

The L D P A

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LANTERN

The quarterly magazine of the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches—Soon to be on the Web at www.unitarian.info



'Who do you think you are?' was the theme of the Blah Funday at Rosslyn Hill Chapel on Saturday 21 May. Children aged 6 to 12 threw themselves into a funtastic day of games, music making, art and drama, building up to an entertaining performance in front of parents. Following the success of our Blah weekend in 2004 we returned to the same multi activity adventure venue, The Arethusa Centre, on 16-18 September for more high ropes, high jinks, watersports, orienteering and marine flavoured ghost stories. We all survived to tell the tale. Many thanks to Liz Hills and Brenda Knopf for their tireless energy and to the LDPA, The Wood Green Trust, The Hackney Trust, SUA and Doris Frizel for funding us. Look out for our next Blah weekend pencilled in for July 2006. (Photos are of Blah Funday at Rosslyn Hill Chapel.)



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No. 649091 Registered Address: Essex Hall, 1/6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY Registered Charity No. 233390

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Billingshurst, W Sussex Tel.: 01276 503
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6UF Tel: 01273 696 022

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Hamond Hill, New Rd., Chatham, Kent
ME4 6AP Tel: 01634 847 407

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Unitarian & Free Christian Church,
1 The Croydon Flyover, Croydon,
Surrey CR0 7HB Tel: 020 8667 1681

Ditchling Old Meeting House,

Ditchling,, W Sussex Tel: 01273 842359

Dover Unitarian Church, Adrian St.,
Dover, Kent Tel: 01304 206 601

Enfield & St Albans Friends Meeting
House, St. Albans Tel: 01707 872 267

Godalming Unitarian Chapel,

Meadow, Godalming, Surrey GU7 3JB
Tel: 01483 421905

London Golders Green

Golders Green Unitarians, 31 1/2
Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS
Tel: 020 8455 5000

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Hampstead, London NW3 1NG
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Hastings

Unitarian FC Church, South Terrace,
Hastings, E Sussex Tel: 01424 432 135

Horsham Unitarian Church, Wor-

thing Rd., Horsham, W Sussex RH12
1SL Tel: 01403 263 377

London Islington

Unity Church, Upper St.,
Islington, London N1
Tel: 020 7226 0276

London Kensington Essex Church, 112

Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8
4RT Tel: 020 7221 6514

Lewes

Westgate Chapel, High St., Lewes, E
Sussex BN7 1XH Tel: 01273 471 149

London Lewisham The Meeting

House, 41 Bromley Rd., Catford,
London SE6 2TS Tel: 020 8695 0389

Maidstone

Unitarian Church, Market Buildings,
Earl St., Maidstone, Kent ME14 1HP
Tel: 01795 470 837

London Newington Green

Newington Green Church, 39 Newing-
ton Green, Stoke Newington, London
N16 9PR Tel: 020 8809 1138

Northiam Unitarian Chapel, Dixters Rd.,

Northiam, E Sussex Tel: 01424 202 552

Reading Reading Fellowship meetings
at a central venue Tel: 0118 941 6976

Richmond Richmond & Putney Unitar-

ian Church, Ormond Rd., Richmond,
Surrey TW10 6TH Tel: 020 8332 9675

London & South East Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

Sevenoaks

Old Meeting House, Bessels Green,
Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2PX
Tel: 01732 458 234

Southend

Unitarian Meeting House, Grange
Gardens, Southend-on-Sea, Essex
Tel: 01702 478 541

London Stratford

Unitarian Christian Church, West
Ham Lane, Stratford, London E15
Tel: 020 8534 3646

Tenterden

Old Meeting House, Ashford Rd.,
Tenterden. Kent Tel: 01424 202552

Watford Unitarian Fellowship meeting in

Friends' Meeting House, Church Rd.,
Watford, Herts Tel: 01923 232 110

Worthing Unitarian Fellowship

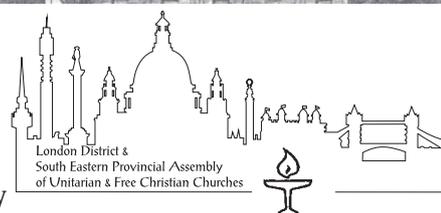
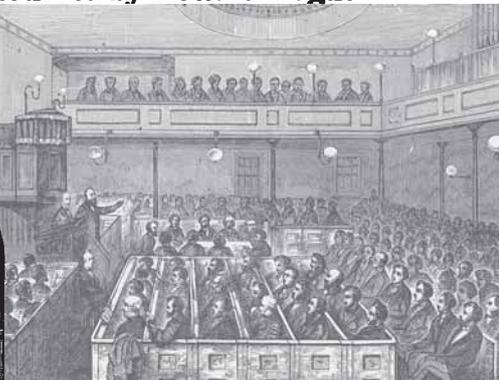
meeting at Friends' Meeting House,
34 Mill Rd., Worthing, W Sussex
BN11 5DR Tel: 01903 202477

WINTER QUARTERLY

Saturday, 21 January 2006

“Roots That Sustain”

A UNITARIAN HERITAGE Trail for London
-- a virtual tour led by Howard Hague



1.30 pm—Service led by
The Rev Brian Cockroft
President (2005-2006) of
the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

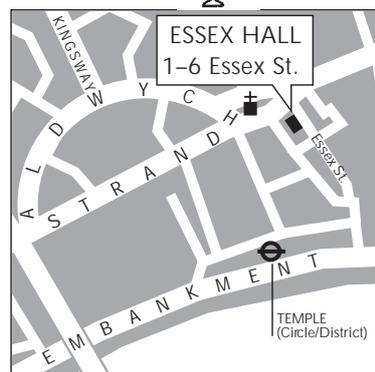
2.15 pm—
Refreshments & Fellowship

3.00 pm—Roots That Sustain

(All are welcome) at **ESSEX HALL**

1-6 Essex Street, London
WC2R 3HY

Nearest Tube Station is Temple
For more information, contact Rev. Steve Dick, District Minister on (020) 8407 1135



LIFE IS BLUE'S GREATEST SPIRITUAL TEACHER

an address by the Rev Feargus O'Connor

There is no one quite like Rabbi Lionel Blue, the Reform rabbi known to millions of radio listeners for his down-to-earth spirituality, warm humanity and a wisdom rooted in his experience of real life. As Lionel himself writes: "My greatest spiritual teacher has been Life itself. Not exotic life in a monastery high up in the Himalayas but ordinary life in London today" – in near-by Finchley in fact.

"Some of life's lessons have been painful...I have pondered on life's lessons on the tops of buses, in railway stations, at parties and when sitting silently in empty chapels, churches and synagogues. And in the silence I have become aware of a life beyond, pulsating beneath the surface of this one."

Lionel has published a new autobiography *Hitchhiking to Heaven* in which he gives us a 'warts and all' account of his eventful life, with all its struggles and setbacks, joys and triumphs, and his spiritual journey from the Jewish East End of his youth to his present position as a Jewish sage loved by millions for his warm humanity, honesty and vulnerability.

Lionel writes of ordinary everyday spirituality and makes religion sound relevant and even inviting. He tells about his "holy places" and among these is the local supermarket. Ten minutes of shopping and mild consumerism quieten him, he tells us, as much as meditation. In supermarkets he comes across ordinary people, such as harassed housewives, old ladies and a whole variety of people – the thoughtful to the thoughtless – from whom he learns about reality-based religion.

He sees a man producing a credit card at a "cash only" queue, an old lady counting out a mountain of small change in the fast check-out and not realis-

ing the fury she is silently causing, a kind woman who sees Lionel is in a hurry and lets him take her turn in the queue, a mother picking up items which have tumbled from Lionel's trolley and a pensioner pointing to a notice and thoughtfully telling him if he waits five minutes more he can get reduced price cakes and biscuits. He also enjoys reading the notices on packets and their claims of how healthy and wholesome these products are.

This puts him in mind of his own merchandise: religion. Lionel wonders whether he can make such reliable and precise claims. He doesn't want to claim too much, he tells us, because for Jews of his generation there were too many unanswered prayers on the way to the gas chambers. So what can he claim are the benefits of genuine religion?

"It has taught me other people are as real as me and God loves them as much as me, so I mustn't manipulate them. It's turned the pain and problems of my life into compassion and pity for myself and others, not anger. It helps to release me from worldly success and failure. It puts me in touch with a 'beyond life' which props me up and takes away the fear of death. It's given me purpose. It's taught me to trust. Though it's illogical, I've found some sort of inner divine friend. It sounds more than I thought. I'm really rather surprised how many goodies I can list on my religious package."

Lionel ends these reflections with a characteristic joke about the beggars who have also made the connection between piety and consumerism and who have transferred their attentions from churches and synagogues to supermarkets. He tells the story of one lady accosted by a beggar who exemplifies the good Jewish virtue of chutzpah. The woman offers him a small bar of choco-

late and he examines it.

"The Belgian ones are better."

"And so is the price", exclaims his indignant benefactress.

"Believe me, lady", he tells her, "it's worth the extra".

In Lionel's writings all human life is there and his spirituality is leavened with his inimitable Jewish humour. In discussing serious, not to say grave and controversial, religious subjects he makes full use of this wonderful humour. Speaking about unanswered prayers he tells another funny story. A young Jewish man rings up his mother to tell her he is in love again.

"Who's the girl?" the mother asked.

"Her name is Mary Magdalene O'Kennedy", he sighs.

"Mary Magdalene O'Kennedy! How can you mention such a name to your Yiddishe momma?" she sobs and hangs up.

Some months later he nervously calls his mother again.

"I'm in love again", he tells her.

"What's her name?" asks his mother, suspiciously.

"Miss Goldberg", he replies.

"Ah, Goldberg, that's a fine Jewish name", exclaims his mother. "God has answered a Jewish mother's prayers!"

"That's nice, mom", he answers, "and her first name's Whoopi!"

Even on the subject of Israeli and Palestinian counter claims to the "Holy Land", Lionel can tell a good joke which makes us think. In our reading *Quality Religion* Lionel writes approvingly of the wisdom of Rabbi Hillel, who, unlike the strict and inflexible Rabbi Shammai, listened sympathetically to his opponents and demonstrated qualities of tolerance and sympathy for rival points of view. As Lionel points out, there is no shortage of religion in the Middle East but what he asks for, and what we all so desperately need, is authentic religion, not the second-rate, ersatz variety which makes matters worse.

In addition to Rabbi Hillel's humanity and tolerance, Lionel tells us, we need humour to prick our own pretensions and see ourselves in proper perspective. So Lionel tells us the story of how Moses was approached by God over his choice of the so-called "Promised Land".

When God asks Moses what land He should promise him, Moses overcome by awe, stammers: "Ca - Ca - Ca -"

"Ah, you want Canaan", interrupts God kindly. "Well, that's nothing to write home about, so I'll promise it to you...."

But what Moses really wanted was of course "C-C-California"!

Lionel heard this joke from an Israeli and wonders whether his Palestinian friends can show equal good humour in the face of these intractable political and religious problems of the Middle East. We cannot but agree with Lionel that humour should be an essential trait of any truly religious person, we should see all these matters in the larger perspective and our own petty concerns as part of the wider picture. Humour, as Lionel shows, can bring out genuine our humanity and empathy for others.

He is conscious of his own strengths and weaknesses and shows us that real religion is about appreciating the richness and variety of the human character and not an artificial construct, an orthodox religious picture which does not really carry conviction in our hearts.

Lionel has known a whole gallery of colourful characters and among my personal favourites is the German Jewish nun, Charlotte Klein or Sister Louis Gabriel, her adopted name as a Roman Catholic nun of the Order of the Sisters of Zion. Sister Lottie, as Lionel called her, saw her synagogue set on fire in Berlin, got married, became a nun and went to teach Arab children in Jerusalem. When Lionel first met her she was severely dressed in the full habit of her order and looked very formidable. When he next met her, Lottie seemed like a thoroughly modern nun. She

was stylishly puffing a cigarette in a long holder and knocking back a whisky "on the rocks".

"Lionel, why don't you have a highball?" she asked.

Amazed, Lionel asked her where her habit had gone and she replied that it was used only on demonstrations. In short, Lottie was a real tough cookie.

"She taught me that religion was not about security or popularity. It was about courage and witnessing to the truth as you knew it...She was the only person I've ever met who could interrupt a sermon and say, 'Father, this is not so!' - something I've always wanted to do but never dared."

At her Requiem Mass, conducted by Jesuits and Dominicans, among those present were rabbi friends, who said Kaddish for her, as well as drug addicts, alcoholics and many others whom she had befriended and who mourned her with such genuine emotion.

As Lionel shows us, real religion is often the sort which orthodox religious institutions fail to provide truth seekers and those in spiritual need. Authentic religion deals with the messy business of our human relationships, our needs and desires, our all too fallible ways of dealing with everyday feelings and events.

There is a raw honesty about the religion of Lionel Blue. He says that all too often big religions are competitive like businesses and in their branding lose sight of the individual. This Lionel never does. When he was asked about his favourite virtue he chose honesty for it has forced him to solve his own spiritual and moral problems and not cover them up. He believes in being honest to himself and honest to God. He doesn't rate religious role playing, values genuine doubt (it's no wonder he's so popular with Unitarians and he feels at home with us) and in this way his religion remains authentic and ever fresh.

"In religion, as in a good marriage, you divorce, rediscover and

remarry your partner many times."

For Lionel religion has been about his understanding of God, finding his true inner voice and the shaping of his relationships with his parents, his lovers, his friends and even his dog, Re'ach, one of his greatest teachers, as we heard earlier.

"That goodness we all serve is a great mystery. For some, like me, it's personal and has a human face. For you, maybe, it's the unexpected resources of love and service inside you. We only begin to understand it as we practise it."

The picture of his life with his mother, aunt and partner Jim, living together in the suburbia he once so loathed, shows us this human face of love. To his mother's question "Lionel, will all that religion make you nicer?" he answers: "Religion can make you very nice or very nasty. I think it's made me nicer than I would have been without it." How wise and what better test can there be?

SEXUAL DIVERSITY WORK-SHOP

Meadow Unitarian Chapel,
Godalming

Saturday, 14th January, 2006
10:30 - 4:00

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker,
Kensington Unitarians
(member of former Sexual Orientation
Equality Group)

Bring own lunch. Drinks provided

Registration - £ 10, payable to
Meadow Unitarian Chapel

Registrations & questions:
Rev. David Usher

5 Westerham Rd, Sevenoaks, Kent
TN13 2PX
01732 465248

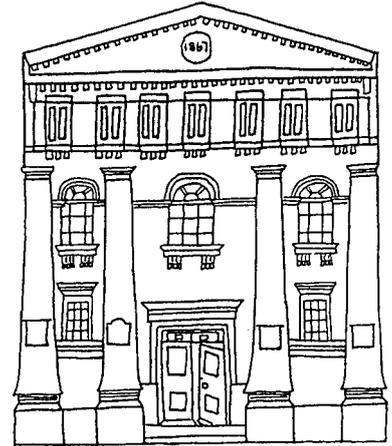
Sunday Morning with the Unitarians *Revisited*

The article from the Hastings & St Leonards Observer of 25 August 1894 which appeared in the last issue of The LDPA Lantern is interesting on several fronts. The language in which it's written is ornate and the whole is far too long; the message could have been presented in less than half the length. 20th century newspapers aimed at getting the message over in a limited number of words, but this was not the case in the 19th century. People wanted a good long read in their newspapers, be they local or national. There was no duty on newspapers after the 1850s, printing and paper were cheap and they were the main means of communication; a very different world to that of today.

Now to the ministers of the church the correspondent was writing about - in 1873 or 1874, it was Mr Briggs. Rev John Atkinson Briggs (1816-1891) had been educated at University College London and Manchester College, and had been a minister from 1841-1844, then at Bessels Green 1851-1861 and finally at Hastings and Battle from 1871-1880 when he moved to Hindley in Lancashire where he died. Briggs is a bit of a shadowy figure. He preached at Unitarian chapels in the Lancashire area, and his obituarist in the

Inquirer in a sense over egged the pudding - "He was faultlessly affable and bland in conversation and greetings. His face was invariably radiant with cheerfulness. He was exceedingly chatty." We could conclude from this that he was an empty windbag, but no doubt this was not the impression the writer intended to convey.

Then we come to Mr Preston - this is the Rev Samuel Gardner Preston (1857-1925). Why did the correspondent feel the need to visit the Hastings chapel after a gap of twenty years? This was no doubt because SG Preston had just become minister, and was probably the talk of the churches in the town. He had been a Congregational Minister for several years, and had 'come across' as the phrase then in use put it, to the Unitarians. No induction packages then, they just preached in the first instance at one of our smaller congregations, got appointed and went on from there. In August 1894 he had just arrived and stayed until 1907. He then had a most unusual appointment for four years at a liberal English-speaking congregation at Hamburg in Germany. After a ministry at Warwick until 1918 he returned to the London area with a ministry at Acton and Kilburn, Unitarian causes long dis-



appeared, until his death. He was a much more compelling figure - 'an interesting speaker who possessed a charming blend of humour with his seriousness, and an impressive preacher, affectionately regarded by both his people and fellow ministers.' While in Hastings he was President of the Liberal Association as well as an elected member of the Board of Poor Law Guardians, so a notable figure in the town.

So I've dug out some detail which hopefully will make the original report come a little more alive, and bring back a little more of Unitarianism in 19th century Hastings. Incidentally all the other people mentioned in the article had an obituary in the Inquirer.

Alan Ruston



Members of the Watford Fellowship translate their beliefs into action and demonstrate their commitment to a fairer world by supporting Amersham-based charity WORKAID. WORKAID is a national charity started in 1986 by an ecumenical house group. They help alleviate poverty in African urban and rural areas by supporting educational and vocational training schemes with the supply of second hand tools, sewing machines and typewriters refurbished in their Amersham workshop. Watford Unitarians are pictured here donating haberdashery to be packed with the re-conditioned sewing machines.



News & Views From The Congregational Newsletters



BRIGHTON

THE PATH

All along it has been the same
path which beckoned,
But I, stepping out newly, was
timid.

Not willing to trust my inner
knowing so
Fortifying myself instead
With spurious reasons, and old
outdated maps,
Claimed that it was for these
That I pilgrimed this way.

At first, it was for my soul's own
salvation I doggedly trod,
Holding myself upright, rigid,
pure,
But at the same time juggling
With compromise and escape
clauses.

Later it was justice and peace
That demanded my passion,
But the pain of my own in-
volvement
Blurred the edges—
Compromise, no longer for
juggling
Was for real ..
And there were no escape
clauses.

And now...?

My heart stands still, knowing
That the path walks me, and
this

For the simple fact of being.
Knows that in the whole span
of existence
There could be found no time—
no place -
Where the path would not have
led my steps.
The path and I are one,
My involvement total, my
connections cosmic,
The path, my allurements, my
destiny,
Me.

Grace Blindell

CROYDON

ANY ACTIVITY MAY BE SACRED

There is a plant on the window
sill
Which sings me its wisdom:
Its green song of triumph,
A vibrant song of life.
It is a wise song which I know

well,
But I forget it easily
And sometimes I cannot hear
it.

A while ago the original plant
fell

A distance.
Disturbed by a gust
From an open window, it fell
and broke:

Pot and stem and root shat-
tered.

All that could be salvaged
Was a small sprig - almost
nothing

Out of the brokenness.
With little hope I planted the
small possibility

In a new pot. I doubted It
would survive.

But the plant on the window
sill

Knew the truth of yielding to
brokenness
Before growing again.

It began to thrive.

So now it sings me its wisdom
Which I hear when I am open
To greenness and sweet vitality:
When I listen.

(the Rev) Elizabeth Birtles

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In May we were fortunate to have
Ingrid Tavkar participate in our wor-
ship and then attend the Social Re-
sponsibility group meeting on the
Sunday afternoon.

Ingrid has responsibility for Social
Responsibility within Essex Hall and
came to Croydon to share with us
some of the projects with which she
is currently involved.

I am not able to do justice to
Ingrid's passion and commitment,
nor the way in which she engaged
the Social Responsibility group that
Sunday.

Ingrid has been closely involved
with the 'Make Poverty History' cam-
paign which is focussing on trade
justice, drop the debt and more and
better aid to the poorer countries.

At this meeting, the group started

to discuss some of the different ways
in which we could take action
against social justice issues:

- affirm and celebrate what is
already being done by individuals
and the congregation
- form an SR working group and
encourage members of the congre-
gation to participate in the planning
of an SR programme
- identify a liaison person who
will work with the congregation, the
district association and the national
office of Social responsibility
- propose motions to the GA
Annual Meetings calling for action
at local level on specific issues e.g.
asylum seekers, refugees and home-
lessness; or on global issues e.g. the
Kyoto Protocol
- organise adult RE discussion
groups with a focus on social issues
organise SR day seminars on specific
topics (educational and awareness
raising)
- organise special services on
contemporary social justice issues
- support social action cam-
paigns e.g. Christian Aid, Oxfam,
Trade Justice Movement and Jubi-
lee Debt Campaign
- organise a Fair Trade Stall af-
ter service (monthly or quarterly)
- organise a letter writing group

At our next Social Responsibility
group meeting, we will discuss how
we can take up some of the chal-
lenges that Ingrid posed to us. My
main memory of that special Sun-
day, however, is from the end of the
meeting when she asked us to con-
sider three questions and I end this
article with a hope that you will re-
flect on them too:

What motivate YOU to do social
action?

What social actions are you in-
volved in or would like to be in-
volved in?

What is / has been your most im-
portant action to create a better
world?

Janet Beater

KENSINGTON

PICKING WILD STRAWBERRIES

You don't know what you've got till

it's gone" sang Joni Mitchell in a famous song and this summer I would amend that to you don't know what you've got till it's going'. The thought of moving to London has filled me with excitement and trepidation in equal measure and a most useful by-product has been a heightened awareness of everything, an appreciation of all that is. The garden that has so often annoyed me with its endless hedge and lawn-cutting requirements looks suddenly and poignantly beautiful. I'm even having fond thoughts about previously irritating neighbours! There's a major house-clearing task to be done to make room for lodgers to move in and much time has been spent looking into drawers and cupboards, full of stuff that has not been used for years but which I'm still strangely reluctant to take to a charity shop or consign to the bin.

Back in the garden, this has been a marvellous year for strawberries, the wild strawberries that grow in the borders, nestled in amongst other plants. They've been there for years and each year I'd pick a few in passing as I got on with the weeding. But this year I've picked them properly, deliberately, appreciatively I've noticed their scent, their colour, their sweet-sharp taste. I've searched out the plants that are hidden at the back of the borders and discovered that it's in the nature of strawberry plants to spread. They are systematically taking over but in doing so they have given a most wonderful crop — several bowlfuls of little berries that sing of summer and warmth and nature's gifts to us. How interesting that it is this year, when leaving is imminent, that I have at last appreciated these little plants that have always been here, that it takes an impending departure to bring me fully into the here and now.

I wonder what it is you would particularly notice and appreciate if you knew you were going to leave? Below are some writings that have inspired me this summer. Some of them mention death and I suppose any change in our lives is like a death; it's an ending, a change, a letting go, a step out into the unknown.

Stephen Levine wrote a book called 'A Year To Live' in which he described his own experiment in living as though he had only a year left to live. It's a rich and inspiring book detailing the insights he gained

through living with the awareness that all of his is temporary. Just as I'm sifting through cupboards and files and garden borders, he examined his life, his thoughts, his relationships, and started to appreciate existence as it is, with its dark aspects as well as the light. Levine recommends staying in the loving present, living a life that focuses on each precious moment, knowing that all must end.

Alan Watts writes of death as the "whole secret of life. It means that the past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that the T cannot be continued and that nothing can be ultimately fixed." When we know this, Watts says, we live fully for the first time in our life.

John Morgan writes of the value of becoming more 'soulful', of increasing our awareness of the hidden and deeper meanings that reside in our everyday moments. He incorporates this in a prayer:

May I become aware of those moments of joy residing in a small child's hand in mine, in the play of sunlight through leaves, in an understanding friend, in each and every instant. May this awareness and joy make my life a dance!

So this has been my summer of the wild strawberries, of appreciating all that is and then letting it go; I wonder what the key themes of your summers have been? I look forward to new beginnings this autumn and of getting to know you all.

(the Rev) Sarah Tinker

NEWINGTON GREEN

WILL SELF TO GIVE LECTURE

Novelist, journalist and broadcaster Will Self has accepted the invitation to give the 2005 Richard Price Memorial Lecture on Friday 25th November at 8pm.

Revived last year after a twenty year lull, the Price Lecture is a way of honouring our illustrious erstwhile minister who spent his life championing the inherent rights of humankind.

Last year's lecture was given by Dr Barbara Taylor, historian of ideas and author of *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*. Dr Taylor kept her audience enthralled as she painted a vivid picture of the social context in which the early feminists

began to articulate their philosophy of alienation.

Will Self promises to be just as engaging. One of the most talented and prolific writers at work in Britain today, he's certain to challenge and entertain us as he explores the satirical quality of religion.

Tickets for the event, priced at ten pounds, go on sale on Monday 5th September. As the number of places is limited you are strongly urged to book your tickets in advance by emailing or telephoning the minister (details on p.2). Tickets will be awarded on a first come, first served basis.

RICHMOND

FREEDOM & THE ORIGINAL SELF

'Original Self: Living with Paradox and Originality' by Thomas Moore (Published by Perennial, 2001)

No Unitarian likes to be told what to think or how to live. When I read the revised Object and Preamble of the General Assembly (GA), I was struck by the importance placed on freedom of belief. This makes Unitarianism a very spacious place to belong. And I think that many people, when they first find Unitarianism, feel an enormous sense of relief and liberation.

But freedom can become a scary place and soon we start to want answers, explanations, some ground to stand on; we find our-selves grasping for certainties. Just think of the titles of some of the Unitarian RE courses currently on offer: 'Build Your Own Theology' and 'Building Our Unitarian Identity' for example.

Although I do think that such courses can be valuable, I wonder if there could be another way. Could we live without a theology? Having freed ourselves from the external imposition of a creed, why then inflict it on ourselves individually. Does your soul need a theology? Does it want one?

And what about 'identity'? Is this really something we have to create? Maybe I am missing something but I don't see how any-body or anything could not have an identity. Perhaps the real problem for Unitarianism lies in knowing how to present itself, how to capture itself

in words. To me, the essence of Unitarianism is that it is an open minded, open hearted religion, a kaleidoscope of all the perspectives of all the individuals who make it up, something very fluid and evolving that changes every time a new member joins or someone steps through the church door to attend their first Unitarian Service.

The first time I read the GA's Object and Preamble, I felt so depressed and wondered why on earth I had joined this church. It is one, 94 word long, sentence and reads as if a great many people spent a very long time debating every point and every word and every comma. Which of course they did. I was later told that it took FIFTEEN YEARS to create and get it agreed. And the result is totally indigestible, lifeless, much more like a legal document than a statement of vision.

But then I looked behind the words and saw something else. I stood in awe of the fact that the people involved would care enough to endure meeting after meeting of frustrating discussion; would be patient enough to persevere until they could mutually agree the wording for the Object. I now feel a great debt of gratitude to those people and their commitment. And even if the wording isn't very beautiful, the essence of Unitarianism does come through. Two aspects that are emphasised are (1) freedom of belief and (2) that Unitarianism is fundamentally a religion (rather than a philosophical discussion group or a social club).

The language of Thomas Moore (a former Catholic monk with a background in theology, music and depth psychology), could not be more different than that of the GA Constitution. His writing reads like poetry. And yet the same emphasis is present - an emphasis both on freedom and on something which seems to me to be akin to worship of God - the necessity of connecting to the beauty and mystery and wonder of life. Thomas Moore talks of religion as 'a way of life and an attitude of fundamental reverence ... not a defensive structure of anxious beliefs ... religion as an open heart capable of allowing life to unfold and strong enough to support a radical philosophy of love'.

What could this way of life be for a Unitarian? How do we live with an attitude of 'fundamental reverence'? In 'Original Self', Thomas Moore shows us. In a series of fifty meditations (each of 2 or 3 pages), he builds up a picture of 'an alternative kind of person, one who lives from the burning core of the heart, with the creativity that comes from allowing the soul to blossom in its own colours and shapes'. Each meditation 'reflects yet another way we become individual by following the lead of the soul'.

If we follow the lead of the soul, we can rediscover our original self, our 'God given personality', the 'person who came into this world full of possibility and destined for joyful unveiling and manifestation'. Thomas Moore is both challenging and encouraging/affirming. He challenges the insidious modern idea that in one way or another we are all defective and in need of fixing; that we should be something other than we are; that we should meet expectations (our own or other peoples) and are not adequate unless we meet some norm of health or weight or correct behaviour. He encourages us to be our creative, unpredictable, eccentric selves; to go deep; to recognise the promptings and desires of the soul; to live with mystery and unknowing.

If you want a way to make the words of the GA Object a living reality in your life; if you want a vision of religion as a way of life, a way of being in the world, rather than a set of beliefs; if you would like some encouragement to live courageously and soulfully from your own innate originality; if you want nourishment rather than certainties - then I wholeheartedly recommend this book to you.

Ann Richards

WORTHING

**CHALICE IS METAPHORICALLY
BURNING BRIGHTLY**

*This free fellowship of faith
welcomes all who seek
the meaning of life.*

*We welcome all who believe
that religion is wider than
any one sect and deeper than*

any one set of opinions.

*We do not impose any
particular creed on our members,
seeking to explore all spiritual
truths from all possible sources.*

*We respect traditional faiths
whilst encouraging individual
freedom of thought.*

*We meet together to provide
strength and understanding
for our daily living.*

Members of our Fellowship have an opportunity to put these words into practice on a regular basis during the monthly Sunday talks which have been running for a year now and are increasingly well attended, with twenty nine present in September.

On these Sundays, when there are many visitors, some of whom are meeting Unitarians for the first time, we have an opportunity to demonstrate not least through our hospitality, our respect for those who have and hold opinions and beliefs that differ from one's own. At the same time we can allow ourselves to question our own thinking in the light of new knowledge and in the general discussion that follows, sometimes much later. .

The presentations range from the particular with information being given about Quakers, White Eagle Lodge and Subud to the more philosophical such as Prison — a spiritual desert?, The Da Vinci Code Conspiracy and Implicit Religion, However, in spite of the apparently disparate subject matter there runs the common and hopefully coherent thread of learning; an increase in our understanding of subjects that are implicitly, or explicitly, religious and/or spiritual.

On these Sundays the chalice is metaphorically, rather than literally, burning brightly and may it continue to do so as we enter the darker part of the year.

(the Rev) Jane Barton

YOUTH EXPERIENCE UNITARIAN COMMUNITY AT ROSSLYN HILL

Three youths from the Rosslyn Hill Congregation spoke at the LDPA Summer Meeting. Here are the stories shared by two of them:

I have been at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel for over a decade now and I have been to the children's chapel, the normal service held on Sundays and the newly established teenager group.

When I was little and went to the children's chapel we were taught how we were the chapel of the "open mind, the loving heart and the helping hands." This is an excellent way of breaking down and simplifying the concepts of Unitarianism for our members of the chapel.

"Unlike many other religions Unitarianism does not tell you what to think. It lets you form your own beliefs." We would say these words around a chalice and then move on to saying our names and what we had done that week. This is an excellent way of making us all feel welcome and accepted.

Nowadays I normally go to the Sunday service at the chapel and listen to the interesting concepts of Unitarianism that our minister Jim Robinson talks about. Every other Friday we have a teen night at the Chapel; it is from 7:30 to 9:30. It is a very enjoyable social event where we can talk to our friends about school, stress of exams, teachers, etc. We play a couple of games and sometimes have a snack. We also sometimes do spiritual activities.

Sometimes we have an outing, or a theme to the evening. We have been to a movie, ice skating and the village for crepes and ice cream we have also had a psychic night where we had special guests from our congregation do palm reading, astronomy (chart reading) and other things. We also had a sleepover where instead of going home at 9:30, we stayed the night watching movies.

When I think about it, children's chapel is a simplified version of the teen group which is a simplified version of the Sunday sermons. These three groups are like stepping stones to fully realizing the true concepts of Unitarianism. *Alexander Jurczynski*

My name is Josephine Dolan, I am 26 years old and this is my story. When asked how I thought young adults might be attracted to the church I thought my story would be helpful because I do not think that my experience is uncommon.

I was not brought up in a religious family, I always however liked the idea of going to church. I enjoyed going to church services with the brownies and also with my school. I liked the idea of reading the bible and enjoyed the stories that I would occasionally read or be told at school.

At 18 I moved away to university and became homesick. I had high hopes about going and the reality was that I felt isolated and alone. I made friends with the girl next-door to me in the student halls of residence. She happened to be a born again Christian. I envied her lifestyle, the community she belonged to and activities, I tried to become a part of things but did not believe the things that they were saying. They scared me with stories of heaven and hell and how you could not go to heaven if you did not believe in the things that they believed in. I of course wanted to go to heaven and felt terribly guilty that my lifestyle did not really fit in with their way of thinking. It was not the type of place you could be on the periphery, which was where I was. So I chose to leave them, taking my guilt with me.

I was not completely put off from Christianity and I tried a few other denominations including:

- Methodist
- Baptists
- Catholic
- Anglican

I was disappointed that I still did not belong. I would sit at the back and scuttle out at the end before anybody could talk to me.

I also did an Alpha course in a local Anglican church in Stoke Newington, they tried to answer my questions and although I enjoyed the debates, it did not quite hit the spot for what I was looking for. I remained unconvinced. I felt comfort-

able in the Christian setting for services, it was the content that was not sure about.

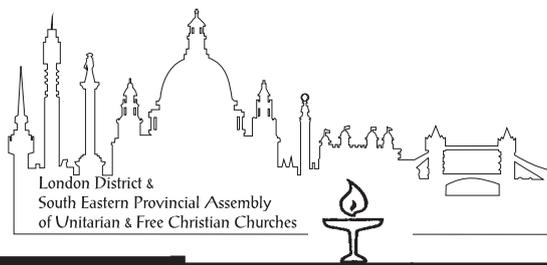
I moved to Hampstead 20 months ago still on my quest subconsciously. I walked up the hill the following February and spotted a sign on the notice board outside a chapel, it said something like:

'the search for truth takes great courage'

I went away and thought about the Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, I had never heard of Unitarianism. I looked at the website, did the 'belief-o-matic' quiz and it turned out that I was a Unitarian! I decided to go a couple of weeks later having sent a few e-mails about the chapel. I walked up the hill got right outside the chapel and the chickened out. I was so annoyed with myself that on the way home I then made a promise to myself that I would go the next week. The next week I made it, I did my usual... I sat at the back and scuttled off at the end. Gradually I began to come more frequently as I enjoyed the sermons and singing, I felt comfortable with both the traditional 'church going' experience, without the God, Jesus and hell stuff being thrown at me.

I decided that this was the place for me, but I just needed to get my hand in, so that people would recognise me and I had someone to sit with if I chose. I felt I belonged in the chapel, but I wanted the chapel to belong to me. So I looked at the things on offer and joined the book group. I had found my way in, I joined in July and a year later I feel I am becoming a familiar face.

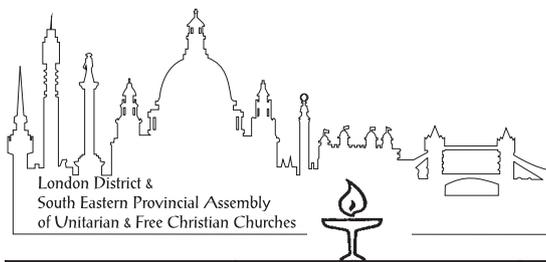
Admittedly I do not go every week, but that is all right, as there is no guilt attached to my church going. I go to the chapel because I enjoy exploring my spiritual identity. Which by the way I have no idea exactly what that is other than I am not quite sure what I believe in, but the human kindness the chapel has offered me is a great place to start. I am comfortable with my unidentifiable identity as a Unitarian.



LDPA Service Arrangements for October 2005

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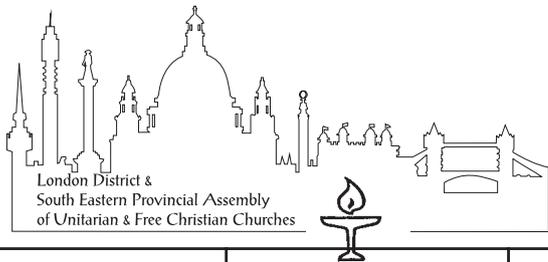
Congregation	October 2	October 9	October 16	October 23	October 30
Bethnal Green	J Barraclough 11 am	NS	J Barraclough 6.30		
Billingshurst 11	Rev A Hills 3pm	NS	Rev Steve Dick	NS	NS
Brighton 11 am	Rev Jane Barton	Ms Estelle Talyor	Rev Brian Anderson	Rev Jane Barton	Rev Steve Dick
Brixton 10.30am	Mr Julian Smith	Mr Julian Smith	Rev J McClelland	Mr Julian Smith	Mr Julian Smith
Chatham	Mrs B Payne 10.30	NS	Mrs V Darbon 3.30	NS	NS
Croydon 11am	Rev F O'Connor	Rev E Birtles	Rev E Birtles	Rev Steve Dick	Rev E Birtles
Ditchling 11am	Mr M Garrard	Rev J Harley	Congregation	Rev Peter Roberts	Rev F O'Connor
Dover 3pm		NS	NS	NS	NS
Enfield/StAlbans	NS	A Braithwaite 2.30	Mr P Kern 11am	A Braithwaite 2.30	NS
Godalming	Ms L Davies 3.30	Rev J Boeke 11	Rev D Usher 3.30	Ms M Robinson 11	Rev D Usher 3.30
GoldersGreen 11	Rev E Birtles	Rev F O'Connor	Rev F O'Connor	Rev R Boeke	Mr M Allured
Hampstead 11&7	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson
Hastings 11am	Mrs C Skelton	Mrs L Davies	Mr W Schmidt	Mr Roy Evans	Mr M Garrard
Horsham 10.30	Rev R Boeke	Rev R Boeke	Mr A Ruston	Rev F O'Connor	Rev R Boeke
Islington 11am	Rev C Courtney	NS	Rev C Courtney	NS	NS
Kensington 11am	Rev Steve Dick	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker
Lewes 10.30am	Harvest Service	Rev Ashley Hills	Congregation	Mr John Henty	NS
Lewisham 11am					
Maidstone 5.30pm					
Newington Green 11 am	NS	Rev Cathal Courtney	NS	Rev Cathal Courtney	Rev Cathal Courtney
Northiam 3pm	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Reading 3pm	Visit to Oxford	NS	NS	NS	NS
Richmond 11am					
Sevenoaks 11am	Rev D Usher	Rev D Usher	Rev D Usher	Mr David Embry	Rev J McClelland
Southend 3.30	Mr W Schmidt	NS	NS	NS	Mrs P Howell
Stratford 6.30	Rev M Shiels 5 pm	Mr Julian Meek	Rev C Courtney	Mr Julian Meek	Rev Mark Shiels
Tenterden	Rev D Usher 3pm	NS	Mr D Embry 11am	NS	NS
Watford 3pm	Mr Alan Ruston	NS	NS	NS	NS
Worthing 2.30	Congregation	Rev Jane Barton	Rev B Anderson	Talk: Bahai Faith	Rev J Barton



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Congregation	November 6	November 13	November 20	November 27
Bethnal Green	Rev J Barraclough11	NS	Rev J Barraclough 6.30	NS
Billingshurst 11	Congregation	NS	Mr W Schmidt	NS
Brighton 11 am	Rev Jane Barton	Rev Jane Barton	Rev John Harley	Mr Dan Lake
Brixton10.30am	Mr Julian Smith	Mr Julian Smith	Mr Tony Cross	Mr Julian Smith
Chatham	Rev S Dick 10.30	NS	Mrs B Payne 3.30	NS
Croydon 11am	Rev E Birtles	Rev J McClelland	Rev E Birtles	Rev E Birtles
Ditchling 11am	Mr Roy Evans	Mr T Weeks-Pearson	Rev A Hills	Ms J Currie
Dover 3pm	Congregation	NS	NS	NS
Enfield/StAlbans	NS	Mr M Allured 2.30	Mrs P Kern 11am	A Braithwaite 2.30
Godalming	Mrs P Kern 3.30	Rev BAnderson 11	Rev D Usher 3.30	Rev D Usher 11
GoldersGreen11	Rev F O'Connor	Rev F O'Connor	Mr M Allured	Rev F O'Connor
Hampstead11&7	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson
Hastings 11am	Rev D Skelton	Rev A Hills	Mr A Larcombe	Mrs P Preece
Horsham 10.30	Rev J Harley	Rev J Boeke	Rev R Boeke	Rev R Boeke
Islington 11am	Rev C Courtney	NS	Rev C Courtney	NS
Kensington11am	Rev A McClelland	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker
Lewes 10.30am	Congregation	Congregation	Congregation AGM	NS
Lewisham 11am				
Maidstone 5.30pm				
Newington Green 11 am	NS	Rev C Courtney	NS	Rev C Courtney
Northiam 3pm	NS	NS	NS	NS
Reading 3pm	NS	Ms J Currie	NS	NS
Richmond 11am				
Sevenoaks 11am	Rev P Godfrey	Rev Steve Dick	Rev David Usher	Mrs Wendy Adams
Southend 3.30	Mr J Meek	NS	NS	NS
Stratford 6.30	Mr J Meek	Rev J McClelland	Rev M Shiels	Rev S Dick
Tenterden	Rev J Harley 3pm	NS	Mrs P Preece 11	NS
Watford 3pm	Rev Ashley Hills	NS	NS	NS
Worthing 2.30	Ms Estelle Taylor	Rev Jane Barton	Talk:	Rev A Hills



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Congregation	December 4	December 11	December 18	December 25
Bethnal Green	Rev J Barraclough 11	NS	J Barraclough 6.30	NS
Billingshurst 11	Rev P Roberts	NS	Rev P Godfrey 3pm	NS
Brighton 11 am	Rev J Barton	Rev Jane Barton	Winter Solstice	Rev Jane Barton
Brixton 10.30am	Mr Julian Smith	Carols 6.30 pm	Mr Julian Smith	Mr Julian Smith
Chatham	Mrs V Darbon 10.30	NS	Mrs B Payne 3.30	NS
Croydon 11am	Rev E Birtles	Rev E Birtles	Rev E Birtles	Rev E Birtles
Ditchling 11am	Rev J Boeke	Rev B Anderson	Rev A Hills 4pm	NS
Dover 3pm		NS	NS	NS
Enfield/StAlbans	NS	A Braithwaite 2.30	A Braithwaite 2.30	NS
Godalming	Rev D Usher 3.30	Rev D Williams 11	Rev D Usher 6.30	NS
GoldersGreen 11	Rev F O'Connor	Rev F O'Connor	Rev F O'Connor	NS
Hampstead 11&7	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson	Rev J Robinson
Hastings 11am	Rev P Godfrey	Mrs M Jenkins	Rev D Skelton	TBA
Horsham 10.30	Congregation	Rev R Boeke	Rev J Boeke 6.30	Rev R Boeke
Islington 11am	Mr D Hughes	NS	Rev C Courtney	NS
Kensington 11am	TBA	Rev Sarah Tinker	Rev Sarah Tinker	NS
Lewes 10.30am	Advent & Lunch	Congregation	Carols 6.30	NS
Lewisham 11am				
Maidstone 6pm				
Newington Green 11am	NS	Rev C Courtney	Rev C Courtney 6.30	NS
Northiam 4pm	NS	NS	NS	NS
Reading 3pm	NS	Congregation	NS	NS
Richmond 11am				
Sevenoaks 11am	Rev D Usher	Rev David Usher	Rev D Usher 3.30	NS
Southend 3.30	Rev F O'Connor	NS	NS	NS
Stratford 6.30	Mr J Meek	Mr A Ruston	Rev M Sheils 3pm	NS
Tenterden	Rev P Godfrey 3pm	NS	Rev D Skelton 6 pm	NS
Watford 3pm	Rev J McClelland	NS	NS	NS
Worthing 2.30	Rev J Boeke	Rev J Barton	Carol Service	NS