annual weekend up in Great Hucklow – an event I've been attending for many years. It's always good to see old friends again as well as enjoying having new attendees joining us. The topic of ageing was an interesting one for everyone – young and not so young! Do make a note of the dates of next year's conference and think about coming along on 23rd to 25th October 2020 when our theme will be 'Killing Eve' - a feminist perspective on the climate emergency facing our world.

Juliet Edwards

'I love the word *pause*. . . . Such a time represents a kind of time that is vanishing: a floating time, completely free of usefulness, suspended between wakefulness and sleep. This is the time zone of wonder, when we fall out of the habitual, the taken-for-granted, and are startled by what is.'

Noelle Oxenhandler

John and Heidi's Poetry Fundraiser



Thanks to all those who came to John and Heidi's poetry reading in October. Copies of 'Some Trees and a Few Flowers' are still available to buy. We raised £156 on the day – thanks to everyone for their generosity – and to Heidi and John for reading poems and providing refreshments.



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

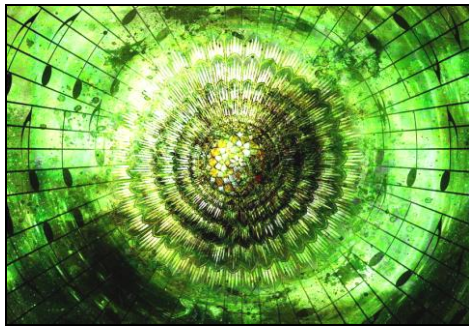
**Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 17th November, 15th December**

Midweek class - Wednesdays - 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 for drop-ins (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a 3-month period.

OneLight Gathering: 'Healing Through Song'



**Fridays 8th November and 13th December,
7–8.30pm, Here at Essex Church**

Healing Through Song! A Ceremony of sacred sound and singing in circle led by Onespirit Ministers Rev Alison Trower and Rev Natacha Ledwidge and The Heart Of London Threshold Choir. Come and sing or just come and absorb. All voices welcome! Please note doors are locked at 7.15pm. OneLight have raised over £300 this year for the local homelessness charity we support, GlassDoor.

Happy Café at Essex Church

Sundays 17th November, 15th December, 3-6pm



Happy Café Returns on November 17th and December 15th. Happy Café's first event here at Essex Church was very popular, bringing some 50 people from far and near together, including some of our congregation and friends, who listened to a talk, had conversations and coloured in dragons. Feel free to pop in or stay for the whole afternoon.

Happy Cafes are part of the Happy Café Network which is being set up by members of the Action for Happiness network. A Happy Café provides a warm welcome for anyone interested in happiness and wellbeing and encourages them to meet together for a drink and a friendly chat. In a Happy Café you can find inspiring and informative material, participate in events and meet people to discover new ways to improve wellbeing and help make others happier too. This Happy Café will be run and organised by two local residents of the Notting Hill area Nicola Webb and Mary Louise Morris. In January they ran a course at the church called Exploring What Matters, which was open to the whole community. Over a period of 8 weeks 20 people came to the church to reflect on what contributes to a happier and more meaningful life. Following excellent feedback about this course, Nicola and Mary Louise realised that there was a need for a regular place for people to meet and so the idea of setting up the café was born. "We are really over the moon that the church has offered us this space. We want to make this Café a space where everyone feels welcome, all ages and all backgrounds. We will be providing tea and cakes, leaflets and information, friendly conversation, as well a range of talks and activities, aimed at improving wellbeing. We are both passionate about and teach well-being and we will be offering our skills, talents and expertise. There will be gentle movement classes, art, creative workshops for adults/children, introduction to mindfulness meditation and relaxation classes. We will be sharing a lot of things that make us feel happy with anyone who comes."

LONDON Heart Meditation

*Using ancient rhythms,
played on a frame drum, the
classes will help you focus on your
heart beat, enabling you to start on a
journey of self-discovery, to uncover your true potential.*

Beginners Course in Heart Meditation

**Classes Held on Various Tuesdays
5th and 19th November 2019 from 6.30-7.30pm
Downstairs in the Library Here at Essex Church**

If you're interested in tapping into a lasting source of inner-peace, and beginning a journey of self-discovery then come and join this Heart Meditation course for beginners. Using ancient rhythms played on a frame drum, the teacher will guide you on a step-by-step process for quietening your mind and truly 'listening to your heart'. Held on various Tuesday evenings, from 6.30pm-7.30pm, your first class is free and donations are welcome thereafter.

**To confirm course dates and book a place email:
infoheartmeditation@gmail.com**

For more information visit: www.heartmeditation.eu



Lotus Life Skills Workshop

Shouvanaket, Cambodia

Julia has been working with this project for girls in rural Laos for five years. Kensington Unitarians funded a project that supplied the making of washable menstruation pads for girls in the village. Now, women in the village have taken over making the pads. This allows many girls to stay in school consistently.

*To be empowered to make good choices and build inner strength.
To build skills and confidence for looking to the future
and making school, job and career choices.*

This was the aim for our returning group of Grade 11 girls for the February 2019 *Lotus Life Skills* segment of the workshop at Thasano Rice Research Farm in Shouvanaket. This is my third year working with the older girls and I was thrilled to see how they were able to pick up easily from the previous workshop activities! It was remarkable to see how comfortable the girls were in returning and picking up the pace of learning from the prior year. The girls demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and interest throughout the week.

Many of our activities continued to focus on how to build self-identity, confidence and personal agency to aid the girls in their future choices. These efforts were supported by involving the girls in activities that highlighted their unique qualities and characteristics. I have continued to use the **Virtues** in guiding them with essential language to identify these qualities has been an on-going work. Using the specific virtues vocabulary and concepts such as strong, resilient, courageous, hard-working, kind...is about fostering the capacity to see their strengths and to build on them in all aspects of their lives. As they set goals for the future, such as where they wanted to see themselves in ten years' time, they were asked to identify those qualities or **virtues** that they had and that would serve them for attaining the goals. This building of confidence and agency...of being able to see that they can make independent choices for their lives is critical in a culture where so much is already determined for them. From this work, the girls created a personal motto to take forward. They also created self-portraits and identified their top three **virtues** that can guide them into the future.

An area of focus for the workshop this year was to create an emphasis on developing critical thinking skills. This linked with providing the girls with problem solving scenarios and asking them to work collaboratively in pairs or groups to come up with ideas or solutions to relevant issues. Critical thinking is crucial for making good decisions and choices, to be able to think



through issues and to follow through on goals or aims. Developing critical thinking is a life-long pursuit for all of us, and we noted that it is a skill that the girls need continual practice in. One way of fostering this is to consistently ask the girls probing questions in all of our activities. As part of the critical thinking process, we again, worked on establishing future goals and breaking them down to see how they might take steps to reach them.

One of the highlights of the week was hosting a women's panel of 'career experts' so that the girls could hear about how these women entered into their professions and how it was to work in that career. We were blessed, of course, to have Dr. Phoudalay who manages the rice research farm, a woman who works in IT, a teacher, a nurse, and a woman working in the tourist section. The girls spent time framing questions to ask the panel. They learned a great deal. Ms. Thipp (our amazing translator and co-teacher) and I then role played how to present oneself in a job or school interview. The girls prepared a bio on themselves and practiced interviewing each other. This culminated with some of the girls giving the interview in front of the whole group. Being a *Lotus Girl* was included as an essential part of who they were! There were many presentation and confidence building skills highlighted in this activity, that it should certainly be a part of our next workshop where other careers and vocations that are appropriate for them are included.

There is no doubt that these girls are developing in their confidence and independence. This was my third workshop with this group of girls, and I am amazed to see how they are flourishing and demonstrating growth and determination. Lotus is empowering these young girls.

Julia Alden, Learning Facilitator

fuse

FESTIVAL OF UNITARIANS
IN THE SOUTH EAST



Working From Within

FUSE Festival will be returning to the Chatsworth Hotel in Worthing in February 2020. Visit www.ldpaunitarians.org for all the details of the programme and how to book. There will be a wide variety of workshops to refresh your spirituality, develop our community, create social action, and inspire your creativity. FUSE is a good opportunity to meet Unitarians from congregations across the district – and beyond – with plenty of time for conversation and fellowship. The basic cost for attending is £280 for single occupancy. Some bursaries are available. Late booking fees apply after 31st December. Speak to Sarah, Jane or a committee member for more info.

West London GreenSpirit Group



We're busy planning a programme for our meetings in 2020, hoping to tie in with some key festivals in earth centred spirituality. Make a note in your diaries to join us if you can for a cosy and meditative winter solstice gathering on Saturday December 21st when we will create a simple ritual together and mark the setting of the sun. Bring lunch to share and we'll gather from 12.30 to 4.30pm. More details in next month's newsletter.

I've connected with a new Unitarian Extinction Rebellion Group on Facebook and was glad to provide overnight accommodation and showers for six people during the recent XR protests here in London.

If you would like to receive a fortnightly email, gathering together assorted items on environmental and sustainability issues just let us know.

A few recent tips - Tuesday 12th November 6-7pm at the Museum of London: Gresham College lecture '*Unlocking the Health Benefits of Nature*' (see www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/reconnecting-with-nature for details). The third in a series of seven 'Sustainable Planet' lectures may be found online www.gresham.ac.uk/series/sustainable-planet/ where videos of the first two are also available.

A recent Panorama programme on BBC1 will be available to watch on iPlayer for the next 11 months: '*Climate Change: What Can We Do?*' The Government has set a target of reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. Justin Rowlatt looks at what changes will have to be made to the way we live.

A small step many of us can easily take is to reduce washing machine and dishwasher temperatures. The church dishwasher works well on its eco setting – and a cycle takes only 25 minutes.

This GreenSpirit Group is open to everyone so do let friends and neighbours know that they are welcome to join us.

Sarah Tinker

Services at Essex Church in November



Sunday 3rd November, 11am 'All Souls'

Service led by Jeannene Powell

Our annual All Souls service, gives us the opportunity to remember those who are no longer with us. This service will include a simple candle lighting ritual.

Sunday 10th November, 11am 'Remembrance Sunday: Remembering'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A service of music and poetry reflecting warfare's complexities and its effect on ordinary people's lives, with music from our quartet of singers.

Sunday 17th November, 11am 'Tick Tock'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us for a mind bending exploration of time's place in human experience.

Sunday 24th November, 11am 'How We Spend Our Days'

Service led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

In this service we will reflect on the words of author Annie Dillard, who wrote: '*How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing.*' Do stay after the service for our Sunday Conversation on the month's theme of 'Time and Transience'.

