

Spiritual Imagination

Our imagination is a powerful tool. It can drive our creativity, fuel our hope, and deepen our faith. What if we engaged imagination as a spiritual practice?

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Hymns

#360 Here We Have Gathered

#1059 May Your Life Be As a Song

#346 “Come, Sing a Song with Me”

Opening Words

“Morning Poem” by Mary Oliver

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice today to illuminate our way toward Love. Inside the womb of this waiting time, we are bathed in sounds, floating in love, growing out of our comfort zone. We experience love, sorrow, pain, and joy. There is a numinous quickening as we await a new world yet unborn.

—Melissa Jeter

Story for all ages

We Became Jaguars by Dave Eggers

Reading

From “Care of the Soul: The Spiritual Imagination” by Thomas Moore

Here is how I see the imagination playing a central role in the spiritual life. Human beings have a natural pull deep into actual life with all its complexity and challenges. It’s wonderful—I call it soul. But we also have an instinct to explore and taste the mystery of it all and the highest, most ideal and sublime values. That is the spirit. But that mystery can’t be defined or placed in a test tube. We approach it through images that bring us close and give us good hints about the elusive element we’re searching for. The imagination—all those stories and parables and rituals—serves the spirit and gives image to the unnamable. To worship the image or confuse it with facts is to miss the very point of spiritual expression.

To benefit from the spiritual insights of millennia, we need two powers: one, the capacity to make effective and powerful images, and two, the ability to grasp the thrust of those images and

be transformed by them, to feel the presence of the unknown that they conjure up. Again, if you confuse the image with what you are seeking, you will not be in the realm of spirit at all. If you translate it into concepts or moral demands, you will have lost the necessary image. Working with imagination is a delicate business.

Some people want nothing to do with religious and spiritual images. Others make too much of them by treating them as facts. Religious images are a means, not an end. They allow us to be in the presence of the great mystery of life—but to benefit from such powerful images, you have to take care not to make them into idols, interpret them too far, or get stuck on only one set of images.

There is a great deal to learn about the imagination, and the best way to begin might be to read one of the sacred stories, as story, and open yourself to the mysterious state of mind in which the story places you. Steep in it, live with it, talk about it, make it one of your own.

Closing Words

Imagine by Rev. Darrick Jackson

Connect with your imagination and let your spirit soar.

Share your heart with another, and savor its sweetness.

Embody the beloved community with your whole being,

And let it radiate out from you like the sun.

Just Imagine.

Blessed Be.

Transcript of the Sermon if you want to read it instead, if you choose to do this, please make sure you give credit to the author.

When I was thinking about this topic, one of the ideas for a title was Imagination: Not just for Children. As children, we have great imaginations. We are bumbling with imaginations. And as we get older that we begin to less use our imaginations. And society tells us that we need to be in reality and out of imagination. And so by the time we become adults, we, we've lost this important part of our lives.

But I think imagination is important. It's not just make believe, it's a way of engaging the world. This is a skill that we were born with. I think there's a reason that children play. It's, it's a tool for engaging life. Being able to imagine possibilities is such an important thing. But, as we get older, we, we lose that imaginative practice. And so we have to work at it again.

In the book, the Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles by Julie Andrews Edwards, the professor is asked how he built up his imagination. And he says, I had to go into training. I had to stimulate and teach my mind to become aware and open to any possibility. I was like an astronaut preparing to go to the moon, think how long they study before they begin their journey.

That's a perfect example of what I'm talking about. It takes work as adults to regain our imagination, especially if we haven't been conscious of it over time, but we can get it back if we work at it. And I think that it's important for us to engage this sense of imagination in many aspects of our lives.

But today, I want to focus on the spiritual. Spiritual imagination can be understood in three different areas. The soul connecting to something larger than ourselves, a heart, our relationship to others, and the body engaging the world.

So we talk about the soul. We are talking about that, that deep place within us that helps us understand who we are and connects us with all that is in the universe. And the Thomas Moore writes The imagination, all those stories and parables and rituals serves the spirit and gives image to the unnameable. And it, I, I like that phrase 'cause it reminds us that all the things that we engage in, like the stories that we engage in, the rituals that we participate in, they can help us give a picture to the things that are beyond our comprehension.

They are manifestations of our imagination. And, and I think in particular as we talk, about love being the center of Unitarian universalism, then what, what is love? But how can we, it's not something that's really concrete, that we can talk about. And yet we talk about it all the time, or we talk about many different types of love and it's our imagination that allows us to put descriptors on love, to help us capture the possibility of what it could look like or feel like or be and help us understand it better, at least for ourselves.

And second Corinthians chapter four, verse 18, it says that because we look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen as temporary, what cannot be seen is eternal. And this is reminding us that all the things that exist in physical form, it all wears down over time. It doesn't, nothing lives forever, but things like love and hope and spirit, breath, life very eternal.

We can't see them, but they manifest long beyond us. And we only understand those things because we imagine what they are like as we also, as we talk about spirit, imagination helps us have faith, something to ground us, particularly when times are difficult, when times are just this hard to manage.

Faith can help us get through, but that faith can be supported by imagination, by imagining a possibility where the world is different, the imagining being in a different space that where you have navigated all these trials and it can give you that grounding to navigate through whatever you are facing.

Imagination also lives in the possibilities that exist in the world. And as we imagine what could be, we are partnering with the holy, however we define that.

We imagine the world to imagine ourselves in a different way that lives up to being our best selves of the world to be its best selves in with imagination. We can be co-creators of our future of what could be imagining. It makes it much easier for it to happen.

The second area of spiritual imagination is centered in the heart. We are beings who feel, and although we differ in our ability to access those feelings, so much of how we engage the world is through feeling.

It's amazing how a word or an image can trigger a feeling within us. And we in that mental space beforehand, but all of a sudden we are there in that moment.

The minister, Reverend James Love says that everything is only imagination. That is, there is no world prior to our image of what ought to be in the world. We cannot live without dozens of mental images of things not present to the census. Daily black marks on a page move me to deep emotion, just words, just images. But such images make the world. Imagination is reality.

There have been so many times where I have gotten lost in a book and I can see myself in that place. And it evokes so many feelings, so many thoughts at that time. And it's just marks on a page. But they convey something to me that incites my imagination. And as I engage in that imaginative space, it also helps me become more empathetic. And we can never fully understand what someone else is feeling. But we can imagine ourselves in that situation and engage our own feelings. And that allows us to have empathy for where they are.

The last area of spiritual imagination is the body. And this can manifest in spiritual practice where we engage in visualizations that take us into a particular place that can bring us calm and peace or a sense of motivation. Or it can also be in a practice of affirmations where, where we are saying the words of what, what, that we want to bring into our lives. And by repeating those words on a regular basis, we can imagine those being part of who we are. And it helps us center in that space.

It also can ground our action in the world to help us move towards beloved community, a community grounded in love and peace and justice. Because to move there, we need to think it's possible. And it's hard to think it's possible if we can't imagine it ever happening.

And so our imaginations helps us, gives us that vision for that beloved community and hope. Hope that it can be realized, hope that it can be real.

Our imagination is central to that, under that, that place of hope and possibility. In the play Six Degrees of Separation. The character of Paul says that I believe that the imagination is the passport that we create to help take us into the real world.

I believe that the imagination is merely another phrase for what is most uniquely us. The imagination is not our escape. And the contrary, the imagination is the place we are all trying to get to.

Imagination can help us find our destination. Even when we talk about imagination as an escape, it is actually taking us into the place where we need to be in the moment, which is not the reality, but to invoke the thoughts and feelings and experience that we need at the moment. The imagination helps give us that vision for where we want to be, where the world could be. And our imagination has inspired so many people to take these thoughts and ideas and make them reality.

So much of our world is been imagined by someone. Our computers, technology, that ideas of different ways of travel, of communication, all was someone's imagination made real, my friends. I think imagination is a skill to be reclaimed. We need to reconnect to our childhood abilities and imagine once more.

May we cultivate a practice of imagination, grounding our faith, strengthening our empathy, and empowering our hope.

Blessed be.