

Love the Limits



REV. SEAN PARKER
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Creativity isn't all it's cracked up to be. Neither is freedom—at least absolute freedom. There's nothing that shuts me down like being told, "Do whatever you want. There are no limits." Perhaps it's related to the way I sometimes feel frozen at the sight of the blank page or empty canvas. I always hear the echo of a voice from childhood, "Don't mess it up, kid."

To get creative, I have to trick myself. I have to make rules like "you can only use three colors" or "this has to be done, start to finish, in 2 hours and 23 minutes. Go!" I've learned to love limits, even the ones that are arbitrary or seem silly. They give me somewhere to start, something to weave my thoughts around, and yes, something to resist.

I'm not alone. When I teach poetry or art classes, I create a prompt for each week's assignment. No matter whether a student is intrigued by the prompt or hates it, as they grapple with what it means, what it requires, and what it refuses, it gets the artist thinking and creating.

"Write a poem your mother wouldn't like" is a perennial favorite. The potential poem asks the

writer to recall all they know or do not know about their mother, all they carry with them about her approval and disapproval. It is fertile emotional ground, but left to roam without fences or landmarks, they may never have found this particular field, this garden bed and these seeds of feeling and the poem that grows from them.

Once they begin to appreciate the prompts, it's time to introduce the poetic forms. I start by telling them that even if they never again use any of the traditional forms we study—tanka, sonnet, cinquain, double dactyl, or the dreaded villanelle—they will be better writers of free verse if they learn about and find a way to play with the rules of poetic forms.

And it's true. Though most of the poets return to free verse, they never forget that every poem has a form and that by making form intentional, they have new tools: meter, line length, stanzas, rhyme, and even the white space on the page, to build worlds and create encounters with the reader. Suddenly iambic pentameter is not just an archaic rhythm, but a way to carve words into a familiar shape which can create comfort or discomfort, depending on the context of the poem and the choices of the poet.

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Quest

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*"You can't use
up creativity.
The more you
use, the more
you have."*

MAYA ANGELOU

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Updates from UUA General Assembly 2021



TANNER LINDEN

CLF Public Relations & Outreach Manager

We were honored to send over 20 CLF member delegates and 16 religious professional delegates to Virtual General Assembly 2021. Now that it's over, we want to let you know some of what happened.

General Assembly (GA) is the annual meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), during which UUs from around the world vote on the business of the Association, and come together to connect, learn, and worship. This year's GA was held entirely online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The delegates from UU congregations passed, with 93% in favor, a Statement of Conscience entitled Undoing Systemic White Supremacy: A Call to Prophetic Action.

The delegates also passed three Actions of Immediate Witness: Stop Voter Suppression and Partner for Voting Rights and a Multiracial Democracy; Defend and Advocate with Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Communities; The COVID-19 Pandemic: Justice. Healing. Courage.

Two Responsive Resolutions passed. Responsive resolutions are responses to reports made during GA; they are not binding, but they represent strong feedback and input of the assembled congregations.

The two resolutions passed were: Article II Responsive Resolution: Include Systemic Anti-Racism in Principles; and Divestment Responsive Resolution: Creating a More Just Future Through Divesting from Pipelines and Investing in Young People.

PDFs of all above statements and

documents are available online at uua.org/ga/off-site/2021/business.

Finally, there was one contested UUA Board election; Rev. Sam Trumbore was elected to the contested position. The other positions on the Board, as well as Financial Advisor and the positions on the Commission on Appraisal, the General Assembly Planning Committee, and the Nominating Committee, were all uncontested.

The Church of the Larger Fellowship had the pleasure of kicking-off the General Assembly Banner Parade, you can watch a recording of that at <https://youtu.be/mqpfiStHNXg>.

Public worship services and sessions from the conference are available at uua.org/ga/off-site/2021.

For those who are able to join, we hope to see you in-person next year! ■

Creativity in Cakes

KUNTRY

CLF member, incarcerated

I have been locked up for four years now and I have seen all things created in the penitentiary. The one thing that has stood out to me most is cakes and pies. I have always loved to bake and since I found out how to make cookie cakes three and a half years ago, I haven't stopped making them.

You see, people like to make things for money or extra food in their locker, I love to make cakes for pure joy and smiles on peoples faces. Everyone always says, 'Kuntry, you can make so much money on this,' and I have to explain why I do it the way I do.

Very rarely do I do it for the extra food. I go into a depressive state of mind when I run out of supplies to

make cakes. I love to make cheesecakes and I am always looking for different recipes.

I have a famous Blueberry Jalapeno Cheesecake that folks are always asking for. They will come up to me and be like, 'Kuntry, when are you gonna make a cake?' I love making people happy in a place that is set on making folks sad. ■

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As I've grown older, I've begun to apply what I've learned to other areas of my life. Whenever I hear someone insisting on their right to absolute

freedom, I question the wisdom of their argument and wonder if it's boring and lonely and empty to be so free. I guess I've come to prefer the kind of liberation that comes with limits. Give me a covenant to live into, a promise to keep, a deadline to

meet, a form to wrestle, a community to serve, a prompt to remind me that I am more creative, more powerful, more alive when I choose to set aside my ego's hunger for the glaring expanse of freedom and learn to love the limits. ■

Reshaping the Soul

GREGORY

CLF member, incarcerated in NH

To create or to reshape. My understanding is that these are two different things. They are often blurred in my mind even as I acknowledge the distinction. Can people truly create? Or can we only reshape what has already been created? If the platonic 'ideal' holds true then it seems that everything I, we, do is a reflection, an iteration maybe, of the ultimate.

The idea that I could perhaps create a new ultimate is intriguing but has no possibility of being authenticated. It is most likely an exercise in idle speculation, but the thought process has led me to some interesting places. These places, these recesses in the corners of my soul have often gone unexplored. Why? Because I have no way of qualifying what I find there. I can't compare myself, my darkest deepest mysterious elements with anyone or anything. Who could I ever safely share them with?

In my core, in my heart of hearts is the blackest of darkness absolutely impenetrable by light or reason. It is not evil, nor good. It is total chaos and utter stillness. It is the yin-yang in its every application. The Wellspring of all things. The Great Mystery.

It is within this darkness that I often send my consciousness. I try to find the things about myself that can help or hurt me. I am always amazed at the riddle that is me. It can not be understood in any conventional way. It can not be expressed in any words but yet, I am compelled to try.

This is the force behind my "creativity." I express myself through music, through my writing, my singing, my guitar. I take the secret parts of myself, I take the inexpressible, and I express them. I unveil to the world and sometimes even myself, the mystery of self.

I have found that this is the best way for me to quantify and qualify my darkness. I cannot bring light into

my black heart, but I can bring my heart out into the light. A little bit by little bit, I am insulated from internal damnation and external condemnation. Art, music, artistic license: these protect me. Even though I can still feel the pain of rejection (I often do), I can also recognize that the rejection may simply be of the manner of presentation, not what is being presented. That may seem like semantics, but it's still true.

I have found that it is impossible for me to explore these caverns and not return again to the surface with a gem. I have found that when Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is within me, he wasn't kidding. I have found that although I have many flaws and shortcomings, I am actually an amazing being, completely and totally without equal, and priceless-ly valuable. I have found, often to my chagrin, that so can everyone else be. I am not unique in this potential. Everyone has the Kingdom of Heaven

Reshaping the soul, continued on page 7

Art as Creative Practice

For many years, you all have sent us your incredible works of visual art along with your poems and essays. In this new era of *Quest*, we would like to feature visual art more regularly, knowing that the full range of creative expression cannot be captured in words alone. If you love drawing or painting, please send us copies of your work for inclusion in future issues of *Quest*!

If you are a free world member of the CLF and have access to email, please email us at clf@clfu.org. If you are currently incarcerated, you can mail a copy of your work to The Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF), 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA 02210. Thank you for sharing your many creative gifts with our beloved community.



FLAMING ZEN CHALICE

MICHAEL

CLF member, incarcerated in FL

[This is] my rendition of our symbol. I have been wanting to render it this way for several years, but apparently the time was now. I personalized it, as you can see, with a Zen Buddhist flower (the Ensō) and with the heart under the flame. If by chance, my version has offended anybody, I meant no harm. Just wanted to share this art, how UU and my individual path has helped me.

Please share with all who find such work inspiring, uplifting and thought-provoking. Please, place it somewhere as a constant reminder that we are a "flame in the midst of fire, motivated by Love within this mysterious circle of life."

**VENICE - DAWN****GARY**

CLF member, incarcerated in NC

**DERECK**

CLF member, incarcerated in VA

**ROD**

CLF member, incarcerated in IL

If You Want to View Paradise (Don't Ask Me For A Picture)

VYLET

CLF Member, incarcerated in FL

Yeah, I know you want something a little more up-beat
And all my poems are sad
I'd write about being happy more often
If I were happy more often, eee'gad!

But for you let me try this
It's no big deal
For you I will write
What I do not feel

With imagination it's easy
Word play I create
A mind set to set minds
In a worlds. Realist. State.

Happy happy joy joy
Ahh, forget this, what do you want from me
My heart is dark as midnight
And only death holds a key

I hate people, I hate life
I wish death, I stir strife
I talk proper and fool people
Sophisticated learned evil

I wasn't always full of resentment
Bitterness and sorrow, pain and depression
But that story will not be told
This morning or after lunch
Use your imagination, and make one the hell up
Ah yes, I imagine and day dream it's true
That one day I won't have to imagine what it's like
to be happy
And happily write a poem for you

Flowers

ELAINE

CLF Member, incarcerated in AK

Just like a flower, we bloom into our-
selves,
Taking our precious time as we open up
to the world.
Each one of us different and unique,
As diverse as nature herself.

We emerge in big cities and small towns,
Wherever our roots have taken hold.
Sometimes we are welcomed and some-
times not,
But regardless we strive to thrive.

Some of us are allowed to live and grow,
Though some are harshly plucked like a
common weed.
Yet for those who we've lost another
grows in their place,
As delicate and stubborn as any other.

So whether you're a daylight daisy or a
darkling orchid,
Or even an atypical Irish rose like me,
Never be afraid to blossom,
Show off the fierce beauty you have to
chase away the ugliness around you.



Reshaping the soul, cont. from page 3

inside them. One needs only to go for a walk one day and they too will find these truths.

How can I exist and not create?
How can the space between that mysterious darkness of the limitless unknowns, of myself and the well-defined light of my reason and awareness not be charged with possibility? The constantly renewed flux of the streams of consciousness flowing up through the wellspring to the mysterious subconscious,

bringing with it all the possibility of the unknown. How could I not create in this situation? How could whole new worlds not be formed? New ideas, new vistas, new fears, new hopes. The dreams of a slumbering god.

To return to my initial question regarding the concepts of creative and reshaping, I find that creation is not an act of deliberation. It happens spontaneously and instantly. It is then that the individual reshapes, polishes it up, smooths the rough edges, makes a second draft, and starts all over.

What many call creation is really just the process of deciding how to present what was created.

A sculptor works hard to free the image from within the stone. The painter strives to capture the image in their mind or sitting in the model's place. The musician struggles to deliver the song within their soul. But all these "presentations" are not creations but simply the revelation of what already is. The creation is done instantly, instinctively and every time we look into the darkness. ■

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on the idea explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

In the first article in this issue, "Love the Limits," Rev. Sean Parker Dennison suggests that creativity can sometimes be best found within limits, with structure and accountability to guide and shape its expression.

Do you also "love the limits" when it comes to your creative practice(s)? What forms does your creativity most often take, and how does it either benefit from or struggle within boundaries?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.



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