

February Theme

Imagination: The Practice of Letting Go

*If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be.
Now put the foundation under them.*

~Henry David Thoreau, Walden

Introduction

Imagination is the process of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses. Imagination is central to our perception and experience of reality, and is central to making our dreams come true. Anything genuinely new is only possible through acts of imagination. We may need to remind each other, as adults, how important and central to our lives imagination is. Dreams don't happen outside of us; they are inspired from within by our own imagination. And our imagination has significant impact on the world outside of us.

Imagination needs space and freedom to allow the mind to roam, to open to wonder and curiosity. Imagine what our collective imaginations could accomplish, if we all could let go of limiting beliefs? Imagination is childlike, and many of us may associate imagination with whimsy or play. To enter into a state where we feel imaginative might require we let go of our many responsibilities; and, we need downtime to explore and open our mind to the world of possibility and wonder. Imagination, therefore, is dependent upon the practice of letting go. So, what do we need to let go of to pursue our dreams, to cultivate our imagination? And, how do we get there?

The practice of 'letting go', perhaps of life's many logistics and responsibilities, is needed to cultivate an imaginary world, one in which we feel excited, curious and open to new possibilities. But imagination can also have a dark side, such as when we are afraid of disappointment or when we are afraid of change or taking a risk. We may struggle with the courage needed to pursue our dreams for fear that they will not happen, and fear of disappointment. This may have the undesired result of preventing us from taking action. So, how do we view life as a playground of possibilities rather than unyielding circumstances outside of our control? How can imagination help us to see the wider context and open us to new horizons? One way is to let go of our attachment to outcomes and expectations, and instead reflect on the journey and not the destination. The act of letting go of things beyond our control and being present to the world around us may help us feel free and open to imagination.

The worship associates brainstormed things we may need to let go of to help us open to imagination: regret of past mistakes, feeling sorry for oneself, the need to be right, negative self talk, the need to impress others, limiting beliefs, toxic relationships, the need to please everyone, gossip and complaining, and worry about the future. We also discussed some things that help us feel imaginative, alive, playful and 'in flow': creative writing, reading, singing, dancing, meditating, being in nature, cooking and baking, drawing, sculpting, laughter, breathing, comedy, crying, listening to music, just to name a few. We encourage everyone to think about letting go and feeling imaginative, and beyond that, how we may embody and capture the impact of our collective imaginations joined together in our UU faith.

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

1. Does your imagination support you or mislead you? How or why?
2. In what ways can imagination be more valuable than knowledge?
3. What do you need to let go of to allow your mind to cultivate imagination?
4. How might you honor your imagination?
5. How does your imagination lean when interpreting other's behavior?
6. Is your imagination kind or cruel to you; in what ways?

7. Do you imagine yourself connected to others, to something greater than yourself? How may our UUAC congregation and UU faith help with this feeling of connection?
8. Are there things in your life you want to let go of? What does letting go feel like for you, and how do you do it?
9. Do you have rituals to help you let go of what does not serve you?
10. Going into the New Year, is there something from your past or from last year that you are trying to let go of?
11. How do you balance your expectations when your imagined outcomes are not met? And how do you let go of disappointment?
12. Do you like to imagine the future? If not, do you know why?
13. Do you imagine where you are going in life, or do you react to what is?

Quotes and Short Readings

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable.

~Mary Oliver

Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality.

~Jonas Salk

When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.

~Lao Tzu

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

~Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver

Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.
~Albert Einstein

Though I personally will defend the value of bedtime stories to my last gasp, I have learned to value imagination in a much broader sense. Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.”
~J.K Rowling, 2008 Harvard Commencement

Science does not know its debt to imagination.
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

The world is but a canvas of our imagination.
~Henry David Thoreau

The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.
~ Albert Einstein

Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.
~Gloria Steinem

Without mystery life shrinks. The completely known is a numbing void to all active minds.
~Biologist Edward O. Wilson

To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.
~ Albert Einstein

Imagination is more important than knowledge.
~ Albert Einstein, *On Science*

I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of imagination.
~ John Keats

The power of imagination makes us infinite.
~John Muir

Let go our be dragged.
~ Zen proverb

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death.

~ *Robert Fulghum*

Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

~ *Carl Jung*

Absorbed in this world, you've made it your burden. Rise above this world. There is another vision.

~ *Rumi*

Life isn't as serious as the mind makes it out to be.

~ *Eckhart Tolle*

If you correct your mind the rest of your life will fall into place.

~ *Lao Tzu*

The most interesting people are the people with the most interesting pictures in their minds.

~*Earl Nightingale*

Our imagination flies -- we are its shadow on the earth.

~*Vladimir Nabokov*

My deafness has been my greatest blessing. It has saved me from having to listen to reasons why things couldn't be done.

~*Thomas Edison*

I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. Which is what I do, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities.

~*Theodore Geisel/Dr. Seuss*

The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it.

~*J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan*

If you will imagine yourself as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, you see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth.

These are the eyes of the earth. And this is the voice of the earth.

~*Joseph Campbell*

...if something is there, you can only see it with your eyes open, but if it isn't there, you can see it just as well with your eyes closed. That's why imaginary things are often easier to see than real ones.

~Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*

All it takes to make creativity a part of your life is the willingness to make it a habit. It is the product of preparation and effort, and is within reach of everyone.

~ Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life*

Our problems with unhappiness are rooted in the imagination.... For instance, we can interpret someone's accidental sharp tone of voice as an unfriendly reaction to ourselves, begin to give that person life in our imagination as someone who doesn't like us, therefore be on the lookout for subsequent evidence of hostility, be ready to interpret everything that happens in that light, and of course ourselves show distrust and unfriendliness in turn, which naturally have their effect on the other person; and so by building this thing up in our imagination we can develop a whole atmosphere and relationship of hostility that may be completely false and unnecessary because it all began from something quite accidental. Similarly, by persistently thinking well of persons, looking for good traits in them, imagining them as pleasant and agreeable, well-disposed toward ourselves, we will enable ourselves to behave in a naturally friendly way to them and elicit friendly responses.”

~Beatrice Bruteau, *from Radical Optimism: Rooting Ourselves in Reality*

We tend to consider imagination too lightly, forgetting that the life we make, for ourselves individually and for the world as a whole, is shaped and limited only by the perimeters of our imagination. Things are as we imagine them to be, as we imagine them into existence.

~Thomas Moore, *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*

Come with me and you'll be
In a world of pure imagination
Take a look and you'll see
Into your imagination
We'll begin with a spin
Trav'ling in the world of my creation
What we'll see will defy
Explanation
If you want to view paradise
Simply look around and view it
Anything you want to, do it
Want to change the world, there's nothing to it
There is no life I know
To compare with pure imagination
Living there, you'll be free
If you truly wish to be
If you want to view paradise
Simply look around and view it
Anything you want to, do it
Want to change the world, there's nothing to it
There is no life I know

To compare with pure imagination
Living there, you'll be free
If you truly wish to be.
~ *'Pure Imagination' from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*

Song lyrics

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today
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 some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one
~*Imagine, by John Lennon*

Turn your magic on, to me she'd say
Everything you want's a dream away
We are legends, every day
That's what she told him
Turn your magic on, to me she'd say
Everything you want's a dream away
Under this pressure, under this weight
We are diamonds
I feel my heart beating
I feel my heart beneath my skin
I feel my heart beating
-*Adventure of a Lifetime, by Coldplay*

Imagination could make a man of you
Imagination could make me love you too
Imagination is all I want from you
~ *Imagination*, by David Bowie

Speech

J.K Rowling, 2008 Harvard Commencement: “Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination”

<http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/06/the-fringe-benefits-failure-the-importanceimagination>

Radio

“How Creativity Works: It’s All in Your Imagination”

NPR, All Things Considered

<http://www.npr.org/2012/03/19/148777350/how-creativity-works-its-all-in-yourimagination>

“What makes people creative? What gives some of us the ability to create work that captivates the eyes, minds and hearts of others? Jonah Lehrer, a writer specializing in neuroscience, addresses that question in his new book, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*.”

“Imagination, Part 1 & 2”

Ideas with Paul Kennedy

<http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/2013/02/05/imagination-part-1-2-1/>

“The poet William Blake claimed that the imagination is our highest faculty and central to our perception and experience of reality. More than two hundred years later, scientific research on the brain and creativity confirms the great poet's insight. IDEAS producer Frank Faulk explores the key role the imagination plays in our lives.”



At Rocky Narrows, Sherborn

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<http://uuasheville.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IMAGINATION-Resources.pdf>