

## How to Use Your Imagination

By Scot Fritz

It happened again, this morning.

I was engrossed in this story about my mother and an argument we were having when I heard my alarm clock go off. I opened my eyes and turned off the buzzer as the images of my mother were replaced with pictures of the shower and a cup of coffee. Then, suddenly, those images vanished as I heard my own voice saying.... Oh no! I'm giving the sermon today! At that moment, I saw myself in a suit, standing before a bunch of people who were throwing rotten fruit at me and hissing. But I remembered something that I heard once from a guy name of Carnegie and I pictured my audience in their underwear. That made me laugh and my stomach relaxed a little bit. Then that voice came back and started ticking off all the things I had to do before I got to the UU, this morning. Another image popped in, of me going back to bed.... or getting in my car and driving to atlantic city.... or going to the IHOP for breakfast....

I tell ya, doctor... you gotta give me something for this.

My imagination is a constant companion, providing running commentary, suggesting alternative endings, critiquing my performance, and entertaining me with endless fantasies where I am either the hero or the victim. It helps me make decisions. way understand things... the way that I 'make sense' of things... is thru my im. The ability to problem-solve... to see things from a different perspective... to empathize... to experience GOD or Spirit is thru my im. With it, I can change my reality. I can 'remember' the past in a way supports me and empowers me. I can do all this thru my wonderful technicolor, multi-channel, curious imagination.

I come from a long line of "Imaginists".

(Psychologists, I'm sure, would call us 'fantasy-prone'.)

My great-uncle, George, was a stage magician and hypnotist.

My grandmother, Grace Edith... my mother, Alice... as well as most of my aunts, uncles and cousins... were Pentecostals in the Wesleyan tradition... as was I, for most of my life. (Pentecostals believe in the 'gifts of the spirit'... the power to heal, to receive messages from God, to prophecy and discern spirits....)

My great-uncle, Charlie, was a philosopher and book-collector. He's the one who turned me on to Emerson and Blake and a Russian named Burdeyev. He's the man who taught me about the Divine Imagination. He had a used bookstore where I spent many afternoons, reading all manner of speculative... creative... outrageous things and talking with him. And I learned that you could come to believe just about anything, if you set your mind to it.

I was also a fan of the Amazing Kreskin. I got his books from the library and I found out that his last name was really Kresge and that his family lived close by. I remember calling his gracious aunt and badgering her for details about the Man.

By the time I was in the fifth grade, I was hypnotizing my friends and using a pendulum and a Ouija board while I was also reading the bible and praying and going to church 4 times a week.

I was confused. The bible... Kreskin... L Ron Hubbard... Joseph Smith... which one was right? I finally realized that the common denominator in all of this is that it was the product of human imagination. And so I studied the Mind.

Our minds are incredibly plastic. That's our blessing and our curse. While the 'open architecture' of the mind allows us to be quite adaptable and responsive, it leaves us susceptible to the improbable and the irrelevant. We waste our resources in an effort to protect ourselves or vindicate ourselves from things that are no longer a challenge. We dicker with shadows and flinch over nothing. Our imagination can become our enemy.

Later, this month, I'm going to have surgery.

Let's use that upcoming experience to look at ways my imagination can either be a benefit or a distraction.

I have been hospitalized a few times in my life, so I have many good memories to draw on. I have also heard many a horror story about botched operations, iatrogenic diseases... all kinds of catastrophes. While I have not personally experienced any of these disasters, my imagination is not above re-broadcasting them whenever I think about my surgery date. (I've actually considered asking my friends to go over my hospital room with disinfectant before I wake up from the anesthesia, after hearing a radio program about hospital filth.)

My imagination is also keen on thinking about the pain, the special care I'm going to have to give my stitches.... the worried look on faces of friends.... running constantly.

Now, in the past, I would have worked on changing those thoughts... countering them.... intentionally creating competing, positive thoughts... but I have discovered a better way of handling my insecurities... and I'd like to share that with you, today.

I got the idea from a book called Pollyanna... and from a psychologist named Martin Seligman... and from Dale Carnegie and about a million other people. I heard Barak Obama talk about it, a few times. And most recently, I heard it in the Ware Lecture at General Assembly.

It's something about optimism... and hope... and faith.

Martin Seligman pointed out, in his book called *Authentic Happiness*, that optimistic people just seem to have better lives than pessimists. They live longer... are sick less often... recover from trauma quicker.... have better marriages.... and the list goes on.

That's kind of a no-brainer, isn't it?

But Seligman went a step further. He found that optimism is the consequence of three attitudes we hold about the world. He called these “explanatory styles” and said that optimists and pessimists differ in the styles they use.

Seligman says, first of all, that optimists view bad events as being the exception to the norm. Optimists believe that bad events are only temporary. Pessimists think that bad events are PERMANENT and never-ending.

Secondly, Seligman teaches that optimists see bad events as being localized and specific, while good is pervasive.

Lastly, Seligman says that optimists see bad events as being impersonal and extraneous. They don't blame themselves or think that they are deserving of the bad that happens. They maintain a sense of personal goodness in the face of adversity.

These styles are ones that can be practiced and learned, so that even the most pessimistic people can become more hopeful.

As I practice optimism, I am naturally more likely to do things that empower... improve... encourage. Since I believe that good is permanent, pervasive and personal, I would want to stick around as long as possible.

But what does optimism have to do with faith?

In order for me to expect good, I have to believe that there is a cause for the good. That cause can be an ordered universe, the natural beneficence of nature, God, etc. BUT, in the end... when my back is up against the wall... I have to find some firm foundation upon which to base my belief. Where does the permanent, pervasive, personal good emanate from? And why would I believe that the bad is not also p,p, and p? Because I have an audacious hope... a faith that is unexplainable but sustaining, for me.

I have found that, as I practice optimism, my imagination follows suit and begins to support my viewpoint. This is because Worldview and Self-Concept are correlative with the imagination. If I insist on seeing the world as good, then my imagination gives me hopeful images. If I harness my imagination and used guided imagery and the like to

give myself hopeful images, I will see that my Worldview and Self-Concept shift to come into alignment with that. The cycle goes something like this  
Concept directs imagination which motivates us to choose or act in ways that confirm our concept. Because, actually, our outlook determines the experiences we have in the world, to a great degree.

But you already knew that.