



Brighton
Unitarians

February Newsletter

Sunday Services

Please note: services are at 11 a.m. All are welcome.

We would be grateful if you would switch your phones to airplane mode before the start of the service.

03rd February - Phillida Simpson (BUC Member)
Pianist Stuart Deeks

10th February - Jennifer Sanders (Interfaith Minister)
Pianist Pamela Nickels

17th February - Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church
Pianist Kathy Pitt

24th February - Brian Bell (BUC Member)
Pianist Joe Ward

Quiet Reflection Circles 7-8 pm, 14th February

Welcome from Jef

I like January and February. I find myself giving thanks for the year that has ended and enjoying the sense of challenge that the New Year brings.

I'm looking forward to the spiritual possibilities of 2019. Now that our building work has been so magnificently accomplished, we can look forward to a year of focussing on our spiritual lives and there will be many opportunities for us to do so.

You'll find below four thoughtful contributions from members of our church on the theme of counting ones blessings. This service was just the first in 2019 to draw on contributions from the congregation. You'll also see details below of a course I'll be running in March and April exploring the spiritual dimensions of grief. Our new spiritual gatherings, Heart and Soul, on Thursday evenings, will continue with two meetings this month on 7th and 28th February. The second Thursday evening every month will continue as a time of candle-lighting and quiet reflection.

Finally a question: would you be interested in a reading group? Some of our members are interested in starting a monthly group, which would read books of a generally spiritual nature and get together once a month to share their responses to what they have read. If you're interested let me know.

Welcome to February and welcome to the Newsletter.

Jef Jones

Thank You Phillida

As most readers will know our member Phillida Simpson has stepped down from her role as church treasurer and retired as a member of the committee. Phillida has served our spiritual community with great commitment, wisdom and purpose. She has helped steer us through two periods of major building work, deftly managed our finances, and co-ordinated our most recent application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is no exaggeration to say we might have had to close if we had not been able to afford repairs. The pediment was found to be in a much more precarious state than anyone could have imagined, making fund-raising all the more complex. During all of this time Phillida has been part of the team setting up the church on Sunday mornings, stewarded the lunch time concerts and led thoughtful and engaging services. Thank you, Phillida for all that you have done - and continue to do - for Brighton Unitarian Church.

Thank You Brighton And Hove Gay Men's Chorus

Brighton and Hove Gay Men's Chorus have made a very generous donation of £1,297.44 to our building appeal. The Chorus are good friends to Brighton Unitarian and have been meeting in our church for a long time. We are grateful for their support and for the blessing they are in our city, to which they bring beautiful music, a commitment to community and a wicked sense of humour.

Thank You Brighton Unitarians

Our member and friend Anne- who brings the lovely flowers- would like to express her sincere gratitude for all the bric-a-brac we have been bringing her. Anne sorts through everything we collect for her and then uses it to raise money for good causes.

Particularly close to Anne's heart is SeeKenya (seekenya.org) a UK-based charity providing eye care services to marginalised communities in Kenya. They provide cataract surgery and eye drops for the treatment of trachoma, the leading cause of blindness in children. Please continue to bring broken watches, clocks, broken jewellery, necklaces and chains, odd earrings and cufflinks, obsolete keys and coins and postage stamps and old glasses and sunglasses and support this terrific project. (There is a container in the Vestry marked *Items for Anne*.) Thank you everyone for all your support.

Annual General Meeting

Our Annual Meeting was held on January 27th after the Sunday service. Kathy Pitt chairing the meeting expressed the church's thanks to Christine Clark- Lowes, our book-keeper; Helen White, retiring committee member and our volunteer designer; and to Phillida Simpson, retiring treasurer. There was a standing ovation for Phillida, who has worked with such commitment for the church, resulting in the completion of repairs to our Portico, securing the church as a place of worship for future generations.

The following committee members were elected for 2019.

| | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Caroline Drijver | Co-Chair |
| Fanny Tulley | Co-Chair |
| Kathy Pitt | Treasurer |
| Jo O'Sullivan | Secretary |
| Trisha Purchas | Member |
| Jennifer Sanders | Member |
| Jeannette Webb | Member |

Counting Our Blessings

For our service on January 27th I asked four members of the church, Jen, Sophie, Mark and Heather, to share what Counting our Blessings means to them. Their contributions are below.

From Jen Barton

I'm aware that I have many, many blessings in my life. For example, I live in a comfortable home, I can turn on a tap for instant hot water. I'm lucky to have been born in a western democracy and to have access to our National Health Service. The list is long!

Recognising these manifold blessings, I thought I'd concentrate on those which have a particularly spiritual dimension and try to give a sense of how they nourish my soul.

I am so grateful that living in Brighton gives me such easy access to the beautiful South Downs and so countless opportunities for encounters with the natural world. Looking at a rolling landscape, looking at a pale-yellow primrose, these things fill me with a sense of awe at the beauty and wonder of creation. So too, TV programmes letting us witness the astonishing variety and inventiveness of nature – strange creatures in the deepest seas carrying their own light source, the leaf-tailed gecko whose head, flattened body and tail curve like dry brown leaves making it invisible in its environment. I can't help but have a sense of something beyond me, something miraculous.

Still with the natural world, I was recently given a teaching by a raggedy old blackbird. Seeing him (it was a him) bravely hopping over the lawn in his search for food enabled me to accept that, just like him, I will live, I will grow older, and I will die – this is how it is. I am grateful for that moment of peace around my mortality.

I count the insights of others among my blessings - without these, I would be stuck – they are taking me on my journey. These insights can be from people as exalted as the Dali Lama or as near to me as you fellow Unitarians! Scientists, spiritual writers, poets, everyday folk. Their wisdom is essential – how could I possibly come to these insights on my own? We are so lucky in the service leaders we have here - who bring us such a wealth of their own, and others, perceptions.

Linked to this, is my gratitude for community. In this Unitarian community, I feel unjudged in my spiritual uncertainty! It's ok not to know, not to have answers! I'm also hopeful that the new Heart & Soul meetings will grow into a place where fellow travellers can share experiences, find encouragement, question and learn from each other.

I'm hugely grateful for the Buddhist Centre just around the corner. I started to go to drop-in meditation classes during the summer and have just completed a Mindfulness course. Both have brought greater stillness and awareness into my daily life, and consequently greater connection to the mystery of existence.

Last, but by no means least, The Arts (that's with capital letters!). Whether it's a painting, music, theatre – I believe there's a moment of transcendence in the experience of a great work of art. Where truth and beauty come together, art carries us to the sublime. Last year, I heard a contemporary opera – Dead Man Walking by Jake Heggie. It tells the true story of the nun Sister Helen Prejean and her work with condemned prisoners on death row in America. It takes us on an exploration of forgiveness, revenge, grace, redemption. The score, the quality of the singing, the deep human engagement of the whole cast, the immensity of the choices facing the characters – all served to create an intensity of performance that took the audience to a place beyond our humanity. There was a palpable sense of some greater grace, of something divine. I feel deeply blessed to have experienced this moment - and other moments – where art has transported me into a greater, mystical realm.

I give thanks for all these precious blessings.

From Sophie Wilson

I had an email from my Accountant the other day and in the course of exchanging niceties, he said "I was in Cambodia over Christmas and New Year and it is very easy to forget that there are people who are way less fortunate than we are."

I was slightly taken aback by this, maybe because I have a (somewhat judgemental image) of my bald, male, pale accountant not being the type to travel extensively. I might have perhaps unkindly not credited him with the compassion to think about the plight of others in the developing world, given that he is, as my dad would say 'a bean counter'.

In reflecting on the subject of this service, though, I realised that for me, too, travelling is one of the few times in my life that has afforded me the opportunity to take a step back and have clarity about how much I have, how much we have in the Western world, and how much I'm thankful for.

In 2012 I was lucky enough to be able to take my gap year at the elated age of 30, spending a year travelling around India and South East Asia, on a spiritual mission to 'find myself'. I chronicled this journey in a blog and decided to dip into it again, to read you some excerpts from when I was struck with this feeling of gratitude:

"Nepal is a country of astounding natural beauty: silvery stones, blood red earth and much flora and fauna. In one day we saw stick insects, grass hoppers, a lizard and many wild orchids and ferns. The trek path cut through terraces, fields and gorgeous little traditional Nepali houses - tiny affairs with thatched roofs and neat porches, the occasional stable.

Each house has a small plot of land to grow maize, millet and rice - just the right amount to feed a family. In front of most houses sat elderly family members, children or women undertaking toiletry, splashing about in the stone mounted taps. I greeted most of these people with a friendly "namaste" which was received to varying response. Some would reply with a warm smile, pressing their hands together in the respectful greeting. Others were nonplussed or nonchalant. I wondered what they must think of me in my hulking, lurid whiteness, taking these paths for leisure that they labour along every day. It was a humbling experience - seeing how simply people live - how they survive even though they have nothing at all. People just going about their work - women with the baskets, men with the oxen - it is unthinkable different to the lives we lead so full of diversion and activity."

The next excerpt is taken from a blog I wrote after I surveyed 'vipassana' – a ten day silent meditation undertaken in the Himalayas. This is was an extremely ascetic experience, living in simple stone huts, eating two light, plain meals per day. Each day consisted of a gruelling 14 hours of meditation. I was not allowed to talk to, communicate or even look at my fellow colleagues on the course throughout. No stimulus was allowed AT ALL. No books, no pencils, paper, radio, phones, or even prayer! It was one of the most difficult but profound experiences of my life. Here's what I said immediately afterwards:

"Upon 'release', my initial reaction was to talk, laugh, tell jokes at a million miles an hour, drink coffee, whoop into the Himalayan landscape, tell everyone I loved them,

run around, drink more coffee and eat chocolate. But when the hysteria finally bubbled down there was a new-found sense of inner calm and equanimity. There was a quiet knowledge in me that I don't need as much to live as I previously thought: not noise, not things, not as much food. Although I had found the process painful, I faced my fears and realised that I am strong. I can make it. I emerged from vipassana a changed woman. I have a wonderful inner self, strength and sense of humour that really got me through."

Reflecting back on both of these experiences, I'm struck by the power of the simple things in life and how gratitude has come to serve such a powerful part of my own, 'spiritual toolkit'.

Mahatma Gandhi once said "live simply so that others may simply live." This quote is often adapted to "live simply, so that YOU may simply live." The Mahatma was right. We don't need anywhere near as much as we think we do. What is important, is being thankful for the things we have, most often the smallest things.

From Mark Denson

So, what role does gratitude play in my spiritual life or within my religious practise?

It seems to me that my perspective is not hard wired into me like the colour of my hair or my height or shoe size. It's flexible and the meaning I give to the world, and my place in it, is determined not only by my experiences so far but also the way I choose to keep experiencing my life. How I choose to keep giving meaning to my life today.

And so for me, gratitude is not just a positive feeling that will arise as a result of agreeable experiences but it can also be an assertive act. An act that can expand and shift my attitude. A practise that can help to shine a light on the world around me and help me to take notice. Not that the world itself is objectively pleasant or positive, or always a kind, lovely, safe place to be. But nor is it entirely negative or out to get 'me'. Gratitude, as it turns out, is also not hard wired in to my psyche. And so I try to practise gratitude because it refreshes my perspective, it widens my vision. I can so easily grow used to the good things in my life. The gifts bestowed upon me by the Gods can become normalised and I start to expect them to be there.

Gratitude is a part of a practise that helps me to counter what does seem to be hardwired, the idea that I'm at the centre of the world around me. That it's about me. And like learning a new skill or using a new tool in order to craft – in this case crafting a balanced, realistic view of the world - I often have to work to over ride this. It takes effort to become, and remain, well adjusted to the world and my place in it. It's a personal choice, a decision to be made and not one that has to or should be made. Because the world would carry on creating itself if I chose not to make it. I know it would happily adjust, manifest and wrap itself around a resentful, blameful, self centred view point and become a bleak and unfriendly place to be. In fact, entire consumer industries are built upon such attitudes.

And I'm not above the trappings of consumerism. The idea of having more, and if I

could only get that next thing or get to that next place then I'd be happy and content. I would suggest that gratitude is an important part of any religious framework and is vital to surviving our day to day lives, which are so often busy in habit and routine, where it becomes so easy to rush past the good things.

And maybe there are things that I want or need that I don't have in my life. To desire, to long for, maybe to improve a quality of living. But if that becomes the only narrative I'm investing into, then that becomes the whole story. So it's crucial for me to notice, to cultivate an awareness of the gifts that are here and what I am receiving from the world around me.

I choose to try and practise gratitude because life is bigger and better when I do so. Because I am bigger and better when I do so. It helps me to 'get me out of my own way' and when I manage to do that I am able to see the world more clearly. To appreciate the daily miracles, the changing seasons, the slugs and bees in the garden, the wonderment of being alive.

Gratitude is one tool in a tool box I would label 'my religious practise'. These tools I endeavour to use and refine on a daily basis. And sometimes I don't want to use them and I struggle to make what is a conscious choice. And that's fine, but then what kind of world am I stepping into? Sometimes it's hard to see the 'positives', to expand beyond myself and my own personal pain, emotions or narratives and meet the world on a level of appreciation and wonder. It can become an effort but it's the striving for, not the achievement that I feel is important. There are also times where I find this has become intuitive, when gratitude and meaning do come with ease.

What I find so pleasing within the quality of being grateful – when it arrives in myself and in others - is how quietly transformative it can be. And I would say that the best transformations are quiet. It helps to not only change me and my outlook but it changes the way I act towards the world and therefore changes the world itself. Like a subtle form of stealthy activism.

This ritual of gratitude shouldn't be exclusive to my Sunday mornings, one that by Monday morning I'm too busy to give time to. Life, day to day, amidst the routine, is rare and extra ordinary and through practising slowness, consideration and careful attention I can attend to my surroundings and my soul can be surprised by the beauty of everyday life. And that which I assume to be ordinary becomes magical. Practising gratitude can awaken my attention and lead to a place of wonder and rejoicing, in the gifts I am receiving.

From Heather Duff

I have had a nightly gratitude practice for some years now where I look back over the day and try to appreciate what it has brought. This is not always easy as I can sink into self-pity and negativity easily but it does help me to refocus on what I have and what is good in my life and temper bitterness and resentment. My mother often jokes that "its not fair" were my first words so I have had some work to do!

Often this practice reminds me of the little things in the day that have been enriching

and challenges me to review the things that have been difficult, to try and see some learning in them or to let go of them and move on. Appreciating these moments and seeing God in the small things in life helps me to let go of the bigger story I can hooked in to, around lack.

There have been times during this winter when I have had to start doing it on waking just to help me get up and greet the day. For example, "Dear God, thank you for this new day...may I be compassionate, tolerant and kind". Bringing together gratitude with intention helps to keep me focused and mindful. I recently read that having a morning gratitude practice was common among "highly successful people" which is interesting in itself and encouraging. There is hope for me yet! To finish on I wanted to share some of the things that I am thankful for...its important to me not to let this practice become "just words" especially for things that often feature. That the connection to my heart and God is kept at its centre...and as today is Holocaust Memorial Day it seems even more meaningful.

I am deeply grateful for the basics of a warm bed, food and a safe place to sleep especially at this time of year.

I thank God for my family for their love and support, and for the opportunity to give back to them and work on my 'stuff'. This is more challenging!

I often marvel at how God can create something as perfect as my cat as he sits purring on my lap or the roses on my fence. Still working on gratitude for weeds and slugs but some day..!

I am grateful for beautiful music and great coffee.

Heart and Soul Gatherings In February

7th and 27th February at 7pm

There will be Heart and Soul gatherings on Thursday February 7th and Thursday February 27th. Heart and Soul gatherings are an opportunity for us to come together as a congregation during the week. There is a time of reflection and stillness and we go on to explore different aspects of our spiritual lives together. Refreshments are available from 6.30 pm and the meetings start at 7pm. Everyone is welcome! If you would like to lead a gathering of Heart and Soul, or suggest a topic for discussion you are also welcome.

Quiet Reflective Circle

14th February, 7pm

On the second Thursday of each month we gather for candle lighting and quiet reflection. This starts at 7pm and lasts no longer than an hour. There will be readings, time for candle- lighting, stillness and a few simple closing words.

If you've been having a busy week, and could do with some stillness, do come along. If you're looking for a time and place to reconnect with your spirit, do come along. If you'd like to sit quietly in a sacred place, please do come along. All are welcome!

Love, Loss and Remembrance

A six week programme exploring the spiritual dimensions of loss.

Grief holds hands with life. Life holds hands with grief.

Mark Belletini

To be alive and to be touched by other people's lives is a precious gift. When we lose someone we love and who has loved us, inside our sorrow there are questions: What does it mean to continue to love that person? What meaning can we make out of our loss? How do we honour those we have lost - in our souls, and in the way we live our lives? What love will we ourselves leave behind? In a safe and creative group setting we will work with our shared experience of loss and look for the treasure within it. We will explore together how lamenting, commemorating and honouring might make our lives more meaningful and more beautiful.

Last year I co-created this course for Unitarian Summer School with Rev Danny Crosby, which due to ill health, I was unable to attend. However I'm pleased to be able to offer a version of the programme that Danny and I put together at our church in Brighton.

The programme will run on Wednesday afternoons in the church and is free. If you are interested in attending please do let me know. There will be 8 places only. Dates are as follows:

March 13th 1.30 - 5pm
March 20th 1.30 - 5pm
March 27th 1.30 - 5pm
April 3rd 1.30 - 5pm
April 10th 1.30 - 5pm
April 17th 1.30 - 5pm

Facilitator Jef Jones

General Assembly Executive Committee Call for Nominations

Nominations are sought for the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. The committee plays an important role in the governance of the General Assembly, being accountable to the national membership via the democratic process of election. If you are interested in standing the deadline for nominations is February 4th. Candidates must demonstrate 3 years active commitment to the Unitarian committee and must be a member of a Unitarian congregation. If you are interested in standing please speak to Jo O'Sullivan or Jef Jones. Further information is available at www.unitarian.org.uk



February

1st: A feast of fine woodwind playing: Stephen Carroll-Turner teams up with members of the LIPS wind quintet in the trio for oboe, bassoon and piano by Poulenc, and music by Abrams and Bartok.

8th: Jane Richards (mezzo-soprano), Kevin Starns (tenor) and Rosemary Kemp (piano) with a programme of favourite songs & duets from Viennese operettas.

15th: Violinist Ayla Sahin will perform Bach Sonata no. 1 G minor, Mozart Sonata no. 4 E minor, Saint-Saens Introduction and Rondo-Capriccioso.

22nd: Alex Bondonno (saxophone) & Joss Peach (piano) come together for a lunchtime jazz recital. These renowned jazz musicians perform mellifluous and melodic interpretations of classic jazz standards from Horace Silver, Abdullah Ibrahim & Thelonious Monk, plus original compositions.

Doors and coffee from 12 noon.

Concert 12.30 – 1.15 p.m.

Ticket £4 on the door.

Peace Symposium

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Association. (AMA) is delighted to invite members and friends of Brighton Unitarian Church to a Peace Symposium being held on Saturday February 2, 2019 at 2:30 pm at the Conference Hall Jubilee Library, Jubilee Street Brighton BN1 1GE

The AMA established its first mission in UK in 1913 and built the first mosque in London which was inaugurated in 1924 in the leafy Surrey suburbs of Putney, London. Established in over 200 countries worldwide, the UK mission is now established in over 150 towns and cities promoting the peaceful message of peace through holding interfaith events all over the UK and raising millions of pounds for UK and International based charities. Last year alone over £50,000 were raised for the Poppy Appeal and Help the Hero campaigns.

The event will attract people of many faiths from the Sussex area and the keynote address will be given by the Imam of the London Mosque, Attaul Majeed Rashed. The speech will address Islam's universal message of peace giving an insight on how to attain inner peace to achieve peace amongst mankind,

The program will start at 14.30 and will include speeches from dignitaries and various faith leaders and close with refreshments 17.00. The session will include an opportunity for the guests to ask questions about Islam and other issues.

RSVP direct to Naseem Dar, 07393998626, naseemahmaddar@yahoo.co.uk

Dates for Your Diary



The poster features a teal background with a central graphic of the word 'FUSE' in large, bold, black letters, with colorful sparks emanating from the 'U'. Below this, the text reads 'FESTIVAL of UNITARIANS in the SOUTHEAST' in a smaller font. A dark blue banner contains the dates '15TH-17TH FEBRUARY 2019'. Below the banner, the venue 'CHATSWORTH HOTEL' and its address '17-23 The Steyne, Worthing BN11 3DU' are listed. Two curved banners with white text on a purple and orange background read 'FIND TIME FOR YOUR SOUL • INSPIRING WORSHIP' and 'EXPLORE, DISCUSS, CREATE'. The central image shows a group of people in a room with their arms raised in a gesture of worship or praise, and a photograph of the Chatsworth Hotel building.

FUSE
FESTIVAL of UNITARIANS in the SOUTHEAST
15TH-17TH FEBRUARY 2019
CHATSWORTH HOTEL
17-23 The Steyne, Worthing BN11 3DU

FIND TIME FOR YOUR SOUL • INSPIRING WORSHIP

EXPLORE, DISCUSS, CREATE

| COSTS (per person) | | Some bursaries are available on application |
|--|------|---|
| Single occupancy full board | £275 | |
| Double occupancy full board (double or twin) | £229 | |
| Child under 12 yrs old in shared room per child | £64 | |
| Day delegate rate (includes lunch, drinks and Conf. fee) | £70 | |
| Friday Seminar with Jennifer Kavanagh | £20 | |

For registration and more info
www.fusefest.org.uk
Deadline for registrations Thursday 31st January

Classical Guitar Recital

Matthew Sear

"A fine guitarist and composer"

Fanfare Magazine

Fantastic live music

J. Witchell, BBC Radio (Kent)

All proceeds to BUC's Building fund appeal

Brighton Unitarian Church

New Road, BN1 1UF

Sunday, 7th April, 2019, 14:30

Cake and drinks will be served from 14:00

£8 & £6 CONC

Erik Satie - Agustin Barrios - Matthew Sear