



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: February 2016

What's On...

Thursday 4th February, 7-8pm

'Heart and Soul'

'Spring's Return' led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 7th February, 11am-noon

'Benedict's Message for Today'

Led by Rev. David Francis Darling

Sunday 14th February, 11am-noon

'Giving In'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 14th February, 12.30pm

Small-Group Communion

Led by Elisa Melgosa

Sunday 14th February, 2.00-3.00pm

Nia Dance

 led by Sonya Leite

Sunday 21st February, 11am-noon

'Brush Up Your Shakespeare'

Led by Harold Lorenzelli

Sunday 21st February, 12.30-1.15pm

'Finding Your Voice'

Singing workshop with Margaret

Sunday 28th February, 11am-noon

'Life in Three Dimensions'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 28th February, 1.00-2.30pm

Conversation Group:

'What Acceptance Means to Us'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Dates for your Diary:

Thursday 17th March, 7.00pm

Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 24th March, 7.00pm

Tenebrae Gathering

Sunday 27th March, 12.30pm:

Congregational Lunch

Sunday 12th June, 12.30pm:

Essex Church AGM

In Our Element

A Message from our Minister

One cold afternoon in early January I had the good fortune to be by a lake in Norfolk. At the lakeside, standing in stillness, was a young heron. In the water was an otter, also young, swimming around playfully, seemingly unconcerned by my presence. Every so often it would dive beneath the surface and disappear for a while, its underwater route marked by a path of air bubbles. On surfacing again, the otter rolled on its back, made a grab for its own tail, floated for a while before diving once more.



Once hunted almost to extinction otters are returning to English waterways. They've even been spotted on the upper reaches of the Thames. But seeing one at play is still quite rare and for it to feel safe to swim openly in front of us seemed quite special an experience. The descriptive phrase that came to mind for me in relation both to the otter and the heron that day was 'in their element'. Their purposeful inhabiting of the present moment spoke to me. They were completely at home in that watery environment. In truth, I know their lives are short and driven by the need to survive, the most fundamental of impulses. Most human lives are so much more complex in their motivations. But their example that day led me to question my own life and I wonder if these questions speak to you in any way.

When do we, or do we not, feel ourselves to be 'in our element'?

Are there areas of life I may as well graciously withdraw from – knowing that they will never be right for me?

Are there areas of life where I might expand my horizons if I could feel more at home there?

In busy central London, a somewhat alien environment for many of us I suspect, where can we still feel most in our element?

What contribution might a spiritual community such as ours make to people's sense of belonging?

How best shall we encourage a sense of being in our element in 2016?

What might bring out the best in us in this year ahead?

I look forward to conversations with you about this and many other matters in 2016 and do let me know if you've ever watched a wild otter at play.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Farewell to Nia – For Now' * 'Giving in for Lent' – Email Course with Kensington Unitarians * 'My Trip to India' – Photographs by Melody * A New Seasonal Wall Hanging – Thanks to Sue * News from the Committee * Unitarian Youth Programme Weekend: 'A World of Colour' * Hucklow Summer School: 'This Changes Everything' * UU Leadership Institute Courses * Poem from John Hands * 'The Mystic's Path' reflection by Rev. Sarah Tinker and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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

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
London W8 4RT

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Planning Ahead for Easter



Tenebrae Gathering - Thursday 24th March at 7pm

This small group worship focuses on the themes of Holy Week and the events leading to Jesus' death on the cross. Tenebrae means shadows or darkness in Latin. We will meet in candle light and hear a series of readings taken mainly from the Gospels. The gathering will be followed by simple Middle Eastern refreshments.

Easter Service followed by Congregational Lunch on Sunday 27th March at 11am & 12.30pm

We will be having a bring-and-share lunch after the service on Easter Sunday. Please sign up to let us know what you'll bring.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

7 th February:	Ben Champion
14 th February:	Melody
21 st February:	Melody
28 th February:	Natasha Drennan

Coffee:

7 th February:	Liz Tuckwell
14 th February:	Sue Smith
21 st February:	Juliet Edwards
28 th February:	Melody

Greeting:

7 th February:	Annette Percy
14 th February:	Gina Bayley
21 st February:	???
28 th February:	Roy Clark

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

Unitarian Youth Programme: 'A World of Colour' Junior Weekend (for ages 7-11)



4th March, 6.30pm – 6th March, 2.00pm
At the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Join us for another action packed, fun packed weekend for the 7-11 age group. We are now taking bookings for Junior Weekend over the weekend 4-6 March at the Nightingale Centre, Derbyshire. The theme for the weekend is 'A World of Colour' and will be full of fun, games, activities, creativity and outdoor antics exploring the vibrant theme of colour.

For more information about this and other Unitarian Youth events see: www.unitarian.org.uk/get-involved/events

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 4th February 2015 from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This will be followed by refreshments and fellowship.

Our February gathering will be led by Sarah Tinker, who says: 'In a week that marks both the pagan festival of Imbolc and the Christian festival of Candlemas, come and join us for our own Unitarian honouring of the turning of the seasons. What seeds might you choose to plant for the year ahead?'

If you would like to know more about our 'Heart and Soul' gatherings email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



'Nobody gets everything he or she yearns for. I look at the world and see three sorts of people: those who dream boldly even as they realize that a lot of their dreams will not come true; those who dream more modestly and fear that even their modest dreams may not

be realized; and those who are afraid to dream at all, lest they be disappointed. I wish for more people who dreamed boldly and trusted their powers of resilience to see them through the inevitable disappointments.'

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

'Giving in for Lent' with Kensington Unitarians



It's traditional to give up something for Lent. This year Kensington Unitarians invite you to 'give in' instead...

Email Course for Lent

Let us know if you'd like to receive our weekly email of inspirational and challenging materials and activities, all of which will help us explore the theme of acceptance in many different areas of our lives. From body image to life story, from grief to the environment, from ageing to the unknown, we'll find out what the world's spiritual teachers have to say about acceptance and the power of surrender, learning to 'give in' to what is. We'll also have chance to ponder what we can't accept.

To join this activity please email
info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.
The seven weekly emails will start
on Ash Wednesday, February 10th.

Conversation Group: 'What Acceptance Means to Us' Sunday 28th February, 1.00-2.30pm

On Sunday 28th February, from 1.00pm to 2.30pm, we'll host a separate yet connected Conversation Group in which we'll consider *What Acceptance Means for Us*.

Raising Money for Water Aid

Throughout Lent we'll be collecting money for Water Aid, helping to provide clean drinking and better sanitation for all. Please ask if you would like a label for a collection jar at home.

In support of
WaterAid

Farewell to Nia - For Now



In February Sonya Leite will be running her last Nia dance classes here at Essex Church, at least for the time-being. Sonya has been offering these classes as part of our Kensington Unitarians programme for almost ten years now and her classes have been noted for their great music and Sonya's spiritual and fun approach to movement. Nia combines martial arts, modern dance arts and yoga in a workout set to music and if you've enjoyed Sonya's classes over the years you'll be able to find other great Nia teachers in London. But we hope Sonya brings more of her inspiration to us when she returns from her visit to India.

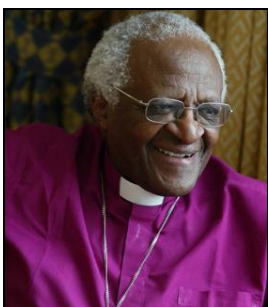


Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Last Class – Sunday 14th February, 2-3pm

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.



'Suffering can be transformed and redeemed. There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case. Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, brokenness, with all the worst that we can imagine. God created order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, and God can do so always, can do so now — in our personal lives and in our lives as nations, globally. The most unlikely person, the most improbable situation — these are all "transfigurables" — they can be turned into their glorious opposites. Indeed, God is transforming the word now — through us — because God loves us.'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

London District AGM

**Saturday 19th March, Croydon Unitarians,
1 The Flyover, Croydon CR0 1ER**



The AGM of the LDPA (London District Provincial Assembly – our local Unitarian district association) will be held on 19th March at our Croydon Church. If you are travelling by car, there is access off the westbound carriageway of the flyover only. The nearest train station is East Croydon (approx. 10 mins walk). People are invited to arrive from 1.30pm. Rev Martin Whitell, our District Minister, will give a short spiritual inspiration at 2pm. The meeting is forecast to finish not later than 4.30pm, followed by tea. Each congregation is entitled to two delegates at the AGM. Do get in touch with Sarah if you might like to attend this event.

Good Cause Collection of the Month

'Respond'

From Hurting to Healing



Collection on Sunday 28th February

Respond exists in order to: lessen the effect of trauma and abuse on people with learning disabilities their families and supporters. The charity aims to make a real difference to people with learning disabilities by providing effective and flexible support to help them to improve their lives.

Respond does this through providing psychotherapy for people with learning disabilities, advice and support for staff and families, training for carers and professionals, education for people with learning disabilities, influencing generic services in order to make their services accessible, influencing learning disability services to consider the psychological impact of living with learning disabilities, undertaking research and disseminating the findings.

For more information see: www.respond.org.uk

Previous Charity Collections:

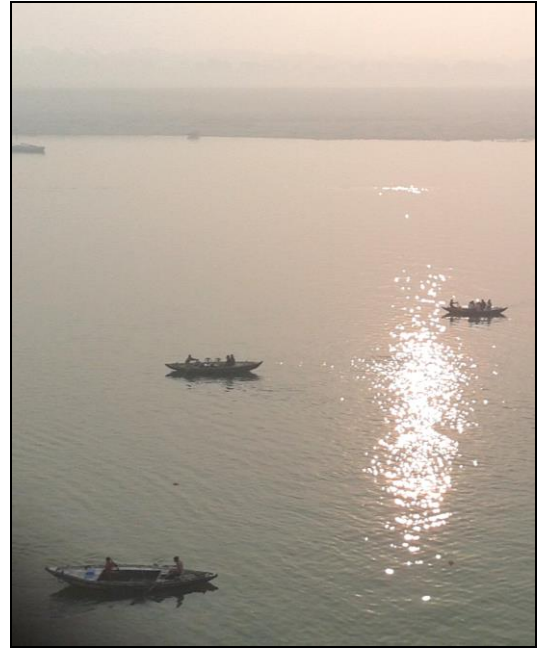
Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

November - The Kiloran Trust - £274.81

December – Glass Door (local homeless charity) - £374.93

January – Unitarian Youth Programme - £666.37

'My Trip to India' – Photographs from Melody



At the Millennium Dome



In this thronging
Bustling, bawling, almost joyful synthetic edifice
A multitude of wandering, ogling folk press forward
Eager to embrace some change of heart.
Hopefully they troop through each seductive section
"Body", "Mind", "Money", "Jewels", "Talk", "Time-keeping"
"Home Planet", "Journey", "Faith" and "Rest",
Each doubtful visitor seeking some sort of
Reassurance that all these marvels will not soon be sucked -
As were so many of their progenitors – into the
Vacuum of what is so blatantly excluded here,
The grisly ungluttable maw of total war.

For that has prompted or made imperative so many of our
Most urgent journeys: its envious antagonistic thrust has sped "Us"
To distant planets, its vast enabling wealth has made a
Monstrous mockery of "Body", "Mind", "Faith" and "Rest". So here
So trustfully, that not all these ogling multitudes could shed tears enough
To shrink or wash away, his dense appalling shadow broods over all:
The angry, vengeful co-habitant we dread to call our own.

John Hands
Sunday 20th August 2000

Essex Church Membership



Current members and friends of our congregation will shortly be hearing from Jane regarding the annual renewal of their membership. It's good practice to ask people to renew their membership in this way each year. We will contact you by email where this is possible. We'd be grateful if you could respond speedily as this makes it much easier to administer.

Our annual suggested subscription remains at £40 for members and £16 for friends. This payment is not a requirement but it in some way covers the cost of newsletter production and mailing and the annual quota payment we make for each member to our central General Assembly. Some people pay with a cheque, others put money in the collection during the year to cover this cost, or pay by standing order. We are particularly grateful to all those who make a contribution by monthly standing order. Monthly payments vary between £10 and £50 a month at present. Could you make a monthly contribution in this way?

Membership is a really valuable way to show that you support our congregation and are in accord with its liberal religious ethos. If you want to know more about what membership entails then do get in touch with our minister, Sarah Tinker, and have a chat.

One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Love'



Friday 12th Feb, 6.45pm for 7.00pm
(ends 8.30pm with sweet treats and tea)

Here at Essex Church

Please join us on 12th February for a warm, honest, playful evening exploring Love. February is known by many as the month of Love. Although in the West we tend to celebrate romantic love then, in our February One Light Spiritual Gathering we will celebrate and share Love in its most expansive understanding and expression. Join us at the start of the Valentine's weekend for a devotional evening of heart-beating, heart-feeling, heart-song.

For further information contact:
onelightlondon@gmail.com

'Finding Our Voice' Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall



Sundays 21st February and 20th March,
after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm

Margaret Marshall 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 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.

UU Leadership Institute



The innovation is online.
The transformation is in person.

I've just completed an online course in Healthy Leadership run by the Unitarian Universalist Association's Leadership Institute. They have many topics of interest to us, especially about membership, welcoming visitors, leadership for all, and making the most of small congregations. Why not take a look and see if any of these courses might be of interest to you and help develop your involvement with our congregation here at Essex Church. The course fees are low and we could help fund your participation.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Small Group Communion



14th February, 13th March 2016
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:

14th February – led by Elisa Melgosa
13th March – led by Jane Blackall

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

Hucklow Summer School 'This Changes Everything'

20-27th August 2016, The Nightingale Centre
Great Hucklow in the Peak District



Hucklow Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections. The core purpose of summer school week is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a carefully balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a wide variety of optional sessions including country walks, poetry, discussions and crafts, which participants might 'take home' and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week!

This year's theme is 'This Changes Everything'. In a series of daily theme talks our team of speakers will offer their perspectives on the subject of change. Amongst the aspects we may examine are: ways in which we may bring about positive change in our own lives, our relationships, our community, and the world at large; strategies for responding to and coping with the inevitable changes that all life entails; the impact of significant moments which prove to be life-changing; and those social, political and environmental changes taking place on a global scale which have an impact on all life. Our theme speakers for 2016 are **John Harley, Maria Pap, Jef Jones, Colleen Burns and Danny Crosby.**

There will also be a choice of morning engagement groups:

'A Change is as Good as a Rest'
with Jo O'Sullivan and Michael Dadson

'All Change!' with Elizabeth Birtles and Lindy Latham

'Taken at the Flood - Epiphany Moments'
with Margaret Kirk and Cody Coyne

'New Brooms?' with Katie McKenna and Robin Hanford

Children & Young People's Programme
led by Claire Maddocks and Izzy Rosenberg.

Basic Cost for Adults (place in a shared room) is £500. Some bursaries are available to help with the cost of attending and we would appreciate it if you would get in touch ASAP for further funding advice.

Please visit Hucklow Summer School website for further details (www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk) and an application form. **Applications are due by 11 April 2016.** Alternatively, telephone Janet Costley on 01732 464211 or email info@hucklowsummerschool.org.uk if you have any questions about the event.

Seasonal Wall Hangings: A Wonderful New Addition



Many thanks to Sue Smith for all her hard work and creativity in initiating, coordinating, assembling, and encouraging others to join in with the new autumn/winter panel for our seasonal-wall hanging (shown third from the right in the picture above). Thanks too to all those who embroidered leaves, raindrops, and snowflakes for it. There is always room for more wall-hanging panels. Ask Jane if you would like the instructions for making a wall hanging of your own or maybe starting another group project like Sue's.

Warden's Column

February is often a quiet month bookings-wise, but this year we have an interesting external event every week.

On Friday 5th, there's a Kundalini Yoga workshop with Guru Dharam. He has some keen followers in London who try and book in a teaching session with him each time he passes through. I don't have specific information about this evening's topic yet, but here are the contact details for their office (open Mon-Fri mornings): admin@i-sky.net / 01635 523900.

On Valentine's Day, Sunday 14th February, after the Nia class finishes, Illumina are holding one of their chanting events: again, no specific information yet, as they only just booked in - but here's the link to their website <http://www.illuminamusic.co.uk> and a brief description from there of what they do: *'A typical Illumina Live Mantra concert lasts for about 2 hours. There's group singing, dancing, chanting, laughing, silence, stillness and great relaxing and letting go! The feelgood factor is a major part of the Illumina live experience. The workshops are designed with one thing in mind - to get YOU to have a major meeting with Yourself without any veils, games and other politics we engage in to remain stubbornly unreal! To find out with tangible personal experience, the true nature of our eternal self which is always here now. All this in a gentle, heart infused space of love and acceptance of all that is within oneself. Oh! and there's singing!! Lovely Blissful Magical Singing! Workshops are usually 'bring a dish to share', 'bring a cushion to sit on' and 'wear comfy clothes' style affairs.'*



The following week, on Saturday 20th Feb, there's an all day workshop on Intuitive Feng Shui, organised by "Alternatives" of St James, Piccadilly. More information here <http://www.alternatives.org.uk/event/feng-shui-secrets-inspired-living>.

Finally, from 2-4.30pm Wednesday 24th, the National Forum for Spirituality and Mental Health is holding an open conference on Suicide, Mental Health and Young People. They have a really interesting panel of young health professionals from different faiths (a Muslim, a Quaker, a Hindu and a Christian) plus two speakers from the Samaritans. They ask for a donation of £6 if you can afford it (we give them free space to hold a conference here each year). Here's their website link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/suicide-mental-health-and-young-people-tickets-20805670320>.

Jenny Moy

'Timeless Waves, Arms of Rock' Retreat



Pilgrimage to Inishmore, Aran Islands Ireland - 16-25 July 2016 with John Harley and Lindy Latham

Our retreat will include eight days of creativity, walks, exploration of ancient sites, meditation, storytelling, living mindfully, reflecting together and relaxing. Each day there will be time for group workshops and activities, sharing and free time. We will start each day with a sharing circle after breakfast so we can deepen our experiences and support each other. Each day will involve shared activities for all the group and free time for your own exploration or relaxation. People of all faiths and none are welcome. No previous experience of retreats or art necessary.

Accommodation: Mainistir House is a simple and homely hostel offering dormitory style beds and a few doubles/singles. It's a fun place to stay with very good vegetarian food. For those wishing for a little more luxury and space there is a B&B with en- suite rooms just over the road.

Costs: There will be a non – refundable deposit of £150 - this covers the leaders' expenses and materials – deadline for this is 1 April 2016. (10% discount for deposits received before 1 January). Flights from London to Shannon from around £75. Transport from Shannon to Inishmore via bus and ferry - around £35. 8 nights in Mainistir House – including breakfast and evening meal - £225. Retreatants to pay for their own flights and to book accommodation directly with hostel or the B&B after paying the deposit to the leaders. Retreatants may want to bring a little extra money for possible bike hire, a "pub" meal Irish style, and of course, the inevitable tempting tourist shop full of wonderful Aran knitwear!

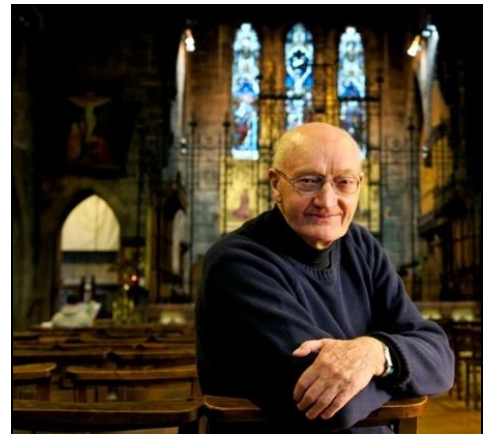
Booking form available at www.beherecreate.co.uk

We hope you can join us! Any questions at all? email Lindy at lindy@belindalatham.co.uk or John at jharley@unitarian.org.uk or if you would prefer to speak to us: Lindy – 0117 950 7906 and John at 0208 670 9280



Worth a Listen

Richard Holloway on Radio 4



I don't know if many of you happened to listen to any of the recent Radio Four programmes in which Bishop Richard Holloway spoke of issues of ageing and death. Entitled '*Three Score Years and Ten*', these five short recordings delved deep into issues of interest to us all – how to live well knowing that we are mortal. You can still hear them on BBC iPlayer and I recommend them.

Here's what the BBC wrote about the programmes: 'Bishop Richard Holloway, with the aid of great poets and writers, looks back on his life now that he has passed his allotted three score years and ten and wonders what his decreasing future holds and how best to cope with it.

He reflects on the way time steals everything from us - "our youth, those we love and last of all it comes for us". What disconcerts him most is how the "unstaying feet of time" seem to be speeding up as they pursue him towards his end and he wonders if Time is trying to cheat him of what is left by fast-forwarding it like this.

The positive side to this apparent increasing acceleration of his life is that it has made Richard determined to cherish what remains. Not to moan about the cold days and long dark nights of a Scottish winter, but to savour them. Not to grieve over the fact that there may not be many springs and summers left, but to heed the words of Dylan Thomas and learn to catch and sing the sun in flight before, for him, it sinks forever.

He admits, "Time has been generous to me so I can bear its impatience now to see me gone, but it doesn't stop me wondering and obsessing about time itself and the way it devours all its children." Now he is determined not to worry about what comes next but to live life to the full'.

David Talbot

'The Mystics' Path'

Address by Rev Sarah Tinker from 17th January 2016

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

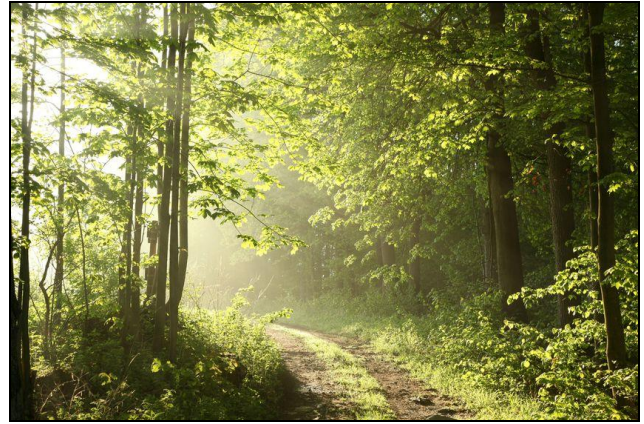
The first line of the hymn we've just sung – 'a core of silence breathes beyond all words' seemed a good choice for our service theme of the mystic's path, It expresses one of the essential features of a mystic approach to life – that there are some aspects of existence which cannot fully be expressed through words. They are experiences, which point to another way of knowing and being in this world, experiences which point to the possibility of realities beyond the life we know and recognise. The task of words is to discern, to clarify, to make distinctions between this and that – yet we know, don't we, the limitations of words to convey our experiences, our thoughts, our feelings.

Human existence and the workings of the universe in which we exist are filled with mystery and I don't know if this applies to you as much as it does to me – but the longer I live the more I realise how little I know. Our lives are shaped by mystery. From birth to death and all that lies beyond and within, our creativity and capacity to love, our sense of justice as we witness the sufferings of others and our striving to make sense of our own struggles and pain – all these are part of that mysterious realm.

Carl McColman, Christian contemplative and author, writes: "And even though we live in a world that tries to manage or at least contain the mysteries — hiding birth and death away, medicating the suffering, putting creative folks on pedestals, and settling for a legal system that reduces ethics to a conflict between competing interests — despite all our efforts to control every aspect of our lives, the mysteries are never very far away. They crop up when we least expect them — when we meet someone new and fall in love, when an old friend dies suddenly, when a sudden flash of inspiration leads to the creation of an artistic masterpiece. We never know — literally from one moment to the next — when the mysteries will crack our safely constructed lives wide open. And we never know whether they will fill us with joy or with pain. But they always fill us with wonder."

These words – mystery and mysticism – evolve from the same root in Greek language. They remind us that our minds, clever though they are, cannot understand or explain everything. There is a realm which lies beyond. And when words fail us, we humans reach instead to symbols, stories, art, music – to attempt to describe that which is seemingly inexpressible in ordinary language. Life's mysteries fuel our human creativity.

When it comes to talking about mysticism here today I'm aware of the limitations of my own language. I also know that the very word mysticism has been used negatively to describe all sorts of hocus pocus. But I think it's a word worth reclaiming. We heard Rumi's poem earlier on where a chickpea cries out to the cook who is boiling the pot, but eventually surrenders to the experience of transformation. When Michaela first read that poem to me all those years ago it was to help me through a tough time, a time when life wasn't going the way I thought it ought to go. In some ways aren't we all chickpeas in the pot, all destined to be mashed into hummus! In 21st century Britain some of us are privileged enough to imagine for a while that we're in control of our own destinies, we think we can choose the course of our lives. But the mystics are there to remind us that our illusions of control are simply illusions or at best a temporary reality. Our setbacks, difficult though they can be, may also be a source of self-knowledge for us, a potential path for growth.



Life's mysteries can be our teachers if we open ourselves and allow their teachings to work on us. When the chickpea surrenders to the experience of being boiled it is submitting to the process of softening. Does that ring bells with you as it does with me? Our hearts may soften or harden in response to life experiences. Softening keeps us connected with all of life, hardening isolates us. Another word you come across when reading about mysticism is gnosis – gnostics - meaning those who seek knowledge, deep knowledge. Next Sunday we have a group of gnostic musicians and meditators coming to join our service and to lead us in their open heart meditation practice. I wonder if there are areas in your life right now, as there are in mine, where a softer and more open heart might help towards a greater understanding, both of self and others.

Ever since my early days of studying world religions I've been interested by the way that all world religious paths contain elements of mysticism that transcend any of the particularities of a specific religion. Mystics, be they Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Hindu or pagan or Buddhist have much in common. Today we can only touch on a few of those common elements. The first is the message of the chickpea that - we can learn from life by surrendering to what is. We are not so much life's victims but rather its students.

Another shared teaching from all mystic paths is that we are all of a piece us humans, though we spend so much of our thinking time exploring our differences from one another. Yet in truth we are all part of the whole, as Joyce Rupp so beautifully described in our reading earlier on – the whole of humanity staring at the same sky in a 'dance of oneness'. The Sufi holy fool Mulla Nasrudin can tell us more. You may recall Nasrudin's love of donkeys and so it was that he visited the local donkey market one day where buying and selling was at its height, the market square packed with peasants discussing the relative merits of their beasts of burden. In the midst of the throng, Nasrudin heard a puffed up stallholder confirm that there were only donkeys and peasants present at the market, nothing else.

"Are you a peasant?" asked Mullah of the stallholder.

"Me? No..."

"Well, say no more!" laughed Nasrudin.

We are all donkeys or peasants in the market place of life, busily trying to make ourselves different from the rest, thinking we're special. The mystic path calls on us to hold our illusions of separateness lightly and to recognise that one life pumps through all living beings, indeed through all of existence.

'The Mystics' Path' *(continued)*

In days gone by our Unitarian faith was noted for its rational approach to matters religious, yet it has always had a mystical element interweaving with the rational. This is perhaps because Unitarians encourage one another to explore their direct experiences in life, to trust and value these experiences. And in the very name Unitarian is the message of unity, of the oneness of all existence.

Alice Walker in her book *The Color Purple* has a character called Shug who expresses this sense of unity so well. She's talking here about her ideas of God and how they've developed from a sense of a separate entity – a God figure, into an essence of divinity found in all existence: *"My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it."*

Alice Walker's description captures something for me of the joy I've experienced when I realise that there's more to life than I'll ever know or understand, when I sense the barriers between me and others, between me and the natural world, between me and the whole of existence slipping away. And I know from conversations that we've had here with Kensington Unitarians over the years that many of you have had similar experiences, similar intuitions that life is filled with mysteries we will never comprehend. Just occasionally we receive a glimpse reminding us that there are realities beyond our own everyday consciousness. Let's share those glimpses with one another in our conversations here with one another and remind each other that we are indeed in this thing called life together.



Sufi master, Hazrat Inayat Khan wrote this mystic's prayer:

*Give me, Oh God,
Deep thoughts
High Dreams
Few Words
Much Silence
The narrow path
The wide outlook
The end in peace.
Amen.*

News from the Committee



Committee Members: Gina Bayley, Roy Clark, Natasha Drennan (treasurer), Carole Grace, Juliet Edwards (chairperson), Heidi Ferid, Harold Lorenzelli.

Our church committee met on January 21st for the first of seven meetings scheduled for this year. We discussed our annual membership renewal process and will soon be asking people to confirm their membership renewal for the year ahead.

We are always interested to hear ideas about the work of our community so do feel free to talk to any committee member or church member of staff. And we're even more interested if you've an idea that you want to tackle yourself or with a small group. We may have resources that could help you.

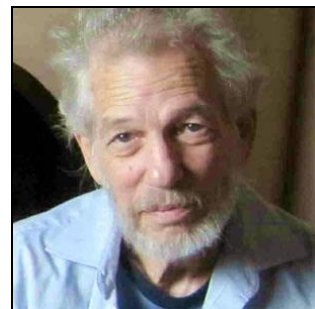
We were delighted to hear that the Emergency First Aid at Work course offered in November had been a success and that Juliet Edwards, Jenny Moy and Sarah Tinker are now certificated emergency first aiders. A new first aid box has been bought and placed up high above the oven in the kitchen.

Look out for the new library curtains arriving soon, paid for by several generous donations. Thank you.

Our meeting considered priorities for the year ahead and agreed Sarah's proposal to concentrate on urgent building maintenance tasks – especially waterproofing the roof, re-leading the back garden wall and finding a suitable new heating system for our worship space. We recognise that none of these are straightforward tasks and would be grateful for any support from people who have any experience in such areas.

We commiserated with Jane who has been experiencing computer problems for a while now. We must be patient if some tasks are taking a little longer than usual. Maintaining our website, newsletter and contact lists is quite a task.

'Nothing is more natural than grief, no emotion more common to our daily experience. It's an innate response to loss in a world where everything is impermanent. We don't know what to do with our pain, and we never have. We have been told to bury our feelings, to keep a stiff upper lip to 'get over it and get on with our lives,' as though loss were not an inevitable part of life. As a result, our sorrow goes unattended and manifests itself in many unexpected ways.'



Stephen Levine (1937-2016)

Services at Essex Church



Sunday 7th February, 11am – ‘Benedict’s Message for Today’

Service led by Rev. David Francis Darling

We are delighted to welcome back our old friend David to lead worship at Essex Church in February. David says: ‘Benedict of Nursia wrote his Rule for monastics in the 6th century but his ideas are surprisingly modern and still have something to say to everyone in the 21st century.’

Sunday 14th February, 11am – ‘Giving In’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A service to mark the start of Lent and to present a Unitarian approach to Easter’s sacrificial theme. Rather than giving up something for Lent why not join our Lent acceptance group (more details inside the newsletter on page three).

Sunday 21st February, 11am – ‘Brush Up Your Shakespeare’

Service led by Harold Lorenzelli

Great authors encourage a dialogue within ourselves when we read their works. The goal is a greater understanding of what it is to be a human being. This morning we will be looking at what such works can teach us about ourselves and each other in our search for how to live the good life.

Sunday 28th February, 11am – ‘Life in Three Dimensions’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Today we’ll be celebrating sculptures in public spaces and their creators’ ability to express our human condition in physical form.



‘Rumi Night’ Concert

Saturday 20th February, 7-9.30pm

At St. John’s Church, Lansdowne Crescent,
Notting Hill, London W11 2NN



It was good to welcome The One Heart Ensemble of musicians from Brighton and London meditators Mehrdad Noorani and Beverley Eve to our service in January. We recommend their charity concert on February 20th at St John’s Church in Notting Hill.

Mehrdad and Beverley brought these words with them to start our service, from the Gulistan of Saadi which can be found carved on the wall at the United Nations Human Rights building:

“Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain”.

Rumi Night

An Evening of Rumi’s Poetry and
Sufi Music Concert by Caravan of Love,
Ensemble Louly, Mostafa Abbaszadeh and
Mohammad Jaberi

20. Feb. 2016
7.00 - 9.30 pm London
icc_contact_uk@yahoo.com

£10
entry

St John’s Church, Lansdowne Crescent, Notting Hill, London, W11 2NN
seats can be book via : <http://interculturalcentre.eventbrite.co.uk>

All proceeds from the concert will go to charity