

What Inspires You?—UUFVB Covenant Groups— July 2017

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Readings

One hears—one does not seek; one takes—one does not ask who gives: a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes with necessity, unhesitatingly—I have never had any choice in the matter.”

(Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*)

I dream my painting and I paint my dream. (*Vincent van Gogh*)

I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking. (*Albert Einstein*)

The only place where I feel the joy of imminent domain is in my woodlot. My spirits rise whenever I enter it. I can spend the entire day there with hatchet or pruning-shears making paths, without a remorse of wasting time. I fancy the birds know me, and even the trees make little speeches or hint at them. (*Ralph Waldo Emerson*)

In our ecstasies of nature and friendship, sex and the arts, sports and thinking, travel, deprivation, celebrating and work, we are a channel through which beautiful memorable experiences flow, and we forget ourselves as we become that channel. (*Matthew Fox*)

Reflection: Which, if any, of the above quotations best describes how you experience inspiration? Why?

Topic Exploration

The experience and understanding of inspiration is diverse, with a fascinating past. The ancient Scandinavians found inspiration by drinking mead, a beverage that transformed the imbiber into a visionary or poet. The ancient Greeks sought the inspiration of the Muses in the creation of poetry and songs, similar to the way that Hindus might pray to Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge, music, arts, wisdom and learning. Plato recognized both prophetic and poetic inspiration, and viewed both as forms of madness, or possession, induced by the presence of a god within the inspired person. This “spirit possession” view of inspiration is widespread in tribal cultures throughout the world.

In the Near East, inspiration was associated with prophecy. Early Hebrew poetry also indicates a belief in a divine spirit’s role in the creative process, a role related to the enlivening breath of God as described in Genesis. By the late 18th Century, the Romantics began to turn outwards to nature and the environment for inspiration. Clearly, people have experienced inspiration in various ways throughout history. (Adapted from the essay “Inspiration” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, MacMillan, 2005)

Silent Reflection: Please read through the questions and take a few moments to reflect on what inspires you before we begin our discussion.

Questions / Sharing

1. Describe a spontaneous or unexpected life experience that produced inspiration. What impact did it have on your life?
2. Describe a time in your life when you actively looked for inspiration and found it.
3. Where are you most likely to find inspiration? Might it be in the written or spoken word, in nature, in spiritual practices, or elsewhere? Describe.
4. What person, living or dead, has inspired you the most?
5. Do you purposefully leave yourself open to inspiration, or does it come as a welcome surprise?

Closing Reading

May we offer to one another, and to ourselves, the fruits of our lives, that others, in return, may be a source of inspiration to those whose lives they touch. (Adapted from Howard Thurman)

Check- out and reflection on today's session

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping