Earth Teacher

FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF BURLINGTON



JOURNALING PROMPTS

- **Wisdom**: What wisdom (caution or inspiration) does this Earth Teacher have to share with me? What do I need to do to be receptive?

- **Resilience**: What does this Earth Teacher have to offer to help me deepen my personal resilience? My community's collective resilience?

QUOTES

"Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
till the right action arises by itself?"
Lao-Tzu , as translated by Stephen Mitchell

“There are times when we are truly all in the trenches of shadow times, dragging each other through salt and mud and just barely making our way through it. We can feel and name those times, and survive in the honesty that we don’t have much to offer each other except our own survival.” ~ adrienne maree brown

POETRY

To Be of Use by Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,

who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

Beans by Rachael Hayes

It hadn't seemed cold until I considered
the bean patch, the rows and rows of low plants
defiantly fruiting against the onset
of fall rooted in the soggy earth. Short
and proud, they demand a worshipful harvest:
I can bow to them, or I can kneel. I
can sacrifice my back in the bending
or sacrifice my warmth by nesting my
knees in the October muck. I choose the
cold. Each plant rewards me with grudging
intimacy as I reach underneath
its leaves to search out its tender beans. One
minute's communion before I move down
the row, the next little god to go.

The Last Rites of the Bokononist Faith (excerpt) by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

God made mud.
God got lonesome.
So God said to some of the mud, "Sit up!"
"See all I've made," said God, "the hills, the sea, the sky, the stars."

And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around.

Lucky me, lucky mud.

I, mud, sat up and saw what a nice job God had done.
Nice going, God.
Nobody but you could have done it, God! I certainly couldn't have.
I feel very unimportant compared to You.
The only way I can feel the least bit important is to think of all the mud
that didn't even get to sit up and look around.
I got so much, and most mud got so little.
Thank you for the honor!

Now mud lies down again and goes to sleep.
What memories for mud to have!
What interesting other kinds of sitting-up mud I met!
I loved everything I saw!
Good night.

"the leaf and the cloud" (excerpt) by Mary Oliver

Listen,
I don't think we're going to rise
in gauze and halos.

Maybe as grass, and slowly.
Maybe as the long-leaved, beautiful grass
I have known,
and you have known --

or the pine trees --
or the dark rocks
of the zigzag creek
hastening along --
or the silver rain--
or the hummingbird...

I look up
into the faces
of the stars,
into their deep silence.

This is the poem
of goodbye.
And
this is the poem of
don't know.

My hands touch the lilies
then withdraw;
my hands touch the blue iris
then withdraw;

and I say,
not easily
but carefully—
the words round in the mouth,
crisp on the tongue—
dirt,
mud,
stars,
water—

I know you
as if you
were myself.
How could I be afraid?

MUSIC

"No Mud, No Lotus" by Bob Sima

MEDITATION

This musical meditation, "No Mud, No Lotus" (a cover of David Frank & the Dharmatones' song by the Blue Cliff Bodhi-beats, 2018) is based on a teaching by the late Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. It is offered here as a means to sit in listening contemplation, observing what arises and then letting such thoughts pass away.

This is an excerpt from a larger piece, *"There Is a Season: A Meditation on the Cycles of Our Inner Lives,"* by Quaker author, Parker Palmer. It invites us into a meditation on mud:

> I will wax romantic about spring and its splendors in a moment, but first there is a hard truth to be told: before spring becomes beautiful, it is plug ugly, nothing but mud and muck. I have walked in the early spring through fields that will suck your boots off, a world so wet and woeful it makes you yearn for the return of ice. But in that muddy mess, the conditions for rebirth are being created.
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> I love the fact that the word "humus"–the decayed vegetable matter that feeds the roots of plants–comes from the same word root that gives rise to the word "humility." It is a blessed etymology. It helps me understand that the humiliating events of life, the events that leave "mud on my face" or that "make my name mud," may create the fertile soil in which something new can grow.

FOR KIDDOS

Hosea Loved Mud - a story for children and adults about Universalist preacher, Hosea Ballou. Written by Janeen K Grohsmeyer from the book Lamp in Every Corner.

IMAGES FOR CONTEMPLATION









