

# Earth Teacher



FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
SOCIETY OF BURLINGTON



## JOURNALING PROMPTS

- **Relationship:** What is my current relationship with this Earth Teacher? What do I like about my current relationship? What do I want to change about it?
- **Wisdom:** What wisdom/caution/lessons does this Earth Teacher have to share with me? What do I need to do to be receptive?
- **Deep Time:** What relationship might this Earth Teacher have had with an ancestor of mine? What relationship might this Earth Teacher have with a descendant of mine?

# QUOTES

## **Give Me Flowers While I'm Still Living** (excerpt) by Thabiti Anyabwile

That's what my mother often says when she attends a funeral and hears all the nice things people say, or witnesses the deep grief of persons who perhaps have loved deeply but not expressed it in various ways. With a resolution born of knowing, she announces in calm tone, almost to herself and to no one in particular, "Give me my flowers while I'm living."

Over the years, it's become for me a lesson in expressing gratitude. I can see the rows of flowers and arrangements adorning the pulpit area and casket at funerals... wonderful colors, arrangements of various sizes, sometimes with ribbons bearing various sentiments. Then my mother's voice, "Give me my flowers while I'm living."

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## **For the Flowers have the Gift of Language** by Reginald Zottoli

Speak, flowers, speak! Why do you say nothing?

Creating patterns wild and free as no gardener could match. In the forest they nestle, snug carpets under the roof of Leaf and branch, making a rug of such softness. At end tip of branches they cling briefly Before bursting into fruit sweet to taste. Flowers, can you not speak joy to our sadness? And hope to our fear? Can you not say how it is with you That you color the darkest corner? The flowers have the gift of language. At the occasion of birth they are buds before bursting. At the ceremony of love they unite two lovers in beauty. At the occasion of death, they remind us how lovely is life. Oh, would that you had voice, Silent messengers of hope. Would that you could tell us how you feel, Arrayed in such beauty. The flowers have the gift of language. In the dark depths of a death camp They speak the light of life. In the face of cruelty They speak of courage. In the experience of ugliness They bespeak the persistence of beauty. Speak, messengers, speak! For we would hear your message. Speak, messengers, speak! For we need to hear what you would say. For the flowers have the gift of language: They transport the human voice on winds of beauty; They lift the melody of song to our ears; They paint through the eye and hand of the artist; Their fragrance binds us to sweet-smelling earth. May the blessing of the flowers be upon you. May their beauty beckon to you each morning And

their loveliness lure you each day, And their tenderness caress you each night. May their delicate petals make you gentle, And their eyes make you aware. May their stems make you sturdy, And their reaching make you care.

\* \* \*

To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul. ~ Rudyard Kipling

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The garden year has no beginning and no end. ~ Elizabeth Lawrence

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The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul. ~ Alfred Austin

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During the worst months of the covid-19 pandemic, when I'd suffered several losses and felt raw and isolated, I spent a great deal of time in our garden. At our bungalow, where the light in the front is best, this meant spending hours in our postage-stamp-size yard. I renewed beds, fertilized fruit trees, and reclaimed the sunny, unused concrete driveway for planters of favas, pole beans, and tomatillos. The labor steadied me, and had an additional benefit: As I worked, I often fell into conversation with passersby. I was grateful to be growing both kale and community—in a difficult time, I tended the garden and the garden also tended back. ~ Tess Taylor

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And don't think the garden loses its ecstasy in winter. It's quiet, but the roots down there are riotous... - Rumi

# POETRY

**Roots** by Lucille Clifton

call it our craziness even,  
call it anything.  
it is the life thing in us  
that will not let us die.  
even in death's hand  
we fold the fingers up  
and call them greens  
and grow on them,  
we hum them and make music.  
call it our wildness then,  
we are lost from the field  
of flowers, we become  
a field of flowers.  
call it our craziness  
our wildness

call it our roots,  
it is the light in us  
it is the light of us  
it is the light, call it  
whatever you have to,  
call it anything.

\* \* \*

**Wedding Poem** by Ross Gay  
for Keith and Jen

Friends I am here to modestly report  
seeing in an orchard  
in my town  
a goldfinch kissing  
a sunflower  
again and again

dangling upside down  
by its tiny claws  
steadying itself by snapping open  
like an old-timey fan  
its wings  
again and again,  
until, swooning, it tumbled off  
and swooped back to the very same perch,  
where the sunflower curled its giant  
swirling of seeds  
around the bird and leaned back  
to admire the soft wind  
nudging the bird's plumage,  
and friends I could see  
the points on the flower's stately crown  
soften and curl inward  
as it almost indiscernibly lifted  
the food of its body  
to the bird's nuzzling mouth  
whose fervor  
I could hear from  
oh 20 or 30 feet away  
and see from the tiny hulls  
that sailed from their  
good racket,  
which good racket, I have to say  
was making me blush,  
and rock up on my tippy-toes,  
and just barely purse my lips  
with what I realize now  
was being, simply, glad,  
which such love,  
if we let it,  
makes us feel.

\* \* \*

**Slow Blooming is Blooming** (excerpt) by Julián Jamaica Soto

Spring has many disguises, bright and sunny, raw and wet, colorful and blooming. Some things nature teaches us are that things are always changing and growth is always possible. One of my favorite stories about this is the tale of the narrow-leafed campion.

Scientists regrew the plant from prehistoric cells. Of course, that feat was not straightforward. When the team, led by Svetlana Yashina and David Gilchinsky, tried to sprout the plant from seeds, that didn't work.

Does that moment resonate with you? Trying but not reaching your goal, hoping and acting, but without the desired result. While it may be disappointing, the narrow-leafed campion teaches us that what appears to be failure, may merely be a delay and may be fuel for the journey forward.

The team tried again with cells from the narrow-leafed campion fruit; they were successful in sprouting a flower from cells that were 31,800 years old. Fortunately, you don't have to wait that long to grow toward being your favorite self, the one you know to be most true and most self-expressed.

\* \* \*

**To Say Nothing But Thank You** by Jeanne Lohmann

All day I try to say nothing but thank you,  
breathe the syllables in and out with every step I  
take through the rooms of my house and outside into  
a profusion of shaggy-headed dandelions in the garden  
where the tulips' black stamens shake in their crimson cups.

I am saying thank you, yes, to this burgeoning spring  
and to the cold wind of its changes. Gratitude comes easy  
after a hot shower, when my loosened muscles work,  
when eyes and mind begin to clear and even unruly  
hair combs into place.

Dialogue with the invisible can go on every minute,  
and with surprising gaiety I am saying thank you as I  
remember who I am, a woman learning to praise  
something as small as dandelion petals floating on the  
steaming surface of this bowl of vegetable soup,  
my happy, savoring tongue.

\* \* \*

**Peonies** by Mary Oliver

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready  
to break my heart  
as the sun rises,  
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers and they open —

pools of lace,  
white and pink —  
and all day the black ants climb over them, boring their deep and mysterious holes  
into the curls,  
craving the sweet sap,  
taking it away to their dark, underground cities —  
and all day  
under the shifty wind,  
as in a dance to the great wedding,  
the flowers bend their bright bodies,  
and tip their fragrance to the air,  
and rise,  
their red stems holding  
all that dampness and recklessness  
gladly and lightly,  
and there it is again —  
beauty the brave, the exemplary,  
blazing open.  
Do you love this world?  
Do you cherish your humble and silky life?  
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?  
Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,  
and softly,  
and exclaiming of their dearness,  
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,  
with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,  
their eagerness  
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are  
nothing, forever?

\* \* \*

**Rhodora** by Ralph Waldo Emerson

In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,  
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,  
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,  
To please the desert and the sluggish brook.  
The purple petals fallen in the pool  
Made the black water with their beauty gay;  
Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,  
And court the flower that cheapens his array.  
Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why  
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,  
Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were made for seeing,  
Then beauty is its own excuse for Being;  
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!

I never thought to ask; I never knew;  
But in my simple ignorance suppose  
The self-same power that brought me there, brought you.

\* \* \*

‘**Flowers**’ by Wendy Cope

Some men never think of it.  
You did. You’d come along  
And say you’d nearly brought me flowers  
But something had gone wrong. The shop was closed. Or you had doubts  
The sort that minds like ours  
Dream up incessantly. You thought  
I might not want your flowers. It made me smile and hug you then.  
Now I can only smile  
But, look, the flowers you nearly brought  
Have lasted all this while.

## JOKES / PUNS

- **How did the flower pass its driving test?** "It 'rose' to the occasion!"
- **What do you call a flower that runs on electricity?** A power plant!
- **Why do you call a clumsy flower?** A Whoopsi-Daisy.
- **What did the rose say to the bee?** You really pollen my leg!
- **Why did the rose refuse to go to the party?** It didn't want to get caught in a thorny situation!
- **Why shouldn't you tell a secret in a garden?** Because the potatoes have eyes and the corn has ears!
- **Why can't the flower ride his bike?** Because they lost their petals!
- A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.

A little boy goes up to an old gardener and says "what do you put on your rhubarb?"



"Well, usually rotted horse manure" replies the gardener.

"We have custard on ours" says the boy.

# MEDITATION

## **The Meaning of Flowers/Flower Language of the Victorian Era** from The Farmer's Almanac

Learning the special symbolism of flowers became a popular pastime during the 1800s. Nearly all Victorian homes had, alongside the Bible, guidebooks for deciphering the "language," although definitions shifted depending on the source.

Following the protocol of [Victorian-era etiquette](#), flowers were primarily used to deliver messages that couldn't be spoken aloud. In a sort of silent dialogue, flowers could be used to answer "yes" or "no" questions. A "yes" answer came in the form of flowers handed over with the right hand; if the left hand was used, the answer was "no." Plants could also express aversive feelings, such as the "conceit" of pomegranate or the "bitterness" of [aloe](#). Similarly, if given a rose declaring "devotion" or an apple blossom showing "preference," one might return to the suitor a yellow carnation to express "disdain."

How flowers were presented and in what condition was important. If the flowers were given upside down, then the conveyed idea was the opposite of what was traditionally meant. How the ribbon was tied said something: Tied to the left, the flowers' symbolism applied to the giver, whereas tied to the right, the sentiment was in reference to the recipient. And, of course, a wilted bouquet delivered an obvious message!

More examples of plants and their associated human qualities during the Victorian era include bluebells and kindness, peonies and bashfulness, rosemary and remembrance, and tulips and passion. The meanings and traditions associated with flowers have certainly changed over time, and different cultures assign varying ideas to the same species. Still, the fascination with "perfumed words" persists just the same.

# MUSIC

["The Rose"](#) by Bette Midler

["Nothing But Flowers"](#) by Talking Heads

["Wildflowers"](#) by Tom Petty

["Where Have All the Flowers Gone"](#) by Pete Seeger

["Garden Song"](#) performed by John Denver

# IMAGES FOR CONTEMPLATION

images included here are from FUUSB congregants - thank you!

























