

March  
2019



richmond + putney unitarians

the flame

## The Journey of Becoming

*'You may find yourself living in a shotgun shack,  
You may find yourself in another part of the world,  
You may find yourself behind the wheel of a large  
automobile,  
You may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a  
beautiful wife,  
You may ask yourself: well ... how did I get here?'*

(From 'Once in a Lifetime' by Talking Heads)

The above extract is from one of my favourite songs, 'Once in a Lifetime', by Talking Heads, and is the sung story of an imaginary American pastor who, at one point in his existence, amidst all life's complexities, looks around himself and doesn't recognize where he is and how he got there. David Byrne, the lead singer of the band, describes this song as revealing the unconscious mind and how we can go through life in an unaware state, fulfilling the duties of society and religion without ever really finding meaning, fulfilment and peace.

I think that many of us have a moment of clarity when the question arises: 'How did I get here?' This, in my opinion, is one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves: How did I get here? Alongside another one – 'What beliefs about myself and my life do I hold?'

One of the many ways we can come to know ourselves better is through journalling and... there is some good news! Journalling doesn't have to be a dull 'Dear Diary' type of activity – it can be as creative as you wish...in truth, the more creative you are, the better! 'Well, what would that look like?' We thought you might ask that question, and that is why on Saturday 9 March we are running a half-day retreat, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. called 'The Journey of Becoming' to explore a variety of journalling methods in the hope that you might find a method or a combination of methods that particularly suit you.

A common experience of many humans is that life isn't quite right. Sometimes this is down to

something in our life that we can easily change, but at other times our dissatisfaction seems to be rather more complicated. If we cannot change or manipulate our world to produce what we need to feel good about where and who we are, then we have to enquire further or look deeper for understanding and, hopefully, solutions. 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' stated Socrates and one has to assume this question arose from feelings similar to those expressed in 'Once in a Lifetime'. At some stage in our lives, many of us will feel disconnected, inside and out, and although the times may have changed, the deeper, perennial questions still arise. Journalling can help us to glean some clarity. The times may have changed, but ultimately, the human endeavour to find meaning is 'the same as it ever was!'

(Listen to the song on YouTube and you'll get the last bit...)

*Simon*

### Roll up, roll up...

I read that Norwich Cathedral has installed a helter-skelter to enable visitors to get close-up views of its architecture. The canon apparently said he hoped it would bring people in for a religious experience.

This got me wondering what sort of funfair attraction we might put in our church to enhance services or bring new people in. A carousel with the organ playing in the middle while the congregation spin around on galloping horses? Dodgems representing diverse and sometimes colliding theologies? Hymn number bingo?

Answers on the back of a coconut...

*David Strachan*

Reflections of a Former Trustee  
or  
*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

I started attending RPUC around 1985 shortly after my father, a Unitarian minister, died. Quite soon, it seems, and for reasons I cannot fully recall, I agreed to be nominated as a Trustee - perhaps because my volunteer instinct drove me to join yet another committee. This was the time of the inimitable Christine Broome, Secretary to the church and the Trustees, a delightful, knowledgeable and very efficient lady long acquainted with the church and its history.

I always had slight uncertainties over the precise role of the Trustees, owing to the dual/bicameral? nature of the constitution, but it had served well for the best part of a hundred years and somehow, under Christine's assured piloting, these did not seem to matter much.

For many years we maintained a pleasurable tradition of meeting over lunch in an Italian restaurant on Richmond's high street before the AGM, later reduced to shared sandwiches in the vestry. The AGM used to take place on a Saturday afternoon - not the best day of the week for most, and I became one of the voices proposing a change - to the arrangement we have now, of meeting after Sunday service and lunch, with the Trustees convening in between (and with extra-mural meeting or electronic communication outside the regular, annual pattern if the need arises).

As still is the case now, the Trustees commented upon but were not involved in day-to-day management, the purview of the Management Committee, unless there was some unusually significant matter. The principal concerns related mainly to physical assets, as the Trustees in effect act as the 'owners' of the church, the two major issues I recall being the consequences of the intrusive redevelopment of the house next door and the purchase of a manse for which we were involved in signing a mortgage agreement, deeds, etc. A few years ago, I experienced the irony of being invited to move in there myself as a tenant while it was vacant between ministers!

I came close to advocating a change of constitution to a seemingly more modern and straightforward structure, like the Charitable Incorporated Organization format adopted by some churches, but was pretty much swayed by the dominant view here that the current system, with some clarification and helped by our new terminology of 'Guardian Trustee', has stood the test of time and builds in a degree of internal checks and balances. It also proved itself during a particularly uncomfortable period of internal 'tensions' (I choose the word carefully) a few short years ago. Lords to Commons, Referee to Players, Congress to President (dare I say...?)

I wish my successors and future Guardian Trustees good luck and good judgement, remembering that although in the long term systems need to adapt to survive, and boundaries sometimes have to be redefined or renegotiated, maintaining unity in our diversity is fundamental.

*David Strachan*

## Annual General Meeting

Our 2019 AGM will take place at 1 p.m. on Sunday 24 March. At the meeting we will, among other things, review our annual accounts, elect our church officers and management committee, and reflect on the year gone by and the year ahead. Only full members of RPUC can vote, but if you are not yet a member but wish to see some of the work that goes on behind the scenes to sustain our community, you are very welcome to attend.

The current officers and committee members have agreed to serve for another year, if elected. However, our committee is low in numbers by historical standards and we are keen to recruit new members. The committee meets once a month to oversee all matters concerning the life of the church, so if you think you would be willing to join us, please put yourself forward. If a monthly committee meeting is more than you can commit to, but you are willing to volunteer in some capacity, there may be other jobs you could do for us. Feel free to talk to me about any of the above.

*David Watson*



# MARCH | services

*(All services by Rev. Simon Ramsay unless otherwise stated.)*

## **Sunday 3 March** – A stateless citizen

Shamima Begum, the young British woman who went to join Isis when she was fifteen years old, has been in the news, and now has had her British citizenship revoked by the government, a situation which has made her into a stateless citizen. This story, I think, speaks of how our society chooses judgement and punishment over understanding and rehabilitation. Policies based on the former, rather than the latter, whether they be applied to the war on drugs or in relation to terrorism, have proved to be ineffective. Could there be better ways for us to act with those people whose actions are unacceptable to us?

## **Sunday 10 March** – The Journey of Becoming – a shared service

This service will be a collaborative effort from some of those who attended 'The Journey of Becoming' journalling retreat held on Saturday 9 March. The service will involve readings and reflections from many different sources and perspectives. There will also be an opportunity for discussion following the service.

## **Sunday 17 March** – Visiting preacher: to be confirmed

*Choir practice:* After the service, from 12.30.

## **Sunday 24 March** – Our financial independence underpins our spiritual independence!

This Sunday is our annual general meeting, a good occasion to remind ourselves that it is our financial self-sufficiency, and the work that our volunteers do to enable it, which sustains our open-minded, liberal spiritual community.

*Annual General Meeting:* From 1 p.m.

## **Sunday 31 March** – 'Your spiritual health programme'

William Bloom is an educator and author whose work centres around spirituality. Recently he has released a course entitled 'Your spiritual health programme' that aims to make a form of spirituality available to all, irrespective of whether they have a belief in God. During this Sunday service we will look at this suggested programme of secular spirituality and consider whether this may be of use in a spiritual community such as ours.

Before the service there will be a shared breakfast and a session explaining William Bloom's programme, which will begin at 9 a.m., and also, following the service, from 12.30 until 2.30 p.m. there will be a further two-hour session for those unable to attend the early morning one.

Organ rota: Margaret Lord: 10, 17 March; Christopher Johnson, 3, 24 March; Marilene Berryman, 31 March.

# MARCH | what's on

## **Monday 4** | 7–8.30 p.m. Creative Journaling

The journaling group, to which all are warmly welcomed, shares silence, a check-in, takes time for writing or reflection, some time for sharing as wished. Sometimes we work with a theme, sometimes the theme emerges out of our check-in.  
*Contact:* Kitty Lloyd Lawrence, Naomi Sophia Rae

## **Tuesday 19** | 7–8.30 p.m. Tuesdays @ RPUC: Reading Group

*The Book of Mirdad* was written by the Lebanese writer Mikhail Naimy. He was a contemporary of Khalil Gibran, the author of *The Prophet*. Although Gibran's work has been more popular there are plenty of people that would say Naimy's work is equal in its beauty. So if you fancy reading a classic spiritual work why not come along! If you would like to know any further details please contact Simon on [minister@rpuc.org.uk](mailto:minister@rpuc.org.uk). You can find the book at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Book-Mirdad-Mikhail-Naimy/dp/1907486402>.  
*Contact:* Simon Ramsay

## **Wednesday 6** | 1–3 p.m. Stitches and Stories (Holland Room)

Our craft and storytelling group meets to knit, crochet or sew items to be donated to charity. Good company and good causes make for a lovely afternoon.  
*Contact:* Margaret Lord

## **Wednesday 6, 13, 20, 27** | 2–3 p.m. Coffee with the Minister

Simon will be available at Tide Tables near Richmond Bridge if you wish to drop by for a chat. This is an open social gathering, but one-to-one pastoral sessions are also bookable later in the afternoon or at any other time.

## **Thursday 7, 14, 21, 28** | 7–8 p.m. Meditation

There is no need to be a Zen master for this practice and practical guidance will be given to help you improve your meditation.  
*Contact:* Simon Ramsay

## **Saturday 9** | 2–6 p.m. Journalling retreat: 'The Journey of Becoming'

A half-day retreat to introduce people to the practice of journaling and its benefits; and one which also reveals the many ways in which this practice can be undertaken. (There is also a shared service from those providing the journaling retreat on Sunday 10 March.)

## **Sunday 10** | 12.30-2 pm Management Committee meeting

As is our tradition, these meetings are open to all to attend, unless a sensitive agenda item is tabled.  
*Contact :* David Watson

## **Sunday 24** | From 1 p.m. Annual General Meeting

Everything 'behind the scenes' but essential to the good working of RPUC is discussed here. Come along and be part of it!

## **Sunday 31** | 9 a.m.–11 a.m. Shared breakfast and 'Your spiritual health programme'

There will be a session about William Bloom's programme of secular spirituality over breakfast. A second session for those unable to attend the early one will be held at 12.30–2.30.

*For further information about any of these activities, please email [info@rpuc.org.uk](mailto:info@rpuc.org.uk). See also our website at: [www.rpuc.org.uk](http://www.rpuc.org.uk)*



# richmond + putney unitarians

We are a radically inclusive community of open hearts and open minds, where individuals are free to trust their conscience in matters of spiritual inquiry, and the inherent worth and dignity of all humankind is celebrated, irrespective of race, social status, gender or sexual orientation.

## Contact

**Minister** | Rev. Simon Ramsay

07915 618549 |

minister@rpuc.org.uk

**Newsletter editor** | Louisa Watson

newsletter@rpuc.org.uk

**General inquiries**

info@rpuc.org.uk

**Lettings inquiries**

lettings@rpuc.org.uk

*Postal correspondence to the church address  
in the first instance*

Richmond and Putney Unitarians,  
Ormond Road, Richmond TW10 6TH

For more information on activities at RPUC  
visit our website:

**www.rpuc.org.uk**

## Find us

We are ten minutes' walk from Richmond Station (Southwest Trains, London Overground and District Line) and two minutes' walk from the bus station. Cars can enter Ormond Road one way only (from the Richmond Bridge end).

<https://goo.gl/maps/cTtbX8acyY12richmond>

