

# CALL TO IMAGINATION

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## MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle and matches or LED-battery operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers.
- [Video of Sikh peace activist Valarie Kaur](#) speaking at a Watch Night service, December 31, 2016 (6:18)
- Transcript of Valarie Kaur's speech, [“Breathe, then Push”](#)

## PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day, and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.

## OPENING (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

*Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces themselves, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce themselves and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today's self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.*

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from author J.K Rowling from *Very Good Lives: Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination* (Little, Brown, and Company, 2015), or invite someone else to read:

*Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation; in its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.*

## FOCUSED CHECK-IN (23 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together, and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, “How did you do with last week’s list from Rev. Kemler?” Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while thinking about this question.

## SPOTLIGHT (10 minutes)

Share this short introduction to the video of Valarie Kaur (pronounced “core”):

*Valarie Kaur, founder of the Groundswell Movement, is an award-winning filmmaker, civil rights lawyer, Sikh activist and interfaith leader who centers her work on storytelling for social change. These words were spoken at a Watch Night service at an AME church in Washington, DC on December 31, 2016.*

Play the video. Distribute the transcript for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the video, read the transcript aloud.

### **SILENCE (2 minutes)**

### **REFLECTION (60 minutes)**

Invite participants to reflect on the Kaur speech. Remind them also of the words from J.K Rowling, used in chalice lighting, which named imagination as the power to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared. Ask them to respond one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it.

- Imagine the womb of transformation Valarie Kaur describes. What does your heart and spirit want to help birth in our nation and our world?
- How do the words of the mid-wife, “Breathe, and then push,” speak to you in this moment? Do you see yourself as one that helps others breathe, or helps others push, and why?
- Who whispers to you, “You are brave”?

### **APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

### **CLOSING (5 minutes)**

Share these words by the Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, used with permission:

*Our real work is not to walk away when we don't know what to do,  
Our real work is to face down the choices even when they're between harm  
and worse harm...  
especially when they are between harm and worse harm,  
[and] when we come to the edge of our knowing,  
when we do not know what to do, and ... we try anyway.*

*Particularly in our justice movements it's so easy to forget  
that behind every triumph there are a million messy choices,  
a million mysteries with no clear answer.*

*We're told that if we don't know what we're doing,  
we're doing it wrong. But the truth may be the opposite:  
only when we don't know what we're doing  
are we doing the real work.*

*So we bring our bravery, we bring our love to the real work  
to the mysteries that are so uncertain  
[but that] in the end are the ones that grow our spirits.*

**Extinguish the chalice.**

**PLEASE SHARE WITH PARTICIPANTS AHEAD OF TIME –**

Ask participants to mull this question in the days ahead: “What has grown your spirit before, and how has that continued to make you brave?”

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am part of or claim these communities  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I am here today because  
\_\_\_\_\_.

# BREATHE, THEN PUSH

Faith Development, Adult Faith Development

*From National Moral Revival Poor People's Campaign Watch Night Service, December 31, 2106, used with permission. The entire service can be found at [this link](#). Find out more about Valarie Kaur's Revolutionary Love or to be part of this organizing effort: About the speaker: [valariekaur.com](http://valariekaur.com) / Twitter: @valariekaur*

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh. [Sikh greeting, prayer, and statement of faith. Translation: *The beloved community belongs to divine Oneness, and so does all that it achieves.*]

On Christmas Eve 103 years ago, my grandfather waited in a dark and dank cell. He sailed by steamship across the Pacific Ocean from India to America, leaving behind colonial rule, but when he landed on American shores, immigration officials saw his dark skin, his tall turban worn as part of his Sikh faith, and saw him not as a brother, but as foreign, as suspect, threw him behind bars where he languished for months- Until a single man, a white man, a lawyer named Henry Marshall filed a writ of habeas corpus that released him Christmas Eve 1913. My grandfather Kehar Singh became a farmer free to practice the heart of his Sikh faith- love and oneness- and so when his Japanese American neighbors were rounded up and taken to their own detention camps in the deserts of America, he went out to see them when no one else would. He looked after their farms until they returned home. He refused to stand down. In the aftermath of September 11, when hate violence exploded in these United States and a man that I called uncle was murdered, I tried to stand up. I became a lawyer like the man who freed my grandfather. I joined a generation of activists, fighting detentions and deportations, surveillance and special registrations, hate crimes and racial profiling. And after 15 years filled with every lawsuit, with every campaign, I thought we were making the nation safer for the next generation.

And then my son was born. On Christmas Eve I watched him ceremoniously put the milk and cookies by the fire for Santa Claus. And after he went to sleep I then drank the milk and ate the cookies. I wanted him to wake up and see them gone in the morning. I wanted him to believe in a world that was magical. But I am leaving my son a world that is more dangerous than the one I was given. Because I am raising - we are raising- a brown boy in America. A brown boy who may someday wear a turban as part of his faith. And in America today, as we enter an era of enormous rage, as white nationalists hail this moment as their great awakening, as hate acts against Sikhs and our Muslim brothers and sisters are at an all-time high, I know, I know that there will be moments whether on the streets or in the schoolyard where my son will be seen as foreign, as suspect, as a terrorist. Just as black bodies are still seen as criminal. Brown bodies are still seen as illegal. Trans bodies are still seen as immoral. Indigenous bodies are still seen as savage. The bodies of women and girls seen as someone else's property. When we see these bodies not as brothers and sisters, then it becomes easier to bully them, to rape them, to allow policies that neglect them, that incarcerate them, that kill them.

Yes, rabbi, the future is dark. On this New Year's Eve, this Watchnight, I close my eyes and I see the darkness of my grandfather's cell. And I can feel the spirit of ever-rising optimism in the Sikh tradition, Chardi Kala, within him. And so the mother in me asks, "What if?" What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if our America...? (applause) What if our America is not dead, but a country waiting to be born? What if the story of America is one long labor? What if all of our grandfathers and grandmothers are standing behind us now? Those who survived occupation and genocide, slavery and Jim Crow, detentions and political assault. What if they are whispering in our ear today, tonight, "You are brave"? What if this is our nation's great transition? What does the midwife tell us to do? Breathe- and then push. Because if we don't push we will die. If we don't push our nation will die. Tonight, we will breathe. Tomorrow, we will labor. And love, your love, and your revolutionary love is the magic we will show our children.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.