

# *Realm of Holy Imagination*

Essay by Steven Maimes

## *Introduction*

A realm is a region where activity occurs. Poetically we can call it a field or garden or kingdom. The realm of imagination needs the human body to exist – mind and senses, heart and soul.

Holy imagination transcends time to touch the soul. It takes us to a place of extra ordinary time where here and now take on an eternal dimension. It allows us to live in peace.

## *Imagination*

*Everything other than God is imagination. ~ Sufi teaching*

*Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world. ~ Albert Einstein*

The faculty of imagining is imagination. It is the ability to form mental images, sensations or concepts that are not perceived directly through the senses.

Imagination is the creative faculty of the mind that allows us to change perception and transform consciousness. The act of imagining allows us to expand time and touch the past. It allows us to play in the present and glimpse the future. It helps provide meaning to experience and understanding to knowledge. It is a fundamental facility through which we make sense of the world.

We are active through imagination by thinking, doing, and being. We perceive physical objects either by our senses or by our imagination. Our image making ability is our power of imagination. We can think imaginatively without receiving pictures.

Imagination is an important tool of consciousness. It is easily tapped and manipulated. It can be private or public. It can cause creativity or eccentricity. It is a necessary ingredient in our life and aging. It is greater than our dreams because it continues and travels where dreams cannot go. It can change any circumstance or perception or reality. Imagination has its own life.

Within imagination we can edit and change how we think. We can see things in a new way; we can observe the mind's eye. Imagination helps transcend conventional thinking.

We gain strength and can experience deeper planes of thinking. Imagination takes hold of our very being.

## *Holy Imagination*

Imagination can include day-dreaming and fantasy. Its forms can be poetic, literary, artistic, and mental.

One dimension of imagination can be called **holy imagination**. This type of imagination is found in Scriptures as prophecy and visions. It is also found in our awakened consciousness.

Holy imagination is infused with images and with spirit. It touches the divine, strives for the divine, longs for the divine. It uses images as tools to see with the spirit. It creates a new paradigm of seeing – seeing with the heart and spirit as well as with eyes.

Holy imagination dwells between the divine realm of pure spirit and the realm of physical manifestation. It has the ability to mirror both the spiritual and the physical. It can intercede between one soul and another. It has the power to connect man to spirit.

Holy imagination provides the vital interface between intent and its achievement. It alters the physical and transcends and transforms past and present. It can move us forward and transform the old into something new.

Holy imagination is higher imagination and can be associated with the sacred, the esoteric, the transpersonal, intuition, myth, archetypes, symbols, rituals, religion, images of the divine, art and language.

Holy imagination includes a taste of presence, holiness, freedom from the bondage of time. It is like spirituality, seeking contact with the divine within. Holy imagination moves us toward intensity, from one location to another dimension

Holy imagination is one way we experience, process, and interact with the realm of imagination. Holy imagination is creative, revealing, and expands in our individual world. All imagination can be transformed into holy imagination.

## *Holy Imagination and Time*

Holy imagination allows us to move freely in time. We can imagine the past, future and present in new ways. We can move out of linear time and taste vertical meaningful timeless holy time. We transcend the present and enter a realm where time vanishes.

Holy imagination needs time to grow and bear fruit. We concentrate, contemplate, and focus to be able to enter into a new dimension, to be transformed, to see things with new meaning. We can touch the eternal present. We can touch the divine.

We can nourish holy imagination, exercise and feed it. We can bathe and create in its timeless moments. Imagination grows stronger with use and repetition. We can strengthen the muscles of imagination. We can create images that are seen within. We can glimpse the unseen.

We can use holy imagination to get out of time, to touch the divine. Images can move us, transport us, transform us – they can touch the heart and soul and move us out of linear time to eternal time.

### ***Holy Imagination and the Soul***

*The holiness of the soul is really the holiness of imagination. What is really a holy soul? – Someone who has great imagination. ~ Shlomo Carlebach*

*Imagination is the eye of the soul. ~ Joseph Joubert*

Every day the soul uses imagination to create reality. Within the soul there are imaginal realms separate from the sensory realms of the body. Holy imagination is the image-making power of the soul. It is not bound by temporal time.

Holy imagination is a spiritual tool, a doorway to the soul. It is replenished by holy words and the richness of images. It can help us to know the soul.

### ***The Realm of Imagination is Like a Garden***

*The Master dances inside the garden / outside of time / and clears a path with a vibrating sickle that appears to cut in only one way. ~ Steven Maimes*

Poetically speaking the realm of imagination is like a garden.

Gardens easily lead us to the realm of imagination, a place beyond temporal time and space. Gardens are symbols of paradise and reminders of God's immanence and transcendence. The beauty of nature's gardens is a reflection of transcendent truths. We look for the garden within and find the divine. That is our eternal garden, our garden of paradise.

A garden is planted and cared for. That is why the garden of imagination seems so real. It appears in dreams when sleeping and later comes to our attention when we awake. It is

experienced in waking consciousness where our visions are active. The garden of imagination delights the heart and enlightens the mind.

The garden of imagination dwells with symbols. It dwells with good and bad spirits, angels and demons, helpers and tricksters. It can be a different dimension from the one we usually are aware of inhabiting. It can be a comforting, mysterious and full of eccentricities.

The garden of imagination is infused with images, with poetry and with ideas. Imagination shapes ideas and trends, determines action and invades daily consciousness. When we create images that are seen within, we are touching spirit.

The garden of imagination is a domain where visionaries, artists and mystics have access. They share ideas and insights, colors and symbols, poetry and art.

God has planted seeds and seeds exist in the realm of possibilities – the realm of imagination. We search for and find seeds and help them actualize. Seeds exist as insights and visions. Some seeds will grow quickly, some will take years, some may not grow in our lifetime – yet, we plant seeds.

## ***Imagination and Reality***

*Everything you can imagine is real.* ~ Pablo Picasso

*The Unreal never is. The Real never is not.* ~ Bhagavad Gita

In addition to observation and perception there is imagination.

Man has the ability to use imagination to make images and symbols. These images have the potential to create reality. As man turns to holy imagination, he can receive visions or seed-visions that go on to change reality. Imagined change is often the same as actual change; we use imagination *as if* it was real.

Photographs, paintings, and moving pictures are images. They can evoke the presence of things and those we know. They are a substitute for the living reality that has vanished and a representation of things captured in time. They can become vehicles of imaginal archetypes or myths and can become works of art.

Imagination helps us feel at home in the world of forms in which we live. Our individual experience sometimes creates a void. Imagination acts as a filler of the void.

Holy imagination takes us out of our “normal” reality and allows us to touch the eternal.

Holy imagination gives us the essential tools that enable us to bridge the divide between normal reality and Kingdom reality. It can act as a bridge between the world of visible physical forms, and the realm of the spirit not perceived by our senses. Even a small taste of eternal reality can sustain us for periods of time.

Imagination changes as we age. We exhibit aging imagination that is exploratory, expansive and discovery focused. We create images and our imaging becomes *im-aging* – images of aging. Meditation and contemplation strengthen aging imagination.

Older people develop a special intelligence of imagination. In late-stage thinking a new and necessary intelligence forms. It is a different kind of intelligence than in youth or middle age. Late-stage thinking is complex because it can be imaginative, symbolic, multileveled and expressive.

Never underestimate the reality of the imagination. It has been around as long as humankind, responsible for fairy tales, music, art, literature and thousands of inspirational inventions. With imagination, we can also imagine things that we cannot do.

Our worldly perspective may be more sensual, whereas the holy may be more whole. The senses can connect us to holy imagination. The practice of sensual awareness can enrich the internal environment and move us forward toward wholeness.

People are a complexity of images. To know someone one must both image that person and absorb images of that person. To stay connected with someone, one must stay imaginatively interested in imaginings of the person. The connection through imagination brings an extraordinary closeness. Love follows.

Imagination is real in the moment of time it appears. It is often unseen like the wind, electricity, love, and peace; but can be seen with the mind's eye and the heart.

For children, imagination often blends with reality and can sometimes appear as a parallel reality. Adults also have experiences of living in an imagined parallel reality; however they no longer have the status of being an innocent child.

### ***Religious Imagination***

Within the world of religion there are imaginative ideas and states of consciousness. Some originate from Scripture, others from oral tradition. Imagination and religious inspiration together allow us to see what is hidden. As religion enlarges our imagination we can imagine different levels of reality.

Religions comply with our need for visual imagery – through art, calligraphy, architecture and sacred symbols. All bear witness to another realm of experience.

Faith is strengthened by imagination. Faith is both a gift from God and an exercise of holy imagination that is rooted in transcendent reality. We allow imagination to bring both new understanding and new faith. We take a leap of faith from logic to imagination, and back to logic with new vision. Our religious-spiritual path helps transform our inner imagination to holy imagination. This exploration challenges our thinking with new possibilities. We can glimpse mysteries.

Religious imagination can help bring us into the presence of spirit and awaken spirit in our hearts. Religious imagination is considered by many as imaginary and not real – *what do they know?*

### ***God and Holy Imagination***

*The wise man lives after the image of God, and is not guided by the ways of the world.*

~ Paracelsus

The cosmos is God's imagination, not our imagination. God imagines everything and by so doing gives all things a reality and apparent independent existence.

Holy imagination is part of the image of God – *imago Dei* in Latin – and is a mystery that enables us to grasp meaning. Human beings created in God's image have inherent value. Imagination helps expand man's image.

We find our connection to that of which we are an image. Our imagination cannot comprehend God's essence, but we can glimpse God's attributes in the realm of holy imagination. God can be approached through holy imagination. We use imagination to find our connection to that of which we are an image. When an attribute or quality of God is perceived, holy imagination allows us to step out of the physical and back again. This is a blessing.

With our language we use words to talk about God. These words invoke imagination. We use holy imagination to open to the absoluteness of the divine, to find God.

Holy imagination dwells in the present moment, and is manifest when we let go of our ego-determined life and say yes to God's presence. This experience takes us beyond our limited imagination to the wonder and presence of God's eternal place.

## *Imagination in Holy Scriptures: Images and Visions*

*God said: Let us make man in our image... God created man in His image.*

~ Genesis (1:26-27)

Many religious traditions give a central role to imagination, though not necessarily by that name. Holy Scripture is believed to be God's word; revelation written down. It may also be inspiration useful for guidance.

Holy imagination proceeds from the divine source of tradition. It offers a way to contemplate the Divine Mystery that we cannot see or understand. It crystallizes spiritual intuitions and realities into formal, symbolic realities.

In *Genesis*, God's desire was expressed in image and later became actualized. We move from God to image; we now can return to God by image. Image as holy imagination is an intermediary link between God and man.

### *Scriptural Language*

Holy Scripture allows us to enter into Biblical time where prophets, priests, and kings are alive and touch our souls through holy imagination.

Scriptural language is highly metaphorical and symbolic and needs to be read as such. Scriptures were not written to communicate facts but to provide stories and poetry to kindle holy imagination.

Scripture provides us with words that address and evoke holy imagination. Many books of the Bible refer to God, but He appears different in each book. The interpreter is required to use his or her imagination to interact with the text. It is out of that interaction that faith and visions arise.

People of faith have used their theological holy imaginations to find in Scriptures truths relevant for them and for their age.

When prophecy about the future is spoken, it is uttered in the present. This allows the present to accept the prophecy in the realm of imagination. It allows the walls of time to dissolve.

Access to the human soul and imagination is often limited. As a result, writings about God sometimes include anthropomorphic imagery. Other images also may be added from personal attitudes and cultural traditions that provide additional meaning.

## Seeing God

From Islamic Hadiths:

~ *Only God can see God.*

~ *Worship God as if you see Him. If you can't see Him, He sees you.*

~ *Allah: I am as My servant imagines me to be.*

It is said in Abrahamic Scripture that no one has ever seen God. But the presence of God has been seen.

Visions of holy imagination become reality as people see the presence of God. *A few examples from Scripture:* Moses saw the presence of God as a burning bush. Moses led the people of Israel toward the presence on Mt. Sinai and they saw the presence in fire. And, Jesus was transfigured and his face or presence shined like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

God is sometimes seen through angels (messengers). In Judaism, angels appeared to Abraham, and Jacob wrestles with an angel. In Christianity, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and Zechariah. In Islam, Gabriel revealed the *Quran* to the prophet Muhammad.

Religious art is almost entirely imaginary. Artists do not know what biblical characters look like, yet they create representations in art. The Temple in Jerusalem is described in detail in *Leviticus*, and we can only imagine it.

Religion uses image-rich ritual. The images fill us with light and help us see beyond with a new vision of reality. Imagination is liberating.

## Imagination: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

### Judaism

Judaism has a history of using imagination to better understand God. Jews live through the power of imagination and use imagination to increase faith, understanding, and to perceive a messianic era.

With Torah, there are many levels of interpretation from literal to secret. In addition, Jewish Midrash amplifies the text with story and extraneous scripture. Imagination is used to teach and to evoke the presence of God.

The Jewish mystical kabbalists transformed sensory experience into symbols and created image maps. This use of holy imagination allowed for personal transformation.

### ***Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach on Holy Imagination***

The truth is, you cannot be a prophet without the utmost, unbelievable, most infinite imagination. A person who has no imagination can never be a prophet.

What is really a holy soul? Someone who has great imagination.

The more your imagination works, the closer you feel to the secrets of the world.

The holiness of the soul is really the holiness of imagination.

What is the whole thing of believing in the Messiah or not believing in the Messiah? It is a question of imagination, right? If you have good imagination why not? That's all there is to it.

Reb Nachman says the most way out thing – the strongest imagination that you need is to believe that God created heaven and earth, and to believe that you really need imagination. You look at the world and you see a solid world, you need the strongest and holiness imagination that God created heaven and earth.

Reb Nachman says that all the holy tzaddikim, all the holy people, they had this strong imagination.

### ***Christianity***

Stories and experiences of Christian mystics have helped shape the Christian holy imagination. Christian devotional practices are enhanced by imagination.

For Catholics, visual experiences became real as exemplified by the Eucharist as a revelation of the real presence of God. Memories and icons of saints, Mary, and angels all are reflections of God's love and experienced in the realm of imagination.

Christian art especially as manifested in cathedrals and churches, certainly enhances imagination and makes contact with the divine easier. Art provides visual and enchanting experiences.

The miracles and transfiguration of Jesus along with his teachings of heaven and many parables allow our inner imagination to expand and experience holy imagination.

### ***Islam: Imagination and the Imaginal***

Sufi philosopher and mystic Ibn Arabi played an important role in reviving imagination as a topic of religious and philosophic concern. Ibn Arabi was a man of enormous imagination and his reasoning was full of imagery and mystic emotions. He did not always prove his ideas with a formal discussion, but referred his readers to mystic intuition and imagination as the final proof of their validity.

Ibn Arabi said imagination is the ability to see things as images; is an ability of the heart.

The whole of existence is imagination while true Being is God alone. Existence as a whole can be called imagination and is an intermediary realm between Being and nothingness.

Islamic mystics have spoken about a spiritual realm of imagination that exists between the Spiritual and the physical. They refer to this mystical imaginal world of ideas-images-  
imagination and call it *alam al-mithal* in Arabic – in Latin it is called *mundus imaginalis* and in Hebrew *olam hamashal*. This inner world is experienced by the active imagination, or what Sufis would simply call the "heart."

## ***Imagination in Poetry and Literature***

*The imagination hovers above ritual, the way fragrance hovers over a flower.*

~Federico Garcia Lorca, poet

*The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, are of imagination all compact.*

~William Shakespeare

*Imagination is the ability to think what is not.* ~Jean-Paul Sartre

Words as symbols affect imagination. Words along with images are imagination food. Part of understanding a poem or story requires imagination. Readers possess vivid imagination and are accustomed to enlivening unfamiliar settings, characters and worlds.

Poets fashion form from the realm of imagination. They do not have to obey rules that are locked in time. Poetry can transcend time and use figures of speech or symbolism that does not literally represent real things. There is poetic imagination.

Authors of fiction experiment with syntax and style. They open new pathways of thought and imagination expressed in words. The writer also edits and adds personal creative thought and visions.

Besides the written word, spoken words have their own melodies and nuances. Storytelling and theater have existed for thousands of years. Culture and spirituality depend on archetypal imagination found in both written and spoken words.

## ***Memory and Imagination***

Memory brings images to mind and is fundamental to the mind. We cannot escape remembering. Our thinking relies upon a collection of mental images that can be recollected. When we recollect the past we are imagining in time.

Our memories are recalled imagination and are colored, flavored and dusted with imagination. Recollected events both written and oral are shared or collected and often called history. Historical imagination is an attempt to relive the past.

Memory is different from thinking. Our thinking can be wrong while imagination has a reality of its own.

Using memory is one way we can transform imagining and imagination to holy imagination. With memory we can manipulate time by extrapolating from the old to create and amplify something new

### ***False Imagination***

The uncertain power of images is pervasive wherever we look. Images can hypnotize, control and feed all sorts of delusions. Hinduism speaks of *maya* (illusion) and *avidya* (individual illusion). Judaism and Islam tell us to avoid illusion by avoiding figurative representation in sacred art. Imagination can result in the error of associating other gods with God.

False imagination can be called lower imagination when it is profane, narcissistic, includes fantasy and self-delusion.

Fancy is one of the lowest forms of imagination and can often be false. There is no creation involved; it is simply a reconfiguration of existing ideas. Rather than composing original concepts, the fanciful individual simply reorders concepts, putting them in a new and fresh relationship to each other.

We can be fooled by false imagination. It can create conspiracy theories. It can border on magic and cancel out holy imagination.

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