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**Spiritual Recharging from Hal French**

When I was in the Dallas airport a few weeks ago, with a three hour layover, I had planned to catch up on a few phone messages. Alas, I had forgotten to recharge my batteries! So I began looking for an outlet. I found nothing till I noticed a sign for the airport chapel, and entering, saw a place to plug in! While my cell phone battery was being recharged, I got ahead on my meditation schedule and recharged my spiritual batteries in that quiet setting. Soon a young Muslim woman spread her prayer rug and went through her own devotions.

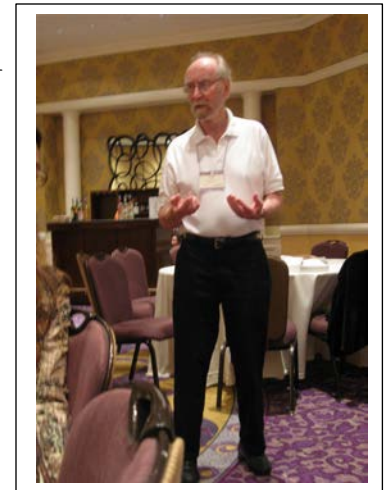
These were rare, reflective moments.

Now, just having returned from my first UUA General Assembly, I realize that this gathering is a familiar spiritual recharging time for many of you. There were many inspiring moments, with Karen Armstrong's stirring address on compassion a highlight.

The IARF-US had a visible presence in our exhibit booth, a reception, and in shared sponsorship of a wonderful celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Michael Servetus. We have reason to be

proud of belonging to IARF, and more good things are planned.

**Continued on page 3.**

**IARF International Council Report****Doris Hunter**

On March 29 and 30th, 2011, the International Council of IARF held its annual meeting at Mutsumi Kai Shinto Shrine, in Kyoto, Japan. Mitsuru Hiraoka was the host, extending to the council members the gracious facilities of the Shrine.

Our president, the Rev. Mitsuo Miyake, chaired the meeting. He opened the session with words of sympathy for the suffering of the Japanese people due to the earthquake that devastated so many cities. Relief funds from United States, Europe, and Great

Britain were presented and received with gratitude by the Japanese Member Group.

The council discussed the financial situation of the organization. With the guidance of our treasurer, a budget was presented that will challenge but also maintain a realistic financial future for IARF. The official address remains in Osaka, Japan, but there is also a virtual office in London maintained by Robert Papini. A grant from the Hibbert Trust was received, of \$2400 for a website update and \$5000 for the Jerusalem/Hebron

Religious Leaders Encounter Project. In addition, funding was given to the Indian Human Rights Project which has been so successful in India, especially with young adults.

Continual effort is being spent on strengthening the IARF presence at the United Nations in Geneva and in New York. The council also held a General Meeting where resolutions to the constitution were presented and passed. These matters related to the General Meeting held in Clearwater, Florida, in **Continued on page 3.**

### SAVE THE DATE- February 3-5, 2012

Our next **IARF-US** conference will be held in Hilton Head, South Carolina, in connection with the UN sponsored World Interfaith Harmony Week, on the theme, **"Faith, Interfaith, and Freedom"**. Three plenary speakers have already been confirmed: Peter Morales, UUA President; Kay Lindahl, Director of the Center for Sacred Listening, and Waleed El-Ansary, Professor, Xavier University, Cincinnati. There will be other attractive program offerings. This will be held at the Hilton Oceanfront Resort-- see their web site-- and watch for further announcements! February weather is uncertain anywhere, but it will probably be better in a southern beach location than where most of you live!



## IARF at General Assembly, June 2011



Front: **Orlanda Brugnola, Betsy Darr, Doris Hunter.** Back: **Hal French, Judy Young, Francie Markham**



**IARF booth at UUA GA**

A number of IARF members attended the UUA General Assembly in Charlotte, NC, the 50<sup>th</sup> since the merger of Unitarians and Universalists. Highlighted at the opening celebration of the anniversary was the relationship of the first UUA President, Dana Greeley, with the Rev. Nikko Niwano of Japan, which led Risho Kosei Kai to join the IARF. In a later plenary, Rev. Niwano's granddaughter Kosho, President-designate of RKK, in a heart-warming address, thanked UUs for their \$120,000 in donations for earthquake relief. She told how in response to the disaster, her members have learned to forget the self in helping others.

The chapter held a lovely reception in the Hilton Hotel where we could welcome guests from Transylvania, the Czech Republic, the Khasi Hills of India, England, and Germany. UUA President Peter Morales spoke briefly to us. The reception led into a celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of Michael Servetus, a forebear of all Unitarians and a martyr to religious freedom, in the form of a lively talk by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, authors of a recent biography of Servetus, Out of the Flames.

Throughout the Assembly, we had a booth in the popular exhibit hall, part of the International Village booths. There was always a welcoming face there to hand out brochures and answer questions, often Hal French and Francie Markham, members of our board at GA for the first time, or Judy Highfill, who also organized the IALRW booth next to ours. In all of these aspects, we had great support from Eric Cherry and his office at the UUA.

## Chapter Board Meets at UUA GA

At General Assembly, Chair Hal French convened a board meeting of the five members present, with Doris Hunter and advisor Richard Kellaway. They reviewed the treasurer's report and the costs of IARF programs at GA (\$1314), and clarified membership issues. Doris reported on the March Council meeting

in Kyoto. The program of the February conference on Hilton Head was discussed, as were some issues of religious freedom around the world.

Some suggestions were made for the next newsletter. Because of the costs involved in producing

and mailing paper copies, the board decided to ask for \$15 extra from members requesting hard-copy newsletters.

Nyla McCulloch was noted for producing a handsome new brochure. Hal will set up a conference call meeting of our far-flung board in August.

## Recharging, continued

**French, cont.** My own Asian research makes me appreciate especially the international support from Japan. President-designate Niwano of Rissho Kosei Kai was honored at GA, and her organization and others in Japan, where our international offices are located, are indispensable to IARF.

I was reminded of our East-West ties in May of this year when I took 22 Honors students from my University to Greece for a course on the Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of Greece. On the morning of our departure, we gathered on the rooftop of our hotel in Athens and went through Tai Chi exercises facing the Acropolis--an ancient Asian art form in the shadow of perhaps the most eminent shrine of Western culture. IARF, similarly, is international in scope, blending elements from many nations, East/West, North/South. There are so many enriching words, as well as shared concerns, that stem from these ties. Please see the page 2 sidebar for news about our IARF-US conference February 3-5, 2012, where we expect to explore them together.



## Religious Freedom News

Read the latest news from the international office at

[www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net)

These issues of religious freedom have been reported in the last few months. See the IARF's blog at <http://rfyn.tumblr.com/> for links to original articles and many more.

Canada: A case involving a Toronto woman's right to testify in a niqab is headed for the Supreme Court. Reported in The Informer. (Canadian)

Egypt: A major force for a moderate interpretation of

## Council Report, continued

**Hunter, cont.** July 2007. No decision has been made regarding the location of the next Congress in 2014, but exciting ideas are being discussed for this future event.

As your representative on the Council, I will be glad to answer any questions you might have at [revdreen@aol.com](mailto:revdreen@aol.com), so keep in touch.



Rev. Koshi Niwano with Doris Hunter

Islamic constitutionalism could be Mohammed Saleem El Awa, an Islamic law scholar who announced this week his candidacy for president. Mr El Awa is known as a cosmopolitan thinker who is concerned with preventing discrimination of different religions. ~The National (Egyptian)

"Proposed legislation in Belgium ...is designed to "fight" against religious minorities through the creation of a new penal offense based not on the criminal activities of such groups, but on the character of their beliefs and religious doctrines," contravening international law. Opinion in Huff Post (US).

China's top Tibetan official

said Thursday "the door was open" for the return of the exiled Dalai Lama, but repeated its charge that the spiritual leader was a separatist bent on Tibetan independence. Reported by AFP

Bangladesh: "Islam will remain the state religion," said Law Minister Shafiq Ahmed, adding that Bangladeshi Hindus, Buddhists and Christians would be allowed to practice their religions freely. Reported by India Times.

USA: A proposed ban on circumcision has qualified by petition for the Nov. ballot in San Francisco, disregarding the ritual significance to Jews and Muslims. Reported in the SF Chronicle. (sfgate.com,US)

**United States Chapter**  
International  
Association  
For Religious Freedom

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Visit our website  
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your dues to  
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added donation.  
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## Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong

### Betsy Darr

In her latest book, the religious scholar takes up her cause of bringing together adherents of many faiths in a Charter for Compassion, based on the Golden Rule in its many forms. She presents a "12-step program" for living out the Rule from a heart of compassion, with steps like Compassion for Yourself, Empathy, Mindfulness, and Action.

Folks who have been involved in interfaith efforts for many years will find themselves well on the path she prescribes. I was most challenged by the step How Little We Know. This surprised me, a member for several decades of the pluralistic UUs, where I weekly learn humility about my own beliefs. But she prescribes curing one's arrogance about political beliefs. How

needed in a time of party polarization!

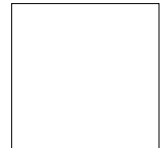
To bring all into the fold, she draws quotes and tales from the roots of many major traditions: Confucius and other early Chinese, the Buddha and other Sanskrit scriptures, Jesus and Paul, early Talmudic rabbis, the Qur'an, Greek philosophers and playwrights, etc.

### a quote from Armstrong's book:

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed so exclusively that you disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for, he says, "Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah." ~Muid al-din ibn al-Arabi, 13<sup>th</sup> c. Sufi

**U.S. CHAPTER  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

BETSY DARR  
183 22<sup>ND</sup> AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94121



**CUSTOMER NAME**  
STREET ADDRESS  
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