

Banbury Unitarians News



*A spiritual and religious fellowship, encouraging
tolerance and independent thought*

Issue 11, July - September 2014 Contents

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Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

This year seems to be racing by - I'm writing this in the third week of June, before heading off to the Ministerial Old Students' Association annual conference, at Harris Manchester College Oxford. This year, four of my friends are going to be valedicted, as they start their careers as Unitarian ministers, so it is going to be a joyous occasion indeed.

But there is more to the MOSA conference than the Valedictory Service, lovely though that is. It is an opportunity for ministers to continuing their professional development, and I am going to be attending sessions on Devotional Literature, Church Growth, and How Local Radio Works. I am looking forward to learning new ways to serve you more effectively, as your minister.

We are also heading into the Summer holiday season, which is why there won't be a meeting of our Engagement Group in August - see the Calendar on page 3 for details. And I am afraid that due to various long-standing commitments on my part, we won't be able to get back to our regular "second Thursdays" until November. The July meeting is first Thursday, and the September and October ones are third Thursday. So **please** make sure you write the dates on your calendars and in your diaries, so that you don't miss a session.

For those of you who didn't make it to the first session of *Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health*, you are most welcome to join us at our next meeting on 3rd July, at 10.30 am. I have a few copies of the book available - just ask me at our next service.

Wishing you all a warm, sunny and happy Summer.

In fellowship,

Sue

Calendar for July - September 2014

July

- Thursday 3rd Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health
Step 1 Develop a Personal Spiritual Practice
- Sunday 27th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

August

- No Engagement Group meeting in August, on account of holidays.
- Sunday 31st Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

September

- Thursday 18th Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health
Step 2 Belong to a Religious Community
- Sunday 28th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

*All worship services are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 11.00 am
All Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health sessions are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 10.30 am*

Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health: our new Engagement Group

At our June meeting, we started to work through David Usher's new book *Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health*, which was launched at the 2013 General Assembly meetings. Some of us felt quite uneasy about the prospect, as we weren't sure what the word "spirituality" actually meant, so we had a stab at defining it. We also shared about some of the great spiritual teachers in our own lives, and about some moment of transcendent wonder we had experienced. Our next meeting is on 3rd July, and all are most welcome to join us. Copies of the book are available from Sue.

Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to A Compassionate Life* by Jack Thomas

Over the past twelve months, this book was the basis of study in our group, led and organised by our minister, Sue Woolley.

The meetings were held monthly at the Grimsbury Community Centre, where we considered and discussed each Step in turn. It was suggested that we read the relevant chapter before attending the meeting, which proved useful, as Sue, wearing one of her many hats as facilitator / leader, had prepared handouts with topics for discussion. These, in themselves, were a minor *tour-de-force*. [Note: credit should go to Sheena Gabriel and Louise Baumberg, of Godalming Unitarians, who put the original handouts together; I just adapted them for our use. SW]

In her writings, Karen Armstrong considered, in depth, the nature, desirability, and practice of compassion in our daily lives.

Early chapters indicated how it was viewed and practiced, by sages, thinkers and teachers such as Confucius, the Buddha, and Jesus, and many others in our own time, e.g. Gandhi. Increasingly, her emphasis was on helping the reader to realise that "becoming a compassionate human being", to quote her words, is a lifelong project.

Each chapter provided many points for the discussion period (which followed a very welcome tea / coffee break provided by Doris Worrall) . The varied ages and life experiences of the group led to diverse and wide-ranging views and responses. These were both interesting and stimulating, and we all appreciated listening to others' thoughts and ideas, sometimes challenging and questioning our own long-held attitudes.

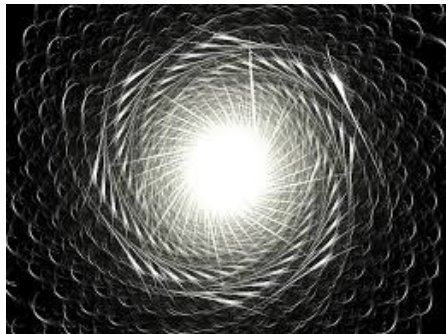
I am sure many of the group found the continuing study the book to be a thought-provoking and valuable experience. Many thanks go to Sue for her hard work (and patience) in organising the course.

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## Poetry Corner

### Miracles by Rosemary Booth

Life, a continuation of creation  
stored intact, each generation  
Every tree, each flower and plant  
Animals, birds to tiny ants.  
Fish, plants and mammals in the sea  
Birds that nest on land or tree  
Mighty eagle soars above high rocks  
Seagulls swoop over sea and docks  
Micro cell, we cannot see  
Share this earth with you and me  
Always changing, growing dying,  
Life conceived, is multiplying  
Every blade of grass that grows  
Full of life force, seeds it sows  
Miracles of life in every way  
Taken for granted every day.



### The Day's Journey by Rosemary Booth

The morning dawns to fresh surprise,  
Each day, anew before our eyes.  
Our hands are busy, giving, taking,  
Sometimes our hearts are happy, often breaking.  
The soul within us seeks for God,  
With knees that ache with constant prayer.  
On winged feet the day has flown,  
Kind night receives us for his own.

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The Reverent Balance - a blogpost by Sue Woolley

Unitarians, like Quakers, have always been in the habit of questioning beliefs and cherishing doubts. I would guess that many of us come to Unitarianism exactly by that path - by starting to question some of the beliefs that we grew up with. In my case, I realised that I could not accept the divinity of Jesus as the unique Son of God, and also struggled with the idea that his death on the cross somehow put me back into right relationship with God. When my father gave me Alfred Hall's *Beliefs of a Unitarian* to read, it was such a relief to learn about a denomination that "holds faith and doubt in reverent balance", to quote Jan Carlsson-Bull.

What does holding faith and doubt in reverent balance mean? I believe that it is a very delicate balancing act, which certainly needs to be undertaken with reverence. It means actively searching for and working out what gives your life meaning, putting your whole heart and mind and soul into the quest, and yet **at the same time** totally respecting the right of every other member of your Unitarian community to disagree with you! It can be a very tough call sometimes.



Because it is only human nature to feel passionately about religious and spiritual matters, about things that touch us deeply. And when we feel passionately about something, it can be difficult to remember that our fellow Unitarians are absolutely free to disagree with us. And that it is our job as **Unitarians**, as folk who are aiming to "live Unitarianly", to use Michael Dadson's wonderful phrase, to not only tolerate their different views, but also to wholeheartedly accept and cherish them. And to not feel aggrieved because Reverend X or Mrs. Y has written something on Facebook or in *The Inquirer* with which we disagree.

Holding faith and doubt in reverent balance also means being open to new ideas, from wherever they come. Unitarianism at its best is a wonderfully open way of approaching life and religion, based on an appeal to reason, conscience and your own life experience. And it is an ongoing process - you don't just experience a one-off conversion, and then rest on those fixed beliefs for the rest of your life; every Unitarian has a duty to approach all new ideas and concepts reverently and critically, and to take from them what speaks to our own reason and conscience, and what makes sense in the context of our own life experience, in order to live out our lives in the best and truest way we can.

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Extract from *Nature's Foods* by Peter Deadman & Karen Betteridge, submitted by Wendy Moorhouse Johns

Be thankful for the simple little things ... thoughts on the origins of our food; where it comes from, the growth & unfolding of the seed, and the mystery of the seed itself.
Cultivating a reverence for the gifts so abundantly borne to us from the Great Mother.
Being happy and satisfied with the simplicity of what is before us.
A wooden bowl full of brown kernels of wheat, nurtured from the seed by wind, rain & sun.
Harvested from the field and cooked by loving hands, to grow into our every cell, tissue, hair, & fingernails.
And when you eat, have above you the angel of air,
and below you the angel of water.
Breathe long & deeply at all your meals, that the angel of air may bless your repasts.
And chew well your food with your teeth, that it may become water, and that the angel of water turn it into blood in your body.
And eat slowly as it were a prayer you make unto the Lord.