



Oldham Unitarian Chapel Newsletter May - August 2011



Oldham Unitarian Chapel founded in 1813

is open to all who wish to worship
with an open mind,
in a spirit of freedom, reason and tolerance.

**We do not all hold the same beliefs,
rather each person is encouraged
'to develop his or her faith
in a continuing search for truth.'**

President: Mr T. Clarke	Tel: 0161 344 0364
Treasurer: Mrs M. Nuttall	Tel. 0161 287 3371
Secretary: Mrs. C. Hall	Tel. 01706 841 798
Minister: The Rev. R. Pounder	Tel. 0161 339 6740

**Unitarian Chapel
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Oldham
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Tel: 0161 620 1810

Lettings Officer: Mrs M. Nuttall 0161 287 3371

Registered Charity No. 1111295

**Dates for your diary:
Sunday services 11.00 to 12.00
unless otherwise stated**

May

- 1 Rev. Dr. David Doel
- 8 Rev. R. Pounder (family service)
- 15 Rev. R. Pounder
- 22 Ken Johnson
- 29 Rev. R. Pounder

June

- 5 Rev. Dr. David Doel
- 12 Rev. R Pounder (family service)
- 19 Rev. Penny Johnson
- 26 Rev. R. Pounder

July

- 3 Chapel closed: service at Chorlton
- 10 Rev. R. Pounder (family service)
- 17 Rev. R. Pounder (Sunday service & baptisms)
- 24 Rev. R. Pounder

August

- 7 TBA
- 14 Rev. R. Pounder (family service)
- 21 Chapel visit to Rivington (lunch & afternoon service)
- 28 Rev. R. Pounder

* Please note the chapel will be closed on July 3rd and August 21st

From the Chapel President

Dear members and friends,

Chapel life continues, and at a sometimes hectic pace at that. Our minister, Bob, has been working hard since his arrival and the spiritual life of Chapel has been enhanced by his efforts. I would like to thank him for the hard work he has put in, above and beyond the half-time ministry we expect from him.

In the first quarter of the year we have explored, together in a three session discussion group, Eckhart Tolle's 'The Power of Now.' We have touched upon meditation techniques following on from this and we have also discussed the work of C. S. Lewis. We held a very successful day on the theme of Taize worship too, which was well-attended.

Services have been taken by the Rev. Bob Pounder mostly, with the Rev. Dr. David Doel officiating on the first Sunday of each month. I would like to express our appreciation to David for that and also thank Shammy Webster for her contribution to worship on a number of occasions. We have held family services with our organist Ian and Sunday school teacher Helen present; these are successful in bringing a stronger sense of community to chapel worship.

We continue to offer a home for our regular users through the week. An initiative of Bob's to create a 'drop-in' centre for asylum-seekers has started in a small way, and we hope to see it flourish as time passes.

The chapel building and car park area have had essential work done and new signage has also been put in place.

We still offer the people of Oldham unconstrained religious and spiritual freedom, in a shared space where ideas can be exchanged and explored.

Best wishes,
Trevor Clarke.

What is Truth?

By Rev. Bob Pounder

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him."



In this story Pilate asks, "What is truth?" Earlier in his ministry Jesus had spoken about truth to his disciples when he said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Well, we might ask what truth and what kind of freedom Jesus was talking about? For it seems we live in a world that extols the freedom of expression, freedom of choice, freedom of movement and the freedom of information. But at the end of the day it seems we can only exercise our freedoms of choice from the position of what we call 'informed choice'. Knowing all the available facts before we can act on anything is of course the key to good decision making. In any case it would appear that the kingdom that Jesus was talking about may have been both a reality and a spiritual metaphor.

So we might want to engage in the spiritual or religious life or to know something more about it, to be able to get a handle on a way of life that can lead to another kind of success, not a success in terms of public acclaim, or in

terms of material wealth but rather in the seeking of the inner life, an inner peace, a contentment that arises from an understanding of our own true natures. The late Rev. David Monk wrote:

"To be in union with God is to be in the NOW. When we surrender our attachment to whom we 'think' we are, to whom we have been in the past and who we want to be, or who we fear we will be in the future, with all anxiety producing 'if only' and 'what if' we enter the NOW, a state of true spiritual freedom which opens the door to unconditional Love for ourselves and all beings."

And there right at the heart of this reality, is this idea of unconditional love, a love that passes all understanding, a love that finds its source in God for the Bible tells us, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

This love is the source of our compassion, of understanding, that is why in the prayer ascribed to St Francis of Assisi we ask God that we should not seek so much to be understood as to understand. Although we may experience this prayer intellectually - in the printed word it is actually only in the spirit of devotion that we may realise and experience the power of its truth.

We might recall that Jesus tells us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. So, *do* love yourself, forgive yourself and celebrate God's love for you right here and now. In the words of the Desiderata, "You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."

But whatever happens, we should know that our motives for change should come from compassion, not from ideologies or wanting to hold power. We cannot accurately anticipate events, we cannot a lot of the time always influence outcomes but we can make a difference, by changing ourselves and by trying to see things as they really are in this worldly existence. In St Paul's letter to the Romans we are urged to offer our lives to God and not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but rather to be transformed by the renewing of the mind so that we can know God's will and act accordingly.

**The Gospel and the Zodiac
A talk and presentation
Details at
www.oldhamunitarians.org**

The Power of NOW

Members of Oldham Unitarian Chapel
explore a modern spiritual classic

By Ian Tilton



Members of the Oldham Unitarian congregation met up on three occasions in February to read excerpts and discuss their thoughts and feelings and to get an understanding of Eckhart Tolle's popular bestselling paperback book "The Power of Now – A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment". It has become something of a classic, selling over 3 million copies since its first publication in the late nineties.

Tolle's writings about simplifying our lives, calming our whirring minds and living in the present 'now' moment has inspired and

influenced many to become happier bunnies. It is worth noting here that some counsellors and psychotherapists have integrated Tolle's spiritual way of living into their own professional work to differing degrees. This is refreshing to me as I work in this area and have sometimes struggled to marry my own faith and values with helping others who have different values to me and who tell me they have no faith in God.

Tolle's basic message in the book is one of surrender and freeing ourselves of the egoic resistant mind, to connect deeply with the present moment, enabling us to accept the reality of what actually *is* without judgement and prejudice, through self-observation leading to awareness of ones own being. He challenges us to drop society's obsession with living in the past and the future and to pay full attention to the present moment. Well, nothing new here you might say, it's a mixture of Buddhism, New Age and Christian teaching with a spice of mysticism thrown in.

However, Tolle appears to be consistent in his message and example, as he endeavours to demystify age-old teachings, and compassionately ease the suffering caused by dysfunctional human minds. He doesn't actually use the word 'love' in the book - the word is conspicuous by its absence, but I'd like to conclude that love is his only motivation and I am left wondering what he does with the millions he has made from book sales. Now that is the true reflection of any prophets message.

One interesting conclusion from our group meetings was: the YouTube videos of Tolle were easier to understand and resonated more powerfully than the book itself. Maybe you'd like to take a look online at <http://www.eckharttolletv.com/tv>

Also free video podcasts can be watched or downloaded online via the iTunes podcast service and of course from YouTube.



Marian & Joan's Australia Tour 2011

Joan and I arrived in Sydney on April 2nd at 6.15 a.m. Just one more leg to take us to Alice Springs, a short hop of two hours. So twelve noon thereabouts saw us in Alice. The plane disgorged its passengers and within half an hour they had all disappeared leaving me and Joan and like two waifs and strays on the forecourt waiting for a transfer which never showed up. Apart from feeling somewhat frustrated and niggled after our nineteen hour journey from Nairobi, it was quite interesting really. The sleepy little airport with only one departure lounge and very few gates had a minor frenzy of activity and then Alice is a small township in the

subsidised back into its ghost town appearance.

It took about an hour of phone calls to establish what had gone wrong with our prepaid booking of transport to the hotel. Not bad considering we had no Australian coinage available and a strange phone system.

We eventually arrived at the hotel to profuse apologies both from them and the transport firm. It transpired our booking for some unknown reason had been cancelled. And there starts



another tale. It seemed quite a nice hotel but to get to your room and the restaurant you had to go through the back door of the reception area to the car park to find the lift which took you to the balcony where your room was situated. The restaurant was a walk through to the other end of the car park. It seemed a bit strange!

Alice is a small township in the middle of a huge expanse of seemingly empty countryside. I'm sure that's not quite true, if you could but see it there is no doubt a lot of Aboriginal activity going on in the area. Alice has a large Aboriginal presence. We had four days and we fitted in three trips. The first one was an afternoon town trip on the Sunday. Joan really wanted to go on an Aboriginal culture trip, but whether they recognise the Sabbath or not, that trip was now cancelled. However the town trip proved to be of interest.

We first went to get up close and friendly with the reptiles. We sat round in an audience while a very enthusiastic chap showed us various reptiles. Not snakes I must say but little dragon creatures. The first one he brought out I thought was a model until I noticed it blink and realized it was alive and breathing although it hardly moved when he put it on the floor. He handled about another half dozen and brought them round to us to stroke or to hold. Just to prove they are not wet and slimy. Nobody held one but we all touched or stroked them.

One thing that did strike us as odd was the fact that the town was quite green, lots of grass, flowers, and trees in full leaf. We hadn't expected

that. The guide told us that this only happened about once every forty years.

The next stop was the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia. Designated "Royal" by the Queen in 1955, founded by the Very Rev. John Flynn, a Presbyterian minister. John Flynn's vision of providing a Mantle of Safety (as he called it) for the people of the Inland can be traced back to the years immediately preceding World War 1.



But it took many years to achieve. Due to his extraordinary tenacity, the Aerial Medical Service as it was then known became operational on May 15th 1928. It is now a modern and sophisticated service which plays a vital role for the people of the outback.

To be continued

Folk at Oldham

Irving Lewis & The CBI

A great night out
By Bob Pounder

Irving Lewis was billed to play and sing at Oldham Unitarian Chapel on Saturday May 7th. Folkie and actor, you can see him on TV in the latest Hovis advert. He's also a regular feature at Debenhams Manchester in December, resplendent in a red suit and a flowing white beard (although you might not recognise him).



As it turned out, Irving turned up with the rest of his band, The CBI, and so we were able to welcome Dave King on fiddle, and the actor John Henshaw, a very funny man, and a dab hand on the boran as well. By way of introduction John exclaimed, "We are our own tribute band" before launching into Ralph Mc Tell's 'Clare to here' "They must have been going the wrong way" suggested John, who added mirth to a solid and enjoyable performance of folk favourites. The humour and the improvisation kept the show fizzing and moving along. "I found a £20 note in a library book", he quipped, "So I went back to the library to see if they had any more books by the same author (laughter). He wasn't allowed to borrow the book on 'Suicide' the librarian had said, "Get lost, we know you won't bring it back!"

Then the group struck up with 'Spencil Hill', a driving melancholy song, before we were back with more comedy with 'Uncle Joe's Mint Balls' (keep you all aglow). Dave King played a fiddle solo, written by the late Alan Mayall; 'The Flight of the Curlew' saying, "It was Alan's wish that this piece should be kept alive. Dave's virtuoso playing conveyed its profound and haunting sentiment to a thoughtful and appreciative audience.

"My wife asked me how I liked my steaks, I said 'rare' and now I only get steak once a year", said John. There was more daftness with 'The Rooster Song' and 'The Ashton Mashers' (although we were in Oldham) ballads and a 'sad song'; about a pub that had run dry: 'Nobody's Mild'. But all too soon the evening's entertainment came to an end with a rendition of the 'The Wild Rover.' "Audiences love it!" said Irving. "No they don't - they hate it!" retorted John. The smoking ban meant that there were no ashtrays to bang out the chorus with, but everyone joined in with gusto. It was a great night out.

Editor's Note:

**The Editor welcomes contributions to the Newsletter.
Please submit any items for inclusion to:**

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Special thanks from the Oldham Unitarian Chapel Committee to John Wilkinson of the National Unitarian Fellowship for creating our website:

www.oldhamunitarians.org.uk