

December Theme
Imagination: The Practice of God

We can relate to God as an interactive verb, God-ing. From this perspective, creation is not a one-time event but rather an unfolding, continuously creating. Imagining God in this way, we need not limit ourselves, but imagine ourselves too not as stagnant nouns, but as a process of becoming. Each part in the universe is in dynamic relationship with every other part.

~Rabbi David Cooper, God Is A Verb

Introduction

The word imagination comes from a Latin root, ‘*imaginari*’ which means to “picture to oneself.” In each moment of our life, we are creating these pictures, intentionally and habitually, weaving an ongoing narrative. Snapshots and stories projected onto the screen of our mind can inspire or frighten; they can serve or hinder us. At its best, imagination unties the tethers that keep us stuck, in unhealthy patterns of being and limited ways of seeing. When we think outside the box, new possibilities and perceptions emerge. Imagination, with its components of curiosity and courage allows us to remain open to limitless connections, seen and unseen. In the flow of creativity, we experience a sense of expansiveness and joy.

Practicing God within the realm of imagination enables us to reclaim or redefine the God of our understanding. Our western notions of God have often been that of a singular deity, of a patriarchal He, including some but excluding others. The God of our childhood may have been seen as wish grantor or comfort. Yet for others, the God they were handed down instilled fear or a sense of rejection. For many UUs, it has been a welcome and healing experience to put that God behind them. Imagination is the bridge that takes us to Rumi’s “field beyond wrong-doing and right-doing,” beyond separation, to where unity resides. By awakening our imagination and in acts of creating, we are, as John O’Donohue said “on holy ground, because we are actually deepening and extending and realizing creation/creator, imagination is the path of the spirit.”

This process begins most frequently when the mind is quiet. When we actively choose to pause in silence, to listen for the small still voice to make itself known, we can enter into relationship with the ineffable. In the ancient language of Tamil, God is defined as “one who is beyond you but resides within you.” This God is evolving and growing, as are we, larger than us and yet us. Mystics of every wisdom tradition have attempted to articulate this experience beyond language. We use words like Energy, Universe, a Power Greater than Ourselves, Spirit, but these are simply words attempting to approximate. As the Zen saying goes, “If Truth is the moon and words are the finger, the finger can point at the moon, but it’s not the moon. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger.”

Atheists and agnostics among us may ask, “Why bother? Why construct or refashion a concept of God in order to explain or conjure a meaning for existence that doesn’t inherently or definitively have meaning?” These very questions may provide an invitation to explore what it is you worship. We ALL worship (find worthy) one thing or another, place value on certain ideals, things larger than ourselves. To name, know, imagine and practice what we worship can uncover meaning and fulfillment for its/their own sake.

A practice of any kind implies a be-ing and a do-ing, a verb. Envisioning God as a verb implies movement, action, interaction and dynamism. When you imagine God as co-creating with you, you glimpse connections that weren’t seen at first glance. Like a darkened room, your eyes begin to adjust and things not quickly gleaned before become illuminated. There are no limits to our discoveries as we practice God. And there are many time-tested methods to assist us daily in this exploration, whether verb or noun. We can kindle our imagination with a variety of

practices, including, but not limited to meditation, prayer, movement, painting, writing, quiet service, walks in nature and acts of love. Experiment with what is calling to you. Enjoy this practice of God as a process, a journey with visits of serendipity and an unfolding of wisdom--a deep knowing--inexplicable, indescribable - beyond imagination.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What do you mean by God? Who or what do you envision/imagine...if anything?
2. Is practicing God different than believing in God?
3. What practices help you engage in a relationship with Spirit? What practices would you like to try?
4. How has the God you imagine evolved over your lifetime?
5. What is the word or words you use to describe? i.e, Universe, Energy, Higher Power, something larger than yourself? If atheistic, what then?
6. Does being in tune with God give you better access to yourself?
7. When do you feel you are at your most imaginative- creative?
8. Is it all my imagination? Is there something beyond imagination?
9. How does the concept of God limit? Does it put you off? i.e. Childhood trauma, connection to religions (you own or others) that limit your imagination...
10. "Prayer changes people and people change things"- does God answer prayers?
11. How does God as a verb help you practice, to engage in a dialogue that promotes growth?

Quotes and Short Readings

As soon as you believe that a label you've put on yourself is true, you've limited something that is literally limitless, you've limited who you are into nothing but a thought. ~ *Adyashanti*

The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination. ~ *Albert Einstein*

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. ~ *Carl Sagan, Cosmos, The Spaceship of the Imagination*

Every particle in our physical universe, every structure and every being, is a shell that contains sparks of holiness. Our opportunities to raise sparks are boundless. The choices we make for our activities, the interactions we have with our family, friends, neighbors, business associates, and even strangers, the way we spend our leisure time, the books we read, the television we watch, the way we relate to food, everything in daily life presents sparks locked in husks awaiting release. ~ *Rabbi David Cooper, God is a Verb*

God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun, proper or improper. ~ *Buckminster Fuller*

Awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters. ~ *C.S. Lewis*

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.

I live my life in widening circles that reach out across the world. ~ *Rainer Maria Rilke, Love Poems to God*

God dwells among the pots and pans. ~ *Teresa of Avila*

The truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell, and broke into pieces. Everybody took a piece of it, and they looked at it and thought they had the truth. ~ *Rumi*

Imagination has the creative task of making symbols, joining things together in such a way that they throw new light on each other and on everything around them. The imagination is a discovering faculty, a faculty for seeing relationships, for seeing meanings that are special and even quite new. ~ *Thomas Merton*

Because here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it JC or Allah, be it YHWH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some inviolable set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. On one level, we all know this stuff already. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, epigrams, parables; the skeleton of every great story. The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness.” ~ *David Foster Wallace*

Linus [writing to the Great Pumpkin]: "You must get discouraged because more people believe in Santa Claus than you. Well, let's face it; Santa Claus has had more publicity, but being #2, perhaps you try harder." ~ *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*

I believe in God, but not as one thing, not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. I believe that what Jesus and Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest said was right. It's just that the translations have gone wrong.” ~ *John Lennon*

You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.” ~ *Anne Lamott*

“Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? . . . If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!” ~ *J.R.R. Tolkien*

Nothing in the universe resembles God so much as silence. ~ *Meister Eckhart*

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I said what about my eyes
God said Keep them on the road.
I said what about my passion
God said Keep it burning.
I said what about my heart
God said Tell me what you hold inside it
I said pain and sorrow
He said... stay with it.
The wound is the place where the Light enters you.
~ *Rumi*

The power of imagination makes us infinite. ~*John Muir*

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace, you
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one
~*Imagine, by John Lennon*

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