

FEBRUARY 2023

MONTHLY MUSINGS FROM UUMFE

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Welcome to Monthly Musings from UUMFE

This month we focus on the eco-virtue of compassion which is defined as the capacity to resonate with and care about the suffering of others (Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough). How can we deepen a compassionate relationship with Earth, lament Earth's struggles, feel our own pain and that of those most impacted by climate disruption? How can we offer loving kindness to Earth and each other? Our sources are Religious Naturalism and Buddhism as we "take Nature to heart". UUMFE's Earth Month issue in April, 2024 will include resources for deeper exploration of climate distress and grief. This is a great start and a good lead-in to Earth Month.

In your communication vehicles, invite congregants or members of your group to bring a stone that will be used in ritual. We invite you to visit our website for an overview of these Monthly Musings. And this Google folder is where you can find other issues in Google Doc and PDF formats.

February: Compassion and Lament



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
MINISTRY FOR EARTH

Respect Life. Restore Earth. Renew Spirit.



Service and Sermon Prompt:

As Karen Armstrong puts it: “Compassion is a practically acquired knowledge, like dancing. You must do it and practice diligently day by day.” “Look into your own heart, discover what it is that gives you pain and then refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else.”

What practices help you deepen your compassion for Earth, humans and nonhumans?

When we encounter the widespread desecration of Nature, our hearts can be broken. How do you feel the pain and suffering caused by climate disruption?

What do you do to make sure you don't inflict pain?

UU congregations are in a unique position to offer community - a sacred space where we can be vulnerable and lament the suffering of Earth. In doing so, we can metabolize our distress and not become paralyzed by it.

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice in the spirit of compassion - the capacity to resonate with and care about the suffering of others. May this light warm our hearts so that we might expand our ability and capacity to care.

OPENING WORDS

From Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough*: “Eco-compassion entails first accepting, and then rejoicing in, one's own critterhood, one's connectedness with all other present and prior beings in the planetary matrix. It then entails experiencing sorrow when these fellow beings are subjected to suffering, followed by efforts to reverse the suffering.” We gather today to deepen our compassion and acknowledge our sorrow.

(*Quote on page 202)

Readings

“It seems likely that the emotions evoked when we absorb our evolutionary affinity with other creatures, and when we are infused with compassion, will turn out to map closely onto the pathways that drive our basal parental and nurturing instincts, emotions that generate such feelings as tenderness and warmth and protectiveness. These same emotions extend to our understanding that the Earth, the planetary matrix, must be nurtured as well, an understanding embedded in many religious traditions.”

-Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough, page 145.

“For me, and probably for all of us, the concept of an interested and caring god can be appealing... But in the end, such faith simply isn’t available to me. I can’t go there. I lack the resources to render my capacity for love and my need to be loved to supernatural Beings. And so I have no choice but to pour these capacities and needs into thick relationships with human and nonhuman beings, fragile and mortal and difficult as they can sometimes be. Earthly intimacy is a gift, filling our lives with experiences of loving and being loved in all sorts of beautiful ways.”

-Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough, pages 154-55.

“The work of the mature person is to carry grief in one hand and gratitude in the other and to be stretched large by them. How much sorrow can I hold? That’s how much gratitude I can give. If I carry only grief, I’ll bend toward cynicism and despair. If I have only gratitude, I’ll become saccharine and won’t develop much compassion for other people’s suffering. Grief keeps the heart fluid and soft, which helps make compassion possible.”

-Francis Ward Weller

“That Stone from the River” by Linda Hogan from A History of Kindness. Used with permission.

This stone tells the story of what happened here
when people came from the four directions more than a hundred years ago
to talk about who lived on this land and this water.

The earth and stone are still singing the same as before.

They are telling another story about forests killed for dark corporations,
shipping America to other continents,

sending oil from between tectonic plates,
the dark earth that needs to be held in shape.

If only someone thought how everything moves
beneath their feet. If only they saw the fish
with tumors and bleeding scales, born the wrong way,
and the Tar Sand people in pain, the lungs of children
who cannot breathe

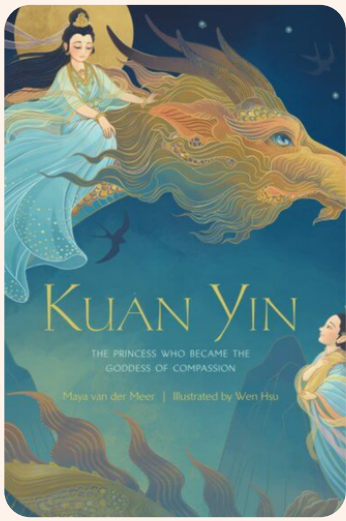
so now the winds are singing
the terrible ballad of water:

Ft. Union. Thunder Creek. Lost Creek. Medicine Bow.

Muddy Creek. Missouri. Animas.

Flint River. This stone, all this
revealed.





Time for All Ages

Kuan Yin: The Princess Who Became the Goddess of Compassion, written by Maya van der Meer, illustrated by Wen Hsu (Boulder, CO: Bala Kids-Shambhala Publications, 2021)

Connection with nature is the superpower of Kuan Yin in this retelling, from a child's perspective, of how an ancient Chinese princess became the Buddhist saint who hears lamentation and heals through love.

Guided Meditation, 7 minutes

Tonglen: Awakening Compassion for Earth, by Rev. Lauren Levwood

Tonglen is a Buddhist meditation practice used to awaken compassion. This practice comes to us from the beloved American Buddhist nun, Pema Chödrön. As Unitarian Universalists, we approach these Buddhist teachings with humility, respect, and gratitude for the teachers and tradition from which they arise.

The practice of tonglen aids us in awakening compassion by opening our hearts to suffering. When we breathe in, we breathe in the pain that surrounds us. When we breathe out, we breathe out loving-kindness. Translated from Tibetan, tonglen literally means “sending and taking.”

Breathing in pain and suffering can feel challenging, especially at first, but it can lead to greater empathy. In this way, a tiny crack opens in our hearts. This crack, this opening to loving-kindness and the willingness to feel the suffering of others, is bodhichitta. We can practice tonglen on behalf of any being. Today, we will use tonglen to cultivate our compassion for Earth.

In preparation for our meditation, I invite you to close your eyes, or let your gaze fall slightly downward. Take a breath, and let it go. Roll your shoulders up and back. Lengthen your spine. Root your feet into the earth underneath you. Welcome to this practice of tonglen. [Ring a chime or gong, which is the traditional way to open this practice.]

We begin by opening our awareness to an inner spaciousness, like the open sky. This wide inner expanse is the doorway to compassion, or bodhichitta. Next, we turn our attention towards our breath. Inhaling, we breathe in the essence of suffering – the texture, the heat, and the weight of it. We breathe in this suffering not just with our nose, but with every pore. We might visualize this suffering as something thick, like “coal dust” or “yellow-brown smog.”

Tonglen cont.

With our exhale, we breathe out relief. With every pore, we breathe out “qualities of spaciousness – fresh, light, and cool.” We can imagine this spacious sense of relief “as brilliant moonlight,” “sparkling sun on water,” or “the colors of the rainbow.” Breathing in, we breathe in pain through every pore. Breathing out, we send out the medicine of relief.

Now that our breath is tuned, we turn our awareness to a specific suffering. Today, we focus our practice on the suffering of Earth.

I invite you to bring to mind a specific image of Earth’s suffering. With the image of Earth’s suffering in mind, begin to breathe in Earth’s stuckness, Earth’s difficulty, Earth’s challenge.

And, breathing out, exhale the vision of Earth’s healing, Earth’s radiance, Earth’s joy.

Breathing in, we draw in Earth’s suffering. Breathing out, we exhale Earth’s relief.

Breathing in, we inhale Earth’s pain. Breathing out, we exhale Earth’s vitality.

Breathing in, we draw in Earth’s struggle. Breathing out, we send Earth peace.

To conclude our practice, we expand our compassion to include all eras of Earth’s suffering – past, present, and future. For the suffering that has been, is, or is yet to be, we breathe in pain, we breathe out peace. For our ancestors, and for the beings yet to be born, we breathe in pain, we breathe out peace. Our hearts’ compassion has the capacity to expand to infinity.

As our practice of tonglen draws to a close, we allow this compassion to stretch as wide as the sky. With the paintbrush of loving-kindness, we color our canvas with radiance and gratitude. We draw our circle wide, as wide as we can imagine. All are included. All are held in the arms of love.

Sources: (footnotes available upon request,
rev.la.lev@gmail.com)<https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-tonglen/>
<https://pemachodronfoundation.org/product/the-places-that-scare-you/>

LET THE MEDITATION LEAD RIGHT INTO A RITUAL OF LAMENT...

Ritual of Lament

Please join in a ritual of lament for Earth. You were invited to bring a stone. At this time, continue to breathe in difficulty, pain, suffering and struggles of Earth. And as you breathe out, offer joy, relief, vitality and peace into the stone you brought. Practice this for a few moments.



Then come forward, as you are willing and able, to build something beautiful with the stones - a pattern as a symbol of hope and beauty.

(This can be done on diaz, on the floor in the sanctuary, on the altar, or in the fellowship hall. Just let the co-creation take place without too much orchestration.)

At the end of the ritual, offer a blessing:

We have breathed out the medicine of compassion and healing into these stones. Our breath carries our hopes for joy, relief, vitality and peace. We offer this medicine to Earth. Thank you, stones, for carrying our healing energy. We acknowledge the power of ritual that leaves us not paralyzed by distress but allows us to metabolize our grief and offer beauty, renewal and love to the world - to Earth, all humans and nonhumans alike.

Music

Where You Go by Shoshana Jedwab
Sheet music [here](#):

- #1031 in Singing the Journey: “Filled with Loving Kindness”
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- #95 in Singing the Living Tradition: “There is More Love Somewhere”
-
- #1009 in Singing the Journey: “Meditation on Breathing”

Closing Words

By Gary Snyder from Earth Prayers

Ah Power that swirls us together
Grant us Bliss
Grant us the great release
And to all Beings
Vanishing, wounded
In trouble on earth
We pass on this love
May their numbers increase

Small Group Ministry Prompts

Feel free to use the readings, music and rituals described above in your small group. Compassion is the capacity to resonate with and care about the suffering of others.

This video features the UUMFE Board Chair, Susanna Wu-Pong Calvert, on her loving relationship with the natural world. She views Earth and the natural world as loved ones.

- How would you describe your relationship with the natural world?
 - How do you communicate with the natural world?
 - How does Earth teach you? What does Earth teach you?
 - How do you show love for the natural world?
 - How do you offer care to the suffering of the natural world?
 - How do you offer care to the suffering of people most impacted by climate disruption?
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Thanks to the Monthly Musings collaboration team. Rev. Kelly Dignan, Co-Director, UUMFE; Rev. Lauren Levwood, Vice Chair, UUMFE Board of Directors; Rev. Daniel Lawlor, Co-Director, UUMFE; Colleen Hamilton, MA Ed, PhD, Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sunnyvale (CA); Jennifer Springsteen, MDiv.

Please let us know how you're using these resources by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/JA6d3nmEggT5BGK46>

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QUESTIONS ABOUT MONTHLY MUSINGS? PLEASE EMAIL
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